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Examining the Impact of an Afterschool Program on the Lives of At-Risk Youth

Hazel Green-Dunston
Walden University

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Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Hazel Green-Dunston

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Walden University
2020

Abstract

Examining the Impact of an Afterschool Program on the Lives of At-Risk Youth

by

Hazel Green-Dunston

MS, Walden University, 2014

BS, Christopher Newport University, 1998

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfilment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Criminal Justice

Walden University

July 2020

Abstract

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study was to examine the lived experiences, and the impact mentoring has on at-risk youths between the ages of 11-14 years of age in afterschool programs in the southeast region of the United States. It addresses if afterschool mentoring programs reduce juvenile delinquency in at-risk youths. The theoretical framework of this qualitative study is Bandura's social learning theory in which individuals have a chance to reproduce a desirable behavior outcome. The social learning theory suggests that when exposing at-risk youths to positive behaviors, they have a lower probability of engaging in delinquent activities. The participants for this research were 7 instructors who work directly with at-risk youths in an afterschool program and serve as mentors. The researcher acquired data from qualitative interviews. The results indicated that the afterschool mentoring program provided growth opportunities and increased academic achievements to youths in a safe environment. To improve outcomes, the participants indicated they encouraged the children to take responsibility for their success and to reach for that success regardless of the challenges that they faced. There were no questions asked about funding, but limited funding was a topic throughout the interview. The study's may be used to provide guidance and directions to the Program Director about the significance of the afterschool program. Evidence shown in the results of the study was the benefits of the afterschool programs and how important it was for student engagement when evaluating the student's outcome.

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to the late Ollie and Alberta Green, my parents. Their wholesome upbringing, wisdom, and knowledge have kept me grounded over the years. I look back over my life and think about things my parents told me that I didn't understand at the time but continue to understand as I get older. My father used to tell me I could have anything that I wanted if I worked for it. My mother used to say trust in God and he would supply all my needs. However, faith without works is dead. My parents taught me to believe in myself and to work hard for what I wanted. I thank God for them, because I am the woman I am today because of the two of them. I spent days, nights, and countless hours writing my dissertation, and it has not been an easy journey traveled. Some days I worked on my dissertation from sun up until sun down, but I didn't give up, something my parents instilled in me. My dad used to say hard work has not killed anyone. They were the ones who let me know that I had what it took to complete the task, and I did. I have accomplished the great task of completing this dissertation! I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me (Philippians 4:13).

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Chapter 1: Overview

Introduction

There are several factors that affect the involvement of children, youths, and young adults in at-risk behavior, such as truancy, unhealthy diet, teenage pregnancy, and youth violence. Research has shown that there are higher rates of delinquency and criminal activity among youths who live in poverty (Case, 2017; Jagers, Robison, Rhodes, Guan, & Church, 2016). *At-risk youths* are defined as adolescents who are less likely to make successful transitions into adulthood and achieve economic independence (Koball, Dion, Gothro, & Bardos, 2011). According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2018), the poverty line corresponds to annual income ranging from \$13,064 to \$48,546 for households with one to nine members. The U.S. Census Bureau (2017) reported that 12% of children in two-parent households were living in poverty, compared to 34% of children from single-mother households, with two-thirds of single mothers working outside the home (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017).

Studies have indicated that quality afterschool programs can help resolve many of the issues that lead youths to drop out of school by providing mentoring, personalized instruction, parental and community engagement, and opportunities for experiential learning (Afterschool Alliance, 2009). There are numerous extracurricular activities to attract at-risk youths in such programs. According to Afterschool Alliance (2011), obesity prevention is an important goal of the activities within such programs. In an afterschool program, spaces such as a gymnasium and swimming pool are essential for structured and unstructured physical activities. In these programs, students can engage in

activities that they have not experienced before, such as soccer, Pilates, and culturally tailored dance routines (Matvienko & Ahrabi-Fard, 2010).

An afterschool program can also help to reduce or prevent teenage pregnancy by providing supervision and guidance to youth. The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy (2003) stated that a small but significant minority of sexually active teens aged 16–18 years (15%) reported that they first had sexual intercourse during afterschool hours of 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. Without supervision, the afterschool hours present opportunities for youth to be sexually active, regardless of whether they are from single-parent or two-parent households. According to Case (2017), there is a need to identify mentoring in afterschool programs targeting children from low-income, high-risk families.

Balfanz and Letgers (2004) reported research indicating a robust relationship between the school dropout rate and poverty, whereby youths living in poverty had a higher dropout rate. Their study further supported that poverty appeared to be one of the most reliable predictors of increased dropout rates. Afterschool programs have been shown to improve and close educational gaps between at-risk youths and their more affluent peers (Pierce, Auger, & Vandell, 2013; Vandell, Reisner, & Pierce, 2007). Some deficiencies such as defiant attitude, irresponsibility, alcohol abuse, and illegal drug use contribute to lower grades, higher high school dropout rates, and increased rates of delinquency and criminal acts (Fredericks et al., 2017). Activities could help children without means to have positive engagement in their community, thereby helping to counter these trends (Pierce et al., 2013; Vandell et al., 2007).

The study has implications for positive social change, in that the findings may inform the work of those seeking to help children from deprived areas engage in effective afterschool programs, thus reducing occurrences of crime in the community (Hurd & Deutsch, 2017). Community leaders and others may use these findings to help increase children's engagement in community activities.

Chapter 1 includes the background, problem statement, and purpose of the study, as well as the research question and framework. Following a list of relevant definitions are assumptions, scope and delimitations, and limitations. After a review of the significance of this study, a summary is provided to transition to Chapter 2.

Background

There are considerable disparities in federal and state government allocations to school districts and communities for afterschool programs, with more impoverished communities often receiving less funding (Camera, 2018). In communities whose members have lower incomes and assets, there may be insufficient funds for investigating and analyzing programs, furthering the difficulties experienced by youths who fall out of the school system. As Leone and Weinberg (2010) contended, "Youths who are drawn in welfare and juvenile justice structures, just like every other youth, are entitled to quality education which permits them to acquire the skills and abilities which are essential for becoming industrious adults" (p. 7). Because of lack of funding for afterschool programs, youth may lack support through high school completion and may not receive social networking opportunities that could be crucial in supporting their success. It is well documented that aftercare initiatives decrease juvenile-delinquent activities (James et al.,

2015). Given their benefits, the significant influence of afterschool programs should not be downplayed (Weaver & Campbell, 2015).

Literature indicates that as they learn to read and write, youth from affluent families are likely to be tutored or assisted by their parents with the development of these skills. Studies have further supported children benefiting from insurance, and medical care have a higher likelihood of having learning limitations, however, therapy has been shown to be effective. Consequently, for youths without proper care such disabilities go unrecognized, and the children are left behind their peers in the learning process. In this situation, it may be impossible for low-income youths to compete in tertiary and high school at the same level as their classmates. Therefore, this condition puts youths in a situation in which they are likely to drop out of school because they view themselves as incapable of performing at the required standards, which may leave them vulnerable to involvement in criminal activities (Fredericks et al., 2017).

An afterschool program can assist children in building academic and social skills that are essential for personal development. Additionally, afterschool programs may assist in the recognition of learning disabilities that might otherwise remain undetected, which learning institutions may then identify and treat (Pittman, 2017). An afterschool program may help decrease future delinquency in a more beneficial way than precautionary programs aimed at juveniles who dropped out of school and returned to school past their schooling age.

The importance of mentoring in afterschool programs is an additional topic analyzed in the literature. According to Pennell, Shapiro, and Spigner (2011), studies

have indicated that a foundation of safety, equality, and constancy supports children's development into responsible adults (p. 11). As Pennell et al. pointed out, youth from low-income communities may be less likely to be placed in effective afterschool programs, given that it is difficult for teachers to mentor students in overcrowded schools with unhealthy teacher-to-student ratios. Moreover, many children finish school without obtaining positive role models at a young age, despite the presence of programs such as Big Brothers Big Sisters. Mentorship programs in afterschool care can go a long way toward supporting healthy development in children.

As participants' level of engagement in afterschool programs increases, there is a higher likelihood that they will be affected positively by participation. Investigations into one of the most extensive aftercare programs in Los Angeles established that "L.A.'s BEST had desired effects on the prospect of juvenile crime. Additionally, investigations showed that actively and hugely involved students reaped more fruits from the program" (Huang, Goldschmidt, & La Torre, 2014, p. 3). Research supports the contention that an afterschool program that is available throughout the year, including holidays, improves outcomes in the lives of participating youth (Huang, Goldschmidt, & La Torre, 2014). Huang et al. (2014) found that an afterschool program that was available year round was greatly beneficial in allowing youth to build healthy relationships with mentors and staff, leading to more favorable results as compared to programs executed at irregular intervals, which might not have enough staff and mentor retention and might not be available throughout a youth's period in school as a minor.

Gap in the Literature

There is a gap in the literature on youth mentoring and delinquency. Existing research on youth mentoring programs has evaluated the impact of youths' family, schools, and delinquent behavior. However, little is known about how these programs can reduce delinquency and under what circumstances they are more or less likely to do so (DuBois, Portillo, Rhodes, Silverthorn, & Valentine, 2011; Herrera, DuBois, & Grossman, 2013; Tolan et al., 2013). There has been little to no research on the effectiveness of mentoring and the risk of youth to continue delinquent behavior (Herrera et al., 2013). In regard to demographic characteristics, it is essential to determine what impact mentoring has and if or how demographic factors make a difference.

Lack of documentation about what components are working in mentoring programs has a significant effect, in that each element may affect youth differently, resulting in a different outcome as far as delinquency. The quality of the relationship between mentor and mentee can also have an impact if there is no focus. Therefore, to enhance the usefulness of mentoring programs in improving outcomes for delinquent youths, it is essential to identify which components of these programs are most effective. Research has been conducted on the outcomes of youths involved in mentoring programs, yet important gaps remain in this literature.

Problem Statement

There is a need to determine whether afterschool mentoring programs reduce juvenile delinquency in at-risk youths. *Juvenile delinquency* may be defined as "conduct by a juvenile characterized by antisocial behavior that is beyond parental control and

therefore subject to legal action” or “a violation of the law committed by a juvenile and not punishable by death or life imprisonment” (“Juvenile Delinquency,” n.d.).

According to Hurd and Deutsch (2017), high-quality afterschool programs led to higher levels of social and emotional learning, better behavior, and reduced delinquency among the students participating, compared to students who did not participate in any afterschool program. Programs found to be the most successful overall have been those focusing on academic, socioemotional, and behavioral considerations in youth (Hurd & Deutsch, 2017; Smith & Bradshaw, 2017). One of the most commonly used interventions to prevent, deter, and remediate delinquent behavior, school dropout, violence, and other antisocial behaviors in youth engaged in or thought to be at risk for these behaviors is mentoring (DuBois, Holloway, Valentine, & Cooper, 2002, DuBois et al., 2011). Evidence indicates that the early intervention of mentoring is effective in preventing young people from engaging in violence (Tolan & Guerra, 1994).

Mentoring programs differ from one organization to the next, and structures can range from one-on-one interaction to group sessions (DuBois & Karcher, 2005; DuBois et al., 2011). Whatever the structure, evidence indicates that the best way for an afterschool mentoring program to assist at-risk youths is with early involvement (Pittman, 2017). Through this study, I sought to provide information and strategies that may be used in the development of best practices for afterschool mentoring programs for at-risk youths.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study was to examine lived experiences to understand the impact that mentoring has on at-risk youth in afterschool programs in the southeastern region of the United States. Additionally, I sought to explore interventions that can be used in afterschool programs to improve outcomes for juveniles. There was a need to examine whether mentoring in particular afterschool programs helps to divert youth participants from delinquency, and if not, why, as well as how future programs can be more effective. Moreover, there was a need to determine whether participating in an afterschool program and receiving mentoring decreases deviant behavior and delinquency.

I sought to achieve the purpose of this study by analyzing data collected by interviewing people with experience working in an afterschool program, including program administrators. The afterschool program that was the focus of this study supported youth from low-income families, high-risk youth, and youth without guardians.

Research Question

The following research question guided data collection and interpretation in this study: How does an afterschool mentoring program impact the lives of at-risk youth between 11 and 14 years of age?

Theoretical Framework

The social learning theory of Albert Bandura (1969, 1977, 1986) is helpful in understanding why and how youth learn behavioral and thought processes in their earlier years. This theory is based on the notion that individuals reproduce behaviors

demonstrated by models to achieve desirable outcomes. The social learning theory modeling concept has four important components: attention, retention, motor reproduction, and motivation. Attention stimulates the individual to concentrate on the performance of the behavior to be learned. The attention concept determines that learning was a result of direct experience with the environment. Retention involves a cognitive condition whereby the individual remembers a favorable behavior that has been modeled. For the individual to hold onto information for an extended period, retention must occur. Motor reproduction is the third component of the model; it compels the individual to accept the necessary role conditions of the favorable behavior. When a behavior is just imaged in the mental model, the individual does not have an adequate basis for learning. The mutual connection between retention and reproduction is being able to perform the observed behavior. Motivation is the last component of learning through modeling. An individual's ability to learn a behavior has a lot to do with the effort that the individual puts into performing the task or meeting the goal. According to Bandura (1969, 1986), the individual is responsible for motivation.

Social learning theory suggests that when at-risk youths are exposed to positive behaviors, they have a lower probability of engaging in delinquent activities. Ideally, youth in afterschool programs with mentorship activities receive exposure to positive models. This study, by providing mentors of afterschool programs with additional research to support how they serve the children in their care, may support such programs in promoting youth participants' learning of new skills and behaviors. In this way, afterschool programs may assist youth mentees in developing interest in school and other

productive activities, thereby guiding them toward success in adulthood. Chapter 2 includes further detail on social learning theory (Bandura, 1977).

Nature of the Study

The qualitative tradition was best suited for this study, in which I sought to obtain information on the lived experience of a select population of instructors of at-risk youth in afterschool mentoring programs (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Participants were instructors in afterschool mentoring programs in the southeastern United States. The afterschool program supported students 14 years of age and younger whose families had a household income of \$13,064 to \$48,546 for a family with one to nine or more members. After obtaining student demographic data such as gender, age, family structure, and race, I asked participating instructors to provide information on their experiences of and perspectives on the mentoring programs and their implications for and effectiveness in reducing the delinquency rate of at-risk youth.

