

2020

Key Inhibitors to Ex-Offenders Obtaining Permanent Housing

Jennifer Bernard
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Walden University

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Jennifer D. Bernard

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Walden University
2020

Abstract

Key Inhibitors to Ex-Offenders Obtaining Permanent Housing

by

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MBA, Alaska Pacific University, 2011

BA, Alaska Pacific University, 2006

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Public Policy and Administration

Walden University

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Abstract

There is a problem with the availability of permanent housing for ex-offenders, which increases the number of homeless ex-offenders, increasing the potential for recidivism that leads to inflated federal, state, and local incarceration budgets and higher taxpayer burdens. However, not much is known regarding the barriers ex-offenders face when seeking permanent housing in Anchorage, Alaska. Narrowing this knowledge gap was the purpose of this study, which was guided by Schneider and Ingram's social construction framework theory. The research goal of this study was to examine how the perception of ex-offenders and the external environment affect the ex-offender's ability of obtaining housing. A qualitative case study design was employed with convenience and criterion purposive sampling of 12 participants (4 ex-offenders, 4 landlords, and 4 housing providers). Structured telephone interviews addressed challenges associated with locating permanent housing when having a criminal felony record to better understand the barriers associated with ex-offenders securing permanent housing. Five themes were identified: housing denials and homelessness, negative societal stigma/reaction, restrictive public housing policies, political environment, advocacy, and rehabilitation. The results from this study reinforced the idea that stable housing is a foundational aspect of successful community reintegration, and there is need for improved collaborations between government and housing providers to aid in streamlining the housing search process. The study contributes to social change by providing information for practitioners and policy makers to consider when developing or revising programs that support housing reentry for ex-offenders.

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Dedication

I dedicate this study to my parents, Dr. James S. Wells, who walks with me in spirit and Grace Wells, one of the strongest women I know. I am appreciative that you instilled in me at an early age a love for God, the importance of doing good for others, mental toughness, and the value of a good education. To my loving husband, William Bernard Jr., no words can express how grateful I am to share this journey of life with you. Thank you for your unwavering love, patience, and support throughout the completion of this project. You are truly one of a kind. To my children and grandchildren, thank you for your love and understanding over the years, especially during all those visits and family vacations when my computer, files, and studies traveled along with me no matter what. To my tribe and village, thank you all for helping me achieve one of my life-long dreams. I could not have accomplished it alone. You are forever loved and appreciated.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Lack of affordable housing is a common characteristic of many urban areas in the United States, especially after the Great Recession of 2007, which led to plummeting property values and foreclosures that resulted in an increased need for rental housing for families across the nation (Lens, 2018). Low-to-moderate income families have more of a challenge as the rental markets become more competitive and the availability of affordable housing continues to diminish (Lens, 2018). There are 37 million people who currently live at or below the federal poverty level in America, and they are competing for 7.5 million affordable housing units (Silva, 2015). To compensate, families face options like moving to neighborhoods where housing is more affordable, staying with relatives while waiting for their names to reach the top of the public housing list, or saving enough money to rent or purchase a home (Roman & Travis, 2006). This lack of stable housing creates further challenges, as a safe place to call home provides consistency and is one of the key elements to living a productive lifestyle in society (Linney, 2013; Lutze, Rosky, & Hamilton, 2014; Purnell, 2013).

In the case of ex-offenders and their families, the housing challenge is far greater than affordability due to policies and community opinions (Roman & Travis, 2006, p. 399). These barriers, although less tangible than affordability, add to the challenges associated with housing for the ex-offender. Ex-offenders and their families can be denied housing or even evicted based on criminal records (Purnell, 2013). The fear of the restrictive policies deters ex-felons from applying for housing because of the anticipation of rejection and the possibility of family members permanently losing housing benefits.

But terminating households with criminal histories has been a politically motivated, cost-free way to cut out a large group of people from the pool of those seeking assistance (Silva, 2015).

Although ex-offenders may have access to temporary housing arrangements like shelters, halfway houses, and the couches of family members and friends, they lack access to permanent housing, which is a housing provision with a duration for longer than 6 months (Clark, 2016). Research has indicated that one in five people who leave prison will become homeless, who are then more likely to reoffend (National Alliance to End Homelessness, n.d.). Further, 30% are rearrested within first 6 months of reentry, 44% within 1 year, and 67.5% within 3 years (Luther, Reichert, Holloway, Roth, & Aalsma, 2011, p. 478). Thus, a lack of access to stable housing increases the potential for recidivism, leading to inflated federal, state, and local incarceration budgets and higher taxes. But ex-offenders face landlords' reluctance to rent to them, unemployment, lack of trust, and community safety concerns (Lutze et al., 2014). There is also a cycle after reentry that ex-offenders go through—without employment, ex-offenders will not have the funds for rental deposits and monthly rents, and without a stable residence, locating employment is more difficult. Having a job and a stable place to live are prerequisites to be a productive citizen in society, and the absence of either lead to negative perceptions and a lack of respect and trust for the individual, further complicating the opportunity for successful community integration.

This study sheds light on the key barriers to obtaining permanent housing in Anchorage, Alaska. This chapter lays the groundwork for the research questions,

purpose of this study, and theoretical framework. Then, in helping to anchor the study, key assumptions and limitations and the study's significance for practitioners and scholars of the public administration discipline are explained.

Background of the Problem

The effects of mass incarceration initiated in the 1970s created an elevated prisoner population of more than 1.5 million individuals in the federal and state prison systems by the end of 2011 (Morenoff & Harding, 2014). As a result, more than 700,000 ex-offenders are released to the communities annually, creating an influx of ex-offenders reintegrating back into mainstream society (Morenoff & Harding, 2014). Additionally, roughly 1 in every 100 adults in the United States is in prison or jail, with more than 1.5 million individuals serving time in the state and federal prison, and 95% will be released and returned to society (Kaebel & Glaze, 2016). Alaska has experienced a growth in prison residents that is 4 times faster than the state's population, resulting in nearly 377 offenders being released monthly to Alaskan communities (Alaska Department of Corrections, 2014).

Access to affordable and safe permanent housing is one of the most significant challenges faced by returning ex-offenders today. Housing insecurity exists for ex-offenders due to having a felony record, lack of employment, poor credit history, and limited access to public housing, which results in a higher propensity of homelessness (Geller & Curtis, 2011). Safe and affordable housing is a key element in leading a productive lifestyle. The absence of stable housing attracts a myriad of challenges, like not having a permanent address to provide to an employer when looking for employment,

not being able to enroll children in school, seek social services, medical treatment, or establish community networks (Geller & Franklin, 2014; Lutze et al., 2014). But ex-offenders are excluded from public housing rosters because of having a felony record. Blanket exclusions from low-income housing registers serve in keeping ex-offenders and their families out of public housing communities (Hoskins, 2014; Linney, 2013; Purnell, 2013), forcing ex-offenders to live in less desirable housing located in neighborhoods with poverty and crime. Because of the housing barriers, ex-offenders are found living in around criminal activity that influenced them to commit crime (Kirk, Barnes, & Kearley, 2018).

In addition to excluding ex-offenders based on criminal records, cost is a barrier to housing. For example, the high cost of living in Alaska makes finding this type of housing even more challenging. The Fair Market Rent for a two-bedroom apartment in Alaska is \$1,256 dollars per month, and a family must earn over to \$50,000 dollars annually to afford this rent without paying more than 30% of their income on housing (National Low-Income Housing Coalition, 2017).

Programs providing housing in addition to wrap-around services for ex-offenders willing to seek treatment and rehabilitation have aided in helping ex-offenders work toward becoming self-sufficient and productive community members (Lutze et al., 2014). However, even though a vast number of programs address the needs of ex-offenders with employment training, substance abuse and recovery, mental illnesses and housing, there is still room for the development of more programs that focus solely on housing. For instance, the ex-offender's transition from prison back into mainstream society could be

streamlined with better coordination between the Department of Corrections and the agencies that provide pre-and post-service release (Garland, Wodahl, & Mayfield, 2011). Improving communications with the ex-offenders and their families post release can inform providers on downfalls and provide the opportunity for additional support and services in those areas (Luther et al., 2011), further reducing the potential for recidivism. Ex-offenders with social and economic support from family members have a better chance of reintegrating back into the community, so those without that support will need more support from Department of Corrections (Harding, Wyse, Dobson, & Morenoff, 2014).

Providing housing voucher systems is another way to provide support for ex-offenders, which is more cost effective than incarceration. A study was conducted in Washington State on a housing voucher program, and the findings supported the fact that it is more cost effective to provide housing for ex-offenders up to 3 months following their release than to keep them incarcerated due to the fact they are unable to provide evidence of suitable housing for their exit transition (Hamilton, Kigerl, & Hays, 2015). Additionally, “every dollar invested in paying for an offender’s voucher expenses saved over seven dollars in other costs” (Hamilton et al., 2015, p. 273). Voucher programs have also been successful historically by providing housing for hard-to-house populations.

The effects of not having stable housing to transition after incarceration and its correlation to recidivism are well documented in the literature (Linney 2013; Lutze et al., 2014; Purnell, 2013). Ex-offenders who are homeless are more likely to reoffend

because of the environmental situations they are exposed to as a result of being homeless (Lutze et al., 2014). However, the specific barriers faced by ex-offenders seeking permanent housing in Anchorage, Alaska have not been documented.

Problem Statement

Not having stable housing to transition into after incarceration and its correlation to recidivism is well documented in the literature (Linney, 2013; Lutze et al., 2014; Purnell, 2013). For example, Clark (2016) found that post release housing placements significantly influenced recidivism and aided with successful reintegration in the community. Research has also indicated the importance of residential stability and how mobility increases the likelihood of recidivism. Ex-offenders are more likely to re-offend during periods of homelessness and housing instability (Steiner, Makarios, & Travis, 2015). Another study found that over one-quarter of the participants experienced a profound struggle with meeting the basic needs like food and housing and experienced periods of homelessness, housing instability, and one-third of this group experienced a desperate struggle for survival without those basic needs (Harding et al., 2014). Further research has noted that ex-offenders who are homeless are more likely to reoffend because of the environmental situations they are exposed to as a result of being homeless (Lutze et al., 2014).

The literature has been instrumental in identifying factors that may be contributing to the problem of the lack of permanent housing for ex-offenders, among which are the landlords' reluctance to rent to ex-offenders, unemployment, lack of trust, limited rental histories, and community safety concerns (Clark, 2016; Lutze et al., 2014). However,

there is a gap in the literature with respect to the problem from a social constructionist approach. This study was necessary to examine the elements of perception, and the external environments and their effects on the availability of housing for ex-offenders.

Purpose of the Study

This study was conducted to examine how the elements of perception and the external environment affect the capacity of previously incarcerated ex-offenders securing permanent housing in Anchorage, Alaska. The primary purpose was to broaden the understanding of the challenges that ex-offenders face in securing housing after being released from prison. The literature provided an understanding on the obstacles ex-offenders encounter when seeking housing, but this research was conducted with ex-offenders, landlords, and public and private housing authority personnel in Anchorage, Alaska using a qualitative case study approach. The method for investigation and detailed interview questions are provided in Chapter 3 and the Appendix.

Research Questions

The research design for this study involved identifying key factors that may be important for developing and revising reentry housing programs for ex-offenders. To this end, the following research questions were devised:

1. What are the key inhibitors to finding permanent housing for low- to moderate-income ex-offenders in Anchorage, Alaska?
2. What is the role of perception within the concept of social construction?
3. What is the role of framing within the concept of social construction?

4. In what way does the external environment affect multiple realities within the concept of social construction?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework employed in this study is social construction framework (SCF; Bergman & Luckman, 1966). According to this framework, people become the product of their environment based on the actions and mental representations of others, and these actions eventually become habitual over time (Bergman & Luckman, 1966). Further, the theory suggests that people require a stable environment (Bergman & Luckman, 1966). For ex-offenders, the ability to obtain stable housing lays the groundwork for creating an environment conducive for the success of this population, but many of them face challenges in securing housing.

The SCF consists of four target groups: the advantaged, contenders, dependents, and deviants (Schneider & Ingram, 1993). The groups either benefit from the advantages of the policies, or they are burdened by the policies and receive less a result. Ex-offenders represent the deviant group, having minute political power and favor, and the receipt of the burden is associated with having a criminal record or the type of felony held by that person. For example, ex-offenders convicted of a felony face sanctions that restrict their ability to obtain public housing benefits. Additionally, housing authorities and private landlords often elect not to rent to ex-offenders because of their criminal records, resulting in limited housing options for this vulnerable population further adding to the burdens.

The SCF suggests that problems are socially constructed in society, and how they are addressed depends not on their seriousness but on the social process of framing and agenda setting (Kingdon, 1984; Rocherfort & Cobb, 1994). Thus, the theory can be used to examine policies that may affect certain groups (Sabatier & Weible, 2014, p. 377). The challenges ex-offenders face when trying to secure permanent housing are related to having a criminal background, current housing policies, and the views that housing providers have toward ex-offenders, based on social constructions. Social constructions are powerful images or stereotypes based on decisions made for groups of people that are grounded on values and emotions (Sabatier & Weible, 2014). Social constructions relate to the perceptions of those who have the power to make changes like the government, the court systems, and housing authority staff members. But these perceptions are not often questioned (Sabatier & Weible, 2014); ex-offenders have been legally discriminated against in the search for permanent housing because that is the way it has always been done, as many see ex-offenders as undeserving based on their previous life of crime.

The framework aligns well with the research questions, as it addresses the relationship between target groups, perception, the external environment, and the distribution of rewards or burdens. Additionally, Lowi's (1972) social construction theory postulates that people are controlled through government regulation, which helped to evaluate the treatment of ex-offenders and the "one strike policies" that require public housing authorities (PHAs) to evict or exclude any applicant with a felony conviction (Geller & Curtis, 2011). Policy designs like these send messages to targeted populations communicating how the government responds to them (Ingram, Schneider, & Deleon,

2006). Policies like the one-strike policy communicate that ex-offenders are not an accepted class even though they have served their time for the crime committed. By the same token, the framework can be used to evaluate the efforts of the Second Chance Act awarding government funding to organizations that provide housing and a vast number of services to assist ex-offenders reentering the communities (Clark, 2015). This legislation communicates that resources are available to ex-offenders who are willing to work with qualified organizations who provide reentry services.

The framework was also helpful in reviewing the impact of those involved providing housing to ex-offenders. Constructivism is used to study different people's realities and interactions with others (Patton, 2015, p. 121). This research entailed conducting interviews with ex-offenders, public and private housing authority personnel, and private landlords. Each group provided information on what dealing with ex-offender housing is like and how it affects their realities, which helped in determining the barriers to ex-offender housing. Because the framework it is built on the idea that reality comes from multiple views (Creswell, 2013), it was a helpful guide in working with the ideas and opinions of these diverse groups.

Finally, the SCF is most suited for the topic as it focuses on agenda setting, framing, assigning values, using emotional characterizations of people and problems, and the cumulative effect of distribution (Sabatier & Weible, 2014, p. 377), which are related to providing housing for ex-offenders. For example, during my employment as a real estate broker for a nonprofit housing authority, the organization supported lobbyists to go to the state capitol and lobby for funds for housing, and the availability of funding

depended on the political climate at that time and what was on the agenda of the political party. Housing availability was a primary focus in some years, and in other years it was not. Because ex-offenders are not allowed to vote in the state of Alaska if they have been convicted of a crime and are on probation or parole (Alaska Division of Elections, 2018), their right to select individuals who support their agenda is lost, and without representatives advocating for policies that support re-entry efforts, ex-offenders are excluded from the policy realms. As a result, the same policy makers are reelected and continue to obtain accolades for punishing those who they believe deserve it (Purnell, 2013; Sabatier & Weible, 2014).

