New Trends in Psychology

From Pathology to Structure: A Psychoanthropological Interview Framework for Inmates

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Abstract: Psychological research conducted in prison settings has predominantly relied on quantitative psychometric instruments to investigate psychopathy, behavioral coping, aggression, and institutional adaptation. Although these approaches have substantially advanced knowledge in correctional psychology, they provide limited insight into the subjective experiences through which incarcerated individuals interpret and negotiate imprisonment. The aim of this paper is to present the development of a psychoanthropological semi-structured interview framework designed to complement quantitative findings within a sequential mixed-methods research design. Building on the theoretical literature, evidence from the quantitative phase, expert consultation, and pilot testing, psychological constructs were systematically translated into eight qualitative thematic domains organized according to the funnel principle. The resulting framework provides a coherent methodological structure for exploring the relationships between individual psychological characteristics and the social and institutional context of incarceration while enhancing the interpretation of psychometric findings. By offering a transparent procedure for integrating quantitative and qualitative evidence, the proposed framework contributes to the development of more context-sensitive prison research and provides a transferable methodological instrument for future mixed-methods studies involving incarcerated populations.

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1. Introduction

Psychological research in prison settings plays a central role in advancing the understanding of criminal behavior, adaptation to incarceration, and the mechanisms underlying social reintegration. Despite its importance, research involving incarcerated populations remains relatively limited compared with other areas of psychology. Restricted access to participants, institutional constraints, ethical considerations, and the logistical challenges associated with data collection have all contributed to the development of a comparatively modest body of empirical evidence (Liebling, 1999).

Moreover, the existing literature is largely dominated by quantitative studies relying on standardized psychometric instruments to assess constructs such as psychopathy, aggression, personality traits, behavioral coping strategies, and institutional adaptation. Although these approaches have substantially advanced the identification of psychological factors associated with violent behavior and difficulties in prison adjustment, they provide only limited insight into the subjective experiences, meaning-making processes, and relational dynamics through which these characteristics are expressed within correctional environments (Skeem et al., 2011).

Prisons constitute complex institutional environments characterized by restricted personal autonomy, continuous surveillance, and the reorganization of social relationships (Gheorghe, 1996). Consequently, adaptation to incarceration extends beyond mere compliance with institutional rules and involves ongoing processes of negotiating identity, social status, group belonging, and attitudes toward authority. From this perspective, the prison experience can only be fully understood by considering both individual characteristics and the broader social and institutional contexts in which they are embedded (Goffman, 1961).

Over the past decade, qualitative research has increasingly emphasized the importance of exploring the lived experiences of incarcerated individuals and the ways in which they assign meaning to interpersonal relationships, institutional constraints, and opportunities encountered during imprisonment. Studies employing semi-structured interviews and narrative approaches have shown that processes such

as institutional adaptation, participation in rehabilitation programs, and the management of violent behavior are shaped by individuals' subjective interpretations of incarceration and cannot be fully captured through standardized assessment instruments alone.

The present study is situated within a sequential mixed-methods design (quant → qual) investigating the relationships among psychopathy, behavioral coping strategies, and institutional adaptation in incarcerated individuals convicted of violent offenses. Although the quantitative phase, based on the administration of a comprehensive battery of psychometric instruments, yielded valuable findings regarding the associations among these variables, it also highlighted the need for a complementary qualitative instrument capable of contextualizing and expanding upon the statistical results.

To address this methodological need, a semi-structured interview framework grounded in a psychoanthropological perspective was developed. In the present study, a psychoanthropological perspective is understood as an integrative framework that examines psychological processes in relation to the social, cultural, and institutional contexts in which they are embedded. Accordingly, this approach seeks to integrate individual psychological dimensions with the analysis of lived experiences, interpersonal relationships, and institutional structures that shape behavior and adaptation during incarceration. Manifestations of psychopathic traits are therefore conceptualized not solely as expressions of stable individual characteristics but also as outcomes of the interaction between the individual and the social and institutional context of imprisonment.

The aim of this paper is to describe the development of this interview framework, its theoretical and methodological foundations, and the process through which psychometric constructs were translated into qualitatively explorable thematic domains. By presenting this approach, the study seeks to contribute to the development of prison research methodologies that are more responsive to the complexity of correctional settings while providing a methodological framework that may inform future qualitative investigations of the prison experience.