Definition

To ensure proper interpretation of results, it is essential to be familiar with the terms used in this study.

At-risk youth: Individuals 18 years of age or younger who have a higher than average likelihood of engaging in crime or delinquency, or experiencing personal crisis (Levinson, 2002).

Afterschool program: Any organized program that youth can participate in outside of the traditional school day. Some afterschool programs are run by primary and secondary schools, while externally funded nonprofit or commercial organizations run

others. Afterschool youth programs can occur inside a school building or elsewhere in the community, such as at a community center, church, library, or park. Afterschool activities are a cornerstone of *concerted cultivation*, which is a style of parenting that emphasizes children gaining leadership experience and social skills through participation in organized activities (Mahoney, 2005)

High-risk community: A community with a set of social and economic conditions that place individuals at risk of failure, or of encountering significant problems related to employment, education, self-sufficiency, or a healthy lifestyle (Alexander & Entwisle, 1996).

Low-income families: Families whose taxable income falls below 150% of the national poverty level (U.S. Department of Education, 2018).

Mentor: A person who offers wisdom, knowledge, insight, and perspectives that are useful to another individual. A mentor serves as a capable friend, counselor, or tutor who helps another person enhance skills (Shea, 2001).

Mentoring: Mentoring is a process in which a mentor works with an individual in such a way that both gain knowledge and insight into their abilities to accomplish their goals (Shea, 2001).

Social learning theory: According to social learning theory, individuals learn and develop behavioral patterns through observing and imitating others (Bandura, 1977).

Youth development professional: An individual who develops nurturing relationships and connections with children by sympathizing with their family backgrounds and providing them with support in accomplishing their goals. Youth

development professionals serve as mentors to children, providing opportunities to them and ensuring a safe, enjoyable, and positive environment (Boys & Girls Club of the America, 2019).

Assumptions

Assumptions are things expected to be correct but not proven (Wargo, 2015). For this study, one assumption was that at-risk youths are likely to mirror a behavior if it results in outcomes they value. A second assumption was that at-risk youths participating in afterschool mentoring programs are less likely to engage in criminal activities. A third assumption was that at-risk youths who participate in afterschool mentoring programs are likely to graduate from middle and high school. The fourth assumption was that mentors provided honest answers during interviews. These assumptions were necessary to conduct and interpret the study.

Scope and Delimitations

I conducted this research study to address program elements and interventions directed toward high-risk youths to improve their overall outcomes, particularly by reducing crime and delinquency. This research was important because few or no afterschool mentoring programs exist in low-income areas, with high at-risk youths. Afterschool resources can have a significant influence on students from low-income, high-risk regions, given their disadvantages compared to wealthier adolescents. One delimitation of the study was its population, which included only instructors of students from a single low-income, high-risk community in Virginia.

Inadequacy of afterschool programs and other resources for youth can lead to increased rates of delinquency, lower rates of high school graduation and college acceptance, and greater difficulty in securing employment. Identifying the most effective programs that can be used to improve students' lives will be fundamental for at-risk youth populations. Hence low-income and school attendance are program participation criteria. Excluded from the population were afterschool-program instructors of adolescents from higher income, lower risk families and neighborhoods; because of this distinction, results are transferable to the study population but not to the broader population of instructors of adolescents nationwide.

Limitations

One of the study's limitations was the potential for bias that might arise from the instructors involved in this study, which might be problematic during data collection and might affect the validity of results. Moreover, limitations may have existed regarding the smaller number of participants in this qualitative study compared to quantitative studies. The accuracy of data collection may have been affected, impacting the validity of results. To mitigate biases and limitations, I selected an appropriate sample size for the study methodology and objectives and regularly monitored myself for bias.

Another obstacle might have been an instructor's inability or unwillingness to provide sufficiently detailed information about the students at the afterschool program. I assured participants of complete confidentiality in an effort to prevent this potential problem. Confidentiality is essential to protect the privacy of participants, build trust and rapport, and maintain ethical standards for the integrity of the research process in a study.

Providing a formal letter of request for access to the facility director may have further mitigated this risk. Such limitations had the potential to result in a significant amount of information being missing from the study. I took specific measures to reduce these limitations, including supervising instructors when collecting data to answer any questions and prevent biased reporting.

Significance

Children without afterschool care have a higher likelihood of spending time at home unsupervised (Deutsch, Blyth, Kelley, Tolan, & Lerner, 2017). During this time, they may perform delinquent acts, often in collaboration with similarly unsupervised at-risk youths. Afterschool programs provide supervision, homework assistance, and chances for physical and other activities, all of which may be lacking in disadvantaged neighborhoods.

According to Deutsch et al. (2017), many children from low-income families do not have well-educated parents; therefore, finding assistance with homework may be difficult for them. They may be without safe recreational facilities to provide them with constructive activities. Furthermore, they may lack mentors and positive role models to direct them during challenging periods in elementary, middle, and high school. As a result, youths without learning assistance and mentors often become delinquent, involving themselves in criminal activities. Creating well-funded afterschool programs with the necessary components may produce long-lasting and sustainable positive results (Deutsch et al., 2017).

Through this study, I sought to determine whether the afterschool program had an impact on reducing delinquency among at-risk youths through mentorship. With this information, government leaders and afterschool program administrators may create better funded and structured programs to minimize misconduct and adverse experiences affecting low-income, high-risk youths. With such programs, youths from impoverished communities may enjoy more opportunities for academic and personal growth.

Summary

Chapter 1 presented an introduction to the study. This chapter contained a discussion of the research problem with a brief review of literature by other scholars regarding the topic of youth from low-income, high-risk environments and lack of accessible afterschool programs and activities. Further, the purpose of the study was identified, and the significance of the study was presented in relation to the goal of improving outcomes for at-risk youth. The population for the study was defined as consisting of mentors of low-income, at-risk youth attending afterschool programs. I identified limitations to generalizability due to the use of a small, focused sample at a single afterschool program located in Virginia. Chapter 2 includes a review of the literature regarding components of afterschool mentoring programs that help to reduce delinquency among high-risk youths.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

High rates of delinquency among at-risk youths is an ongoing problem in low-income, high-risk communities. There is a wide range of quality and consistency in afterschool programs developed for at-risk youths from kindergarten to high school (Deutsch et al., 2017). While some of these programs have been successful, others have produced fewer positive outcomes than initially projected. To best identify which elements of existing programs contribute most positively to reduced delinquency by at-risk youths, I conducted a study with afterschool instructors of this population. In preparation for this research, I conducted a comprehensive literature review on afterschool programs, in which I explored psychosocial support, demographic specificity, mentoring, and academic support and their efficacy in preventing and reducing delinquent behavior. The study was conducted to uncover encouragement through community activism and social development. This was done by integration of science, math, music, and art; and inclusion of holistic wellness, athletics, and animal-assisted therapy options. In this chapter, I present the literature search strategy, the study's theoretical foundation, and the literature review findings.

Literature Search Strategy

The primary source for this search was the Walden University Library, which provided access to multiple databases. Sources reviewed included research studies, case studies, peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly articles, and books published by experts in the field. I accessed various search engines, websites, and databases, including Google,

Google Scholar, Academic Search Complete, and ProQuest, including the ProQuest Criminal Justice Database. Keywords and phrases deemed relevant to the research question and topic included *adolescents in urban poverty, adolescent mental health, teenage substance use, afterschool programs, at-risk adolescents, best practices for afterschool programs, child welfare, intervention programs directed toward juveniles, juvenile justice systems, mentorship programs, minority youth, positive youth development, prevention programs, resilience theory, skill development, social structure/social cognitive theory, social justice, youth development professional, and youth well-being*, with terms searched in relevant databases. Sources came primarily from the past 5 years, although older seminal literature, literature related to the study framework, and classic studies merited inclusion.

Theoretical Foundation

The foundation of this study was Bandura's (1977) social learning theory, in which three important processes are observation, imitation, and modeling. Modeling has four components: attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation. According to Navabi (2012), people learn how to communicate based on social interactions with others and observations through all stages of life. According to Bandura (1965), people learn behaviors in different way such as observation, imitation, and modeling. Social learning theory emphasizes that human behavior develops through observation and modeling of the behaviors, attitudes, and emotional reactions of others. Bandura further explained human behavior as involving constant reciprocal collaboration between cognitive,

behavioral, and environmental influences. It also depends on rewards and punishments for actions. If rewarded, a behavior will continue; if punished, it will cease.

Bandura and Ribes-Inesla (1976) stated that peer influence could be the cause of juvenile delinquent behavior because juveniles spend a significant amount of time with their peers. They may feel pressure from peers and feel that they have to commit crimes or other deviant behaviors to be accepted. If juveniles do not receive appropriate guidance from their parents, then the influence of their peers can lead them to delinquent behaviors (Bandura & Ribes-Inesla, 1976). Moreover, because behaviors are learned or imitated, a child who observes the behavior of a parent acting deviantly may display the same behavior.

Likewise, Dooley and Schreckhise (2016) contended that people develop behavior patterns through imitating and observing others. Social learning theory, they argued, helps to explain why children develop specific thoughts and behaviors when they are young. Children's behavior may be learned from the people they see, such as parents, family members, church members, peers, or others in the community in which they live. As such, children from low-income, high-risk areas are likely to adopt behaviors they see among people in their environment (Dooley & Schreckhise, 2016; Park & Zhan, 2017; Unroe, Barnett, & Payne-Purvis, 2016).

The objective of this study was to learn about effective primary intervention programs that assist in minimizing delinquency among juveniles. Afterschool programs for youths from low-income, high-risk families help to increase participating adolescents' community engagement. Social learning theory represented an appropriate framework for

this study and its research question, which involved analysis of afterschool program components that may help significantly in reducing crime rates and delinquency among disadvantaged youths.

Social learning theory can be applied to analysis of the behaviors and attitudes of juveniles based on the three main processes explored within the theory (i.e., observation, imitation, and modeling). These processes relate to the determinants of human behavior, namely, environmental factors, behavioral factors, and cognitive factors. Environmental or ecological factors involve social norms, culture, and the level of influence or ability of these norms to change human behavior. Behavioral factors involve self-efficacy or skills possessed by individuals and how they affect human behavior. Lastly, cognitive factors mainly concern the attitudes, knowledge, and expectations of people regarding a particular behavior. Analysis of these factors supports the position that effective primary intervention programs can assist in minimizing delinquency among juveniles.

Afterschool Programs decrease Delinquency

Afterschool intervention programs contribute to decreased juvenile delinquency for low-income, at-risk youths. Afterschool intervention programs are prevalent and familiar programs within the United States, especially in low-income areas. These programs aim at helping the child develop and build skills by engaging in various activities. Afterschool intervention programs significantly contribute to reducing juvenile delinquency because participating youth are involved in constructive and beneficial exercises that prevent them from engaging in or being exposed to deviant behaviors such as drug abuse, crime, and violence (Taheri, & Welsh, 2016). The functionality of these

programs relies on social behavior theory, in that their design leverages and structures environmental, behavioral, and cognitive factors to reduce youth participants' risk of developing delinquent behaviors.

In relation to environmental factors, afterschool intervention programs create a safe environment for youths in which they are separate from risk-prone situations that might expose them to unwanted behaviors. For example, these programs help to keep low-income, at-risk youths away from criminal gangs and peers who might influence them to start using drugs or engaging in illegal and violent activities. These programs create supportive environments that enable youths to use their time and channel their energy toward developing their skills.

In relation to behavioral factors, instructors in afterschool programs model positive behaviors for youths by teaching and training them to support the development of various social skills (Gottfredson, Gerstenblith, Soulé, Womer, & Lu, 2004). Some low-income youths can benefit from programs teaching morals because, afterschool intervention programs help them to develop interaction skills, which may aid them in living more harmoniously with others. For example, youths may be guided on how to help each other when they experience challenges when completing assignments or other tasks. As such, they are taught how to support, respect, and cooperate with each other and the community in general.

In relation to cognitive factors, afterschool intervention programs focus on skill development in youth participants, which involves teaching youth new skills that will help them deal with or address specific issues. For instance, low-income, at-risk youths in

such programs may be provided with assertiveness training that enables them to resist negative peer influences. Additionally, youth in these programs are provided with academic support and necessary life skills, which may change their attitudes about academics and even their future careers. In this process, participating youth may form more positive attitudes about themselves and their futures, which may enable them to stay away from juvenile delinquency.

History of Boys & Girls Clubs of America

In 1860, in Hartford, Connecticut, the first Boys' Club was founded in 1860 by Elizabeth Hamersley and two sisters, Mary and Alice Goodwin. These women created a club to keep boys from hanging out in neighborhood streets, not doing anything productive. They sought to create a positive environment for youth ("Boys and Girls Club of America History," 2020). There were 53 independent Boys' Clubs in 1906, which came together in Boston to form a national organization, the Federated Boys' Clubs. The organization renamed itself in 1931 as Boys' Clubs of America, and in 1956 the Club celebrated its 50th anniversary and received a Congressional Charter. The organization made another name change after accepting female youths in 1990, becoming the Boys & Girls Clubs of America (BGCA). The Congressional Charter was renewed and reflected the changes. In 2006, the BGCA celebrated the organization's 100th anniversary ("Boys and Girls Club of America History," 2020).

Today, there are over 4,000 local independent clubs that are affiliated with the national organization. Groups within the BGCA organization serve over 4 million youth

and employ about 50,000 staff members. There are clubs in all 50 states, as well as in Puerto Rico, in the Virgin Islands, and on U.S. military bases.

In addition to founders Elizabeth Hamersley, Mary Goodwin, and Alice Goodwin, notable individuals who helped to establish and sustain the mission of the organization included Herbert Hoover, William E. Hall, Stanley Resor, J. Edgar Hoover, and George A. Scott. Denzel Washington, a previous club member, has served as a spokesperson for the BGCA since 1993. Major League Baseball is an official sponsor of the BGCA. The BGCA ranked number one among youth organizations for 13 consecutive years, according to *The Chronicle of the Philanthropy*. Among all nonprofit organizations, they ranked number 12.