Nature of the Study

The goal of this study was to examine how the perception of the ex-offender and the external environment affect the likelihood of this population securing permanent housing in Anchorage, Alaska. This qualitative case study included interviewing participants from different facets of the housing arena, ex-offenders, housing providers, and landlords. A case study is research focused on a case in a real-life setting, with data collection from multiple sources (Creswell, 2013). One of the key elements of a sound qualitative study is that it provides an in-depth understanding of the case (Creswell, 2013). Thus, it is necessary for the researcher to collect data from numerous sources and not rely solely on a single source of information to accomplish this goal. This case study was focused on one main issue—barriers faced by ex-offenders seeking permanent housing—but the data were derived from ex-offenders and public and private housing providers to exemplify the concerns.

Participants were selected using purposeful sampling to select cases that show different perspectives of the problem and ensure that in-depth information is collected (Creswell, 2013). The interviews were recorded with a digital audio recorder, transcribed, and coded with the NVivo computer software program. After that, the information was analyzed, and the transcribed document was coded and reviewed for recurring themes and patterns. In addition to interviews, housing documents were reviewed as secondary sources to support the findings.

Assumption

The design of this study included a few primary assumptions. First, the study involved the assumption that the sample may be hard to reach because of the stigma associated with having a felony record, which may have encouraged ex-offenders to not participate. Second, I assumed that the participants would answer the interview questions truthfully, providing accurate recollections of their procedures and their opinions to the best of their ability. Finally, I assumed that the case study method was appropriate for the exploration of the research questions and advancing the knowledge on the topic.

Scope

The scope of this qualitative, case study was to use of face-to-face interviews to document the experiences of both ex-offenders seeking permanent housing, housing authorities' representatives, and private landlords who provide housing. The intent was to identify and better understand the challenges associated with finding permanent housing in Anchorage, Alaska and to provide information to consider when developing

reentry programs. The target populations included ex-offenders, public and private housing providers staff members, and private landlords in the Anchorage area.

Delimitations

The study included delimitations which are boundaries intentionally placed by the researcher that aid in guiding the scope of the research. The first delimitation was the participant exclusion criteria. All participants needed to be 21 years old to be a part of the study. The ex-offenders needed to be out of prison, jail, or police custody for a minimum of six months. This requirement was initiated to include ex-offenders who were experienced housing seekers in the Anchorage area that were able to provide an array of information on their experiences seeking housing.

The second delimitation was the geographic location of the research. The housing providers were required to be based in Anchorage and provide rental housing in the municipality. This boundary was established to obtain housing information from the city with the highest population in the state.

Limitations

The limitations for this study arose from collecting valid information from the housing authorities. There was a possibility that the employees would not disclose accurate procedures due to the possibility of being accused of discrimination, not following written policies, or the threat of losing their jobs. This issue was addressed by keeping the responses confidential and not disclosing the name or position of the participant.

A second limitation related to the generalization of the study. Anchorage is a smaller-sized remotely located city comprised of approximately 300,000 people (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016), and it is surrounded by several lesser populated cities within driving distance and various smaller cities including the state's capital that are accessible by airplane. The results of this study are not generalizable to other smaller metropolitan areas due to the remote location of Anchorage, as residents of non-remote metropolitan locations may have more housing opportunities available within driving distance than the residents of Anchorage. Additionally, Anchorage ex-offenders had fewer housing choices because of the area's higher rental housing costs as opposed to other comparable cities.

Conducting sound qualitative research involved the use of several strategies. To address limitations, one of the qualitative validation strategies I used was triangulation, which involves using multiple sources or methods to corroborate evidence and validate the findings (Creswell, 2013). Triangulation was an effective strategy for the research topic as people from varying degrees associated with housing were interviewed using open-ended interview questions for detailed and rich explanations. The data collected from the different groups produced different theories on the matter. Next, documentation from the housing authorities and landlords was used in addition to the data collected from the agencies.

A second helpful strategy was the peer-review process, where a colleague checks the study for honesty and accuracy of interpretations (Creswell, 2013). The reviewer for the study focused on making sure that I conducted the research appropriately. I also kept

detailed notes on the fieldwork and the data collection process by videotaping or recording the interviews and then transcribing them. Another strategy that was beneficial in strengthening the validity of the research was being open and upfront regarding any researcher biases (see Maxwell, 2013).

Significance of the Study

This study added to the literature that described the impact that housing instability has on ex-offenders and their families seeking permanent housing (Hoskins, 2014; Linney, 2013; Purnell, 2013). The research filled a gap in the literature on housing barriers faced by ex-offenders from a social construction approach and how perception and external environment affect the possibility of obtaining permanent housing in Anchorage, Alaska. The cost of housing in Anchorage ranks among the highest in the country, and the income of ex-offenders is minimal, which makes obtaining housing a major obstacle for this population.

Practitioners and scholars can benefit from the new knowledge gained through this research. The results of this study may also provide policy makers and housing organizations with insight to develop improved housing programs geared toward successful reentry into mainstream society and help reduce recidivism and homelessness among ex-offenders. The results of the collaborations between housing authorities, landlords, and policy makers could encourage positive social change by creating stronger communities through an environment that is more receptive of the challenges faced by ex-offenders upon release and better poised in working through the obstacles, resulting in the proactive creation of increased permanent housing solutions.

Summary

Chapter 1 provided a brief introduction to the study on the housing barriers faced by ex-offenders in Anchorage, Alaska, illustrating the issues associated with ex-offenders locating permanent housing and the importance of permanent housing with regards to reducing recidivism and state incarceration costs. The purpose, theoretical framework, research questions were also explained. Chapter 2 provides a thorough examination of the current and most relevant literature on this topic, focusing on the barriers to housing for ex-offenders. Evidence of similar case studies or studies from different perspectives and foci are provided in this chapter. Chapter 3 contains a detailed description of the applicability and suitability of the methodology, the interview questions, and the data collection methods. Chapter 4 includes a thorough report of the raw data collected, and Chapter 5 contains a detailed analysis of the findings.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

More than 700,000 offenders are released from state and federal prisons yearly as a result of mass incarceration (Morenoff & Harding, 2014). As 2,000 ex-offenders return to communities daily, one of the largest obstacles they face is finding a place to live (Clark, 2016), and without stable housing, the chances of recidivating drastically increase. Further, there are a larger number of people on probation, which is a court-ordered period of correctional supervision in the community that usually acts as an alternative to incarceration; however, it can also be a combined sentence following incarceration (Department of Justice Office of Justice Programs, 2018). Parole on the other hand, is a period of conditional supervised release in the community following a term in state or federal prison (Department of Justice Office of Justice Programs, 2018). A recent study found that one in every 48 American adults is on parole or probation (Harding, Wyse, Dobson, & Morenoff, 2014).

Housing stability helps to create a foundation when seeking training, employment, and treatment; complying with parole; reuniting with children, and building solid social networks within community (Keen, Smoyer, & Blankenship, 2018; Lutze et al., 2014). Proper shelter is a basic living necessity, and without a permanent mailing address it is more challenging to open a bank account or apply for identification like a driver's license (Evans & Porter, 2014). For example, according to the U. S. Postal Service (2018), there is only one post office located in Anchorage that provides a general delivery service that accepts mail for individuals without a permanent address. Moreover, housing instability

opens the door to negative social stigma, exposure to harmful environments, and situations and behaviors that are prone to failure (Lutze et al., 2014).

Many studies have been conducted documenting the effects that housing instability has on ex-offenders and their families (Clark, 2016; Geller & Franklin, 2014; Herbert, Morenoff, & Harding, 2015; Keene et al., 2018; Lutze et al., 2014; Morenoff & Harding, 2014; Steiner, Makarios & Travis, 2015). However, minimal attention has been dedicated to understanding the barriers to achieving permanent housing and how perception and external environments affect securing housing in Anchorage, Alaska. This study addressed this gap in research.

Literature Search Strategies

A review of the literature on housing for ex-offenders helped to bring clarity to a topic with many facets. The search provided information on all aspects of housing associated with ex-offenders, resulting in over 200 peer-reviewed studies, journal articles, and reports published within the last 5 years. The Walden University Library provided access to ProQuest Central, Sage Premier, Business Source Complete, Political Science Complete, and EBSCO. A combination of keywords and phrases were used to perform the search: *ex-offender, ex-felon, felon, housing, recidivism, re-entry, released offender, accommodations, public housing, private housing, fair housing, discrimination, unprotected class, private housing, formerly incarcerated, homelessness, housing instability, permanent housing, federally subsidized housing, affordable housing, landlords, housing assistance, housing bans, unsubsidized housing, housing choice*

voucher, parole, and residential mobility. Additionally, reference lists of peer-reviewed journals and relevant dissertations were reviewed for further sources of information.

Although the literature review provided an array of information on a vast number of social concerns related to the challenges associated with the ex-offender's quest to find housing, there was a gap in the literature regarding the availability of permanent housing in Anchorage, Alaska. Specifically, the challenges that coincide with the restrictions of being on probation or parole in a remote city with elevated living costs and the limited affordable housing.

Theoretical Foundation

Constructivism began with a concept that was originally taken from the Western philosopher Emmanuel Kant in the 1800s, who described individuals having unique realities (Cronley, 2010). Several variations of social construction exist and can be traced back to Karl Mannheim's *Ideology and Utopia* (1936), which stated that social science is used to interpret reality. Social construction as described by Berger and Luckman (1967) entails the way people interpret things that have happened to them personally, thus shaping and creating their own reality. Social construction accounts for the interaction between individuals and the interpretation of their experience (Cronley, 2010). As a result, reality is subjective as opposed to an objective experience that emerges independent of people and their environment. Kuhn (1970) also suggested that problems are viewed as interpretations of problematic conditions demanding immediate action.

Social construction continued to evolve, as Schneider and Ingram's (1990, 1993) SCF of targeted populations describes social constructions as strong images created by

the perception of others with influence about specific groups of people. The SCF was designed to help better understand why policies sometimes fail to meet their original goals and purposes of solving public concerns and creating a greater sense of citizenship (Ingram, 2007). Social constructions can be positive or negative containing benefits or burdens for the group (Edelman, 1964, 1988). Negative constructions portray individuals as “undeserving or dishonest” (Schneider & Ingram, 1993), which fail to solve social problems, perpetuate injustices, and breed disparate citizenships (Sabatier & Weible, 2014). Therefore, social constructions are important to examine because they can influence rationales for actions like political campaigns and policy formation that affect target groups (Sabatier & Weible, 2014; Schneider & Ingram, 1993). External factors like the media, public relations, and the political environments affect information and how it is translated (Stacey, 1999). Even people’s identities come from social influences (Burr, as cited in Andrews, 2012).

The foundations of SCF are directly associated with the questions of who gets what, when, and how (Lasswell, 1936), supporting that socially constructed policy design is intertwined with socially constructed knowledge (Pierce et al., 2014). The theory of social construction and policy design was created to aid in understanding why public policies struggle to solve public challenges, provide aid to institutions, and help to provide quality citizenship (Dryzek, 1990; Ingram, 2007). Theorists have indicated the relationship between public policy and democracy (Lowi, 1964; Wilson, 1986). For example, Lowi (1964) concentrated on identifying parts of the policy that caused groups to come together, energize, and use their voice to request their needs and desires. To

make sure policy shows compromise for those involved, it is important to not only satisfy the desires of the privileged (Lowi, 1964). Lowi's theory was based on the possibility of high or low coercion resulting in the creation of four types of policy: distributive, regulatory, redistributive, and constituent (Lowi, 1972). Lowi (1972) theorized that policy creates politics through the distribution of benefits and burdens that create political activity for the groups. Schneider and Ingram (1997) supported this theory of policy affecting political participation and subsequent policy implementation. In contrast, Pierson (1993) identified "policy feedback" and the fallout of policy designs on institutions. However, both theories begin with the same idea of that policy affects politics. Ingram (2007) further postulated that policy designs create opportunities and deliver variable messages to various groups about how the government operates and the likely treatment they will receive as a result.

The theoretical foundation of SCF helped study the barriers to permanent housing that are faced by ex-offenders in Anchorage, Alaska because housing creation and availability coincide with the role of perception of the ex-offender, current and future housing policies, and the multiple realities that exist between the ex-offenders and the housing providers.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts

Housing Assistance Programs

There are limited housing resources for ex-offenders and their families. But finding a safe and appropriate place to reside is one of the most important first steps for the ex-offender in the long process of securing employment and adhering to the

conditions of post-release (Hamilton et al., 2015). The type of housing available ranges in length from temporary to permanent placements provided by private entities, nonprofits, and governmental agencies.

One type of housing resource is provided through housing assistance programs. This intervention-style approach is geared to help offenders who have completed their prison term but could remain incarcerated because they are homeless and have no place to go upon being released. Because suitable housing is a condition of probation and reintegration, these programs offer subsidized rental payments to the ex-offenders to assist with the transitioning back into the community (Hamilton et al., 2015). Housing assistance programs are also often referred to as voucher programs. The voucher is used in conjunction with a partial rental payment and is accepted by public and private housing authorities and private landlords. Voucher systems can be used as an effective option in lieu of incarceration and are cost effective when compared to elevated prison costs because using the voucher system increases the offender's opportunity for reintegration in the community (Hamilton et al., 2015).

Researchers have also examined state-specific programs. For example, Clifasefi, Lonczak, and Collins (2017) studied Seattle's Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion, which is a program that offers case management and legal assistance instead of prosecution and incarceration to offenders of low-level drug and prostitution offenses. One of the resources offered through the program is housing assistance. Findings indicated the offenders were twice as likely to have lived in a shelter at some point, and "89% more likely to have obtained permanent housing after being referred" from the

program (Clefasafi et al., 2017, p. 440). Furthermore, the research indicated that housing through the program was associated with significantly less recidivism (Clifasefi et al., 2017, p. 441), aiding housing outcomes for ex-offenders.

Additionally, Lutz et al. (2014) examined the results of the Washington's State Reentry Housing Pilot Program. The program was geared to reducing recidivism through providing high risk ex-offenders access to stable housing and supportive services for a period of 1 year (Lutz et al., 2014). The study suggested that "providing housing in conjunction with wraparound services increases the likelihood of successful reintegration" (Lutze et al., 2014, p. 485). Though some argue that these types of programs are a detriment to public safety because ex-offenders are released prior to completing the full term of incarceration, findings on Washington state's housing voucher program showed no increased public safety risks (Hamilton et al., 2015).

Further, researchers have examined the outcomes of housing programs and found that they were not effective unless they addressed cognition (Mackenzie, 2012). In other words, providing housing for ex-offenders will not change their thinking process and the choices they make on daily basis, but the programs will have greater potential if the cognitive thinking piece is dealt with prior to providing housing. For housing programs to be effective in providing housing for ex-offenders, it requires the inter-connected work of both public government and nonprofit agencies. Thus, there needs to be collaborative work on interventions for better quality control (Lutz et al., 2014). However, housing providers and agencies have different viewpoints on their roles where ex-offender housing is concerned. For instance, correctional facilities have different ideas on who is

responsible for long-term housing provision, and the departments do not see it as one of their undertakings (Fontain & Bess, 2012). Current housing programs are in the hands of the government, and the decisions made by policymakers can excel or deflate the efforts of all involved, so it is the government's responsibility to ensure the correct steps are taken to resolve the current housing concerns (Mackenzie, 2012). But because there is no recourse for ex-offenders who have been discriminated against on the basis of having a criminal record, and there are limited programs helping to unite this group with resources that aid in reestablishing their associations with the community, the struggle will continue to produce challenges for ex-offenders seeking housing (Evans & Porter, 2014).

