

1-18-2019

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## Recommended Citation

Burt, Latoya Rochelle, "African American Male Ex-Offenders' Perceptions of a Reentry Program's Impact on Recidivating" (2019). *2019 Program & Posters*. 1.

<https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/symposium2019/1>

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# African American Male Ex-Offenders' Perceptions of a Reentry Program's Impact on Recidivating

Latoya R. Burt, PhD

## Problem

The transition from confinement to freedom is an adjustment for African American male ex-offenders, who spend a significant amount of time behind bars only to find that they are unprepared for life on the outside. The concern is the fact their transition is not well understood by the community. The problem addressed was there is a lack of knowledge African American male ex-offenders' experiences in reentry programs regarding their likelihood to recidivate within one year.

## Purpose

The purpose of this general qualitative study was to explore African American ex-offender perceptions of the reentry program and the likelihood of recidivism within one year of exiting the program.

## Significance

This study expands the understanding of what does and/or does not help African American male ex-offenders with their transition while being a part of the reentry program.

After these men reenter the community, they are faced with the arduous task of what to do next. It is important for African American male ex-offenders to understand how their actions before and after incarceration impact themselves and others.

This information also allows administrators of reentry program to evaluate their service and make the proper adjustments necessary based off the perceptions shared by the African American male ex-offenders.

## Social Change Implications

The more adjustments made to suit the needs of African American male ex-offenders, the better the community and reentry program.

## Theory or Framework

Three theories guided this study:

- Becker's (1963) **labeling theory** provided important information about how individuals are stigmatized, which is a challenge for these men.
- Shaw and McKay's (1942) **social disorganization theory** provided a lens to crime in communities and why criminal activities exist.
- Bandura's (1977) **social learning theory** describes how people learn by observing others and imitating what they see, as some African American male ex-offenders are surrounded by other African American male ex-offenders.

## Relevant Scholarship

When discussing the intake case manager and the intake participant, Dean (2014) noted lack of understanding of how the reentry programs assist in advancing the educational opportunities for African American male ex-offenders. Dean also observed a gap in understanding the impact reentry programs on African American male ex-offenders' interpersonal relationships and social networking skills. Chamberlain et al. (2017) suggests, a positive relationship with their probation or parole officer encourages the African American male ex-offenders to confide in them and share personal information that can help them recover from the hardships of incarceration. Overall, positive relationships contribute to recidivism being less likely to occur.

In addition, Rodriguez (2015) found mentoring programs are successful avenues that strive to support these men in completing their educational goals towards graduation. Rodriguez also believed the mentoring programs that are offered through higher education is important for African American males because this gives them the opportunity to complete their degree with guidance.

## Research Question

How does participating in a reentry program impact the likelihood of an African American male ex-offender recidivating within one year?

## Participants

The sample consisted of 60 African American male ex-offenders intake participants of a reentry program that all completed the Client Satisfaction Survey.

A purposive random sampling method was used to select 10 participants for in-depth interviews.

## Procedures

Sources of Data

- The 19 item **Client Satisfaction Survey** was adapted from Dean (2014) and was mailed to participants in a self-address stamped envelope.
- Using a researcher-designed protocol of 30 items the 10 interviews were scheduled for 45 minutes to 1 hour over a 2-week period. They were recorded and transcribed.

## Analysis

The survey results and interview transcripts were analyzed to identify themes in the responses.

## Findings

The three themes were as follows:

- **enhanced well-being**, described as being a positive element in the lives of the participants.
- **improved communication skills**, described as being an annoying, but a necessary tool to holding the participants accountable.
- **increased resourcefulness of participants**, described as a bridge that leads to opportunities.

## Interpretation

The results suggest that the reentry program does positively impact the likelihood of participants not recidivating after incarceration.

Sharing their stories may have resulted in positive individual change based on their responses provided during the interviews.

## Limitations

Potential limitations include:

- the inability to ensure honest and accurate answers in the interviews and survey. During the interview process, the participants could have been nervous or fearful when answering the questions.
- the structured qualitative interview, which may have limited the questions that could be asked of the African American male ex-offender participants.

## Recommendations

Recommendations for this reentry program are:

- to improve the services offered that the participants did not find useful.
- to maintain an unwavering relationship between the client and their intake case manager.
- to continue working with the participants on their interpersonal and social skills.
- future studies should not limit their target population to one specific ethnic group and gender.
- future studies should research how reentry programs operate and what is required to make the reentry program a success for their clients.

## Acknowledgements

*Gregory Campbell-Chair  
Jessie Lee-Committee Member  
Dianne Williams-URR*