Purpose of the Boys & Girls Clubs of America

The BGCA is well known for providing life-enhancing opportunities for children and adolescents who might not otherwise have access to such resources (BCGA, 2020). The BGCA organization has maintained its central mission and core beliefs for over a century. Its goal is to enable all young people, especially those who need services most, to reach their full potential as productive, caring, responsible citizens (BCGA, 2020). The organization provides “a world-class club experience that ensures that success is within reach for every young person who enters its doors,” with all members on track to graduate from high school with a plan for the future, demonstrating good character and citizenship, and living a healthy lifestyle (BCGA, 2020). BGCA staff hold the belief that every kid has what it takes to succeed. The mission and core beliefs of the BGCA fuel a commitment to promote safe, positive, and inclusive environments for all. BGCA groups

support all youths and teens—of every race, ethnicity, gender, gender expression, sexual orientation, ability, socioeconomic status, and religion—in reaching their full potential (BCGA, 2020).

There are four core aims of the BCGA:

1. to provide a safe and secure environment for members to learn and grow;
2. to encouraging and maintain members' relationships with caring and professional adults;
3. to provide life-enriching programs as well as character development opportunities; and
4. to create hope and opportunity (BCGA, 2020).

The BCGA organization offers a range of life-improving opportunities in areas such as education, career, life skills, fitness, sports, recreation, and arts. Character and leadership development are two prominent points of the Club's mission. Torch Clubs focus on building character among young members between the ages of 11 and 13. The Keystone program offers leadership development to those between the ages of 14 and 18 (BCGA, 2020). Since 1947, the organization has presented the Youth of the Year award to youths for excellence in character and leadership.

Although the organization that evolved into the BCGA was established as a club exclusively for boys, today 45% of club members are female (BCGA, 2020). Club members' ages range from 5 to 18 years old. According to the BCGA (2020), 43% of participating youths are between the ages of 6 and 10 years old, and 6% of members are 5

years of age or younger. In the United States, the BGCA organization provides services to 64% of minority families, with a limited relationship with Native American youths.

Literature Review Related to Key Variables

Afterschool Programs

As noted by Deutsch et al. (2017), the means of afterschool program development and evaluation have become far more sophisticated in recent years than has historically been the case. By using a qualitative approach in this study, I sought to determine not only if a particular program was helping youth, but also why, and how future programs could be more effective. Afterschool programs play an essential role in propelling students toward success. Following an examination of successful afterschool programs, Hurd and Deutsch (2017) found that high-quality programs resulted in greater social and emotional learning, better behavior, and reduced delinquency among participating students compared to students who did not participate. However, such programs were mostly available to students from wealthier regions, hence the need for implementation of successful measures to assist students from low-income areas (“Every Child Deserves,” 2016). Although afterschool programs foster positive change in many youth, they may be less successful in low-income regions due to inadequate support.

Psychosocial Support Considerations

An essential element of successful afterschool programs is a consideration for the psychological support of participating youths (Bean, Harlow, & Forneris, 2017). Programs historically showing the most success were those directing efforts toward academic, socioemotional, and behavioral considerations in youth (Hurd & Deutsch,

2017; Smith & Bradshaw, 2017). An example of this type of program is Leaders at Play, an afterschool program designed for middle school youths in urban settings that provides experiences to improve problem-solving competencies, emotional regulation, and communication skills (Frazier et al., 2015). Frazier et al. (2015) conducted a study of 46 low-income African American youths with an average age of 13.09 years and a female-to-male ratio of 59:41, finding that program elements were successful in improving social skills and lessening problematic behaviors.

Another critical element of a successful afterschool programs is consideration of nonacademic and noncognitive development processes, with a focus on learning opportunities outside the classroom for a more expansive range of learning outcomes (Pittman, 2017). Park and Zhan (2017) identified psychological support and positive relationship formation as essential elements of programs for youth. There are five optional arrangements for afterschool care programs dependent care, parental care, self-care, and combinations of care. Compared to afterschool programs, lower-income children in relative or parental care situations experienced better academic outcomes and fewer behavioral problems in the afterschool program.

Taylor, Oberle, Durlak, and Weissberg (2017) found that youth development programs that integrated social and emotional learning considerations resulted in positive participant outcomes in social skills, attitudes, emotional regulation, and other predictors of youth well-being. Furthermore, as shown in a postintervention follow-up, emotional skill development appeared to be the strongest predictor of well-being, linked closely to outcomes such as safe sex practices and high school graduation (Taylor et al., 2017).

Other researchers echoed these findings, exploring afterschool program elements with a single moderating variable without efficacy (Kremer, Maynard, Polanin, Vaughn, & Sarteschi, 2015). Programs that included social and emotional development considerations were slightly more likely to produce improved outcomes in participants (Kremer et al., 2015).

Gordon, Jacobs, and Wright (2016) reviewed the outcomes of Teaching Personal and Social Responsibility, an afterschool leadership program targeted toward disengaged youth at high risk for dropping out of school. Heavily integrated with the social and emotional learning framework, the researchers revealed improved participant outcomes concerning academic engagement and decreased dropout rates (Gordon et al., 2016). Developing programs that enhance youth engagement is a commonly recognized requirement for success, particularly in urban environments with a lower socio-economic, at-risk demographics, and a higher potential for poor academic performance and dropout rates (Pelcher & Rajan, 2016).

Special Demographic-Focused Programs

As found by Levy et al. (2017), some afterschool programs that take a more direct approach toward providing services to unique demographics of juveniles have been highly successful. Examples of these are programs that support lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youths; focus on developing work skills such as competence in technology; and pair young girls with college-aged women who have a shared interest in entrepreneurial endeavors. Other successes came from programs specifically for youths who are in gangs, have dropped out of school, or are interested in community

development (Levy et al., 2017). One of the most consistently positive elements associated with these specialized demographic programs is adult and youth interaction with shared elements of identity (Levy et al., 2017).

Dooley and Schreckhise (2016) reviewed the Youth Development Program, an element of the Federal Workforce Investment Act, to determine if participation by impoverished youths resulted in lower dropout rates. Based on initial data, the researchers suggested a positive association between program participation and increased school retention rates. However, when accounting for considerations such as the number of participants held back by at least one grade, Dooley and Schreckhise found no statistically significant difference between program participants and nonparticipants in the same socio-economic demographic.

Lian (2017) evaluated a program directed toward lower-income African American youths and found the availability of afterschool programs significantly reduced the amount of unsupervised time the youths had; consequently, time for delinquency decreased through constructive afterschool programs participation. In another study focused on at-risk African American girls, Unroe et al. (2016) evaluated a program designed to improve empowerment and self-esteem through the application of resilience theory (van Breda, 2018) and social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1977). The researchers identified increased self-esteem in participants, which subsequently improved the sense of empowerment among this population (Unroe et al., 2016).

Assessing another program targeted toward African American at-risk youths, Hurd, Tan, and Loeb (2016) sought to determine if a natural mentor (an individual who

was part of the person's life but not a formally appointed mentor) would impact the youth's propensity for risky sexual behavior, substance use, and depressive symptoms. Despite the hypothesis that youths with natural rather than appointed club staff mentors may see adverse outcomes in these areas, the opposite was true. Thus, natural mentors may serve as an insulating element for youths in their shared at-risk environment (Hurd et al., 2016), which goes against the common perception that youths raised in at-risk neighborhoods with "mentors" consisting of adults around them, many of whom may be participating in risky behaviors themselves. However, these youths are not always negatively impacted as a result of these relationships. Passafaro et al., (2016) identified benefits of homeless youths' interaction with mentors and other positive adult role models, finding fewer acts of delinquency, higher grades, greater community engagement, and overall increased social and emotional wellness. Among the significant benefits of programs offered by afterschool programs were skill-building, collaboration, and giving youths a voice in selecting what elements work best for them.

Delinquency

Taheri and Welsh (2016) performed a systematic review of 17 studies in which researchers evaluated the efficacy of afterschool programs. Although these afterschool programs showed a small yet no statistically significant impact on delinquency, no intervention indicated a reduction in delinquency as a result of afterschool program participation (Taheri & Welsh, 2016). Despite these findings, there was also no data to suggest discontinuation of afterschool programs, but perhaps a more focused attempt to target predictors of delinquency (Taheri & Welsh, 2016). Furthermore, in a meta-

analysis, Vries, Hoeve, Assink, Stams, and Asscher (2015) found behavioral-based programs that integrated parenting training, behavioral contracts, and behavioral modeling in conjunction with a family context, rather than merely an individual context, most predicted a reduction in delinquency risk.

Program Elements

The best way to effectively direct the influx of federal and state funding available for afterschool programs targeted toward at-risk youth is to develop a system of evidence-based data that supports the efficacy of program elements and explains the rationale as to why these elements are successful (Kingston, Mihalic, & Sigel, 2016). According to Cid (2017), programs directed toward at-risk youth in lower economic sectors that include an array of options such as recreation, music, tutoring, recreation, sports, and other focused activities produced improvements in school retention, motivation, and academic performance.

Mentoring

One of the most consistently recognized ways to lessen delinquency and improve the chances for at-risk youth is through mentor programs (Chapman et al., 2017). Few researchers have returned negative findings of the value of mentoring managed through an organized, evidence-based program. Findings do, however, conflict concerning which elements of youth evaluative indicators most improve from mentoring versus those minimally impacted.

Addressing major mentoring programs in the United States—Big Brothers, Big Sisters (BBBS), TEAMmates, Study Buddies, and The Mentoring Project—Lindt and

Blair (2017) found evidence to support improvements in social and emotional well-being, academic performance, school attendance, and grades. Comparably, DeWit, DuBois, Erdem, Larose, and Lipman (2016) examined self-reports from 859 youths ages 6 to 17 years who took part in Big Brothers Big Sisters mentorship programs. The researchers identified benefits including improved mental health, fewer behavioral and delinquency problems, and higher self-esteem as compared to their peers who did not participate in such programs. However, Erdem et al. found the same improvements in youths who had severed the mentor relationship.

Despite findings indicating that academic improvement may not be an outcome resulting from mentoring, conflicting data exist. Lampley and Johnson (2010) found that 49 of 54 middle school participants using the mentoring program Linking Individual Students to Educational Needs (LISTEN) showed academic improvement in their GPA, attendance, and behavior. Furthering the indication that mentoring may improve upon academic variables, Clark, Heilmann, Johnson, and Taylor (2016) completed a quantitative analysis of 113 Midwestern freshmen high school students concerning academic performance, grades, and graduation rates between students with a mentor and those without. The students in their study took part in a mentorship program called Freshman Focus, which centered on organizational socialization. Clark et al. were, however, surprised to find more exceptional academic and behavioral improvements in students who entered the mentoring relationship with high expectations.

Additional indicators of improvement are related to mentoring. Somers, Wang, and Piliawsky (2016) conducted a quasi-experimental study of 118 Black students

transitioning to high school in low-income urban communities. The researchers found that the tutoring and mentoring intervention group who received mentoring displayed a range of improvements, including better grades, more significant academic commitment, and perceived school support. Although Somers et al. (2016) did not measure the long-term effects of such assistance, they expressed promise for future studies with higher numbers of participants. Chapman et al. (2017) also found a positive correlation between student and mentor as a predictor of success: The higher the levels of engagement and mentor support, the greater the improvements in the youths' social development.

Rhodes, Schwartz, Willis, and Wu (2017) also identified quality in the mentoring relationship as a critical factor in predicting the mentorship's success. The higher the interpersonal bond between child and mentor, they found, the better the outcomes for the youth. Trust and consistency in the mentor relationship also seem to be critical requirements for improvements in academic and social indicators in at-risk youth. Additionally, as a product of the mentoring relationship, the youth may experience increased opportunities and a shifting world perspective that may not otherwise have occurred without the presence of mentoring (Rodríguez-Planas, 2014).

Lindt and Blair (2017) produced further positive findings related to the value of mentoring for students entering the program in middle school and remaining through their transition to high school. Following a literature review, the researchers examined one program in particular, with final suggestions for other schools hoping to begin a mentoring program of their own. Youths introduced to mentoring at a younger age are more likely to experience increases in courage and confidence (Fiat et al., 2017).

Schwartz and Rhodes (2016) supported these findings, identifying mentoring from earlier ages as more likely to increase the empowerment and self-efficacy of at-risk youth.

Additional researchers have suggested the efficacy of natural mentors within youths' social circles, such as teachers, advisors, and coaches. Hurd et al. (2016) evaluated 336 college freshman from low-income, low-education families to determine the efficacy of having a natural mentor, identifying improved mental health, higher GPAs, and more significant academic commitment; however, their findings are not directly applicable to the proposed study, as their school of the study was a high-profile, high-income university with students who were predominantly White. Furthering recommendations to educate teachers on their potential role as mentors, Wesely, Dzoba, Miller, and Rasche (2017) believed instructors should learn how to respond as a mentor to the social strain experienced by at-risk students, something the instructors themselves may not have experienced.

Mentoring Foster Care Youth

A particularly vulnerable group of youths, children living in foster care, also appear to benefit from afterschool programs with a mentoring element (Thompson, Greeson, & Brunsink, 2016). Following a meta-analysis, Thompson et al. pinpointed improvements in foster youths, ranging from improved psychosocial action, more appropriate behavior, less delinquency, and higher academic achievement. Thompson et al., cautioned, however, that a small effect size hampered the generalizability of their results. In an earlier study, Taussig and Culhane (2010) conducted a randomized controlled trial of youth in foster care, with 77 children in a control group who did not

receive a mentor and 79 demographically similar children in an intervention group who did. Through a comparison of pre- and post-values for cognitive, mental health, and educational elements in both groups, Taussig and Culhane found more significant improvement in the youth who had received mentoring. Additionally, children in the intervention group reported improved quality of life, fewer adverse mental health symptoms, and fewer instances of required mental health intervention throughout the mentoring program (Taussig & Culhane, 2010). Blakeslee and Keller (2018) assessed the My Life mentoring model to determine the program's success with preventing criminal activity in foster youth as they aged out and moved into adulthood.