Public Housing

A housing bubble that took place in the 1920s created a surplus of housing in the residential markets, leading to the National Mortgage Crisis of the 1930s (Silva, 2015). This era contributed to the financial crisis known as the Great Depression. Public housing was developed in the 1930s to address the housing affordability issues that plagued low-income families during this time (Clark, 2007). During this time, many Americans suffered extreme financial hardships due to unemployment and homelessness (Silva, 2015). The National Housing Act of 1934 was enacted by the U.S. government serving as the foundational legislation for public housing, followed by the U.S. Housing Act of 1937, which established the nation's housing policy objectives (Silva, 2015). Many years later, housing affordability is still a major obstacle for families with minimal to moderate financial means. Current research estimates that there are 45 million people

living at or below the federal poverty line, and this group is competing for 4.6 million units subsidized by the government (Silva, 2015).

There are three major housing programs provided by the federal government—the public housing program, housing choice voucher program, and Section 8 project-based rental assistance program—with an objective to provide affordable housing to low-income households (Curtis, Garlington, & Schottenfield, 2013; Lundgren, Curtis, & Oettinger, 2010). The major objective of the programs is to provide stable and affordable housing to approximately 4 million low-income households (Curtis et al., 2013). In exchange for housing, the residents of these programs must abide by the governing federal laws that include alcohol, drug, and criminal activity restrictions (Curtis et al., 2013). Residents can be denied housing if they or any member of their household has engaged in any activities related to drugs, alcohol, or criminal activity. Additionally, residents actively receiving benefits from their programs can be evicted from housing if a household member violates any of these restrictions.

Further, to give the PHAs the liberty to address housing conditions on local levels, the federal government afforded the PHA staff the authority to make housing decisions based on the needs in the community and its surrounding areas (Curtis et al., 2013). The staff has the authority to determine who will receive housing and who will not (Curtis et al., 2013). But this leads to a lack of consistency that applicants experience when attempting to obtain housing because of the discretionary power that has been granted to the PHA staff (Curtis et al., 2013). An applicant could be approved by a housing authority in one community and disapproved by an authority in another area

based solely on the staff's discretion. Silva (2015) finds that "disqualifying individuals with criminal records has proven to be a politically cost-free way to cut out large groups of people from the pool of those seeking assistance" (p. 379). The lack of continuity among housing authorities further obscures the housing search process for ex-offenders and their families (Curtis et al., 2013).

Housing Policies

Policies like "constructions are specific to a sociohistorical context based on communally held beliefs and values and require institutional legitimacy to be accepted by the general public" (Drew, 2013, p. 618). Schneider and Ingram's Policy Design Theory proposes that social constructions and political associations become intertwined with the policy structures, goals, rules, and procedures that are contained, and the implementation can have a direct effect on the target population (Schneider & Ingram, 1997). Studies have been conducted on the concept of framing, how it is used politically, and how frames tap into thinking patterns (Nguyen, Basolo, & Tiwari, 2013; Steensland, 2008). Stringent requirements and criteria of eligibility directly effects ex-offenders and determines the burden or benefits that are distributed to this target population (Schneider & Ingram, 1977). Furthermore, these same policies communicate to society how these groups should be treated, and where they fit socially in society (Drew, 2013).

Enforcement strategies for criminal activity have become more aggressive over the past decades attempting to reduce criminal activities and increase community well-being (Curtis, Garlington & Schottenfeld, 2013). The current public housing policies were established based on several pieces of legislation, first, the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of

1988, which permitted more restrictive screening processes, and gave PHAs the right to make their own housing determinations (Silva, 2015). Second, the Cranston-Gonzalez National Affordable Housing Act of 1990 (NAHA) allowed the criminal histories of all household members to be considered as a factor in housing eligibility process (Silva, 2015). Third, the Housing Opportunity Program Extension Act of 1996 “ordered federal and state law enforcement agencies to comply with PHA criminal records requests” (Silva, 2015, p. 381). The act strengthened eviction rules and called on the National Crime Information Center and local police departments to provide PHAs with applicant’s criminal records (Curtis et al., 2013). This legislation also encourages the “One Strike” initiative encouraging PHAs to “evict public housing residents who were suspected of engaging in drug related criminal activity” either on or off the public housing premises” (Silva, 2015). Furthermore, this legislation revised the verbiage to include anyone under the age of 18 who was convicted for a crime as an adult. Fourth, the Quality Housing and Work Responsibility Act of 1998 created a baseline for uniform screening tools and standards for admission to public housing as well as eviction policies for people with criminal records (Sohoni, 2014, Silva, 2015).

Legislation has given PHAs significant levels of discretion in reviewing applicants and residents, however federal regulations provide baseline restrictions on alcohol abuse, drug use, and criminal history. Housing assistance programs are required to deny applicants who (1) have been evicted from public housing within the past 3 years for drug related activity, (2) are on lifetime sex offender registry in any state, (3) have been evicted for manufacturing methamphetamines on public housing property, (4) are

using illegal drugs currently, (5) are abusing alcohol in a manner that interferes with the public housing community (Curtis et al., 2013).

The Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1988 amended the United States Housing Act of 1937 by requiring PHAs to use verbiage in the leases that disallows tenants or people living with the tenant to engage in criminal activity on or near the public housing property (Silva, 2015). Policies at the state and local levels vary between the states, and PHAs have different rules and regulations with regards to the rights to public housing following a drug offense. Alaska adheres to the 3-year federal housing ban that is followed by many states; however, some states have no time limits on how long a person can be barred from public housing (Lundgren et al., 2010). The Cranston-Gonzalez Act “prohibits a household from receiving public housing for a period of three years or reasonable time if the household was previously evicted from public housing based on “drug related criminal activity,” unless the person of the offending action was rehabilitated” (Silva, 2015, p.790).

Sohoni (2014) evaluated the impact of housing bans and recidivism and concluded that housing bans that restrict drug offenders from residing in public housing are associated with lower recidivism rates. This could be a result of dismantling drug regimes that congregated in housing prior to the implementation of the bans.

Stahler’s (2013) study also found that ex-offenders residing outside of the proximity of criminal related networks were less likely to reoffend. (Stahler, Mennis, Belenko, Welsh & Hiller, 2013).

Private Landlords

One of the largest obstacles ex-offenders face is the ability to qualify and secure housing, and private landlords play a major role in the approval or disapproval of prospective tenants. Evans and Porter (2015) studied landlord rental decisions and the effects of having a criminal record when applying for housing. The study suggests that “having a criminal conviction significantly reduces the landlord willingness to consider prospective tenants” (p. 37). One major indication of character is trust. If a landlord perceives an applicant as trustworthy, they are more likely to respond positively to the application. Trust is based on the positive image portrayed by the applicant, entailing their ability to pay and references from previous landlords (Evans & Porter, 2015). This is a difficult area for ex-offenders as they often lack many of the basic requirements like income and prior rental references since they have been recently released from prison. The study also suggested that “some landlords avoid renting to certain classes of ex-offenders for the fear of being sued by tenants for criminal acts that may occur on their property” (Evans & Porter, 2015, p. 25). On the other hand, the study indicated that the bulk of the landlords would not rent to applicants with a criminal record, but if they could demonstrate that they were actively involved in rehabilitation 60 percent of the applicants were considered for housing (Evans & Porter, 2015). Rehabilitation is a critical component of the housing re-entry circles that is beneficial to both landlords and ex-offenders; however, it is overlooked due to strained governmental budgets, and the lack of available funding.

Ex-Offenders and Communities

Ex-offenders come from diverse backgrounds with regards to ethnicity, socioeconomic status and criminal behaviors, which includes those who have committed crimes of a sexual nature, referred to as sexual offenders, and those who have committed non-sexual violent crimes like assault, robbery, and homicide (Grossi, 2017). Ex-offenders face many challenges and uncertainties upon release from prison because of their criminal record, and community reentry and reintegration is one of them (Grossi, 2017). For example, ex-offenders may encounter increased housing discrimination, be denied social capital, excluded from participation in community-based support programs, and could face community resistance against them residing in them residing in the neighborhood (Grossi, 2017). The elevated incarceration rates and the costs associated with it are detriments to the local communities and governments. Ex-offenders that are released to neighborhoods without the adequate skills and resources to reintegrate successfully into those areas penalize their families and the neighborhoods where they return (Drakulich, Crutchfield, Matsueda, & Rose, 2012).

The Maryland Opportunities through Vouchers Experiment (MOVE), a pilot program directed by Kirk, Barnes, Hyatt, and Kearley (2018), gave 6 months of free housing to ex-offenders to determine if the location of housing away from their previous community favorably impacted recidivism rates. The findings supported the idea that there are benefits to obtaining free housing for periods after incarceration, and that the combination of stable housing and residential change are important aspects in reducing the risks of recidivism. (Kirk et al., 2018).

Research conducted by Drakulich, Crutchfield, Matsueda, and Rose (2012) studied the effects of high concentration rates of offenders returning to neighborhoods coupled with low economic means and housing instability. It is unlikely that neighborhoods are treated equally with regards returning offenders, as “poor urban communities bear a disproportionate share of the burden as incarceration rates are particularly high in these communities” (Harding, Morenoff & Herbert 2013, p. 217). The research suggests that high numbers of returning offenders produce negative consequences “associated with a reduced capacity for collective efficacy, the fostering of social situations conducive to criminal behavior and higher levels of violent crime” (Drakulich et al., 2012, p. 514).

Harding et al. (2013) research confirms that neighborhoods with offenders returning at accelerated rates had higher crime rates than the areas receiving fewer offenders, as the revolving door between the prison and the community created a breach in social circles deterring the ability to reduce criminal activity. On the other hand, most offenders are not returning to their previous residences, “less than one-third of parolees in the study returned to an address within a half mile of their pre-prison address” (Harding, et al., 2013). Offenders are transitioning into neighborhoods as newcomers without established “resources to buffer the detrimental effects of living in a disadvantaged neighborhood”, where there is a lack of the sense of community, which is still a negative aspect associated with recidivating (Harding et al., 2013, p. 232).

Summary and Conclusions

The lack of literature that exists on the barriers ex-offenders in Anchorage, Alaska, face led to an extensive literature search on the housing resources that are available to ex-offenders and their families. Thereafter literature on public housing and the effect of housing bans, followed by a literature search on private landlords, the effects of having a criminal record, and the return of ex-offenders to the communities. The literature gaps that derived from the barriers faced by ex-offenders from a social construction approach compelled an interest in a qualitative case study design method.

The following chapter presented the basis for the selection of a qualitative research methodology to thoroughly address the research questions. In addition to the study design, the role of the researcher, the collection and warehousing of the data, instruments, tools used, and issues of trustworthiness were found therein.

There are five primary sources of housing for ex-offenders after their release. The first is living with family members or friends, which is usually a short-term arrangement. Second, community based correctional facilities like half-way houses which are highly regulated and are considered a temporary placement option (Fontaine & Biess, 2012). Third, supportive housing programs offering case management for those who struggle with mental illness or substance abuse disorders (Fontaine & Biess, 2012). Fourth, federally subsidized housing voucher programs, which are intended for low-income individuals, but they come with an array of restrictions, extensive paperwork, and long waiting lists (Foutaine & Biess, 2012). Fifth, the private housing market catering to

people with rental and work histories, the ability to work, earn a living and maintain a household (Foutaine & Biess, 2012).

Previous research suggests that landlords are less willing to consider applicants with criminal records as tenants (Evans & Porter, 2015). Additionally, roughly 10% of inmates were homeless before or after their previous prison term, and the same amount encounter a life of homelessness after their term (Lutze et al., 2014). When ex-offenders are not able to secure acceptable housing arrangements, they may have no better alternative other than a life of homelessness (Clark, 2016). Housing instability leads to repeat offending and a vicious cycle of a crime induced life. Assisting ex-offenders with the quest to secure suitable permanent housing has the potential to improve safety in the communities and free up funds that can be reallocated and used in areas where there is a greater need (Lutze et al., 2014). Previous research confirms a parallel to housing instability and incarceration (Lutze et al., 2014). There is a need for different types of stable housing for ex-offenders re-entering the communities, and there is substantial research on the effects of temporary housing solutions like half-way houses, and shelters. This research focuses on permanent housing solutions and the challenges associated with obtaining it in Anchorage, Alaska.

To begin, a review of research strategies was presented to aid researchers in locating articles for future review. A review of the Social Construction Framework provided insight into how perception and external environment affects vulnerable populations and keeps them from receiving necessary resources like housing. The remaining part of the literature review highlighted seminal research detailing the effects

of housing instability for ex-offenders and their families. This review covered housing programs, public housing, housing policies, private landlords and the different aspects of each type of housing. Finally, the review shed light on how the communities that receive the returning ex-offenders were affected.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

Stable housing is one of the elements required to initiate building a life of stability, and much is known of the obstacles faced by ex-offenders when transitioning back into society. What is not known, however, is how the restrictive housing policies affect the likelihood of obtaining permanent housing in Anchorage, Alaska. The purpose of this study was to identify how the role of perception and the external environment affect the possibility of securing permanent housing in Anchorage, Alaska. The research questions for this study were:

1. What are the key inhibitors to finding permanent housing for low- to moderate-income ex-offenders in Anchorage, Alaska?
2. What is the role of perception within the concept of social construction?
3. What is the role of framing within the concept of social construction?
4. In what way does the external environment affect multiple realities within the concept of social construction?

This chapter outlines the qualitative method used to assist in understanding barriers to housing for ex-offenders.

Research Methodology

The research was conducted using qualitative methodology. Qualitative researchers follow an inductive approach rather than entirely following a theory or the researchers' perspectives (Creswell, 2013). Additionally, qualitative researchers study phenomena in their natural settings to better understand them (Creswell, 2013). This

methodology best suited the topic, as it allowed me to collect data from multiple interrelated sources in the housing industry, which is a key component to determining the barriers. I also chose the qualitative method because the research style is flexible and emergent, which allows the plan to change as the study evolves (Creswell, 2013; O'Sullivan, Rassel, & Berner, 2008). The data gathered helped in answering the research questions in rich detail, which adds to the quality of the research conducted.

Additionally, qualitative researchers act as close observers, so understanding the topic adds to the quality of the study (O'Sullivan et al., 2008). My former experience as a real estate broker for a nonprofit housing authority brought a level of knowledge that was beneficial to the quality of research. My desire to select this topic was based on some of my experiences while working in the field.

Research Design

A research design describes the type of study that will be conducted by the researcher (O'Sullivan et al., 2008). The design used to conduct the research was a qualitative multi-case study. Qualitative case studies include information related to a case such as the features of an individual, organization, or program (O'Sullivan et al., 2008). This design is most appropriate for my research because qualitative research is flexible and can continue to evolve during the research. This is an important aspect, as I interviewed private and PHA representatives, private landlords, and ex-offenders, which could have resulted in needing to change the interviewing technique as the information became available. Another benefit of the case study design is that it allows the researcher to draw data from multiple data sources (O'Sullivan et al., 2008). This option was

beneficial when collecting information from the housing authorities, landlords, and ex-offenders, as it created a rich source of information from different perspectives in the industry.

Population and Sample

A research population is the sample from a larger population that a researcher studies (O'Sullivan et al., 2008). The population sample entailed 12 participants: four ex-offenders no longer incarcerated, four housing providers staff members, and four private landlords all based in Anchorage. These groups were selected because each section represents a different housing perspective, and by obtaining data from all groups involved, the data showed a more accurate picture of the barriers. Including as many perspectives as possible also added to the validity of the research and possibly confirmed that there is a challenge faced by ex-offenders who are searching for permanent housing.