2. Related Work

2.1. Qualitative Research in Prison Settings

Qualitative research provides an opportunity to explore the subjective experiences

associated with incarceration and the meanings that incarcerated individuals attribute to their behaviors, interpersonal relationships, and life plans, particularly in the post-release period. Unlike quantitative approaches, which seek to identify relationships among measurable psychological variables, qualitative methods facilitate the investigation of the processes through which individuals interpret and make sense of their experiences of imprisonment.

Recent studies have demonstrated the value of semi-structured interviews for exploring topics such as violence, institutional adaptation, personal identity, participation in rehabilitation programs, and future expectations. For example, Hoek et al. (2025) employed in-depth interviews to examine the experiences of incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals during the process of social reintegration, highlighting the importance of social relationships and community support following release. Similarly, Slater et al. (2023) investigated incarcerated individuals' perceptions of prison education, demonstrating how participation in educational activities contributes to a greater sense of competence, strengthens personal identity, and fosters hope for successful reintegration.

Other qualitative studies have focused on mental health experiences and psychological recovery during and after incarceration. Brine et al. (2021) emphasized the importance of personal narratives for understanding processes of psychological adaptation, whereas Chauke (2025) explored the lived experiences of young former offenders, identifying both individual and contextual factors involved in desistance and social reintegration. Likewise, Smith and Howie (2024) demonstrated the usefulness of qualitative interviews for examining experiences related to violent behavior and the interpersonal relationships developed within correctional settings.

2.2. Semi-Structured Interviews in Prison Research

The semi-structured interview is one of the most widely used data collection methods in qualitative research because it provides an effective balance between exploratory flexibility and methodological consistency. Guided by a predefined interview protocol organized around key thematic areas, it enables the systematic investigation of topics of interest while allowing participants to introduce perspectives, experiences, and meanings that cannot be fully anticipated by the researcher (Jamshed, 2014).

Within prison settings, this approach is particularly valuable because it provides access to dimensions that are difficult to capture using standardized assessment instruments, including perceptions of authority, experiences of stigmatization, conflict management strategies, interpersonal relationships, and the meanings individuals attribute to their own behavior.

2.3. Methodological Gaps in Existing Research

Although the literature has increasingly recognized the value of qualitative approaches for investigating the prison experience, most existing studies focus on specific topics, such as prison education, mental health, social reintegration, or experiences of violence. Comparatively few methodological studies have attempted to integrate psychopathy, behavioral coping strategies, and institutional adaptation within a coherent qualitative framework.

Furthermore, although mixed-methods designs have become increasingly common in psychological research, relatively little attention has been paid to the methodological process through which psychometric constructs are systematically translated into qualitative interview domains. Consequently, there is limited methodological guidance on developing interview frameworks that are explicitly grounded in quantitative findings while remaining sensitive to the subjective and contextual dimensions of incarceration.

2.4. Problem Statement

Despite the substantial contributions of quantitative research to understanding psychopathy, behavioral coping strategies, and institutional adaptation in prison settings, important aspects of the incarceration experience remain insufficiently explored. Standardized psychometric instruments enable researchers to measure psychological constructs and identify statistical relationships among them; however, they provide only limited insight into how incarcerated individuals interpret, negotiate, and assign meaning to their experiences, interpersonal relationships, and behaviors. Consequently, quantitative findings may reveal significant statistical associations without adequately explaining the subjective and contextual mechanisms through which these relationships are experienced and expressed.

At the same time, qualitative research has demonstrated the value of semi-structured interviews for exploring the prison experience. Nevertheless, most existing studies address specific themes, including prison education, mental health, violence, or social reintegration, rather than providing an integrated methodological framework capable of linking multiple psychological constructs within a single qualitative investigation.

Moreover, although sequential mixed-methods designs advocate the integration of quantitative and qualitative evidence, relatively few studies have explicitly described how psychometric findings can be translated into a systematic semi-structured interview framework. This methodological gap is particularly evident in prison research, where guidance on transforming quantitative constructs into qualitatively explorable thematic domains remains limited.