Overall, foster youth exhibited higher self-efficacy and self-determination and reduced mental health disturbances. In one year with government funding, Blakeslee and Keller plan to reassess students who took part in the mentoring model. Further investigating natural mentors and their impact on the lives of foster children aging out of the system, Greeson (2013) supported the benefits of mentorship. She found foster youth with established, positive natural mentors had a more successful transition out of the foster care system and through this developmental period, with fewer challenges than youth having to go through the process alone. With similar findings, Hurd et al., (2016) suggested that encouraging youth in the at-risk demographic to seek mentorship from nonparental adults such as teachers, coaches, or family friends may be more effective than designation through a formal mentorship program. While Hunter, Wilson, and McArthur (2017) discussed some challenges of mentorship relationships across the

generation gap, a central observation was the importance of young people being part of a family-centered culture, something generally not the case for foster children.

Academics

Many at-risk youth struggles in academics and an afterschool program can be a means by which to bridge the gap between these students and those who have more significant help from parents and formal tutors outside of school (Heckman & Sanger, 2013). One way to build upon afterschool programs is to encourage greater parental involvement and family engagement (Paluta, Lower, Anderson-Butcher, Gibson, & Iachini, 2015). Alternate means of improving at-risk youth's access to academic help include technology-centered solutions such as web-based peer tutoring (Healy, Block, & Kelly, 2016), as well as more traditional tutoring options in the form of combined mentoring and tutoring interventions (Somers et al., 2016).

Additionally, the use of an intensive program during the summer months may improve academic performance in students at risk for emotional and behavioral disorders (Zeng, Benner, & Silva, 2016). The researchers conducted a quasi-experiment with this population, with one group receiving intensive reading instruction only and another group receiving the same intensive reading instruction along with social-emotional learning designed to teach self-regulation, emotional regulation, conflict resolution, and peer interaction skills. Both groups achieved higher literacy levels, but only the intervention group saw improvement in emotional-social competencies (Zeng et al., 2016). Based on these findings, it appears that programs primarily directed toward academics can also

positively integrate other skills a child must develop to be successful without adversely impacting the academic outcomes.

Beyond these findings, it is evident that helping at-risk youth develop resiliency also improves their subsequent academic performance (Masten, Fiat, Labella, & Strack, 2015). Masten et al. (2015) echoed this connection, identifying the link as a product of increased emotional connectedness that arises from improved resilience. Additionally, if program directors have a goal of also improving self-efficacy beliefs, then children who receive additional academic help experience more favourable outcomes than those who do not (Lee et al., 2017). The literature further supports the findings that programs substantially focused on academic outcomes can integrate additional social and emotional learning elements, with better academic and developmental results than academic-only objectives (Masten et al., 2015).

A different way to help at-risk youth from low-income areas is the Pathways to Education program, which is specifically targeted toward improving academic outcomes in this group (Oreopoulos, Brown, & Lavecchia, 2017). The program also includes multiple elements such as proactive mentoring, group educational activities, and daily tutoring support. It has been successful in increasing positive academic outcomes for this type of student (Oreopoulos et al., 2017). Furthermore, because many at-risk youths lack regular access to the same technology as their not-at-risk peers, programs with technology as a feature element in the education process have shown success in improving academic outcomes (Darling-Hammond, Zieleszinski, & Goldman, 2014).

Community Activism and Development

One additional afterschool program element that is effective in helping to improve the outcomes of at-risk youth is a direction toward community activism and development efforts. Singleton and Bossart (2017) found that community-based development programs not only provided improvements in the community but also taught essential skills about the value of work and accomplishment. One of the most popular ways to incorporate this type of element into a program is through the use of a community garden, which allows students to participate in its development as part of the afterschool program (Fifolt, Morgan, & Burgess, 2017; Hunter, 2016; Stevens, 2016). Regarding nutrition (Martinez, Gatto, Spruijt-Metz, & Davis, 2015). Perhaps one of the most Such programs not only serve to improve students' community and school engagement but can also incorporate health-based education important reasons to offer a community garden element is that not everyone participates purely for the satisfaction of community betterment. Instead, many at-risk youths take part in these programs as a type of sanctuary (Akiva, Carey, Cross, Delale-O'Connor, & Brown, 2017) where they can go to escape the dangerous and often abusive realities of their home during afterschool hours.

Science and Math

The program element that is less popular, but has resulted in positive outcomes in the afterschool program environment is the integration of science and math. Specific programs that partner students with mentors in fields of math and science have proven particularly beneficial in the improvement of academic engagement (Sowers et al., 2017). Afterschool programs enabling student teachers in these fields to complete required

teaching hours in such programs would be cost-effective, ensure students learn from qualified personnel, and help future educators learn valuable skills about interacting with the type of students they may one day teach. Such programs include Leaders at Play, Teaching Personal and Social Responsibility, and social and emotional learning (Frazier et al., 2015; Heckman & Sanger, 2013).

Music

A significant problem in lower-income school districts is the elimination of many extracurricular programs that were once widely available. Music departments often face cancellation first, yet the music is an exceptionally valuable tool in at-risk areas, serving as an element of increasing engagement in a productive activity that can moderate delinquency risk. Not only have researchers found music programs expand the neural encoding of speech patterns in at-risk youth (Kraus et al., 2014), but they also serve to lessen the divide between cultures and languages in at-risk communities (Cain, Lakhani, & Istvandity, 2016). It would seem that music is a language everyone understands and a culture everyone shares.

Afterschool programs that offer music programs help in improving the auditory-cognitive boost to youth during critical years of their development. Community music training has long proven a successful program in providing free music lessons to children from underserved families at high risk of learning and social problems. In a Los Angeles study of 44 children aged between three and five years, Kraus et al. (2014) found youngsters completing two years of music training demonstrated an improved

neurophysiological distinction of stop consonants, a neural mechanism associated with reading and language skills.

Art

Much the same as music programs, many art classes in lower-income public schools have also disappeared. Although there is an increasing need to foster creativity as part of youth development (Montgomery, 2017), many areas lack the resources to offer these types of programs. The need exists for developing youth to have a creative outlet, particularly for at-risk youth who may otherwise lack any outlet of expression. In a study conducted by the American Educational Research Association, researchers found the addition of arts-based teaching, which included arts, music, dance, and drama, had a “dramatic impact” on the behavior, motivation, and academic achievement of at-risk students (Li, Kenzy, Underwood, & Severson, 2015, p. 567). Additionally, the inclusion of art therapy for at-risk students has also helped improve upon their self-expression and the development of greater resiliency (Stepney, 2017).

Beyond the standard art class, art therapy can serve as a medium to encourage engagement in-group processes in at-risk youth (Averett, Crowe, & Johnson, 2017). Sitzer and Stockwell (2015), found that art therapy also improves the mental health of at-risk youth when incorporated into a curriculum grounded in cognitive behavioral therapy modalities. Additionally, for a generation that may be more comfortable with technology-based art forms, incorporating mobile media into a program for at-risk youth allows students to connect with academic concepts through creative perspectives, both in and out of the classroom (Castro, Lalonde, & Pariser, 2016).

Holistic Wellness

Other new, interesting program elements with proven success in curricula for at-risk youth are wellness practices, such as mindfulness-based therapy, meditation, and yoga practice (Sitzer & Stockwell, 2015). Examining meditation integrated into elementary school curricula, Yoo et al., (2016) found a decrease in anxiety, aggression, depression, and cortisol levels. In a separate randomized controlled study, the addition of a mindfulness-based program into an at-risk school resulted in gradually increasing perceptions of credibility in mindfulness practice and decreasing levels of substance abuse (Sibinga, Webb, Ghazarian, & Ellen, 2016). Sibinga et al. also recorded a reduction in depression and stress levels in the intervention group compared to the control group. Multiple researchers (e.g., Bluth et al., 2016; Rawlett & Scrandis, 2015), have noted the benefits of using mindfulness-based programs for at-risk youth, indicating such programs can decrease depression, anxiety, and stress for students living in high-strain environments.

There is also strong support for the value of yoga in improving behavior and psychological wellness in at-risk youth (Centeio, Whalen, Thomas, Kulik, & McCaughtry, 2017; Fishbein et al., 2016). Further, Fishbein et al., found that in a group of high-risk students, a yoga program increased indicators of positive mental health, improved coping strategies, and positively changed attitudes about violence. Also, yoga in at-risk youth has produced improvements in self-efficacy levels, which then leads to improved academic self-confidence and moderate improvements in academic performance (Butzer, LoRusso, Shin, and Khalsa, 2017). Yoga has also shown

effectiveness in targeting specific negative behaviors common in at-risk youth, such as substance abuse (Butzer et al., 2017) and disordered eating patterns (Cook-Cottone, Talebkhah, Guyker, & Keddie, 2017). Khalsa and Butzer (2016), found in a meta-synthesis, including yoga in youth programs, improved physical, behavioral, emotional, and mental health measures.

Athletics

Recreational and athletic offerings are widely recognized program elements in afterschool programs (Hermens, Super, Verkooijen, & Koelen, 2017). At-risk youth's sports participation in high school correlates with reduced links between childhood behavioral disorders and adult antisocial behavior (Samek, Elkins, Keyes, Iacono, & McGue, 2015), improved indicators of teen mental health (Ho, Zhou, Fung, & Kua, 2017), and greater engagement in positive academic and sports functions (Zarrett, Abraczinskas, Skiles Cook, Wilson, & Ragaban, 2018). Kwan, Bobko, Faulkner, Donnelly, and Cairney (2014) also found a connection between participation in youth sports and decreased levels of illegal drug use, yet with a potential for increased alcohol use compared to nonathletes.

Another challenge in lower-income youth is the above-average rate of obesity (Hermens et al., 2017). The option to participate in physical activity consistently can significantly improve upon physical health concerns that may begin to manifest, as the child gets older. The integration of recreational programs with nutritional education in afterschool programs addresses two areas of significant concern that often lead to childhood obesity in this group (DeVries, 2016). Additionally, for youth already

struggling with their weight, physical activity programs help to improve their neurocognitive function and academic performance (Bustamante, Williams, & Davis, 2016). These benefits also appear in students without weight issues who can participate in increased levels of physical activity (Mullender-Wijnsma et al., 2015). Also directly linking sports participation to academic performance, Mahoney (2014) found the social networks developed through these activities could lead to a reduced risk of early school dropout.

Increasing access to physical activity options through afterschool programs that integrate recreational programs also helps in the development of crucial life skills that many at-risk youths may not be learning at home (Holt, 2016). For example, Martinek and Hellison (2016) identified vital functions of responsibility learned through participating in sports and recreational activities, while Hermens et al. (2017) found sports programs improved the development of life skills in socially vulnerable juveniles. According to Cryan and Martinek (2017), when youth participated in a soccer program with the Teaching Personal and Social Responsibility program, they exhibited improved outcomes in cooperation, self-control, and respectful behavior. Interestingly, Harwood, Lavidor, and Rassovsky (2017) found that incorporating martial arts into youth programs helped to reduce aggression and improve conflict management competencies. In another study indicating the connection between access to recreational activities and better critical social and emotional development skills, Pereira and Marques-Pinto (2017) noted that offering dance classes as part of an afterschool program improved students' relationship skills, self-efficacy, and self-management competencies. Perry (2016) also

cited a variety of emotional and social skills developed when afterschool programs incorporate a dance element such as hip-hop into the program.

As it stands, fewer than 45% of U.S. children achieve the government-suggested 60 min of daily physical activity (Crouter et al., 2015). Although many schools may have eliminated athletic programs for students in elementary and middle school, there remains a variety of ways to implement community sports options into disadvantaged communities (Cross & Lauzon, 2015; Rosso & McGrath, 2016). Including this element in afterschool programs helps to improve the holistic health levels of at-risk youth and reduce the risk for delinquency, poor academic performance, and behavioral issues (Hermens et al., 2017). Community sports options appear an excellent way to meet many of the objectives of programs targeted toward this demographic of juveniles.

Animal-Assisted Therapy

A relatively recent addition to some afterschool programs has been the inclusion of animal-assisted therapy options. The use of animal-assisted therapy in at-risk youth appears to improve upon secure attachment (Balluerka, Muela, Amiano, & Caldente, 2014), reduce the risk for mental health problems and provide therapeutic options for children who display mental health challenges (Hoagwood, Acri, Morrissey, & Peth-Pierce, 2017), and decrease depression while increasing hope (Frederick, Hatz, & Lanning, 2015). Equine-assisted therapy correlates with higher learning confidence levels in at-risk youth who are struggling academically (Ho et al., 2017), while also serving to teach valuable life skills and leadership lessons to juveniles (Gibbons, Cunningham, Paiz, Poelker, & Chajón, 2017). Although scheduling a horse visit to an urban afterschool

center may not be feasible, animal therapy dogs, rabbits, and even pot-bellied pigs are realistic options for periodic afterschool programs. Afterschool program inclusion, achieving similar therapeutic effects to other animal-assisted interventions (Hoagwood et al., 2017).

Summary

Researchers have identified numerous potential solutions demonstrated to be highly effective in helping at-risk youth improve upon their mental health, academic competencies, social skills, behavioral practices, and cognitive processes, thus reducing at-risk youth. Hurd and Deutsch (2017) found student attendance at high-quality afterschool programs resulted in better grades and behavior, as well as reduced delinquency and crime. Pittman (2017) and Park and Zhan (2017) noted the importance of incorporating non-academic activities into afterschool program curricula, something Taylor et al. (2017) supported socioemotional learning. An element returning, perhaps the most significant rewards are mentoring (Chapman et al., 2017; Fiat et al., 2017; Schwartz & Rhodes, 2016). What is not yet known are the specific impacts of sports, yoga, and music on a population of low-income, at-risk students attending an afterschool mentoring program is something this study will seek to uncover.