Participants were recruited through housing provider channels located in the Anchorage, Alaska area. In meeting with housing authority staff and private landlords, information regarding the nature of the intended research was provided and a request for assistance in recruiting participants was made.

Ethical Protection of Participants

Qualitative researchers may encounter many ethical challenges in collecting data (Creswell, 2013). There were several ethical concerns related to conducting research of this nature. The first is the confidentiality of the ex-offenders, housing authorities, and private landlords. The information contained in housing applications is confidential because it contains the personal information of the applicant. Prior to collecting data

from the participants, I thoroughly explained the nature of the research, which was done to create trust (Creswell, 2013). The participants were also asked to sign a consent form that stated that they were willing to participate in the study. Further, each participant of the study was assigned a number, and their names remained confidential throughout the study (see Creswell, 2013).

Another concern is gaining access to participants by building trust with organizations or sites (Creswell, 2013). To conduct research at the housing authorities, I spoke with management in advance and requested permission to interview staff members. No research was conducted in this study without the proper consent forms and disclosures signed in advance.

The credibility of the researcher is also an ethical concern regarding the validity of the research. The credibility of the researcher is based on their training and past experience (Patton, 2002). It is imperative that credibility is established early during the research by exposing any biases that may influence the research. For example, as a credible researcher, I disclosed the fact that I was previously employed as a real estate broker for a nonprofit housing authority, as these experiences contributed to my exposure and feelings about the treatment of ex-offenders obtaining rental housing. Further, it is important to include information about the researcher because he or she is the instrument of data collection (Patton, 2002, p. 566). Credibility is increased by including background information on the project such as “personal connections of the researcher to the topic or program” (Patton, 2002, p. 566). Providing as much information about myself as possible showed that I was transparent and had nothing to hide.

Procedures

The following procedures were followed to recruit and inform participants, collect and analyze data, and validate findings. First, I called Anchorage local housing authorities; the Housing and Finance Corporation, Cook Inlet Housing Authority, and NeighborWorks Alaska were provided information about the study. I also called reentry organizations—No Limits, Inc., Partners Reentry, and New Life Development—and provided information about the study. Finally, I called landlords provided by referral of friends, colleagues, community councils, housing networks, and provided information about the study. I also sent informative letter via email to each group detailing the nature of the study and requested assistance recruiting participants. Interested participants were requested to contact me by replying to the e-mail to schedule an interview, I would contact the participants.

During the interview, each participant was given a copy of the letter describing the proposed study and sign the consent form. The interview included asking the questions listed in the Appendix. Audiotapes were transcribed verbatim and analyzed according to the steps outlined at the end of this chapter.

Data Collection

The data collection method was through semi-structured, face-to face or telephone interviews with ex-offenders, no longer incarcerated; public and private housing authority staff; and private landlords. The interviews lasted between 30 to 60 minutes. They consisted of two parts, with the first being a collection of demographic information from the participant. The second part of the interview consisted of data surrounding process of

accessing permanent housing in Anchorage, Alaska. The interviews followed the established interview protocol for each group of participants (see Appendix). All interviews were recorded, with the permission of each participant. The researcher took detailed notes about the provided answers to the questions. After the interview, the audio recordings of the interview were saved to a secured location on the interviewer's computer, and the transcribed notes taken during the interview were scanned and saved to the computer. The paper documents from the interview was saved in a fireproof storage box until all the interviews are completed. At the end of the interview, each participant was given a \$5 gift card for their time spent participating in the interview. After all the interviews were completed, they were transcribed by the researcher.

The researcher conducted a review of documents from secondary data sources like residential housing documents used by management to track the program usage and outcomes. A Google search was conducted to locate the local housing authorities within the Anchorage Municipality. The PHA websites were reviewed for documents containing their admission policies referred to as the Admission and Occupancy Manual, which were carefully reviewed for admissions criteria, the eligibility sections policies coded based on the exclusionary criteria of the ex-offenders.

The researcher conducted a review of Alaska newspaper articles published within the last past five years, using the Lexis-Nexis database. Newspaper articles provided data sources for understanding the framing of ex-offenders by local actors.

Surveys were not used in addition to the interviews for the private landlords who lived outside of the state, as all of the participants were residents of Anchorage. I believe

the data collected through interviews with ex-offenders provided a wealth of information on the actual experiences encountered during the search for permanent housing, and the information collected from the landlords and housing authorities will also be extremely beneficial to understanding the attitudes and beliefs from the housing provider perspective. The data collected from this population resulted in obtaining descriptive data that will be beneficial in providing a quality research piece with the potential to provide information that can assist in creating an atmosphere ripe for social change.

The nonprobability sampling design is Purposive or Purposeful Sampling, which entails “selecting information-rich cases to study, that by their nature and substance will illuminate the questions being investigated” (Patton, 2015, p. 264). Each group of participants represented a different facet of the industry and the information gained from their exposure aided in obtaining information that is pertinent to the study.

Data Analysis

According to Creswell (2013) “researchers typically organize their data into computer files” and further states “researchers convert their files units by words, sentences or stories to be coded by hand or by computer” (p. 182). After I conducted the interviews consisting of preselected questions, I hand-coded the responses by hand and color coded them to easily recognize patterns among the participants. I numbered the interviews and referred to them by numbers in order to keep the names of the participants confidential. I created separate computerized files for each interview. I reviewed the documents for accuracy, scanned the documents in the computer, and then saved in a separate computer file for each interview.

Next, I created Nodes, a collection of references about specific themes (NVivo, n.d.) through the NVivo software based on the information that was previously hand coded, using themes, ideas and words frequently repeated throughout the interviews. This information was then coded using the NVivo computer software coding program. One feature I appreciate in the NVivo program is it “copies a copy of the computer file in its database which creates a backup file to the researcher’s file” (NVivo, n.d.), and that is a beneficial aspect of the software in my opinion because the it provides the researcher a working copy and the original documents can be stored in a safe place, and the researcher minimizes the risks of destroying or losing the original documentation during the research.

Once the information was organized with the software, I re-read the transcripts and made additional notes about the interview. According to Creswell (2013) “researchers should read the transcripts several times writing notes in the margins of the field notes and under photographs which helps in the process of exploring the database” (p. 183). I found that each time I read the interview I discovered more information or new details about the interview that I did not recognize the first time I read it. To conduct quality research, it is imperative the researcher has a clear understanding of what the participant is trying to say, and that begins with thoroughly reading and analyzing the interview transcripts.

The next phase included coding the data with the computer software. “The process of coding involves aggregating the text of visual data into small categories of information, seeking evidence for the code from different databases being used in the

information to be inserted to the process to skew the findings to support their agenda (Creswell, 2013). To keep those type of situational dilemmas suppressed, steps have been taken to add reliability and validity checks and balances to research process. Specific steps were taken to avoid researcher bias when conducting the study (Creswell, 2013; Singleton & Straits, 2010). First, the researcher participated in a mind mapping exercise with an employee of a local housing authority, which allowed the researcher to compare their initial thoughts with someone in the housing industry that deals with the issue daily. This exercise allowed the researcher to identify any potential areas of bias, prejudices, and orientations prior to conducting the study. Second, the researcher will use Triangulation, the use of multiple sources and methods to provide supporting evidence that entails themes from different sources (Creswell, 2013). The use of triangulation allows the researcher to capture multiple perspectives as opposed to a centralized perspective (Patton, 2002). Lastly, a Peer Review process that provides an external check of the research process was conducted reviewing the methods and interpretations of the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Summary

Chapter 3 provided a thorough explanation of the research design, participant information, data collection and analysis procedures, and validity and reliability concerns, among other topics. Chapter 3 showed that the study included the qualitative case study research method and the detailed description of the research design and its appropriateness. Further information in this chapter covered how the researcher collected data from the participants, and how the data was analyzed after the collection. This study

was conducted following standard procedures for conducting qualitative research. All precautions were taken to ensure the safety and privacy of the participants involved, while every effort was made to identify the barriers ex-offenders face when trying to secure permanent housing in Anchorage, Alaska. Chapter 4 includes a thorough report of the raw data collected, and Chapter 5 contains a detailed analysis of the findings.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the barriers that are associated with ex-offenders obtaining permanent housing in Anchorage, Alaska. The problems addressed in this study are how the perception and the external environment affect the capacity of previously incarcerated ex-offenders securing housing. The principal research question was “What are the key inhibitors to finding permanent housing for low to moderate income ex-offenders in Anchorage, Alaska?” To assist with answering the research question, three supporting questions were developed that addresses the role of perception within social construction, the role of framing within social construction, and how the environment affects multiple realities within social construction. The data collected for this study were gathered to answer the research questions.

Data Collection

The study was conducted using 12 semi-structured telephone interviews including ex-offenders and housing providers. All interviews were 40 minutes or less, conforming to the promise of the interview length when participants were engaged. All the interviews were digitally recorded, and upon successful completion of the interviews, the digital voice files were transferred from the digital recorder to Express Scribe Transcription Software for back up and stored on a separated hard drive used solely for my dissertation. The interviews were labeled with a participant number and then transcribed using the Express Scribe software.

I maintained two backups of the files at all times for safety purposes. The first back up was stored on a secured, password-protected server that I own. The second backup was maintained on two separate USB memory sticks stored inside a fireproof security file box. Multiple file copies were made to ensure the integrity of the data in the event of a computer hard drive or USB malfunction. I was the only person with access to the data throughout the research process.

Participant Identification

The demographics and characteristics relevant to this study included 12 participants consisting of four ex-offenders, four housing providers, and four private landlords in the municipality of Anchorage. The selection of participants in the study involved a combination of convenience and criterion purposive sampling. The personal information of all participants has been kept confidential. The names used in the responses were changed to numbers to protect the identity of the participants in the study (see Tables 1 & 2). All 12 participants were recruited through e-mailed letters, recruitment flyers, or referrals based on having a criminal record or being a housing provider. The advertisement was placed in the public's view at a housing office, but no participants were recruited from the flyer. All the contacts were received through community contacts and one through a participant referral. The potential participants were informed by the letter that as ex-offenders, they had to be at least 21 years of age, served time in prison, and released from prison for 6 months or more. The potential housing provider participants were required to be at least 21 years of age and provide housing in the Anchorage area. Both sets of participants answering "yes" to the

questions and agreeing to be interviewed allowed them to share their experiences seeking housing as an ex-offender or providing permanent housing as a housing authority, provider, or landlord in Anchorage, Alaska.

Participants

The study originally called for 15 to 25 participants—no more than five ex-offenders, two staff members at one PHA, two staff members at two nonprofit housing authorities, and no more than five private landlords. The results of the convenience and purposive sampling yielded four ex-offenders, four housing providers, and four landlords (see Table 1). Although this number was less the desired quantity of participants for each group, the group did allow for a detailed analysis of the phenomenon of the barriers to permanent housing for ex-offenders in Anchorage. This smaller sample size is also supported by various examples of phenomenological research that entailed smaller numbers of participants (Creswell, 2013).

Table 1

Demographics Information of Ex-Offender Participants

Participant	Ethnicity	Gender	Years Incarcerated	Released
P1	African American	Male	12	2003
P2	African American	Male	6.5	2013
P4	Other	Female	2	2016
P7	African American	Male	7	2009

Table 2

Demographics Information of Housing Provider Participants

Participant	Ethnicity	Gender	Industry Involvement
P3	Caucasian	Male	Landlord
P5	African American	Female	Landlord
P6	African American	Male	Landlord
P8	African American	Female	Landlord
P9	Other	Female	Housing Provider
P10	African American	Male	Housing Provider
P11	Caucasian	Female	Housing Provider
P12	Caucasian	Female	Housing Provider

Interview Questions

The study was designed to gain insight into the barriers for ex-offenders seeking permanent housing after prison release and examine how the elements of perception and the external environment affect their capacity to obtain permanent housing. The research questions were designed to prompt further discussion between me and the participants. The ex-offenders were asked about their individual experiences with seeking housing, whereas the housing providers were asked about their experiences providing housing to ex-offenders.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using the phenomenological research analysis established by van Kaam and modified by Moustakas (1994). This 7-step approach method aided in

effectively analyzing and synthesizing the data. The process was iterative that started with an expansive level that was narrowed down into solid identifiable themes that were applied directly to the research questions proposed for this study. All data were entered into NVivo software application for qualitative analysis. The interview audio files were uploaded and were paired with the interview transcripts, and my notes were scanned and saved as PDF documents.

Coding Method

The first iteration of data analysis involved reading the transcript of each participant multiple times to refresh my memory of data. I highlighted key statements in the data that were relevant to the experience, using various colors to represent particular thoughts and ideas of the participants, and I made handwritten memos and summaries in the margin about each chunk of the text. Next, I created a list of themes from those ideas and entered them as the first-cycle method using in vivo coding. In vivo coding is a first-cycle coding method that involves using the participant's own voice in the data as a code (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). This first step is the process of horizontalization, where each sentence or phrase is viewed as being equally relevant and having equal value (Moustakas, 1994). The term *horizon* comes from Moustakas's research method where researchers are coming upon new ideas or themes in the research, and each horizon or coded thought is a new starting point in the research (Moustakas, 1994).

The second step is the reduction and elimination process. During this process, I assessed the expression of each participant to determine if the inclusion was necessary and relevant to the phenomenon being studied. I identified the horizons or codified

thoughts and eliminated statements that were redundant or imprecise, decreasing the data to those of the lived experience (Moustakas, 1994). Then, the identified horizons were clustered into 44 initial categories.

The third step of the analysis process was the clustering of the core categories and placing the invariant constituents into themes, referred to as the clustering and thematizing process (Moustakas, 1994). The initial 44 categories were reduced to five themes after merging overlapping and repetitive categories. The 44 invariant constituents and the five clustered themes are presented in Table 3.

The fourth step entailed validating the core themes to the transcripts to ensure the statements and themes are consistent with the participant's transcribed interview. The transcripts were compared with the core themes. During this process I verified that they were (a) explicitly stated by the participant, (b) compatible with the account if not explicitly expressed, and (c) If they are not clearly expressed, the themes were relevant to the participant's lived experience. The analysis of this data resulted in the identification of five themes (see Moustakas, 1994).

In the fifth step, the relevant and validated statements were given themes that were constructed into textual descriptions as outlined by the participant, providing an understanding of the participant's experience (Moustakas, 1994). Verbatim examples of the transcribed interviews were used in this step. The sixth step entailed the construction of a composite description of each participant's experience (Moustakas, 1994). I constructed a structural description based on the individual's textual description and imaginative variation. In the seventh step, I constructed the textural (what) and the

structural (how) descriptions of the participants and incorporated the invariant constituents and themes. Lastly, the descriptions were compiled into a composite description of meanings and essences of the experience that represented all the participants.

Table 3

Themes by Participants

Themes	Participants
1. Criminal record, housing denials, homelessness, and financial challenges	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10, P11, P12
2. Negative societal reaction	P4, P5, P6, P7, P8
3. Restrictive public housing policies	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P7, P8, P9, P10, P12
4. Political environment	P3, P5, P6, P8, P9, P10, P11
5. Advocacy and rehabilitation	P1, P2, P3, P6, P8, P9, P10, P11, P12

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility

Significant attention must be given to credibility when conducting qualitative research. Credibility involves the interpretation of the participants' views and their representation by the inquirer (Cope, 2014). Credibility is further strengthened by the researcher describing in detail the experience and verifying the findings with the participants (Cope, 2014). I initiated the processes listed in Chapter 3 to ensure the credibility of the research during the data collection and analysis process.