3. Concept and Terms

3.1. Psychopathy

Psychopathy is a multidimensional construct encompassing a constellation of interpersonal, affective, and behavioral characteristics, including interpersonal manipulation, shallow affect, lack of empathy, impulsivity, and persistent antisocial behavior (Hare, 2003). However, psychopathic traits cannot be understood solely as stable individual characteristics; they must also be examined in relation to the social and institutional contexts in which they are expressed. Within prison settings, these characteristics may influence interpersonal relationships, attitudes toward authority, patterns of institutional adaptation, and involvement in violent behavior.

3.2. Behavioral Coping

Behavioral coping refers to the repertoire of strategies individuals employ to manage situations perceived as demanding or stressful. Within the transactional model of stress, coping is conceptualized as a dynamic process through which individuals seek to reduce the psychological and social impact of stressors (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). In prison settings, behavioral coping assumes particular importance because incarcerated individuals are continuously exposed to institutional, social, and emotional challenges that require ongoing adaptation. The ways in which these

coping strategies are employed may influence both institutional adjustment and the development of interpersonal relationships within the correctional environment.

3.3. Institutional Adaptation

Institutional adaptation can be defined as the process through which incarcerated individuals respond to the demands, norms, and constraints of the prison environment. This process involves cognitive, emotional, and behavioral adjustments that enable individuals to function within a context characterized by restricted autonomy, formalized control, and the reorganization of social relationships (Crewe, 2009). Institutional adaptation extends beyond mere compliance with institutional rules, encompassing the development of personal ways of interpreting, negotiating, and managing the experience of incarceration.

3.4. The Psychoanthropological Perspective

The psychoanthropological perspective adopted in the present study is based on the premise that human experiences cannot be fully understood solely through the analysis of individual characteristics but must also be interpreted in relation to the cultural, relational, and institutional contexts in which they develop. Applied to prison settings, this perspective seeks to integrate the psychological constructs assessed through standardized instruments with participants' lived experiences, the meanings they attribute to those experiences, and the social dynamics that characterize incarceration.

Accordingly, psychopathy, behavioral coping, and institutional adaptation are conceptualized not only as measurable psychological constructs but also as experiences that are shaped, interpreted, and negotiated through ongoing interactions with the structures, norms, and social relationships of the correctional environment. This conceptual perspective guided the systematic translation of psychometric constructs into qualitatively explorable thematic domains, providing the theoretical foundation for the development of the semi-structured interview framework presented in the following section.

4. Solution Approach

The qualitative phase was designed to deepen and contextualize the findings obtained through the psychometric assessment conducted during the quantitative stage of the study. Rather than serving solely as a complementary source of descriptive information, the quantitative findings provided the methodological foundation for developing a semi-structured interview framework capable of exploring the experiences and meanings associated with the psychological constructs under investigation.

Accordingly, the development of the interview framework was intended not only to complement the quantitative data but also to strengthen the interpretative validity of the overall research by integrating statistical evidence with participants' lived experiences and subjective interpretations. Within the sequential mixed-methods design, the qualitative phase was therefore conceived as a mechanism for expanding and contextualizing the relationships identified during the quantitative stage.

The development process was guided by the conceptual framework of the study, which focused on the relationships among psychopathy, behavioral coping strategies, and institutional adaptation in incarcerated individuals convicted of violent offenses.

The development process followed a theory-driven approach in which each thematic domain was derived from the underlying psychological constructs and informed by the findings of the quantitative phase. This procedure ensured conceptual consistency between the psychometric assessment and the subsequent qualitative exploration.

The interview framework was developed through the systematic translation of the psychological constructs investigated quantitatively into thematic domains suitable for qualitative exploration. During this process, the theoretical dimensions associated with psychopathy, behavioral coping, and institutional adaptation were examined to identify those aspects that could be more effectively explored through narrative accounts, personal reflection, and participants' lived experiences. Consequently, the analytical focus shifted from measuring individual characteristics to understanding how these characteristics are experienced, interpreted, and negotiated within the prison environment.

To support the systematic organization of the interview, a conceptual matrix (*Table 1*) was developed to establish explicit correspondence among the psychological

constructs investigated, their underlying theoretical dimensions, and the thematic domains incorporated into the interview framework.

