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

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Latoya R. Burt, PhD

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.

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.

Social Change Implications

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

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.

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.

Research Question

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