Next, I used the process of triangulation, using multiple sources to draw conclusions (Patton, 2015). The goal was accomplished by interviewing ex-offenders and housing providers, constructing themes based on the participant interviews and comparing those conclusions to theory and secondary data.

Dependability

Qualitative researchers exercise dependability when the data are shown to be consistent across similar situations (Cope, 2014). In other words, the study is deemed reliable if the researcher's processes and findings can be replicated using similar participants and conditions. I achieved this by annotating the specific details in the data collection process and analysis methods used to communicate the findings of the study. There were no changes made to the procedures as described in the Chapter 3 that will impact the dependability of the study.

Confirmability

In qualitative research confirmability is based on the researcher's ability to demonstrate that the participant's responses are clearly represented, and the responses are not the viewpoints or opinions of the researcher (Cope, 2014). I have exercised this aspect by including rich quotes from the participants that formulate the emerging themes.

Results

The study was focused on identifying the barriers to ex-offenders obtaining permanent housing in Anchorage. A concern was being able to answer the research questions from the lens of both the ex-offenders and housing providers. Themes emerged that supported the following research question: What are the key inhibitors to finding

permanent housing for low to moderate Income ex-offenders in Anchorage, Alaska? The five emerging themes included criminal records, housing denials, and financial challenges, negative societal reaction, restrictive public housing policies, political environment, rehabilitation, support, and advocacy. I provide specific quotes to support the themes that emerged.

Theme 1: Criminal Records, Housing Denials, Homelessness, and Financial Challenges

The four ex-offender participants described finding permanent housing as one of the most difficult challenges they faced after incarceration. Although each stated that they had an acceptable form of housing at the current time, their difficulties associated with finding housing after prison release were due to having a criminal record, lacking financial means and periods of homelessness. For example, Participant 2 shared that he was forced to live in less than desirable housing arrangements because of his criminal record, and he had to accept the housing that would accept his past:

It didn't matter if I had employment, because it went off your history. So, what I did was I actually moved into a transitional living house. Someone that would accept my background, and I lived there for five months. Then I had to move into another transitional living home and that time I became the security guard for that place so, I was able to get reduced rent, but because of my background I wasn't able to rent through some of the other agencies in town.

The four participants also described their experiences with being denied for housing after applying multiple times; however, most eventually found housing through

an acquaintance or on a referral basis. Participant 1 shared his experiences with being denied for housing multiple times, the importance of transparency about the record, and being persistent in looking for housing:

I understood the playing field. Everyone had to look your name up. I got denied so much, but I just believed that someone would like me enough to give me a chance, even with the record because I'm telling them about it so, the record was hindering the whole process. I just stayed in there and kept asking.

Likewise, Participant 2 discussed his experience with being denied on several occasions that his application was denied after applying and paying application fees to multiple organizations. Participant 2 reported:

I'd been denied. I filled applications out for a few places that were close to the downtown area that's where a lot of releasees see themselves staying. The downtown area close to a bus route, whether it's meetings, go to probation whatever it is, treatment services they primarily stay close to downtown. I had applied at a few places, paid the application fee, and due to the criminal background and the length of employment history not being sufficient for them I was denied.

Participant 4 shared that it took several years to find housing, and that in the interim she moved from place to place and was eventually reincarcerated while on the housing list. She also described the challenges of finding decent housing in the 30-day window allowed by the housing providers. Participant 4 reported:

It took seven years for me to even get the housing. So, I was living from place to place, struggling with addiction, in and out of jail, it took seven years for me to finally get my housing, and when I got it, they gave me 30 days to find a place to stay. You know and that just doesn't work. You need time to find a place and the way that Alaska is, there's places that private landlords will accept housing, but you have to find them. They're not the kind that are going to be on Craigslist or in the newspaper there the kind with the sign on their buildings. You've got to drive around neighborhoods and look for these places that accept housing.

Participant 7 shared his experience of applying for housing with a sexual crime on his record, and how the denials are related to the stigma attached to the sexual crime and landlords not wanting the responsibility of having sex offenders live on their property.

Participant 7 stated:

First of all, housing denied me because you can't have a sexual crime or a crime against a person. So, they deny you on that basis right there alone, and private individuals will deny you because they didn't really want to have a responsibility or stigma attached to them as far as having a sex offender located in their property. So, they turned me down because of that. I've had some good stuff too, but the majority of people turned me down because of the nature of my crime is basically what it was.

Some participants expressed they suffered periodic bouts of homelessness as a result of not being able to secure housing after prison release.

Participant 1 described his bout with homelessness that resulted from his previous history of drug abuse, and how his limited family in the area would let him stay with them on a short-term basis and when that time expired, he would resort to staying in the shelters. Participant 1 expressed:

It was self-imposed. I was couch surfing a lot, sometimes I stayed with my mom, but half of the time she wanted her own space, so I did the shelters. I would go to the shelter. I didn't have that much family up here. Well, you know I was on drugs too, so everybody was expecting me to do the same things I was doing before. So, you couldn't stay long. They were willing to help you on a short-term basis.

Participant 2 talked about the challenges with strained family relationships after incarceration and difficulty in not knowing the motives of the people who offer help or place to stay. He talked about how he elected to live in his car for two weeks during his homeless period, and shared as follows:

I was actually homeless for about a total of about two weeks. Just due to family histories which a lot of people have upon getting out. Just because your mindset has changed and your families hasn't, or you just don't really know who you can go to for support, and then there's a lot of people that offer you places to stay with ulterior motives. So, someone will have a place to stay but it's either an ulterior motive or very unhealthy environment. I elected not to go to those, and I slept in my car for about two weeks. I was broken up, yeah for about two weeks I was homeless.

Participant 4 described the periods of homelessness as being a scary time in her life that ranged from living alone on the streets, to sleeping in condemned buildings without the basic necessities to survive like water, heat, and electricity.

Participant 4 stated:

I was living in a condemned building actually before I ended up getting rescued, I'd like to say by God, and going back to jail. It was the absolute scariest thing in the world. There was no running water, there was no light, there was no heat. Everybody in there was an addict. So, you're living with like a whole bunch of strangers, you're not safe you're not trusted. Actually, in the room I resided in, I had a lock on the outside and inside of my door for a reason, you know. It was the lowest of lows. I've slept under bridges wrapped in cardboard boxes because I didn't have anywhere to go, or just walking, walking, walking because you weren't safe at any of the places where you could sleep. So, you're just walking and going and going hoping that you don't pass out in a bush.

Some participants expressed that the lack of access to finances added to burden of securing housing. Most had access to less money than was required for the security deposits, utilities, and basic living necessities.

Participant 1 expressed that he had a little money when he was released, but it was not a substantial amount to obtain housing. He states:

I think back then they *was* giving out that \$150. That's about what I had, then I had a forced savings of about \$300 I got out with almost \$500. I had a little money on my books.

Likewise, Participant 2 had some money he saved up during incarceration, and he had money for transportation by bus or cab and, no local family to help support him. He shared:

I had access to about \$800, and that was from saving up money during my last 3 years in prison. They give us transportation money to catch a bus that we were supposed to take in and for a cab after we landed in Anchorage to take a cab from the airport to the halfway house. I didn't have family or a support system out here to fund anything for me, so I was released with \$800.

Participant 4 described her financial challenges as having no money upon release, however, her mother would help with her basic needs like a bus pass, but she would not give her money directly, based on her past behavior. Participant 4 offered:

They had this place that would give me bus passes, but unless I had a job, I didn't have my own money. I didn't have nothing. My mom would pay for what I needed because of my history with things, she didn't want to just put money in my hands. She would pay for what I needed. She paid for the phone for communication, she paid for an ID, my bus passes and other than that I had to figure out a job so I could pay for stuff myself.

The private landlord participants expressed that having a criminal record makes finding housing more difficult for ex-offenders. However, some stated they have rented to ex-offenders before and most had favorable experiences with their tenants.

Participant 3 expressed that having a criminal record is a challenge for the ex-offender but showing characteristics of rehabilitation and sharing the positive things they

are doing now to overcome their negative past is helpful for landlords in making rental decisions. Participant 3 relayed:

Probably hurts a little bit but it depends on how they are coming across and as long as they are being straight forward with what they did and what they've done to overcome it and what they are planning to move forward with. If they are straight up about it and they explain why they went in and what they are doing to make their lives better, a lot of times I'd be more willing to give them a chance.

Participant 5 shared a similar opinion, but included that he believed working with an agency that advocates for the ex-offender is beneficial in them gaining access to the right resources. Participant 5 expressed:

In my opinion generally speaking it does. It has a profound effect for them pursuing housing unless, they are working with an agency or someone that can instruct them and walk them through the process.

Participant 6 stated that employment and their ability to follow the rules are the attributes they look for in applicants. He shared:

What we do is see if they are currently employed and if they are willing to abide by the rules of society. We haven't had any issues when renting to the ex-offenders.

Participant 8 discussed the difficulty with ex-offenders finding decent housing, and he believes they are discriminated against based on the stereotype of having a criminal record. They may be able to find housing, but it will be most likely be in substandard living conditions. In his words:

I think it's very hard and difficult because as soon as someone sees that the individual has a criminal record, they don't want anything to do with them and they move on to the next applicant. I think they're discriminated against. I do. No one is going to come out and say because you have a record, I'm not going to rent to you, but I do feel that is a key factor in individuals not receiving housing or decent housing. They may be able to rent a place that has some issues going on, maybe there's drugs being sold in the place, or maybe the landlord doesn't keep the place up to code. They probably would not have as much problem renting that type of housing, but decent housing, I think it is a major factor.

The housing provider participants expressed that securing housing is a difficult process for ex-offenders and the level of difficulty varies depending on the nature of the crime.

Participant 9 believes that having a criminal record is one of largest barrier for ex-offenders to overcome because most housing providers do background checks, and they are not going to rent to an ex-offender. Participant 9 expressed:

This completely effects an ex-offender's to secure housing. Everybody does criminal record searches like landlords and anybody who runs your background, checks anything about you they obviously check to make sure you have some kind of criminal record or not and it's a huge barrier in our community because there are people who will straight out just not rent to people who have a felony or even a misdemeanor or anything like that. So, having a record I would say is probably the biggest barrier in our community.

Participant 10 on the other hand believes the challenges associated with ex-offenders finding housing are more associated with the type of crime that was committed by the ex-offender. He shared:

Sometimes it depends on the criminal conviction, it's harder for some convictions and less hard for others. Sex offenders is probably the most difficult, then arsonists, and then moving down the line to murder. So, depending on the crime it gets harder, with the degree of the crime, it gets harder and harder.

Participant 11 discussed that they routinely do background checks, and certain offenses create automatic denials, while others are looked at on a case-by-case basis.

Participant 11 noted:

As a general policy for those applying there's a criminal background check, and the things that go into that are every case is looked at an individual basis. There a couple of things that sort of automatically disqualify someone otherwise our housing intake people look at the nature and severity of criminal activity, the recentness of the convictions going back to possibly five years, more frequently three years and then also taking into account any evidence of rehabilitation or other history since the criminal record might be viewed.

Participant 12 agreed that finding housing is a challenge and ex-offenders are regularly denied. She stated:

So, they get denied a lot and have a hard time finding housing. So, it takes them a while to find it.

Theme 2: Negative Societal Reaction

Several participants discussed the stigma associated with having a criminal record and the difficulties that come with reintegrating with society.

Participant 4 described her frustration with being denied housing because of the mistakes of her past, even though she has served the time in prison to pay for the crime, the negativity associated with being a felon lingers. In her words:

I just wish that it was as equal to everybody as they say it is. I wish that there was not so much fine print. Because a person thinks that they are eligible for housing and they go in there with their children seriously in need, they're not on drugs, they're not this, they're not that, they're really in need and they are rejected or denied because of a mistake they made in their past. It's horrible, we shouldn't be, we're held accountable already for the mistakes we made by going to jail but having that thrown in our face and opportunities and resources and benefits not being available to us because of that is a gut punch to your spirit. It's like oh my God!

Participant 5 talked about the negative stereotypes that people have about ex-Offenders, and the lack of community support they receive based on those stereotypes. She relayed:

Oh, there's no support, none to my knowledge. They have housing for the homeless, sort of, but for not ex-offenders to my knowledge. Because it's a negative thing, and people can change if they have the right environment and the support. But we generalize so much like, he's an ex-offender, she's an ex-

offender, they're not going to do anything but sit around smoke and get back in trouble again. It's the normal thinking regarding that.

Participant 6 responded similarly that they were not aware of a lot of resources for ex-offenders. He stated:

I don't hear a lot of information about opportunities for ex-offenders. I don't see a lot of people representing them or even talking about opportunities that are available for those who used to be ex-offenders.

Participant 7 talked about the stigma connected with being a sex offender, and how the society sees them through a negative lens and rarely believes that people can change. Participant 7 offered:

Now, granted if you commit a crime you need to be punished, I understand that but there also should be an opportunity for people with the nature of my crime to get housing. I understand that there is a stigma attached to it, but that still shouldn't exclude them from being, or having a place to come to or go to for housing. When you commit a crime like that, I mean I understand the victim deserves every opportunity and every right, but they totally discount the effect it has on the perpetrator. Because me being a perpetrator now I'm out, the victim got all the rights and now I have no rights. It's like I'm a throw away, everybody that commits that crime doesn't reoffend, some people do now, don't get me wrong everybody is not the same. That's the thing they do, they throw everybody in the same basket, and they shouldn't.

Theme 3: Restrictive Public Housing Policies

Participants discussed restrictive housing policies and their role in further complicating the quest to find or provide housing for ex-offenders.

Participant 1 shared that they did not apply for public housing because of his criminal record and he knew his application would be denied. Participant 2 on the other hand, did not apply because he lacked the financial means for the initial deposit and utilities, and he knew that he needed to find a place that would accept people with a record. Participant 7 on the other hand, applied and was turned down because of his record. From Participant 1, “I didn’t apply for public housing because I had a felony, back then a felony got you automatically denied. There wasn’t no reason to apply.” From Participant 2:

I did not apply for public housing because I didn’t have the funds, so I couldn’t even try. When I did get the funds, I had to move to another transitional living home with someone that accepted my background because I could not find a place that would you know accept felons.

From Participant 7: “I applied but got turned down because of the nature of my crime.”

Participant 4 expressed her frustration with applying and being eligible to live in housing. She described the long waiting list process and how it took several years before her name moved to the top of the waiting list. Participant 4 shared:

I did apply. With public housing you’re put on a waiting list, unless you’re staying in a shelter with your child, then you are not bumped to the top of the list and that could even take a year or two or three or four.

Private landlords were less aware of the policies associated with housing and were more willing to give the ex-offenders a chance if they met the specific criteria. Participant 3 shared that he was not aware of any specific policies that would deter him from renting to an ex-offender, and he discussed the importance of being non-discriminatory in selecting tenants. Participant 3 expressed:

As far as I know, there's nothing that restricts on that part it's up to the individual, but like anything, and like the law you have to be careful about how you go about you know, where you're not allowed to discriminate. So, you have to be a little open minded on it and try to I would say walk the fine line to not be discriminating.

Likewise, Participant 6 was not aware of any restrictive housing policies that would keep him from renting to ex-offenders either. He relayed:

No, I haven't seen any restrictions for us if there are, I don't apply them. I don't let that be a determining factor for us as a landlord that would prevent me from being able to rent to an ex-offender.