Table 1. Conceptual Matrix Underlying the Interview Framework

Theoretical Construct	Psychometric Variable	Interview Domain
Psychopathy	Interpersonal manipulation	Interpersonal relationships
Psychopathy	Lack of empathy	Affective and moral dimensions
Psychopathy	Antisocial tendencies	Self-evaluation of violent behavior
Coping	Behavioral coping	Coping strategies
Adaptation	Institutional adaptation	Attitudes toward authority
Adaptation	Social adaptation	Reintegration activities

The interview was organized according to the funnel principle, whereby the discussion progressed gradually from broad, descriptive topics to more sensitive and reflective issues. This structure facilitates rapport building between the researcher and the participant while reducing the likelihood of defensive responding, an important consideration in prison research.

The conceptual matrix served to ensure the traceability of the interview framework by establishing explicit links between the theoretical foundations of the study, the psychological constructs assessed through psychometric instruments, and the thematic domains included in the interview guide. Interview questions were formulated using an open-ended, non-judgmental, and context-sensitive approach adapted to the prison environment. The guide incorporated descriptive, narrative, reflective, and probing questions designed to encourage participants to elaborate freely on their experiences while generating rich and detailed accounts. Particular attention was paid to avoiding leading or evaluative wording and to minimizing the risk of defensive responses, which is especially important when conducting qualitative research with incarcerated populations (*Table 2*).

Table 2. Examples of Interview Questions

Domain	Example Question
Personal context of incarceration	How would you describe your experience in prison so far?
Coping strategies	How do you usually react when conflicts arise?
Affective and moral dimensions	How do you currently view the offense for which you were convicted?

Domain	Example Question
Post-release perspectives	How do you imagine your life after release?

Based on this conceptual matrix, eight thematic domains were defined: personal context of incarceration, interpersonal relationships, attitudes toward authority, coping strategies, affective and moral dimensions, self-evaluation of violent behavior, reintegration activities, and post-release perspectives. These domains were designed to facilitate a flexible exploration of participants' experiences while maintaining conceptual consistency with the psychological constructs investigated during the quantitative phase.

The preliminary version of the interview framework was subsequently reviewed to evaluate its clarity, thematic relevance, and contextual appropriateness, resulting in an instrument specifically designed to explore participants' experiences, the meanings they attribute to those experiences, and the relational processes associated with incarceration. Through this iterative development process, the interview framework was conceived as a methodological bridge between psychometric assessment and an in-depth understanding of the subjective experiences of incarcerated individuals.

Following the development of the preliminary version, the interview framework underwent an exploratory pilot-testing phase. The pilot study included three interviews with incarcerated individuals and consultations with three correctional professionals involved in rehabilitation and psychosocial services (a psychologist, an educator, and a social worker).

The pilot-testing phase highlighted the need to optimize the structure of the interview framework. The initial version included three primary questions and between two and four follow-up questions for each of the eight thematic domains, resulting in an average interview duration of approximately 100 minutes. Analysis of the pilot interviews revealed thematic redundancies and overlaps among several probing questions, indicating the need to streamline the interview while preserving comprehensive coverage of the core domains.

To reduce the burden on participants and shorten the administration time, the interview framework was revised by retaining those questions with the greatest potential to elicit rich descriptive and reflective accounts. In addition, probing questions were intended to be used selectively, depending on the content and depth

of participants' responses, with no more than one or two follow-up questions typically asked within each thematic domain.

The pilot-testing process also resulted in refinements to the wording of several questions, clarification of key terms, and reorganization of specific thematic sequences to facilitate a more natural progression of the interview. These modifications were intended to improve clarity, reduce redundancy, and enhance the practical applicability of the interview framework within the prison context.

Furthermore, additional information was incorporated into the interview protocol to emphasize the voluntary nature of participation, participants' right to decline answering any question, and their right to withdraw from the interview at any stage without any consequences.

5. Analysis of Results

The principal outcome of the development process described above was the construction of a semi-structured interview framework organized around eight interconnected thematic domains (*Table 3*).

Table 3. Thematic Structure of the Psychoanthropological Interview Framework

Domain	Main Focus
Personal context of incarceration	Meaning of detention
Interpersonal relationships	Social interactions
Attitudes toward authority	Institutional adaptation
Coping strategies	Stress management
Affective and moral dimensions	Emotional and moral functioning
Self-evaluation of violent behavior	Interpretation of violence
Reintegration activities	Motivation for change
Post-release perspectives	Future orientation

These domains were developed through the systematic integration of the psychological constructs investigated during the quantitative phase with evidence from the literature on incarceration, institutional adaptation, and qualitative research in prison settings (*Figure 1*). Consequently, the interview framework provides a conceptually coherent structure for exploring the relationships between individual psychological characteristics and the social and institutional contexts in which they are expressed.