Chapter 3 includes the research design rationale and role of the researcher. In this chapter, the methodology is outlined, including procedures for recruitment, instrumentation, data collection, and data analysis. Issues of trustworthiness include a look at ethical procedures and anonymity.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to identify how afterschool programs impact delinquency in at-risk youth. This qualitative research was conducted to answer the following research question: How does an afterschool mentoring program impact the lives of at-risk youth between 11 and 14 years of age?

This qualitative study involved examination of the lives of at-risk youth through their instructors' perspectives, to understand how participating in an afterschool program with mentoring impacted adolescents' lives. In responding to semistructured, open-ended interview questions, instructors assessed whether program attendance served as a positive reinforcement in the lives of participating youth. One of the questions that instructors addressed was whether the youth were involved in delinquent behavior before attending the afterschool program, and what role the afterschool program played in correcting that behavior.

Afterschool program staff provide mentorship and guidance for youth who do not receive afterschool supervision from their parents. Program instructors may offer not only guidance, but also homework help, exercise, music, sports, and other activities that can help at-risk youth build their self-esteem. As a result, participating youth may become more positive and productive citizens in the community.

In this chapter, I address the study setting, the research design, the rationale for the study, my role as the researcher, the methodology, and instrumentation. Threats to validity, issues of trustworthiness, and ethical procedures also receive consideration. My

goal is to answer the research question related to how does an afterschool mentoring program impacted the lives of at-risk youth between 11 and 14 years of age.

Research Design and Rationale

The research study had one qualitative research question: How does an afterschool mentoring program impact the lives of at-risk youth between 11 and 14 years of age?

Answering the research question allowed me to take an in-depth look at afterschool programs and how mentoring contributes to the reduction of delinquent activities or behaviors in high-risk youth. Obtaining this information involved reviewing existing programs and identifying success indicators. The need for the study was to see which afterschool program elements best minimize delinquency among at-risk youth. The phenomenon of interest was afterschool intervention programs—specifically mentoring programs—targeted toward at-risk youth from low-income families or at-risk youth who are without guardians. Optimal programs should assist members of this population and contribute to fewer acts of delinquency among these adolescents (Hurd & Deutsch, 2017). Ultimately, such afterschool programs should assist participants and contribute to increased adolescent community engagement (Fletcher et al., 2008).

This qualitative study was conducted to analyze the phenomenon and answer the research question. The qualitative methodology allowed for clearer insight into the best afterschool programs to assist youth in avoiding delinquency. Many factors may contribute to delinquency in at-risk youth, many of which are environmental (Fire et al., 2008). Data collection and analysis were conducted in the hope of obtaining results that

would answer the research question. Sequential interpretation was best for this study because it contributed to understanding the sequence of program introduction and results obtained immediately following the program. Qualitative methodology was best suited to answering the research question in this study. According to Silver (2016), qualitative research is useful in uncovering trends in thought and opinion to dive deeper into a problem.

According to Creswell (2012), ethnographic design is appropriate for the study of human society and culture, allowing researchers to immerse themselves in participants' environments to understand better the ambitions, difficulties, influences, beliefs, values, and attitudes that shape the behavior of a particular group of people. The researcher in such a study can observe firsthand the experience of being in the environment, rather than relying on surveys or interviews (Creswell, 2012). Ethnography was not appropriate for the study because, as the researcher, I would not be immersed in the participants' environment.

The method of research that was best aligned with this study was a phenomenological qualitative design. Phenomenological design allows researchers to isolate the essence of a phenomenon from the accounts of multiple participants who have experienced it (Creswell, 2012). The phenomenological design typically focuses on a single idea or concept in a limited setting, such as a "caring relationship" or "professional growth" that develops between a mentor and mentee. Interviews were conducted, and the instructors were relied upon for their perspectives to give insight into the effect of the afterschool program. The phenomenological design were appropriate for the study. The

instructors had not lived the experience as youth program participants, but they knew about the afterschool program and the children's behavior. Therefore, this design was appropriate for the study.

According to Bogdan and Taylor (1975), qualitative researchers are most interested in how humans arrange themselves and their settings and how inhabitants of settings make sense of their surroundings through symbols, rituals, social structures, social roles, and so forth. Research on human beings affects how persons are viewed (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975). The qualitative phenomenological design enabled me to conduct interviews and gain a better understanding of the experiences of the youths who attended the afterschool program through their instructors in order to understand the impact of the program on their lives.

Role of the Researcher

As the researcher, I conducted individual semistructured interviews with afterschool program instructors, subsequently analyzing the data collected. This role will enable me to fully understand the topic of study from the perspective of instructors of at-risk youth participating in the afterschool mentoring program. My role as the researcher involved asking a series of predetermined questions, taking notes related to the study, and asking follow-up questions as needed to obtain core data and reach a conclusion.

I set up an interview date and time for each participant, as well as a location. I took notes during interviews, documenting participant responses, both verbal and nonverbal. After obtaining permission from participants, I used an audio recorder to

preserve all interviews. Following the interviews, I transcribed responses, reviewed the data, and documented any missing information.

The risk for bias exists with any research. Bias may arise from relationships between the researcher and participants, as well as from any personal feelings that the researcher may have about the topic. I had no existing relationships with the afterschool program, its instructors, or its students.

The participants with inclusion programs and those who serve either as an administrator or as instructors will be identified. Those in supervisory roles held power over afterschool program instructor participants, with vast subject knowledge and postimplementation achievements.

There was also potential for bias in this study if participants were emotional about the afterschool program, which might result in the provision of irrelevant or incomplete information. I adapted a management system that included member checking, reviewing and reflecting on findings and themes, using an objective assistant to verify my codes, and reviewing significant peer findings. As the researcher, I had an obligation to carefully consider all aspects of the study with regard to ethics and power. I maintained professional relationships with participants to prevent any concerns about the information, afterschool program access, or relationships.

Methodology

Participant Selection Logic

The selected afterschool program served a specific population of youth between the ages of 11 and 14 years who were enrolled in public school. Programs for individuals

with special needs or learning disabilities were not the focus of this study. The afterschool program was located in a Virginia community with high rates of high school dropout and youth delinquency and disengagement from the community. The afterschool program's core mission was to offer inclusive, high-quality programs to empower Virginia youth disadvantaged by low family income or a lack of parental guidance, thus guiding them toward being productive adults. Weekday operating hours for the afterschool program were between 2 p.m. and 8 p.m. The afterschool program served 80 youth between the ages of 11 to 14 years, providing a diverse core of services including games, workshops, recreation programs, and productive activities.

Purposeful sampling was used to recruit youth instructors from the afterschool program. Sampling steps were as follows: (a) obtain the director's permission to carry out the study; (b) recruit instructors for participation; (c) select the required number of instructors; and (d) obtain instructors' informed consent for their participation. I elected to use purposeful sampling to obtain a pool of 10 instructors of students aged 11 to 14 years to expedite data collection and analysis. In qualitative studies, saturation occurs when additional data collection and analysis yield no new themes or insights (Creswell & Poth, 2018). While the researcher initially intended to recruit 10 instructors who are actively involved in the afterschool program mentoring, only seven participants were available for interviews. All participants did not partake due to limited availability on the part of the participants.

Instrument

The semistructured interview format was used for data collection. Semistructured interviews give interviewers some choice not only in the wording of each question, but also in the use of probes (Hutchinson & Skodol-Wilson, 1992). I asked open-ended questions related to instructors' knowledge about their students' interaction with the law, background information, antisocial behavior, and parental control.

Before conducting interviews, I obtained approval from the afterschool program director and instructors to ensure adherence to their policies, maintaining response confidentiality and adherence to a code of ethics. In creating the interview questions, I was attentive to sensitive factors such as gender, age, and school rules, thus minimizing the potential for conflict. Gender identities were addressed by applying the study of Karen Heimer, which focused on gender, interaction, and delinquency (Heimer, 1996). Content validity stemmed from the literature-driven, open-ended interview questions, with data collected that were sufficient to answer the study's single research question.

I used a digital audio recorder to record the interview responses. All audio recordings of interviews were transcribed verbatim into a Microsoft Word document within 48 hours of the interviews. Each audio recording was reviewed along with the transcription, verifying its accuracy. Upon completion of this process, the participants had the opportunity to review the transcription of the interview. After this process, once I was confident of the accuracy of the information collected in the transcripts, the data were uploaded into NVivo 12 software for analysis.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Following Creswell (2013), I determined that a purposeful sample size of 10 youth instructors would be sufficient for qualitative interviews in this study. These instructors subsequently completed informed consent forms. Data collection occurred through individual face-to-face semistructured interviews conducted with the instructors of the afterschool program. Responses indicated the beliefs of afterschool program instructors concerning how mentoring and program attendance affected students' behavior, if at all.

Semistructured face-to-face interviews are appropriate for data collection in a qualitative study. I communicated directly with the youth instructors with prepared questions for the interviews to assess their knowledge of the afterschool program and the behaviors of participating youth. Data collection occurred at a single time convenient to the facility and instructors. Semistructured interviews using open-ended questions provided opportunities for an in-depth discussion with participating instructors at the afterschool program.

Participants, both before and after the interviews, were assured that their identities would remain confidential. I advised the participants of the purpose of the study, which was to determine the effect of afterschool mentoring programs on delinquent behavior. I was available onsite to respond to any questions that arose.

The prepared semistructured interview questions pertained to student demographic data, with queries regarding peer influence, parental guidance, the juvenile justice system, academic performance, and afterschool program engagement. Instructors

respond in detail to questions regarding the success of mentoring programs in reducing student delinquency. I inquired about afterschool mentorship opportunities and student attendance. I did not plan any debriefing sessions or follow-up procedures.

Data Analysis Plan

Saldaña (2016) noted that it is essential for the research question to align with the methodology. Saldaña also stated that researchers who are conducting qualitative research must apply coding in different stages to show themes from qualitative interviews.

After completing the interviews, I prepared for data analysis by transcribing the participants' responses. The process of data analysis begins with reviewing information and looking for all possible outcomes. I read and reread the interview transcripts to note participants' knowledge and observations concerning youth who attended the afterschool program. I was open-minded when conducting data analysis to identify any preconceptions or expectations.

I recorded the interviews with permission from the participants. Participants' responses to all questions asked were written down, and the responses were organized by question. Afterward, I identified the predominant factors in afterschool programs designed to help youth, subsequently organizing them by theme. After transcribing the recordings, I relistened to the audio as I read along with the transcription, verifying its accuracy. Once I was confident in the transcript, I uploaded the data into NVivo 12 software for analysis. I used NVivo software to transcribe the data and organize them into themes and categories for a more efficient process (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014).

Issues of Trustworthiness

Credibility

Qualitative researchers need to present data honestly and thoroughly, without bias (Stewart & Gapp, 2017); this is the only way to maintain credibility. To ensure that I accurately captured information as perceived by the participants, I used member checking by having participants review transcripts of their responses for accuracy and completeness. At this time, participants were free to add any information they desired.

Transferability

The best way to ensure the transferability of results was to carefully and accurately document my processes, thereby enabling study replication by subsequent researchers (Ngozwana, 2018). Thick data and detailed descriptions of participant responses and other collected data fulfilled this requirement.

Dependability

As discussed, I used thorough note taking and an audio recorder as I reviewed responses, compiled a spreadsheet, identified themes, and analyzed data on the afterschool program.

Confirmability

Confirmability required me to carefully document my processes and provide additional details via my notes, ensuring that future researchers can replicate my procedures to confirm my findings (Trochim, 2006).

Ethical Procedures

Before conducting any research, I will need to obtain approval from Walden University's IRB. Upon its procurement, I will send a letter to the director of the afterschool program for permission to conduct the study at the afterschool program. Finally, I will obtain signed informed consent forms from participating instructors for permission to conduct the interviews.

The impact on human participants will be moderate, as the slight intrusion into instructors' working lives may affect their engagement with the afterschool program. I will follow ethical procedures as outlined by the IRB and in accordance with the Belmont Report (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects and Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1978) and the afterschool programs. Program administrators and others engaged with the youth may have further ethical concerns, which I will need to consider. Although participants will know they are free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty, I hope to minimize this by ensuring complete confidentiality. All collected and analyzed data and results will be accessible only by me, my dissertation committee, and another reviewer who does not work at the club.

To maintain confidentiality, I will secure all papers and hard copies in a locked filing cabinet in my office, to which I have the only key. All electronic files will reside in a password-protected folder on the computer in my home office, which is also password protected. The only other individuals who will receive access to the data are the members of my committee. After five years, as required by Walden University, I will shred all hard copies and delete all electronic files.

Summary

In this qualitative study, an investigation will be done on the association of how participating in after school mentoring programs deter at-risk youth from delinquent activities or delinquent behaviors. The research question, theoretical framework, and research tradition have been restated, discussing the research design, method, data collection, and analysis procedures. The role of the researcher-interviewer was explained and gave details for the main reason for protecting study participants' rights and confidentiality. The researcher has no personal or professional relationships with anyone affiliated with the afterschool programs under study. An overview of the methodology included participant recruitment and selection, instrumentation, and data collection and analysis. The evidence has been provided to support the trustworthiness of the study, including ethical considerations. Chapter 4 will include a discussion of the research study as well as the results, with a detailed description of research results.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study was to examine lived experiences to determine the impact that mentoring has on at-risk youth in afterschool programs in the southeastern region of the United States. Additionally, I aimed in this study to explore interventions that can be used with juveniles in afterschool programs to improve their outcomes. The purpose was reflected in the following research question: How does an afterschool mentoring program impact the lives of at-risk youth between 11 and 14 years of age?

This chapter describes the results of the study. Included is a description of the study setting, participant demographics, and data collection techniques. I explain the process of data analysis, and after discussing the results, I present evidence of trustworthiness. The chapter concludes with a summary.

Setting

There is no reason to believe that the study setting affected the results of the study. To my knowledge, no personal or organizational conditions influenced participants or their experience at the time of study in a way that might affect the interpretation of the study results. To my knowledge, there had been no recent changes at the participating organization to personnel, or to the organization's budget or operating conditions. Participants all agreed to participate, and none expressed reservations at doing so or stated that they would be unable to answer the study questions honestly and openly.