Participant 12 on the other hand discussed the position of her organization was to provide the funding subsidy to the landlord, and the tenant selection process was the landlord's decision and not closely affected by restrictive housing policies. Participant 12 noted:

We deal with private landlords and it doesn't really affect the landlords themselves too much. There's a few that by the client having this assistance from us are more likely willing to rent to them, but we don't really have any control

over what these private landlords who they will or will not rent to. Someone might have assistance from us, but it's up to the landlords to do their background checks and those that are willing to rent to ex-offenders might not necessarily be the best places.

Participant 5 discussed her experiences when she worked for a housing authority, and how the applications were denied automatically if they had a felony record.

Participant 5 expressed:

Because they check background references and if there is something that comes up in the background they screen them out, and also even sometimes and I've seen this when I was working in housing, is that even though they have someone working for them in the community as an advocate for them because of the federal guidelines and rules, they were still screened out.

Participant 10 and 11 talked about the landlords using the housing policies to their advantage because they can blame the denials on the restrictive policies. He offered:

I think it's an easy out for landlords, it's one of those things where if it's a doubt, they can just blame it on the restrictions. Landlords aren't going to stick their necks out for somebody they don't know. If it was a family member or somebody or a friend of a relative maybe they would go the little extra step to disregard certain restrictions or find a way around them, but when it's a stranger why would they even house them, when there's so many other people looking for housing? So, it's kind of an easy way out for the landlords.

Participant 11 shared:

There's sort of a level of risk mitigation that landlords are trying to achieve. I think the eligibility requirements put in place often reflect a pretty sort of conservative approach to risk and so that ends up looking like a more restrictive eligibility requirements, especially for ex-offenders or people with criminal records and so I've seen how ex-offenders are kept out of housing opportunities because of those policies.

The provider participants discussed the risks related to proving housing for ex-offenders and the increased expenses that are incurred by insurance companies and the like for the services they provide. Participant 9 stated:

There is a liability, we all have to pay property insurance, homeowner's insurance and all these things and we have to recognize that some of these criminal activities are liabilities for these houser's. So, I think that maybe being able to have the insurance companies understand that there is second chance.

Participants discussed the possible policy changes that might reduce the number of denials ex-offenders face from housing providers, like removing the felony question from the rental application. Participant 3 stated:

I mean the only way you could do that is if you're not allowed to ask if you have been convicted. But I don't know if that's fair for the other tenants who are there, but that would be the only thing to do but it opens up the door for other problems, so that's a little bit on the tougher side, but that would be the only thing that could eliminate and give them a lot more opportunities.

Likewise, Participant 10 concurs with taking the misdemeanor questions off of the rental application at a minimum. He expressed:

I would say take at least the misdemeanor questions if they have them on their housing applications, take it off the application. So, it's just a discouraging process for them to have to go through and embarrassing. What can be done? I don't know, maybe an interview process, where you sit with the person face-to-face, not just look at what's on the paper.

Participant 5 talked about a tiered system based on the number of years incarcerated, and the felony record was required to be disclosed if you were incarcerated for a period longer than two or three years and not required to be listed if it was less than three years. Participant 5 relayed:

Anybody with a record of incarceration automatically is denied. So, the changes that would have to happen is something like, this is me talking ok, depending on the number of years, if it were 13 years in prison yes, but if it's two or three years and they have the wrap around service to help them be successful, something like that, but it would be a case-by-case basis.

Participants 8 and 11 discussed policies that were based on the offense and not excluding ex-offenders across the board, but a piloted approach. Participant 8 expressed:

I think the policies there should give ex-offenders a chance based on the type of offense that they had against them. So, like I said if you're a sex offender or something like that, that puts it in a different category in my opinion, but I still think that the policies should not exclude ex-offenders across the board. It should

take into account what the offense was and what they're doing at this time instead of just saying no, you have a record and I'm not going to rent to you.

Participant 11 shared:

Taking more of a piloted approach where we're looking at housing a sort of smaller number of people with a more relaxed set of eligibility requirements and then from there seeing if broader policies can be changed from that.

Participant 6 discussed the idea that more attention should be given to the progress they are making in life and what they are doing today, as opposed to their criminal record of the past. In his words:

I think if they made it where ex-offenders are not judged on their past, but what they are doing right now to move forward from that lifestyle of criminal activity, I think that would lessen the burden for the ex-offenders that are coming out of jail to get housing. I think not just looking at the past, judging them based on what they're doing right now.

Theme 4: Political Environment

Participants discussed the effect the political environment has on the availability of housing for ex-offenders, and the barriers associated with the costs of building new construction in the Anchorage area. Participant 3 shared:

I would say unfortunately they restrict the building codes and the expense of the homes, being able to build some of the low-cost housing. Right now, unless you belong to a native corporation or you're very wealthy and you've got nothing else to spend money on, no one is going to build another housing complex, especially

here in Anchorage. If there was a way to help out the building community lower the costs, you'd probably see more housing development done.

Participants 5 and 6 concluded they did not think housing for ex-offenders was a priority on the political agenda of the current administration. Participant 5 noted, "Politically, I think that's on the lowest point on the political agenda because it's not a priority." Participant 6 expressed:

I don't hear a lot about that from our political parties. I don't think the political parties have a lot to say about what they do or even care about the fact that once they are out, they are a byproduct of society, not as someone they could use as a resource, and establish policies that would give opportunities for the ex-offenders.

Participant 8 stated:

It depends on if it's a political year, if there's some race going on, governor etc. I think it does affect it. It depends on what the issues are at the time and what that candidate thinks they can do or say that will increase their chances of winning.

So, the political environment I think it does affect it, but I think as far as making a change, it's the people in the community that will really help to make a change.

Participant 9 shared that not only was the availability of housing connected to the agendas of the political parties, fiscal position of the state and municipality, but also the beliefs about who is responsible for the burden of providing housing for this marginalized group. Participant 9 relayed:

The political environment very much effects the availability of housing for ex-offenders. I think it does go back to your morals or your political beliefs about

whether or not, who should be paying for these services and who should be fronting the financial burden for this, because someone's got to pay for it. Being fiscally conservative is kind of a new norm now and people are looking around going how are we going to pay for this? How are we going to put it in the budget? We need this in the budget. I would say currently the political environment is adversely affecting the availability of housing in Anchorage.

Participant 10 also agreed it is connected to the priorities of the political party and the amount of funding available in the budget. In his words:

Each administration comes in and has their focus and our last administration in Alaska was very housing friendly and there was a lot of work done toward housing people. The administration that's in now, they're fighting over a budget, and their focus with regards to reentrance it went from housing to longer sentencing. Which even still the people will eventually get out. So, it's a very political issue. It deals with a lot of money, a lot of jobs and a lot of people's fears you know. If you can recriminalize those who have already served their time and paid their debt to society, but if you recriminalize them in the eyes of the media, then it's a very powerful political tool. Because you can get elected on that, and then your position is "lock them up, keep them locked up". But we've seen that in Alaska before and it doesn't work. You know, we see that all over the country with the prison industrial complex is we have more people incarcerated in the United States than anywhere else in the world. So, yeah it comes and goes depending on which administration is in and what their focus is,

but it can change. As we see it changing right now with the current administration who has attempted to cut the budget for housing from 12.5 million down to 1 million. If that passes, that means there's going to be a lot less housing for folks coming out of incarceration and those who are just low income.

Participant 11 noted that most affordable housing programs are politically connected and require the government's funding to be successful. She relayed:

You need some level of political to build general affordable housing and that can be difficult here in Anchorage for a number of reasons. I think if it's not a private program, the program I've worked on is all privately funded and so there's a little more flexibility there, but if it's not a privately funded program and there's a need to really engage with government, then obviously you need sort of the political will there to make those policies happen especially when you're talking about housing a group of people that that people don't normally think of to house first, they think they're sort to taking a risk on that population and so you definitely need some form of political will if there's policy change involved.

Affordable housing in Alaska is tough in general and changing those systems to be even more flexible just requires another level of sort of difficulty, not that it's impossible by any means, but it just very expensive to build here. There can be municipal permitting requirements that can be prohibitive and there's sort of a whole host of reasons that the housing piece can be hard, and when you're adding on an additional layer to that then it requires more thought and effort.

Theme 5: Advocacy and Rehabilitation

Participants discussed the need for advocacy, rehabilitation, support, and the development of housing programs and opportunities to create programs that are dedicated specifically to ex-offender housing. Several participants noted that there was an immense need for organizations to help with the basics of providing housing, support and advocacy. Participant 1 noted: “There has to start being people that help with the nuts and bolts of securing housing. The stuff we didn’t know how to do, like security deposits, help you get your lights on and all that kind of stuff.” Participant 2 on the other hand, believed there was more work available for organizations to help in the transitional program arena. He expressed:

There needs to be more transitional settings that has a bridge to straight permanent housing. There needs to some type of agency that has those resources that can bridge you to permanent housing on a basis of when you’re ready.

Participant 11 added:

I think the one thing I would point to is sort of the difficulty of navigating the system of different housing options, different eligibility requirements. I think a community resource that sort of helps those people better navigate the system would be one element.

Participant 8 expressed:

We need more permanent housing for ex-offenders, and I believe people should be more receptive and willing to rent to individuals that are ex-offenders and just of course do your due diligence. Make sure you do your background check. Talk

to the individual, talk to others if you need to, previous landlords or like I said the parole officer, their employer, people that the volunteer with etc. Do the due diligence and find it in the heart to maybe give someone a chance.

Participant 9 noted:

More housing, more options, more sober stable supportive housing. I think we need those residential programs that are all encompassing, not only providing a roof over your head, but will also provide those case management services.

Participant 12 reported: "More supportive services, more treatment programs."

Participant 3 believed there were opportunities for nonprofits and housing organizations to build up the over-run and dilapidated hotels in the Anchorage area and convert them to housing for ex-offenders. Participant 3 shared:

Like maybe going into to something with these some of these ran down hotels, that we have, take them over private, but then have the state help subsidize it some. It gets them where they can at least get started and then from there maybe it's a short transition. They can't stay there but a year or two and sure it might be a great deal, but eventually they have to move on into reality.

Participant 6 believed the opportunities for advocacy for ex-offenders was plenteous and that various programs could be provided by churches and local nonprofits. He expressed:

I think we could own some places and when the ex-offenders come out give them some tools to help them get back on their feet and help change their mindset from being in that criminal element and also being able to integrate as a part of society.

Nonprofits could have more housing that's available that they own and run some programs that could teach the young men how to apply for jobs, start businesses or programs on how to go into the schools and do community service and talk to the kids.

Summary

This study examined how the elements of perception and the external environment affected the capacity of previously incarcerated ex-offenders securing permanent housing and helped to broaden our understanding of the challenges that ex-offenders face in securing housing after being released from prison in Anchorage, Alaska. The interviews served as the primary method of data collection. I conducted all interviews via telephone. The interviews generated significant statements regarding the participant's experiences related to ex-offender housing.

Chapter 4 contained the findings of the study. The study entailed interviewing 12 participants and examining the responses to themes surrounding the barriers associated with ex-offenders obtaining permanent housing in Anchorage, Alaska. The 44 initial categories were reduced to five themes: housing denials and homelessness, negative societal stigma/reaction, restrictive public housing policies, political environment, advocacy, and rehabilitation. All data was presented in the participants' own words and the research contained existing and new themes.

The participants described the first theme, criminal records, housing denials, homelessness, and financial challenges as some of the major contributors to the barriers ex-offenders face when seeking housing. From the ex-offender's viewpoint, the negative

responses are primarily associated with having a criminal record, which intertwines with being able to find employment and housing. The rejection ranges from family members not wanting to help them because of their crime-related past, to employers not wanting to hire them, to the landlord's lack of willingness to rent to them. Then, the ostracization leads to further frustration and feelings of hopelessness, that could ultimately create a string of bad decisions which lead to being reincarcerated, and the cycle repeats itself again and again.

The housing provider participants agreed that the challenges associated with ex-offenders finding housing are significant, ongoing, and experienced on many different levels from lack of mental clarity to financial duress. There was a general consensus among the providers that the ex-offenders have to be resilient and willing to persevere until opportunities open up for them, and in the meantime work on rehabilitation, be upfront about their past, but more importantly continue to relay information on the steps that are being taken to move forward in life and not digress to the previous life of crime.

Negative societal reaction, the second theme of the study, the ex-offender participants discussed the reparations associated with being a felon, and even after serving time in prison for the crime they committed, they are continually judged and reminded of their missteps when the applying for a job or a place to stay. Blemishes that will never completely vanish, but will require a detailed explanation, re-evaluation, and final decision by someone in authority over and over. These patterns will most likely continue until the negative stereotypes are outweighed and replaced over time by the positive characteristics of successful societal reintegration. The housing providers

described the stigmas associated with being a felon as critical in shaping opinions throughout the community, and the fact that they will most likely continue until there are more resources for ex-offenders geared toward successful community re-entry.

Thus, restrictive housing policies emerged as the third theme of the study, as participants described their experiences seeking and providing housing. The housing provider participants expressed their desire to help the ex-offenders with the daunting tasks of obtaining housing, and the difficulties with the application process because of the criminal record. The restrictive policies pose an obstacle to the providers that receive government funding, as they are bound to the current policies to be eligible for funding. Although most of the housing providers stated their services are provided on a case-by-case basis with certain offenses being grounds for an automatic denial. The private landlords on the other hands, knew less about the current policies and were open to working with offenders that were employed and rehabilitated. Most of the ex-offender participants discussed the fact they did not apply for public housing because they knew they would be denied automatically because of their criminal record.

The participants described the fourth theme of study, the political environment. There was a general consensus among all participants that providing housing for ex-offenders was a complicated and an extremely political endeavor due to the current fiscal challenges encumbering the state, the conservative views of the current administration, and the high costs of housing construction in Alaska.

The fifth theme, advocacy and rehabilitation were an area of agreement by ex-offender and housing provider participants. They discussed the available opportunities

for government and nonprofit organizations to provide more resources specifically geared to ex-offender housing initiatives that would support providing basic resources like housing counseling, rental application assistance to more complex needs like assisting ex-offenders with finding landlords who are willing to rent to them. The housing providers agreed that rehabilitation was one of best things an ex-offender could do to prepare for community reintegration and there is also a need for organizations to provide more of those type of opportunities and services to ex-offenders as well.

Chapter 5 provides an interpretation of the findings presented in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 includes a discussion on how the findings fit within the current research in addition to an explanation on the limitations of the study, and recommendations for future research. Chapter 5 concludes with a discussion on the possible social change implications of the study.

Chapter 5: Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations

Overview

Few studies represent the Anchorage permanent housing phenomenon from the social constructionist point of view. This gap supported this study's more thorough review of the barriers that ex-offenders face when seeking permanent housing in Anchorage. The current case study was designed to identify these barriers to help inform future housing programs. For this case study, four ex-offenders, four landlords, and four housing providers participated in the interviews. The participants were located using combination of convenience and criterion purposive sampling. Interviews consisted of a set of questions for the ex-offenders and a set of questions for the landlords and housing providers apart from any follow-up questions. Interviews ranged from 12 minutes to 40 minutes depending on the details of the participants' responses. I digitally recorded the interviews and then transcribed each interview. Following the transcription process, I used a phenomenological analysis adapted from Moustakas (1994).

In attempting to answer the research questions on key inhibitors to housing and the role of framing, perception, and multiple realities on social construction, I identified an initial set of 44 categories that were reduced to five themes: housing denials and homelessness, negative societal reaction, restrictive public housing policies, political environment, and advocacy and rehabilitation. Chapter 5 includes a summary and interpretation of the study findings, including the limitations the implications of this research, and recommendations for future research.