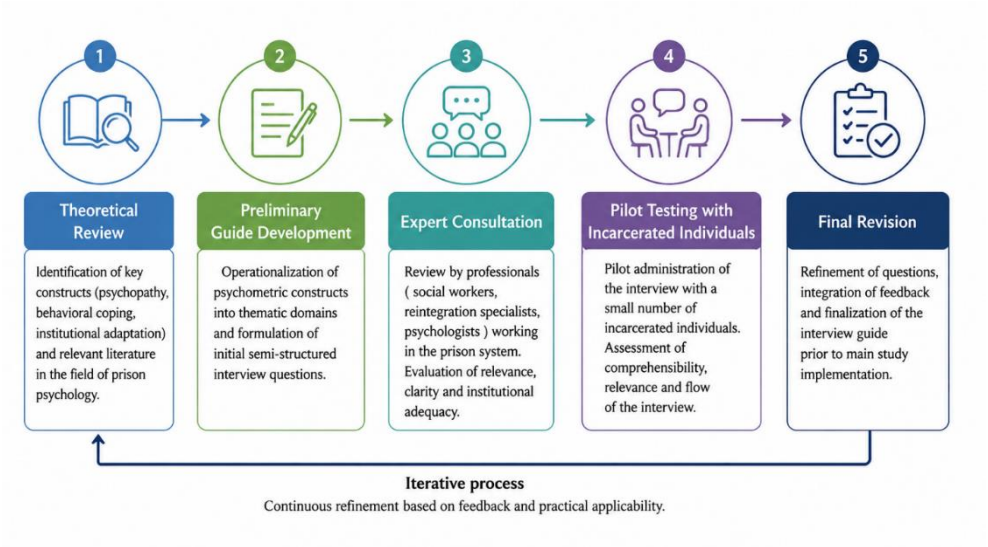

Figure 1. Development Process of the Interview Framework

The final structure of the interview framework was designed to facilitate the simultaneous exploration of participants' lived experiences, subjective interpretations, and relational dynamics while maintaining conceptual consistency with the psychometric constructs assessed during the quantitative phase.

Unlike approaches that focus exclusively on the assessment of individual traits, the proposed interview framework is designed to explore the interaction between individual characteristics and the institutional context of incarceration. From this perspective, each thematic domain was developed to capture not only participants' individual experiences but also the relational and institutional processes that shape adaptation to prison life.

The first thematic domain, **Personal Context of Incarceration**, explores participants' experiences of imprisonment, their perceptions of their conviction, and the ways in which they describe the impact of incarceration on their lives. This domain provides essential contextual information and facilitates a deeper understanding of the circumstances within which the remaining themes are situated.

The second domain, **Interpersonal Relationships**, focuses on interactions with fellow inmates, correctional staff, and family members. Particular attention is given to how participants describe trust, cooperation, conflict, and the strategies they employ to manage interpersonal relationships within the prison environment.

The third domain, **Attitudes Toward Authority**, examines participants' perceptions of institutional rules, the legitimacy of authority, and experiences related to formal control. It provides valuable insight into institutional adaptation and the ways incarcerated individuals interpret and respond to the constraints of prison life.

The fourth domain, **Coping Strategies**, investigates the approaches participants use to manage stress, frustration, interpersonal conflict, and other challenges associated with incarceration. Exploring these strategies extends the quantitative findings by providing a richer understanding of the contextual factors that influence adaptation within correctional settings.

The fifth domain, **Affective and Moral Dimensions**, examines emotional experiences, reflections on personal responsibility, and the ways participants interpret their decisions and behavior. This domain offers valuable insight into processes of self-reflection, accountability, and identity construction.

The sixth domain, **Self-Evaluation of Violent Behavior**, explores participants' perspectives on their own aggressive behavior and the factors they perceive as contributing to its occurrence. Emphasis is placed on the meanings attributed to experiences of violence and the integration of these experiences into participants' personal narratives.