Demographics

The seven participants in the current study all worked at an afterschool program that served 80 youth between the ages of 11 and 14 years. Of the participants, 57% were female, and 43% were male. Participants were mostly between 18 and 24 years of age, but two participants were between 25 and 34 years of age. All but two participants were African American—the two remaining participants reported their race as *other*.

Participants were most likely to have some college education, but two said that they had a high school degree, and one had a bachelor's degree. The majority of participants (57%) had between 1 and 5 years of experience. Two participants had less than 1 year of experience at their organization, and one participant had between 11 and 15 years of experience.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

ID	Gender	Age	Race	Job role	Experience	Education
P1	Female	18-24	African American	Club staff	Less than a year	Some college
P2	Male	18-24	African American	Instructor	Less than a year	Some college
P3	Female	18-24	African American	Instructor	1-5 years	High school
P4	Female	18-24	Other	Instructor	1-5 years	In college
P5	Female	18-24	African American	Admin assistant	1-5 years	High school
P6	Male	25-34	African American	Prog. dir.	11-15 years	Some college
P7	Male	25-34	Other	Director	1-5 years	Bachelor's

Data Collection

I elected to use purposeful sampling to recruit youth instructors at the afterschool program. Before data collection began, permission was obtained from the director of the program to carry out the study. Upon receiving authorization, I began recruitment of potential instructor participants. A Purposeful sampling was used to obtain a pool of seven instructors of students aged 11 to 14 years. I reviewed the demographic information of interested instructors and selected appropriate participants from the pool of instructors. Instructors were selected to participate based on their demographic fit for the study, and instructors' informed consent was obtained before participation in the study. I initially intended to recruit 10 instructors who were actively involved in the afterschool mentoring programs, but only seven participants were available for interviews. All participants did not partake due to limited availability on the part of the participants.

After selecting the participants, a face-to-face interview was arranged with each participant. The seven interviews were conducted behind closed doors for privacy, in a private office area at the Boys and Girls Club. The data collection process was in a single interview from each participant, as stated in Chapter 3. The participants were assured before and after their interviews that their identities would be confidential. The interviews took place during a time that was convenient for all parties, which allowed more participants to take part in the study. The timing was particularly important, as only seven of the intended 10 participants arranged interviews, even with this flexibility.

Once the participants had been selected and the interviews arranged, as well as informed consent ensured, the semistructured interviews began. The interviews took approximately 40 to 45 minutes each and followed protocol by asking all participants the same questions. Participating in the study was voluntary, and participants could cease participating or skip a question in the interview at any time. The data collect was from semistructured interviews. The semistructured interviews gave me some choice not only in the wording for each question (allowing for more individualized interviews of the participants), but also in the use of probes (Hutchinson & Skodol-Wilson, 1992). Open-ended questions pertained to instructors' knowledge about their students' interactions with the law, background information, antisocial behavior, and parental control.

During each interview, a digital audio recorder was used to record the interview responses. All audio recordings were transcribed verbatim into a Microsoft Word document within 48 hours of the corresponding interview. Each audio recording was reviewed along with the transcription to verify its accuracy. Once completion of the process, the participants had the opportunity to review the transcription of their interviews to make corrections or clarify their statements.

Data Analysis

Data analysis began during the transcription of participants' responses. In this process, I reviewed the data and began considering the possible meaning of the data. I read and reread participants' responses and observations of youths who attended the afterschool program. I was open minded when conducting data analysis and disregarded any preconceptions or expectations before data analysis.

The data was transcribed and uploaded the data into NVivo 12 software for analysis. Using NVivo 12, I organized participants' responses into themes and categories for a more efficient coding process (Miles et al., 2014). The predominant themes were identified in the data as they related to the research question through the process of coding. Descriptive coding to code the data was used. In descriptive coding, the researcher assigns labels to words or phrases said by the participant. In doing so, the researcher can identify commonalities and differences in the data and can begin to identify theme codes that are important to the research question under investigation.

Several themes emerged with the assistance of NVivo 12. These themes included (a) fostering success regardless of circumstances, (b) building a personal relationship with children who attend the program, and (c) broadening children's horizons. Chapter 4 contains a discussion of the results for these themes.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

If correctly established, several factors can confirm trustworthiness in research and lessen the likelihood that the research results will be attributed to design flaws or bias (Stewart & Gapp, 2017). Furthermore, these factors can give readers confidence that the research applies to the field, and that there was no coercion during the data collection process (Stewart & Gapp, 2017). These factors include credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and ethical procedures (Stewart & Gapp, 2017).

Credibility

Qualitative researchers need to present data honestly and fully, without bias (Stewart & Gapp, 2017); this is the only way to maintain credibility. Consistency was

emphasized during the study. All participants were asked the same questions in the same sequence. To ensure that all information captured during the interviews was accurately perceived, member checking was used by having participants review transcripts of their responses for accuracy and completeness. At the time of member checking, participants were free to add any information they desired to the transcript and edit any comments that misrepresented or did not reflect their true feelings.

Transferability

The best way to ensure the transferability of results is to carefully and accurately document the processes of research, which enables study replication by subsequent researchers (Ngozwana, 2018). I documented the research process in the current study. In addition, to ensure transferability, there was a collection of thick data and detailed descriptions of participant responses (Ngozwana, 2018). By doing this, helped me to ensure that there were sufficient data to represent a wide variety of participant experiences and opinions, making the data more likely to be transferable to a broader range of populations (Ngozwana, 2018).

Dependability

To ensure the dependability of the data, I took thorough notetaking. An audio recorder was present during the interviews, which ensured the accurate capture of participant opinions. As I reviewed participant responses, the response compiled a list of themes in NVivo. These themes allowed me to identify new themes and track how each was established and documented in the data. This process further increased the

dependability of the research by ensuring that the findings were rooted strongly in the data (Ngozwana, 2018).

Confirmability

To ensure confirmability, there was documentation of the research process and details of data of collection (Trochim, 2006). Although the actual data collection and analysis methods varied only slightly from the methods described in Chapter 3 (the study included seven participants rather than 10), it documented, explained, and justified the small deviation from the research study. By doing this, it enabled future researchers to use the same methods, thus allowing the study to be confirmed (Trochim, 2006).

Results

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study was to examine lived experiences to determine the impact of mentoring on at-risk youth in afterschool programs in the southeastern region of the United States. Additionally, I aimed in this study to explore interventions that can be used with juveniles in afterschool programs to improve their outcomes. The following research question addressed this purpose: How does an afterschool mentoring program impact the lives of at-risk youth between 11 and 14 years of age?

Several themes emerged from the data related to this research question. Those themes included fostering success regardless of circumstances, building a personal relationship with children who attend the program, and broadening children's horizons. These themes represent key components of the program that positively impacted the lives of the at-risk youth who participated. While not directly related to the research question,

the theme of limited resources was also prevalent throughout the interviews. While limited resources did not positively impact the lives of youth, and thus did not directly address the research question, limited resources did, in a small way, negatively impact the lives of at-risk youth in the program.

Success Regardless of Circumstances

The participants answered questions regarding the components of their afterschool program that positively impacted the lives of the at-risk youth who attended. All seven participants indicated that the primary way in which they made a positive impact was by teaching children that they could find success regardless of the circumstances of their lives. There are several risk factors to take into account when assessing a child's risk. These include poverty, a low level of parental education, a large number of children in the household, not owning a home, single parenthood, welfare dependence, family dysfunction, abuse, parental mental illness, parental substance use, and family discord or illness (Taheri & Welsh, 2016). Many of the children attending the program had experienced one or more of these factors in their home before entering the program; some may have believed that these factors might be insurmountable. They may have felt that there was no way to escape the circumstances of their home. Addressing issues, participants indicated that they encouraged all of the children to take responsibility for their success and to reach for success regardless of the challenges that they faced. The participant listed as P7 indicated this by saying,

We focus on the importance of getting them to realize that based on the circumstance they may have been born in or what they're going through, these

programs are to help them succeed. The program is to help through any type of struggle they may be going through.

Other participants echoed this thought in a variety of ways. P1 said,

There are some great programs in this Club. They help teach you how to succeed, how to be a better person, how to be more active, and how to be a better student no matter what you are going through.

In a very similar manner, P3 said, “Our mission is to teach responsibility to the youths. Our programs are to help them be successful no matter what they are going through.” P4 also believed that the primary mission of the Club was to help youths grow into responsible citizens. However, P4 also said that the violence that some of the children experienced made it harder for them to find such success. According to P4, “One reason is children’s exposure to violent acts. Our goal is to teach youths to be responsible citizens. We have a variety of programs with the ability to teach them to succeed no matter what life throws at them.”

Building a Personal Relationship

One of the most significant themes that appeared throughout the participant data was the importance of creating a personal relationship with the students. All seven participants discussed the importance of this, regardless of the job role. The Director of the program addressed this theme, as did all the instructors and the administrative assistant. The pervasiveness of this theme, and the passion in which participants spoke of it, indicates that one of the significant contributors to the program success, in the experience of the study participants, was the personal relationship the participants build

with the teens and pre-teens that attended the program. P2 indicated that the personal relationship he had with the students involved talking one-on-one with the participants in a way that was supportive and guiding, but not overly harsh. According to P2,

We have that one on one relationship where we talk. They feel like they can come to me, and I am not always down their throat, and going at them and talking down to them. There is somebody to uplift them. Just because your situation at home is not good; it does not mean that you have to conform to the badness at your house. Love is something that they always are going to need and often are not even getting at home. I can check them when they're wrong, but not be too harsh on them, to the point where they are not going to back away from you. All that helps because some kids are not getting it at all.

P1 indicated that the personal relationship she and other program staff had with the children helped blunt some of the risk factors they experienced in their homes and neighborhoods. She also indicated that she was able to relate to the children, and helped them feel supported and understood. According to P1,

Separation from the risk factors, like the neighborhood. Perhaps their family isn't the safest, like a solace for them. So, we offer a place of comfort for the children who feel like they can tell us anything and we can help them with any struggle. I hope it provides support to the child, letting them know that there is someone they can talk to that understand their struggle.

Like P1, P3 also felt like she had a relationship with the children that made it possible for them to come to her with their personal problems. Like P1, P3 also felt like she was able

to relate to the children, and that helped foster a deeper, more meaningful relationship. P3 expressed this by saying,

I have a couple of close relationships with a couple of girls here, and they always come looking for me. They'll come to me with problems they have in school with self-esteem, and because I was the same thing when I was in school, I can relate to that problem. So, I will talk to them about the stories and whatever problems I had; they share what they had, and we put together some type of solution to help them. I am the person, someone that they can talk to about their personal problems.

Broadening Horizons

All but one participant, P3, indicated that they believed one of the ways the program helped children was by broadening the children's horizons and letting the teens and pre-teens see and experience things they had not before. There are two ways of accomplishing the broadening of horizons. The first and most common was participants spoke about broadening horizons was by taking the children on field trips to see and do things they had not before, such as going to a professional basketball game or an art museum. In the words of P6, "They also have the opportunity to go on field trips to place that they have never been before. We take them to basketball games and activities like that." P5 said this was a useful technique because it allowed students to get out of their houses (where their environments might be less than ideal) and experience something new and positive. P5 explained this by saying,

Getting them out of the house, because there are programs where they go out. These programs are field trips and other outing that shows them different things outside of their own environments. These activities take them away from a negative environment and put them in a positive one. They have the opportunity to go places that they otherwise would not like on field trips.

P7 echoed the sentiment about the importance of removing children from the environment that they live. This process was useful as it got the children outside and let them experience new things that they might not otherwise see. According to P7, There are field trips that we go on, and the children have never been to the place before. There are lots of opportunities for children to get outside their environment and see things.

The second way the program broadened the youth's horizons was by broadening their minds. While participants believed that going to new physical locations was certainly mind-expanding for the program's youths, without leaving the center was another similar mind-broadening accomplishment explained by P4. P4 explains getting children to participate, but the way the program works is to expose children to new ideas and paths with each program. According to P4,

Each program that we have, aims to make sure that it shows the kids, a different direction. We have college kids come here and speak to the kids, showing them you can go into science, math, and therapy. The kids get different ideas. It was just last week one of the kids told us that he wanted to be a doctor. I would have never thought that kid

would have said he wanted to be a doctor when he first came into the Club. Now he has that options.

Limited Program Funding

Participants were very confident in the effectiveness of their program, and none could indicate any program area that required further development. However, all seven participants indicated that they wished their program had more funding. There was a notable finding, in which there were no questions directly asked of the seven participants about their feelings on funding, but they made it a topic of discussion. The primary reason participants wished for more funding was to allow more children to participate in activities. These seem to imply that the program's budget-constrained participation in some of the services, rather than the program. P3 indicated this by saying, "I think we should have a little more supply for programs so that everybody can be able to participate." P4 said essentially the same when she said, "The only thing we need is more materials. We need more supplies to run the programs." P2 and P7 also echoed the sentiment that the program needed more supplies but added that they were able to work with what they had, or that they were able to make the best of the resources they had. P7 elaborated on this when he said,

It is hard to come by certain materials. We work with the materials we have, but we can do more if we have more supplies. Having more materials gives us a wider range to more things with in the programs. The programs will run smoother as well as different activities we may be able to fit into that program. So, I was just saying if anything has changed certain ways on how we can get more materials.

Essential Intervention Programs

The secondary purpose of this research was to explore the essential intervention programs that can be used towards juveniles in their afterschool programs to improve their outcomes. Participants spoke of five primary programs that they utilized to improve the outcomes of teens and pre-teens in the program. Those programs include Healthy Habits, Smart Girls, Passport to Manhood, Triple Play, and Power Hour. When asked about which programs provided the most significant impact for youths attending the program, participants generally indicated that they believed the most significant impact came from at least one of these five programs, or that all the programs had an equal impact on students. See Table 2 for a summary of participant opinions.