Interpretation of Findings

The five themes yielded in this study were as follows: criminal records, housing denials, homelessness, and financial challenges, negative societal reaction, restrictive housing policies, political environment, advocacy, and rehabilitation. Most of the results in Chapter 4 were expected; however, some were unexpected.

Theme 1: Criminal Records, Housing Denials, Homelessness, and Financial Challenges

Participant responses. There was a consensus among the participants that finding acceptable housing was a one of the hardest challenges that ex-offenders experience after prison release. Several discussed the obstacles with finding employment, which led to the lack of ability to pay security and utility deposits and afford even modest rent. Participants discussed the failed efforts of staying with family members, friends, and couch surfing from place to place.

Most of the ex-offender participants discussed their bouts with periodic homelessness that ranged from choice, addictions, strained family relationships, and lack of financial support. Some also discussed the fact that they had a limited number of family members living in the Anchorage area and most family members lived many miles away in various parts of the country, on the average a minimum of 3 to 5 hours flown by airplane. The landlords expressed that they were willing to work with ex-offenders if they were employed and were currently working on or had completed some form of rehabilitation.

Literature confirmation and support. The findings of the study showed a parallel with the current research trend. For instance, Herbert et al. (2015) confirmed that some of the main obstacles faced by ex-offenders seeking housing is limited income, discrimination from private landlords, and public housing restrictions. A common theme among the ex-offenders was that they wanted to find a decent place to live because they did not want to violate parole and go back to prison. One participant discussed the attempt to stay with a parent who lived in public housing, but they could only stay there for 2 weeks due to the housing regulations, which eventually led the participant to periods of homelessness and living in abandoned buildings in unsafe conditions. Most participants experienced points of homelessness that ranged from living in their car for several weeks to staying with friends temporarily.

The information from the ex-offenders also confirmed some of the findings in previous research such as reentry success depending on housing availability and post-housing placement (Clark, 2016). Research has indicated that residents of emergency shelters and similar areas are more likely to recidivate than those that live with a spouse or relative (Clark, 2016). Several ex-offender participants expressed the fact that they did not want to live in the shelters after being incarcerated because they did not want to be in that type of negative environment being exposed to others with records, which is a parole violation, or being in a drug environment. One participant said that there were more drugs in the some of the shelters than there were on the streets.

This study also suggested that ex-offender rehabilitation efforts could drastically improve the chances for acceptance. Previous research has indicated that having a

criminal record significantly reduces a landlord's willingness to accept the ex-offender as a tenant due to a lack of trust and the liability that could impact the well-being of the other tenants (Evans & Porter, 2015). The participants expressed that their housing denials were primarily based on the fact they had a criminal record. They discussed the point that they would like to be given an opportunity to interview or meet with the landlord prior to being denied for housing, which would give the landlord a chance to make a decision based on their character as opposed to the checked felon box on the rental application.

Findings

The remote location of Anchorage is an aspect that further complicates housing stability for ex-offenders, as having fewer family members who reside in the Anchorage area lessens the support that some relatives could provide. The result of limited housing choices often leads ex-offenders to homeless service systems that includes services, transitional housing, and shelters. Additionally, as more inmates are released on parole and probation in the municipality, the ex-offender housing need will continue to surge (see Figures 3-4).

The landlord participants expressed a willingness to rent to ex-offenders who are employed and rehabilitated. However, none of the landlords were a part of an organized housing reentry program where they could be found by those ex-offenders. There is a current need for one or more organizations to maintain databases of credible landlords who are willing to rent to ex-offenders who meet a pre-established criterion.

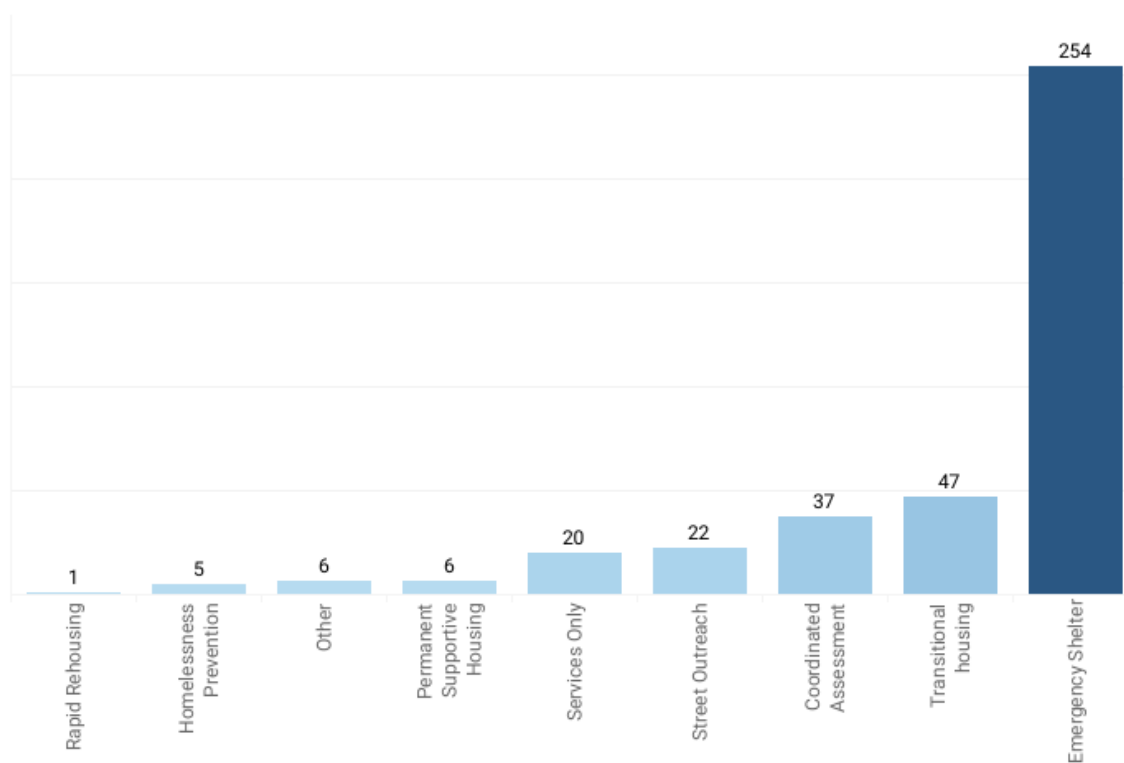


Figure 3. Number of clients entering homeless service system. Clients entering the homeless service system all reported living in jail or prison immediately prior to seeking assistance during the period of January 2017 to December 2019. Data from Institute of Community Alliances (2019).

Figure 3 shows the number of people entering the homeless services system in Anchorage who reported their most recent living situation as jail or prison prior to seeking housing assistance. The emergency shelter and transitional housing sections represent the highest number of clients, confirming that many offenders who are released without a solid plan for housing end up being homeless. Several participants from this study expressed that the shelters and transitional settings were the places that they tried to avoid because of the increased potential of reoffending while exposed to those type of environments. However, several participants stated that they went to the shelters because they had no other options because of their criminal record and lack of finances.

Figure 4 illustrates that 63% of Alaska residents are on probation or parole, and with the limited number of affordable housing units available in the Anchorage area, this information confirms that low-income housing solutions for ex-offender will continue to be a resource in great demand.

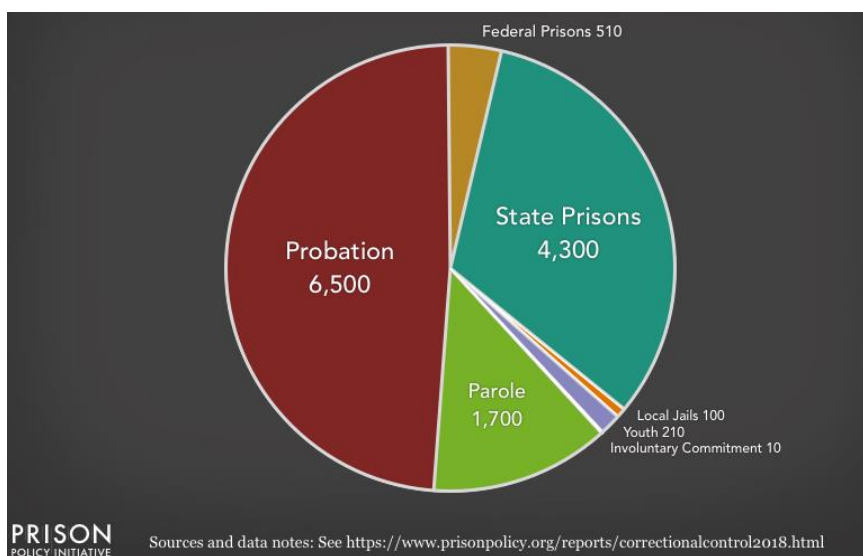


Figure 4. Number of Alaska residents in the criminal justice system and on probation or parole.

Theme 2: Negative Societal Reaction

Participant responses. One participant discussed having to live in a less than desirable hotel to avoid being homeless for over a year until he could save up enough money and find something better. Most participants had similar responses of living in unacceptable conditions on the streets, in their cars, and places that had a negative influence because they could not find anything better solutions because of landlord perceptions.

Literature confirmation and support. The literature supports these responses from participants. For instance, research has documented the effects of the stigma and prejudice that follows incarceration and the effect that it has on finding employment, finding housing, and making personal relationships (Herbert et al., 2015). Stigmas associated with stigmatized places and communities can influence sense of self, daily experiences, access to resources, and the ability to advance (Keen et al., 2018). Several of the ex-offender participants spoke about not wanting to live in the halfway house because of the negative environment and wanting to live in an area not ridden with crime and drug activity.

Findings. There was a consensus among the participants that ex-offenders were viewed negatively because of their criminal records and previous life of crime, and it was often hard to get past that negative perception. The negative stigma is often two-fold for the ex-offender—one aspect is having a criminal record and the other is being associated with the low-income category. This study differs from previous research by including housing

authorities and landlords in addition to ex-offenders, though the findings from the ex-offender perspective are parallel (see Keen et al., 2018).

Theme 3: Public Housing Policies

Participant responses. The housing provider participants discussed the limitations on providing housing that stems from the current housing policies. Although the current restrictions are more lenient than they have been in previous years for one agency, there was a consensus that looking at housing decisions on a case-by-case basis would be more effective than across the board denials resulting from having a criminal record. Another participant discussed the inflexible eligibility requirements and the lack of ability to review applicants on individual circumstances. It was suggested that the application process be amended and not ask about misdemeanors and that agencies be allowed to pilot an approach to housing ex-offenders, which if successful could be expanded to larger groups and possibly relax some of the eligibility requirements. Another participant concluded that restrictions were an easy out for landlords if they had doubts about an applicant; they could blame it on the policy restrictions, and they were most often not going to go out of their way to help a stranger.

Literature confirmation and support. Research has shown that bans for crimes violent and nonviolent vary in length depending on the offense, and many have chosen to leave the ban length to the discretion of housing staff, with federal policy allowing discretion based on local conditions and individual cases (Curtis, 2013). Further, current housing policies from the 1980s and 1990s with little to no revisions are still the reason for many denials, with these policies written to give the PHAs discretion in their

decisions, though the involvement in rehabilitation should be considered in these decisions (Silva, 2015). This study confirms that decisions are based on based on antiquated policies and that discretion is less likely to be exercised.

Findings. The findings of this study were parallel with the current research that public housing restrictions contribute immensely to the inability to provide housing for ex-offenders even though public housing is established for low to moderate income residents.

Theme 4: Political Environment

Participant responses. It was a consensus among housing authorities that providing stable housing for ex-offenders was a challenge due to the costs of construction in Anchorage, the state's current budget reductions, the lack of funding, and the public's perception of ex-offenders and their ability to reintegrate into society. Another participant discussed the recriminalization tactics that are used in the media against ex-offenders, even though they have already served their time. The politicians run campaigns on being tough on crime and "locking them up" to get votes and ease community fears about being soft on crime. One participant also discussed how morals and political beliefs are connected and the different approaches of the conservative and liberal political parties. One party was generally pro-housing and focused on who they can help, while the other was budget conscious and concerned with who was going to pay for it.

Literature confirmation and support. Research has shown that biases, stereotypes, and misconceptions influence views of affordable housing developments in

many communities and the determination of which groups are deserving or undeserving of the housing (Nguyen, Basolo, & Tiwari, 2013). Based on the findings of the current study, public housing staff, housing advocacy organizations, and developers understand the implications of framing and how the ignorance of negative social constructions can add to a unified message creating barriers. When discussing the political aspects with the participants of this study, the decision to provide funding for housing was connected to the political party and their support or lack of support for ex-offender housing. Thus, framing and negative messaging was connected with low-income residents and target populations.

Findings. The availability of housing for ex-offenders is affected by what is happening in the external environments like the political environment. The findings of the study supported the fact that messaging that is generated impacts the acceptance or lack of acceptance for particular groups. The Not-In-My-Backyard campaign is an example of the negative feedback that marginalized groups face.

Theme 5: Advocacy and Rehabilitation

Participant responses. There was a consensus among the participants that there was a need for increased advocacy and additional housing programs, specifically those that provide case management services and can help ex-offenders navigate the housing program systems. In discussing housing programs with the ex-offender participants, they made numerous comments that having someone to work with them exclusively on finding a place to live would have helped them immensely after incarceration and that

having a decent place to live was one of the most important aspects to a successful reentry, yet the hardest to find.

One participant discussed needing more transitional programs that could work as a bridge to permanent housing and help them learn basic things like the first month's rent and a little extra to pay bills and get good would be a huge help in the beginning. The housing providers responses were parallel saying that there was a need for residential programs that are encompassing providing housing and case management.

Literature confirmation and support. Clifasefi, Lonczak, & Collins (2017) research found the Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion program which provided housing advocacy, case management and legal assistance to low-level offenders instead of incarceration was successful across all outcomes. The case management involved connecting the participants with existing community resources and helping them with basic needs like housing, food, clothing, and treatment resources using an approach geared to client-driven goal setting and relationship building.

Clark (2016) found that dedicating extra resources and planning toward ex-offender populations can significantly reduce recidivism. The High-Risk Revocation Reduction program was established to assist underserved populations with reentry into their communities. The program provided assistance with housing, employment, mentoring, planning, transportation, and case management services. The research also confirmed that release planning and multiagency collaborations are necessary and have an immense impact on recidivism outcomes.

Findings. Currently there is a need for the development of more agencies that provide coordination and information on available resources for ex-offenders and housing providers who want to be a part of established program that provide housing to ex-offenders.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study was based on Bergman and Luckman's (1966) and Schneider and Ingram's (1990) Social Construction Framework (SCF). Social constructions can come from policy makers, media representatives, members of the general public, and persons within the target group itself (Schneider & Ingram, 1993). The results of this study aid in understanding the theoretical framework on which this research was constructed and executed as identified in the emerging themes. Bergman's (1966) theory was based on the idea that interpretations are based on personal experiences of people and are, thus shaping their own reality, making those experiences subjective as opposed to objective. Schneider and Ingram's (1990) theory is based on the concept that strong images are created by the perception of others with influence about specific groups of people, influencing the effect on the targeted groups' welfare producing an allocation of benefits or burdens. The social construction of targeted groups is connected to the cultural characterizations or popular images of the person or group (Edelman, 1964, 1988).

The findings from this study were applied to this framework using the following four aspects of the framework: Past and Current Policy Designs, Institutions and Culture, Target Populations, and Future Policy Designs (See Figure 5).