The seventh domain, **Reintegration Activities**, investigates participants' perceptions of the educational, psychological, and social programs available within the correctional system. It also explores motivation for personal change and the factors that facilitate or hinder engagement in rehabilitation activities.

The final domain, **Post-Release Perspectives**, examines participants' expectations, concerns, and future plans following release from prison. It provides insight into perceptions of reintegration opportunities and the ways in which the experience of incarceration is incorporated into participants' broader life narratives.

By systematically translating psychometric constructs into narratively explorable thematic domains, the proposed interview framework demonstrates how quantitative findings can be operationalized within a qualitative research design. In doing so, it establishes a methodological bridge between psychometric assessment and the in-depth exploration of incarcerated individuals' lived experiences, offering a transferable framework for future mixed-methods research in correctional settings.

6. Conclusion

Psychological research conducted in prison settings has relied predominantly on standardized psychometric instruments to assess individual characteristics associated with criminal behavior, institutional adaptation, and the risk of recidivism. Although these approaches have made substantial contributions to scientific knowledge, they provide only limited insight into the subjective experiences, meanings, and relational processes that shape how incarcerated individuals understand and interpret their experiences of imprisonment.

In response to this limitation, the present study described the development of a semi-structured interview framework grounded in a psychoanthropological perspective and embedded within a sequential mixed-methods design. The proposed framework was developed through the systematic translation of the psychological constructs examined during the quantitative phase—psychopathy, behavioral coping strategies, and institutional adaptation—into qualitatively explorable thematic domains. The resulting interview framework comprises eight interconnected domains that enable the investigation of incarceration from an integrative perspective that considers both individual characteristics and the broader social and institutional context.

The principal contribution of this study is methodological. The proposed interview framework provides a systematic procedure for integrating psychometric findings with data generated through semi-structured interviews, thereby facilitating a more comprehensive interpretation and contextualization of the psychological phenomena under investigation. Furthermore, it shifts the analytical focus from the exclusive assessment of individual traits toward examining the dynamic interaction between the individual and the institutional environment in which incarceration is experienced.

The framework also enables the exploration of dimensions that are difficult to capture through standardized psychometric assessment alone, including interpersonal status, respect, conflict management, identity reconstruction, and processes of personal change. By incorporating these dimensions into a structured qualitative inquiry, the interview framework broadens the understanding of adaptation to prison beyond the measurement of individual psychological characteristics.

Overall, the proposed interview framework offers a valuable methodological resource for qualitative and mixed-methods research involving incarcerated

populations. Beyond its application in the present study, it provides a transparent and transferable approach for translating psychometric constructs into qualitative inquiry, thereby contributing to the development of more context-sensitive prison research. Integrating quantitative and qualitative evidence may ultimately support a more nuanced understanding of the psychological processes underlying institutional adaptation and inform the design of rehabilitation and reintegration programs grounded in a richer understanding of incarcerated individuals' lived experiences.

Rather than viewing psychometric assessment and qualitative inquiry as separate methodological approaches, the framework presented in this study demonstrates how they can be systematically integrated to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of the prison experience.

7. Future Work

The development of the interview framework presented in this study represents a preliminary stage within a broader research program investigating the relationships among psychopathy, behavioral coping strategies, and institutional adaptation in incarcerated individuals convicted of violent offenses.

Although the interview framework has undergone initial development, expert consultation, and exploratory pilot testing, it has not yet been systematically evaluated within the main qualitative phase of the study. Therefore, the findings presented in this paper should be interpreted as evidence of the framework's methodological development and preliminary feasibility, rather than as confirmation of its broader applicability or methodological validity.

An important next step will involve the systematic implementation of the interview framework during the qualitative phase of the sequential mixed-methods study and the integration of qualitative findings with the psychometric data obtained during the quantitative stage.

Future research should also examine the applicability of the interview framework across different correctional contexts and evaluate its potential adaptation for other incarcerated populations. Testing the framework in more diverse samples may contribute to the refinement of its thematic domains and further strengthen its methodological robustness and transferability.

In addition, the framework may be employed in comparative and longitudinal research to examine how experiences of incarceration, adaptive strategies, and reintegration processes evolve over time. Such applications would provide further evidence regarding the utility of systematically integrating psychometric assessment with qualitative inquiry in prison research and may contribute to the development of more comprehensive mixed-methods approaches for studying correctional populations.

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