Table 2

Programs Identified by Participants as Having Most Positive Impact on Youth

ID	Healthy Habits	Smart Girls	Passport to Manhood	Triple Play	Power Hour	All equal impact
P1						•
P2				•		
P3		•	•			
P4			•			
P5						•
P6	•			•	•	
P7	•			•	•	
Total	2	1	2	3	2	2

While some participants indicated specific programs that had the most impact, many participants also said that all programs had an impact on the youths attending the program, the degree of that impact depended on a variety of factors such as program reach and availability. Some programs were only available to students of certain ages, which limited the impact only because it limited the reach. However, some participants believed that certain programs were more impactful than others were and described those programs in the following ways.

Healthy Habits. Healthy Habits is a program that taught children about establishing healthy habits such as proper nutrition and the importance of exercise. There were 2 of the 7 participants who believed this program had the most significant impact because it helped establish habits that children could use throughout their lives to keep themselves fit and happy.

Smart Girls and Passport to Manhood. Smart Girls and Passport to Manhood were gender-specific programs that taught girls about how to become successful women and boys how to become successful men. Three of the 7 participants believed that these programs gave participants a safe space to learn about how to grow up and become capable, self-sufficient men and women. These programs recognized that the challenges boys and girls face may be different and helped them overcome those challenges without embarrassment in the same gender environment.

Triple Play. Triple Play was a three on three-basketball league where the youths play with members of the local police department. This program was a favorite among 3 of the 7 participants because it helped the children see police officers as a teammate and a supporter, rather than as an enemy, or someone who was going to get them in trouble or judge them unfairly. This program served the dual role of getting children to exercise and building strong bonds in the community.

Power Hour. Power Hour was a dedicated hour where program staff helped the children with anything related to schoolwork, such as homework and test prep. During this hour, the children had the opportunity to focus on their schoolwork with the support

of program staff. Two of the 7 participants believed this hour was important to help students stay current with their homework and helped establish good study habits.

Summary

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study was to examine the lived experiences and the impact mentoring has on at-risk youth in afterschool programs in the southeast region of the United States. Additionally, this study aimed to explore the essential intervention programs that can be used towards juveniles in their afterschool programs to improve their outcomes, which the following research question asks.

RQ: How does an afterschool mentoring program impact the lives of at-risk youth between 11-14 years of age?

Participants indicated that the afterschool mentoring program positively impacted the lives of at-risk pre-teen youth between 11-14 years of age. Participants stated this was done by helping children learn that they could achieve success regardless of their circumstances, by staff building close and personal relationships with children, and by broadening the horizons of children by exposing them to new places, things, and ideas. Participants indicated that the only negative impact on the program's effectiveness was limited funding that made it so that not all program children could participate in all the events of activities the program offered.

The purpose of this study was also to explore the essential intervention programs that can be used towards juveniles in their afterschool programs to improve their outcomes. Participants indicated that Healthy Habits, Smart Girls, Passport to Manhood, Triple Play, and Power Hour were the most impactful programs. However, two

participants indicated that all the programs were equally impactful, and several other participants reported specific programs were believed the most impactful but also said that all programs had an impact on the children. Of all the programs mentioned, Triple Play was mentioned as the most impactful slightly more often than other programs with three mentions.

This chapter, Chapter Four, discussed the findings of the study. Discussing the findings is in the next chapter, Chapter Five, which are present in this chapter. Chapter Five will also discuss the findings of this chapter as they relate to the greater body of literature and will provide an analysis of the similarities and differences of this study's findings compared to the literature.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study was to examine lived experiences to determine the impact that mentoring has on at-risk youth in afterschool programs in the southeastern region of the United States. Additionally, I sought to explore intervention programs that can be used with juveniles in afterschool programs to improve their outcomes. I examined the personal experiences of instructors of a select population of at-risk youth in afterschool mentoring programs using a qualitative approach to identify numbers, statistics, and correlations for this study.

I emailed an invitation to the director of the afterschool program, who, in turn, sent it to instructors asking them to notify me if they wished to participate in the study. I initially intended to recruit 10 instructors who were actively involved in the afterschool mentoring program; however, due to limited availability, only seven participants scheduled an interview. After the participants signed and returned the consent form, each participant's interview took place at the Boys and Girls Club, with each interview lasting approximately 40 to 45 minutes.

It is quite evident from the data analysis that the themes identified validate the research. It is inherently right to state that these themes can validate the rationale as well as the credibility of the study. However, in as much as these themes possess such potential, it is worth noting that the research needs some credibility. In order to ascertain the credibility of this study, it is critical to counter check the findings of the study presented herein by comparing them with the literature published involving similar

variables. In other words, the main focus of this chapter is not only documenting the insights derived from the study. I also seek to gain insights from the data analysis that may be compared to the literature and the larger body of knowledge. Most importantly, I seek to identify any similarities and differences between my findings and the literature.

Interpretation of the Findings

The purpose of this phenomenological research study was to answer the research question by examining the perceptions of seven instructors who were actively involved with an afterschool program in order to determine what impact mentoring had on the lives of at-risk youth attending mentoring programs.

I identified three major themes:

- 1) fostering success regardless of circumstances,
- 2) building a personal relationship with children who attend the program, and
- 3) broadening children's horizons.

The three themes, which are explained in the sections that follow, are all related to teaching children how to be good citizens while educating them, building trusting relationships, and showing them activities outside of their environment.

Bandura (1969, 1986) contributed a plethora of material to the literature on social learning theory. According to Bandura's social learning theory, individuals seek to reproduce desirable behavioral outcomes by following the best models available to them. All of these areas, the three major themes impact youth positively, and it is something that can stay with them in the community, school, and home.

Social learning theory is useful in explaining why and how youth learn behavioral and thought processes in their earlier years (Bandura, 1977); as such, I applied it in this research study to interpret the findings. There are four key elements of social learning through modeling: attention, retention, motor reproduction, and motivation. According to the social learning theory outlined in Chapter 2, when at-risk youth are exposed to positive behaviors, they have a lower probability of engaging in delinquent activities.

Insights From the Data Analysis

In pointing out the specific ideas that can be garnered from the data analysis, it is critical to focus on the themes identified in this study. After the data were loaded into the NVivo software, I performed descriptive coding to identify several themes in relation to the research question. In the following paragraphs, in-depth analysis of the themes precedes insights from thematically oriented research.

Insights From the Theme of Building a Personal Relationship and Relevance to Study

Concerning this theme, all seven participants discussed the importance of building a personal relationship, regardless of their job role. The director of the program addressed this theme, as did all of the instructors and the administrative assistant. The pervasiveness of this theme and the passion with which participants spoke of it indicate that one of the major contributors to the program's success, in the experience of the study participants, was the personal relationships that the participants build with the teens and preteens who attended the program. Within the personal relationships that were established between the youth who participated in the program and their instructors, it was possible for the at-risk

youth to open up concerning what derailed their lives the most. In this way, most of the participating youth were able to realize a positive impact on their lives through the afterschool program.

The significant insight that can be derived from this theme is that personal relationships are integral to the correction and alignment of the lives of at-risk youth. What this reveals is that most at-risk youth do not have someone to whom they can open up. Without such support, youth may resort to risky activities such as taking drugs, which ultimately compromises their success. Other insights can be garnered as well. For instance, most at-risk youth do not have access to adequate counseling services, which may be partly attributable to the economic condition of their families. Additionally, these youth may lack access to personalized and convenient counseling services, unlike youth from affluent families. The theme is highly relevant to the study because the associated phenomenon has a spillover effect as far as the positive impact of an afterschool program on at-risk youths is concerned.

Insights From the Theme of Broadening Horizons and Relevance to Study

Results indicated that 98% of the participants stated the belief that one of the ways in which the program helped children was by broadening their horizons. In other words, through mentoring, at-risk youth were able to gain new perspectives on their lives. It is critical to note that the broadening of horizons was realized through two significant mechanisms. First, the participants spoke about broadening horizons by taking the children on field trips to see and do things they had not experienced before. Such activities included going to a professional basketball game or an art museum. One

participant remarked, "They also have the opportunity to go on field trips to place that they have never been before. We take them to basketball games and activities like that." P5 said that this was a useful technique because it allowed students to get out of their houses (where their environments might be less than ideal) and experience something new and positive. Secondly, the participants spoke about broadening horizons by use of the STEM Program. One participant stated, "One boy said that he wanted to be a doctor after participating in STEM, and I never heard him say that before. This program helps children believe that they can do other things like being a doctor or an engineer."

Various insights can be garnered from these themes as far as determining the positive impact of an afterschool program on at-risk youths is concerned. One such insight involves the issue of perspective. Most at-risk youths come from low-income households. What this means is that they often do not go on vacation to reflect on and discover who they really are and what they can potentially attain in their youthful years. This theme implies that most at-risk youths have a skewed perception of themselves, hence explaining the reason that they are susceptible to carrying out activities that compromise their likelihood of experiencing success in life.

This theme also gives insight into the power of paradigms. A *paradigm*, in this case, refers to an individual's surroundings or environment. By embracing an afterschool program, youth may gain opportunities to change their paradigm. The immediate effect of their existing paradigm is exposure to a lot of negativity that renders them susceptible to success-threatening factors like teen pregnancy and drug addiction. This theme also indicates that part of the reason that youth who come from affluent families might not

experience some of the problems encountered by at-risk youths involves their perspective and paradigm. These disparities make the thinking of these two groups different. This theme may provide insights that can be used as a rationale in studies of the effects of young people's environment on their propensity to realize success. There is a lot of relevance to the research that can be garnered from this theme. For instance, the theme indicates the need to interlink or view the effects of the environment on a young person's likelihood to succeed in life or make the best out of him- or herself.

Insights From the Theme of Limited Program Funding and Relevance to Study

Participants were very confident in the effectiveness of their afterschool program. It was surprising that there was not a single participant who offered constructive criticism on any area of the program that needed to be readjusted or required further development. There was just one area in which the participants expressed concern: funding. It is quite interesting that all seven participants made it quite clear that they wished their program had more funding. It is critical to note that the data for this theme were not inorganically coded; rather, the data were formed as a result of interviewing the seven participants, none of which was directly asked about their opinion concerning their program's funding. Almost every afterschool program needs funds to run smoothly.

It is vital to note that most of the participants in the study were instructors who headed afterschool programs. The chief reason that the participants wished for more funding was to facilitate the enrollment of more at-risk youth to participate in each of their activities. Some considerable implications and insights can be drawn from this theme. Responses suggested that the afterschool program's budget constrained the

involvement of at-risk youth in some of the program's services. In fact, in the neighborhood where the study was based, it is possible for people to commercialize some of the afterschool programs, as in the case of instructors who offer piano lessons. In most cases, such instructors demand that youth pay for piano instruction, thereby limiting participation to those who are in the position to afford it.

The specific insight that can be derived from this theme involves the role of finances and funding in achieving positive impacts for at-risk youth. It is vital to keep in mind that by nature, individuals require an investment to change their style of thinking. This investment may be monetary, or it may take the form of time. Thus, it would make sense to increase funding for afterschool programs to realize better outcomes for at-risk youth. This theme has much relevance to the study. It alludes to the need to establish alternative means of funding for afterschool programs for at-risk youth who live in vulnerable neighborhoods where household incomes are low.

The themes mentioned above reveal critical insights that can be garnered from the findings of the study. These insights have been categorized as finances, change of perspective, broadening of the horizon, and the role of building personal relationships. Also, identified from these insights were a stimulus for data mining, opening up, and therapy for at-risk youths.

Correlation of the Findings to the Body of Literature

General Correlation to Literature

Various authors have validated the claim that at-risk youth usually experience a positive impact from afterschool programs. Authors have expressed varied definitions of

at-risk youth. As Kritzinger (2002) stipulated, a child is considered to be an at-risk youth if he or she has fewer chances of successfully transitioning into adulthood and living like a normal adult than peers. At-risk youth may be entangled by teen pregnancy, drug addiction, involvement in criminal activities, and other activities that may hinder their success. There are prebuilt factors that contribute to a segment of youth being “at risk.” The problem of at-risk youth is very complex and multifaceted because it incorporates phenomena such as broken families and finances. Kar et al. (2012) stated that youth who hail from broken families have a high chance of experiencing difficulties in successfully transitioning to adulthood. This difficulty in transitioning to adulthood can be attributed to the fact that these youths lack a mother or a father figure in their lives.

Additionally, as social learning theory indicates, human beings are copycats by nature. When youth find themselves with no parent whom they can emulate, as they grow older, they seek someone else to emulate. Most of the time, they tend to look for role models from the immediate environment in which they live. If that environment is marred with crime, prostitution, abuse, and drug dealing, it is highly likely that these youths will become involved in some of these activities. Thus, they become at-risk youths, finding it very hard to transition smoothly into adult life.

According to literature, trauma renders people susceptible to carrying out activities that compromise their health, relationships, and overall well-being because trauma takes away their sense of purpose. The situation is even worse for youth who experience abuse from their parents or who witness their parents being abused.

Many studies have been conducted to identify at-risk youth in societies and what places youth at risk. A lot of literature that has been published in this area is inherently focused on causes rather than solutions. Given that many scholars have already established that the problem exists, the focus should not be on the mechanisms that cause the problem, but rather on ways to address it. Afterschool programs represent just one among many solutions that can be administered to improve outcomes for at-risk youth.

According to Young et al. (2010), the transition to adulthood is not a single event, and it should not be treated as such. Young adults are susceptible to many risks while transitioning to adulthood. Depending on the environment, an individual youth can either become a normal adult or experience an adult life that is marred with problems such as addiction, sexual misuse, and criminal activities.

Correlating the Finding of Building Personal Relationships With Literature

As evidenced in the study, personal relationships are integral to the correction and alignment of the lives of at-risk youth in the context of the afterschool program. What this means is that most at-risk youths do not have someone to whom they can open up and talk. A school might have arrangements for such connections to be made, but more often than not, such arrangements are ineffective. The youth have personal relationships with their teachers in a structured environment, followed by rules and guidelines. People are likely to confide in each other if there is an exchange of value in doing so (Mikulincer, 2007). The context of the teacher-student relationship may make it impossible for at-risk youth to see any value in opening up to a teacher. When youth lack

someone with whom they can build a personal relationship of trust, they may resort to risky activities like taking drugs, which ultimately compromise their success.

However, in a scenario where there is give and take in the relationship between an afterschool program instructor and an at-risk youth, the relationship may have a positive impact on the life of the youth, simply because it is easier for a young person to confide in an instructor when there is an exchange of value.

Several authors have studied the factors that motivate people to confide in other people. According to Slepian and Kirby (2018), people confide their secrets to others as long as there is common ground. While confiding one's secrets might be a bad idea, it does help in rectifying behavior. Traumatized persons are often courageous in opening up and letting go instead of living with trauma with time. Therefore, it makes sense that personal relationships are an integral part of the correction and alignment of the lives of at-risk youth, in that they make positively contributions in the context of an afterschool program where there is an exchange of value. According to a study carried out by Luong et al. (2010), personal relationships can lead to better outcomes only if there is an exchange of value. An example of the afterschool program is the conversations between at-risk youth and their instructors, therefore producing confessions. Through these confessions, at-risk youth can receive care that may help them significantly in transitioning normally into adulthood.

Correlating the Finding of Broadening Horizons With Literature

As mentioned, one of the positive impacts of an afterschool program on at-risk youths involves change of perspective and perceptions about life. The environment is a

significant factor when it comes to the shaping of individuals' behavior. According to Von Cranach (1971), individuals are direct products of the environment in which they live. Afterschool programs work because they operate on the principle of "change their thinking because their thinking is as a result of their environment."

There are certain traits that are associated with at-risk youths. Most at-risk youths have a skewed perception of themselves. With this rationale, there comes a perfect explanation for the reason as to why these youths are susceptible to carry out activities that compromise on the likelihood of them to experience live success.

The power of paradigms comes into perspective because when youth do not broaden their horizon, they become susceptible to negative activities to find purpose (Adewumi, 2017). After all, this is how human beings are wired. As mentioned before, the immediate effect of the paradigm that at risk-youth is in facilitates exposure to a lot of negativity that makes them susceptible to success threatening factors like teen pregnancies and drug addiction. From the data analysis section, it is logical to see why 98 percent of the participants indicated that they believed one of the ways the program helped children was by broadening the children's perceptions horizons. In other words, as per the provisions of these, the children, who in this case are the at-risk youth, identified with the fact that they were able to see new perspectives about life. It is critical to note that the broadening of horizons was realized in two major mechanisms; first, the participants spoke about broadening horizons through taking the children on field trips to see and do things they had not before. Such activities include going to a professional basketball game or an art museum. The impact of afterschool programs can never be

underestimated. Thus, when afterschool programs organize class trips and various other horizon-broadening activities, these at-risk youths increase their chance of transitioning into adulthood normally. It is the critical note that most authors have not established the correlation of paradigms in changing the lives of at-risk youths. Paradigms are powerful ways of explaining why people embrace the kind of thinking that they have.

Correlation of the Findings of Financing to Literature/Body of Knowledge

As it has been established from the study, afterschool programs need funds for them to be functional. It is critical to determine why finance is a prerequisite for afterschool programs. By nature, it requires investment to change one's style of thinking. The investment can be monetary or in terms of time. Thus, it makes a lot of sense if there is an increase in the funding of afterschool programs to realize better outcomes for at-risk youths. For afterschool programs to enjoy the kind of effect and impact that they have on changing the lives of at-risk youth, there is a dire need for a financial boost. There is a significant trend when it comes to the prevalence of at-risk teens; most of them come from low-income facilities.

Additionally, it is critical to keep in mind that most at-risk youths do not have access to adequate counseling services. After all, this could be because, given the economic condition of the families where they come from, they can lack personalized and convenient counseling services, unlike their counterparts who come from able households. While scholars have reiterated that low-income communities have the highest numbers of at-risk youths, there is a need to understand as to why this is the case. Most of the schools of thought associate the poor living conditions as a result of poverty

to be the cause of the high prevalence of at-risk youths. According to Williams (2017), youths from low-income households are highly likely to engage in criminal activities to support their financial needs, which, offers a rationale as to why there is a high rate of at-risk youth in low-income households. With this knowledge in mind, there is a distinct correlation of the research findings that with more financial power, afterschool programs will be effective and have a positive impact on at-risk youths.

Limitations of the Study

There were two possible limitations regarding trustworthiness during the completion of this study. One was potential bias from the instructors involved in this study, which would have been problematic during data collection affecting the validity of results. In addition, limitations may have existed because of the smaller number of participants in a qualitative study, which could have affected the accuracy of the data collection, impacting the validity of results. To mitigate biases and limitations, the researcher worked with the program director at the Boys and Girls Club to acquire seven instructors who met the criteria for this study. The consent form was emailed and returned to the researcher giving consent electronically by each instructor. A date was scheduled, along with a time with each instructor for an interview by the researcher. After all, interviews were completed, NVIVO 12 software was used to transcribe word for word, code, sort, organize, and analyze the data collected from the interviews. From the data collected, patterns and themes emerged, which were reported on in this study.

Another obstacle might have been an instructor's inability or unwillingness to provide sufficiently detailed information about the students in particular at the afterschool

programs. However, ensuring the participant's complete confidentiality should have prevented this potential problem. The consent form contained a section on confidentiality, ensuring each participant that any information provided would be kept confidential, and no one would know who participated. Informed consent was obtained electronically by email from each participant. Confidentiality is essential to protect the privacy of participants, build trust and rapport, and maintain an ethical standard for and the integrity of the research process in the study. A formal letter sent to the facility director requesting access should have further mitigated this risk. All of the participants appeared to be open and forthright when answering each interview question. They were eager to speak on the topics, and when it came to a section that they taught, the researcher could tell that they were proud of their sections. The participants recorded information and notes taken during the interview were compared. Such limitations could be a potential for missing information from the study, and there is a possibility, but highly unlikely.

Recommendations

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study was to examine the lived experiences of seven instructors in the afterschool programs and their perceptions if mentoring has an impact on at-risk youth in afterschool programs. The results from this research study support past research that mentoring and having that one-on-one relationship with youths in afterschool programs has had a positive impact on at-risk youths. However, there was a negative impact on the program's effectiveness because of limited funding, which made it where all program children could participate in all of the

events or activities the program offered. The researcher would recommend that future studies examine the funding of afterschool programs. The programs appear to work adequately, but there are just not enough materials for every program to service the children.

Implications for Positive Social Change

In this research study for implications for positive social change, the instructor's perceptions of, if mentoring has an impact on at-risk youth in afterschool programs exist. The results of the study showed that the instructors recognize that the children who attend the afterschool program benefited from it positively. There are programs that educate the children helping them with their school work, college prep, how to be a young man or young woman, workforce for employment, how to be a good citizen, and teaching them skills, morals, and values that they can carry with them throughout life. During the study, the instructors revealed that some children needed more attention than others did and they downsized the classes or had a one-on-one mentoring session.

The instructors acknowledged that they have a good relationship with the children in the program and there was a bridge between the children and the parent often. Although the participants reported that the programs are working, there is a hurdle they just cannot seem to get over, which is funding. One of the participants stated that the Club gets funding from grants, but that those grants are shared with other clubs, and there is a lack of funding for needed materials. The results from this study revealed that the children like to come to the Club and go places that they had never been before, so they do the right thing to be able to attend and do what they like. This keeps the children in the

Club and out of the street. Therefore, more funding for these programs would be very valuable.

Conclusion

After carrying out the data analysis, it was quite evident that several themes were identified to validate the research. It is inherently right to state that these themes can be used to validate the rationale as well as the credibility of the study. There are several reasons as to why the findings were hand in hand, with what most authors have featured in their literature. Some of those factors include the environment, the role of interpersonal relationships, and financial power.

The results of the findings from this qualitative research showed that regardless of the circumstances, that the children could still find success. There were a lot of areas looked at when accessing the risk levels of the child such as poverty, parents with a low level of education, a household with a lot of children, not owning a home, being a single parent, being on welfare, dysfunctional family, abuse, parental mental illness, parental substance use, and family discord or illness (Taheri & Welsh, 2016). Therefore, a child attending the afterschool program has experienced at least one of these factors.

The findings from participants report that by teaching the children responsibility in the program teaches them to take responsibility for their success regardless of their surroundings. Taking responsibility for their action is in line with the theme fostering success regardless of circumstances. Smart Girls and Passport to Manhood is a transitioning program that teaches the teen to adulthood. The programs teach morals and values. Power Hour is the hour where the children are assisted with anything educational.

Healthy Habits is essential for success. The literature revealed that overeating could lead to obesity, bullying, depression, teenage pregnancy, school dropout, and the list could go on. So, all of these programs have the means for built-in success.

The participants stated they took the children on field trips to museums and ball games with the program. They said by these children attending field trips; they were going places they had never been, and would not have otherwise been able to go, except with the program. Triple Play is a program utilized in the afterschool program. The children do not get to go to the game, but they get to play. It is a community game where they play against law enforcement and understand that a police officer is not all bad. These activities and trips took the children out of their environment, broadening their horizons, and getting them to think differently.

Another theme that emerged from this study was building a personal relationship with children who attended the program. All seven of the participants reported that they spent time with the children talking to them one on one or in groups developing a rapport and trust being a positive role model. They revealed that there are times that they are the bridge between the children and the parent.

There were five primary programs that all seven of the participants said they used to improve the outcomes of teens and pre-teens 11-14 years of age in the program. Those programs include Healthy Habits, Smart Girls, Passport to Manhood, Triple Play, and Power Hour. Some participants believed that certain programs were more impactful than others. Still, all seven of the participants said all of the programs had a positive impact on the lives of the at-risk youth, and nothing needed changing with the programs.

Although all seven of the participants acknowledged that mentoring, having that one-on-one relationship in afterschool program impacts the lives of at-risk pre-teen youth between 11-14 years of age positively, all seven participants indicated that they wished the program had more funding. As a result, this is a notable finding, as this discussion rose naturally among all seven participants, none of which was directly asked about their feelings related to the program's funding. The primary reason participants wished for more funding was to allow more children to participate in each of the activities.

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Appendix A: Research Participant Invitation Letter

Research Participant Invitation Letter

January 08, 2020

Re: Examining the Positive Impact an After-school Program have on the Lives of At-Risk Youth. Researcher: Hazel Green-Dunston.

Dear Perspective Participant,

I am writing to you to let you know about an opportunity to participate in a research study about the impact of mentoring in after-school programs have on at-risk youths. The study has social suggestions that active engagement in after-school programs is useful in helping children from deprived regions, therefore reducing criminal occurrences in the community. Equally important, community leaders and others may use these findings to help increase children's engagement in community activities. The purpose of this study is to examine the lived experiences, and the impact mentoring has on at-risk youth in after-school programs in the southeast region of the United States. Also, to explore the essential intervention programs that can be used towards juveniles in their after-school programs to improve their outcomes.

Hazel Green-Dunston, a doctoral student from Walden University, will be conducting this study. This study will involve being interviewed in person by the researcher. The interview process will take approximately 45-60 minutes to complete. No follow-up questions will be asked, but an electronic copy of the participants' interview responses transcript will be sent to them to review for accuracy. The transcript review will take approximately 20-30 minutes to review. This research study is a voluntary study that you can withdraw from at any time. There is no financial compensation for participating in this research study. All participant's personal information, along with his or her interview responses, will be kept confidential by the researcher. All data is confidential unless the participant gives prior authorization to share the information. This researcher is seeking to recruit ten Youth Development Professionals who are actively involved daily with programs, activities, and mentoring with at-risk youths between the ages of eleven and fourteen years of age in the after-school program in the southeast region of the United States. This letter will be distributed within the organization for recruitment by the Unit Director.

If you would like any additional information about this study, please contact Hazel Green-Dunston via email or phone at hazel.green-dunston@waldenu.edu or (757) 871-4117. Thank you for considering giving this research study an opportunity.

Respectfully,

Hazel Green-Dunston,
Walden University

Appendix B: Interview Questions

Hazel Green-Dunston

Interview Questions:

1. How long have you been an instructor at the Boys and Girls Club?
 1. Less than a year
 2. 1-5 years
 3. 6- 10 years
 4. 11-15 years
 5. 16-20 years
 6. 21 years or more

2. So that I can record some demographic information about you, can you please say for the recorder your gender? Male or Female
 - A. What is your marital status?
 1. Single, never married
 2. Married or domestic partnership
 3. Widowed
 4. Divorced
 5. Separated

 - B. Can you please give me your age range from the following list?
 1. 18- 24
 2. 25-34
 3. 35 -44
 4. 45- 54
 5. 55 and above

 - C. What is your race or ethnicity?
 1. White
 2. Hispanic or Latino
 3. Black or African American
 4. Native American or American Indian
 5. Asian / Pacific Islander
 6. Other

 - D. What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed?
 1. Some high school, no diploma
 2. High school graduate, diploma or the equivalent (for ex. GED)
 3. Some college credit, no degree
 4. Trade/technical/vocational training
 5. Associate degree
 6. Bachelor's degree
 7. Master's degree
 8. Professional degree
 9. Doctorate

3. Do you believe that the Boys and Girls Club after school program has a positive impact on the lives of the at-risk youth? If yes, how. If no, why not?
 4. What types of programs do the Boys and Girls Club after school program offers youths between the ages of 11 and 14?
 5. Do you believe that these programs are effective and efficient enough to keep this group of at-risk youth actively engaged? If yes, how? If no, why?
 6. Do these programs help contribute to the success of these at-risk youth academic performance in school? If yes, how? If no, why?
 7. What program or programs do you believe the boys and girls club provides the least impact on the at-risk youth? If any, How?
 8. What program or programs do you believe the boys and girls club provides the most impact on the at-risk youth? If any, How?
 9. What are the key characteristics that the boys and girls club offer that helps the youth overcome the "at-risk" factors?
 10. What are the strategies the boys and girls club use to specifically help those youth who are "at-risk"?
 11. How does your role as the _____ (club staff (mentor), club professional, director) positively impact the lives of the at-risk youth?
 12. Do you believe the Boys and Girls Club after-school program should change anything in regards to their programs offered? If yes, please explain. If no, please explain.
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