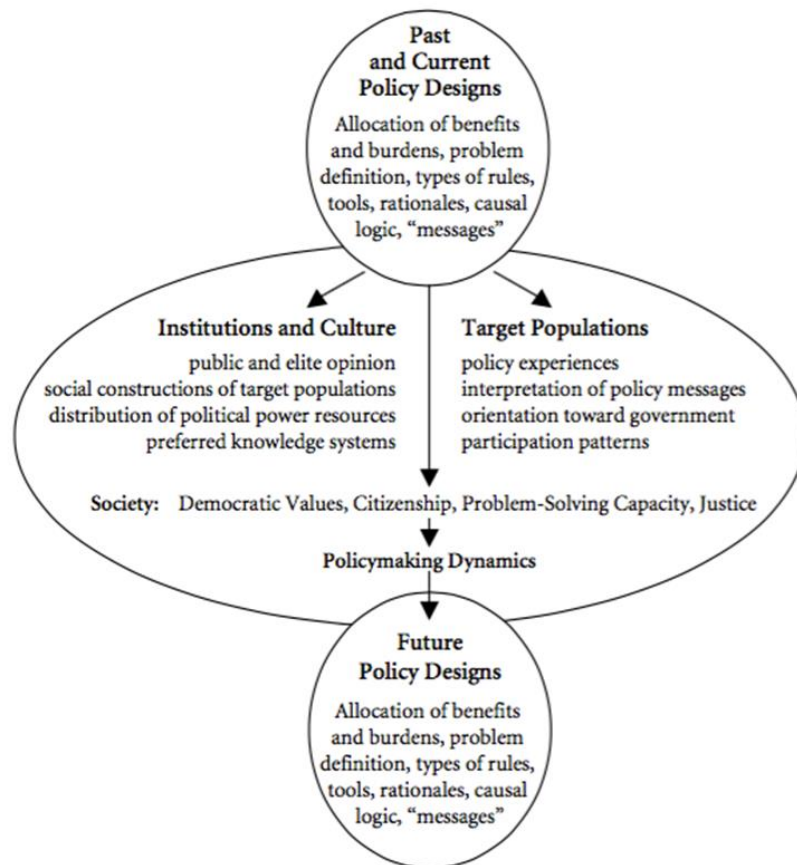


Figure 5. Social construction framework of target populations.

Past and current policy designs. The policies that are currently guiding the decisions with regards to ex-offender housing practices date back to the “Tough on Crime Policies” from the 1980’s and 1990’s. These policies were originally established to help control the criminal activity that was beginning to infiltrate some of the inner-city public housing facilities. Decades later, those same policies most without revision are still the deciding factor in the decision to house or not house the ex-offenders and permanent housing placement is still excluded from the prison release planning process. Most ex-offender participants discussed the fact that they did not apply for public housing even though they were low-income and had extremely limited financial resources, because they knew they would be denied since they had a criminal record. As a result, they sought out other less acceptable housing venues which lead to reincarceration for some of the participants.

Institutions and culture. The housing provider participants discussed their procedures and requirements for providing housing to ex-offenders, many confirming that decisions made on a case-by-case basis were more beneficial for everyone involved. On the other hand, some providers followed the more restrictive path as a requirement to receive federal funding, which is consistent with the cultural behavior of organizations funded by the federal government. The federal guidelines must be adhered to score favorably and receive the necessary funding.

Target populations. The experiences of the ex-offenders had similarities and differences. Most experienced issues with self-esteem resulting from multiple bouts with

rejection from society on various levels, most importantly the inability to find employment and housing. The ex-offender participants discussed how the policies continue to re-shape their lives daily by continually having to pay for a crime they committed even though they have completed their prison time. The housing providers on the other hand, are often guided by those policies in exchange for funding.

Future policy designs. The participants concur that the allocation of resources for ex-offenders is lacking and needs a collective review by government and housing organizations. Future policies should include collaborations from government, public, private, and nonprofit entities to be successful and address the housing disparity that currently exists in the ex-offender community.

Next, further detail is provided on the theoretical constructs of perception, framing, and multiple realities. Specifics are provided on the effects of stereotypes and how they impact the ex-offenders, how the culture impacts the decisions made toward housing ex-offenders, and the challenges faced by housing providers and private landlords due to the lack of available resources and the high costs associated with providing housing in Anchorage.

The role of perception. Social constructions are stereotypes about particular people created by politics, culture, socialization, history, media, literature, religion, and the like (Schneider & Ingram, 1993). Most of the participants discussed the effects of being looked on negatively by society as a result of being incarcerated.

It became evident during this study that the perception of the ex-offender had a great deal to do the ability to successfully reintegrate with society. Several ex-offender

participants shared their experiences of being denied housing based on having a criminal record, and how most landlords judged them on their past instead of the person they had become since incarceration. The ex-offenders described the challenges they faced resulting from the application process, and how disclosing information about their criminal history upfront oftentimes resulted in being automatically denied for housing.

The landlord participants' perception of ex-offenders varied based on their individual experiences which aligns with SCF. One participant shared they had rented to several ex-offenders and had never had any problems or issues doing so. On the other hand, several participants shared that the ex-offenders should not expect to find decent housing, and they should accept what is available "even if it is a piece of crap" and realize it is a temporary situation that they will need work from the bottom up. These thoughts coincide with the SCF with deviants being less deserving of quality housing because of their criminal past.

The role of framing. Frames are socially shared organizing principles that work symbolically to structure the social world and are found in all types of media from print to broadcast news. They are embedded in culture, the mind and within the agenda of the media (Carter, 2013). Frames are most influential when they persist over time as the persistence creates meanings that are resistant to change (Carter, 2013). Research suggests that framing news in negative ways, has influenced the demeanor of the public toward political issues and politics in general (Carter, 2013). These frames are present in the cultural social circles that are connected to creating programs and policies. Funding

goes to the target groups that are considered deserving as opposed to those who are considered underserving.

This aspect of SCF aligns with the research conducted as several participants discussed the fact that providing housing for ex-offenders was a very political issue in Anchorage. One participant commented that it had to do with the morals and political beliefs of the policy makers and their thoughts on who should be fronting the financial burden for housing for ex-offenders. It was also discussed that the funding for housing could decrease or increase depending on the conservative or liberal views of the political party. Scheider & Ingram (2013) discusses that the popularity of policies directed toward powerless groups with negative images are high on the agenda and are greater in number during election campaigns. This aspect of SCF aligns with the research conducted as a participant expressed how the recriminalization of the ex-offenders was a tactic used by politicians to get elected.

The role of multiple realities. The Western philosopher Emmanuel Kant's (1800) social construction theory contends the brain actively filters active information and that individuals experience reality differently (Cronley, 2010). This aspect of the SCF theory was confirmed during this research. Each group of participants ex-offenders, landlords, and housing providers spoke to their own experiences and realities related to ex-offender housing. All three groups faced different subjective challenges within their own realities of seeking or providing housing for ex-offenders.

Several ex-offender participants discussed their reality relating to the difficulties with finding housing resulting from their criminal record, lack of finances, restrictive

housing policies, and strained advocacy resources. Additionally, they talked about the obstacles faced relating to the public's perception of previously incarcerated individuals and the challenges with reintegrating into the communities.

The landlords discussed their reality and the various takes on providing housing for ex-offenders with most being open to working with individuals who have participated in rehabilitation efforts, are employed, and are giving back to the community through volunteerism. However, two participants spoke of their attempts to help ex-offenders with housing and the disappointments they faced from the lack of follow through on the ex-offender's part creating strained landlord arrangements with both resulting in eviction of the ex-offenders.

The housing providers discussed their reality related with working with ex-offender housing. One participant discussed the lack of funding available due to the competitive nature of the process, and how organizations are fighting to receive a limited amount of funding that is available and how the reward process not related to the number of housing units that are being supplied. Another participant discussed the challenges associated with working with the Department of Corrections and the communication channels that are strained due to their heavy case load and staffing changes resulting in an underutilization of available programs for ex-offender housing. Another participant discussed the need to try different housing models and to selectively move forward with the new models that are the most effective.

Answering Research Question 1

The first research questions were as follows: What are the key inhibitors to finding permanent housing for low to moderate income ex-offenders in Anchorage, Alaska? The themes identified were (criminal records, housing denials, homelessness and financial challenges, negative societal reaction, restrictive housing policies, political environment, and advocacy and rehabilitation). The participants agreed that the five themes were significant barriers to obtaining permanent housing in Anchorage. The ex-offender participants discussed their experiences with their applications being denied on multiple occasions because of their criminal records and the lack of financial means to pay the initial security deposits. While the housing providers on the other hand, spoke of the policies that are in place and how the restrictions further complicate their ability to house ex-offenders. The group of participants discussed the lack of resources that are available to aid the ex-offenders in reintegration into society. Although the level of impact from each theme varied between the ex-offender participants, they concluded the themes were major barriers to becoming a successfully functioning member of society.

Answering Research Question 2

The second research question was as follows: What is the role of *perception* within the concept of social construction? The participants discussed their experiences based on the stereotypical views of ex-offenders and the profound effect it has on receiving or not receiving help from individuals and organizations. The participants discussed that most people have a negative view of ex-offenders because of their criminal past. The ex-offender participants discussed the challenges associated with getting

beyond the past and creating a new reality. These negative views are sometimes held by family members, the community, and political leadership.

Answering Research Question 3

The third research question was as follows: What is the role of *framing* within the concept of social construction? The participants discussed that society looks at situations by the way they are supported or not supported. The stage of support is set up politically and sometimes the candidates are in favor of housing for this target population and other times they are not. One of the participant's discussed the recriminalization that often occurs, if candidates can continue to keep ex-offenders viewed as criminals it becomes easier to support "Tough on Crime Politics", and fund other low-income groups that are considered to be more deserving of aid.

Answering Research Question 4

The fourth research question was as follows: In what way does the external environment affect *multiple realities* within the concept of social construction? The participants all discussed how they are affected by seeking or providing housing for ex-offenders. There were challenges on all levels from the ex-offenders, to housing providers, to private landlords. Their realities were all complicated for different reasons. The ex-offenders were challenged by the lack of finances, negative stereotypes, lack of advocacy and support. The housing providers faced tough policies, reduced budgets, and lack of staff. The landlords on the other hand, experienced different realities within their group, as some had positive experiences with renting to ex-offenders, while others had negative experiences. The commonality for the landlords was not being connected to a

resource to get the information they needed to become a part of the housing solution for ex-offenders.

Limitations of Current Study

This study provides an important contribution to the literature on the lived experiences of ex-offenders seeking housing and the experiences of housing providers providing housing in Anchorage, Alaska. The phenomenological research was limited to 12 participants, six males and six females. This form of research allows the participants to share their experiences in their own words. This aspect might deter some researchers from selecting this form of research. The results of this study would not be generalizable due to the low number of participants.

Although Anchorage is a metropolitan area, affordable housing is limited due to the high cost of construction and the remote location which makes the study not generalizable when compared to other metropolitan that are not located in isolated areas providing more options for housing choices.

Researcher knowledge was a possible limitation to the study based on the researcher's experience in the housing field as a real estate broker, landlord, and prior assumptions of the participants. Bracketing and self-reflection of the preconceived were used in reducing the potential bias. All preconceived notions, knowledge and experiences were abandoned to accurately represent the experiences of the participants.

Recommendations for Future Research

Providing affordable, stable housing for ex-offenders in Anchorage is a situation that has many layers and affects the community in various ways. It is a ripe topic of

discussion in the housing arena that extracts many opinions of scenarios on what should happen now and moving forward.

Checking the Felony Box

The first area that indicated a need for additional research was the impact of checking the felony box on the rental housing application and the stigma associated with being a felon. All of the ex-offender participants shared their experiences on being denied housing numerous times from checking the box resulting in the creation of substantial barriers to community reintegration and increased recidivism. It would be interesting to explore how landlords would evaluate the ex-offender if the application were revised and the felony question removed from the application. The ex-offender participants discussed longing to have the chance to meet with the landlords in person and the opportunity to discuss their future plans and not being continually judged by their past would be a step in the right direction of fair housing.

Ethnicity and Gender

The second area that warrants additional research is how ethnicity and gender might impact the ex-offender's experience with securing housing. There were four ex-offender participants, three African American males and one Bi-racial female participant, however there were no other ethnicities like Alaska Native or Pacific Islander. The participants were required to be at least 21 years of age and out of prison for six months or more. The time spent in prison for each participant ranged from two to 12 years. The participants shared their experiences on the multiple attempts and the difficulties

associated with securing housing in Anchorage. It would be interesting to apply a quantitative approach to the percentage of housing denials per ethnic or gender group.

Underutilized Programs

The third area that indicates a need for additional research are underutilized programs for ex-offender housing. One of the participants adhered to the fact that some of the housing programs were underutilized resulting in housing vouchers not being used at all, resulting in funding being left on the table that could provide a housing unit for an ex-offender. Affordable housing is a commodity because of the cost of constructing housing in the area and the remote location of the city. It would be interesting to research the role that government and nonprofit organizations have with the underutilization of housing programs for ex-offenders.

Pilot Programs and Policy Change

The last area that area that showed a need for additional research was how pilot ex-offender housing programs can affect policy change. One participant talked about the possibility of launching pilot programs for smaller groups while closely monitoring the outcomes and gradually expanding the population size over time. It would be interesting to research the effects that ex-offender pilot housing programs have on policy change.

Implications for Social Change

The availability of affordable housing has been at the forefront of government and leadership discussions for decades, and housing for previously incarcerated individuals is an even more complex topic of discussion. The results of this study indicated there are

five barriers to permanent housing that ex-offenders must navigate through in Anchorage, Alaska.

1. Criminal Records, housing denials, homelessness, and financial challenges
2. Negative societal reaction
3. Public housing policies
4. Political environment
5. Advocacy, and rehabilitation

These five themes surfaced throughout the literature as valid challenges that ex-offenders face when trying to find permanent housing, but the literature does not always reflect the challenges that are faced by the housing providers in addition to the ex-offenders. In the course of conducting this research, the researcher sought out four social change goals to be acknowledged or reached.

Housing Experience

The first aspect social change was to provide an avenue for ex-offenders and housing providers to share their experiences on what it is like to seek housing and provide housing in Anchorage, Alaska. It is imperative to look at the specific challenges that are faced by organizations and individuals, and this research was able to do this through private interviews that were conducted with ex-offenders, landlord, and housing providers. Some of the challenges of providing affordable housing for low-income ex-offenders are a result of the location and high costs of living and inclement weather conditions in Anchorage, Alaska. The ex-offender participants discussed the financial challenges of being released with little to no money at all, in addition to having limited or

no family members living in the area to help support them upon release. Both landlords and housing providers discussed the expenses associated with providing housing to ex-offenders, the increased insurance rates, the high cost of building housing, and the limited funds available to organizations that are all competing for the same funding and the lack of structure for how the funds are allocated.

Future Research

The second aspect of social change was to provide a basis for future research on this topic. There are many avenues available for future research on this topic ranging from research that is based on ethnicity and genders to different geographical locations in Alaska. As the numbers of incarcerated minorities continues to grow, it is important to provide a basis for continued research on providing housing for ex-offenders as the numbers of released ex-offenders continues to increase.

Improved Collaborations

The third aspect of social change was to provide information that may help to improve collaborations between housing organizations. Each group of participants touched on the lack of collaborations between agencies and governments, often implying that it did not seem to be intentional, but there were consistent communication gaps that continue to hamper the progress of housing provision in the city. Improved housing scenarios will only surface through the combined efforts of various levels of governmental and professional expertise.

Future Programs

The fourth aspect of social change was to provide information that may aid in the development of future housing programs and opportunities and start discussions on approaches that can be taken to improve housing availability for ex-offenders and contribute to reduced recidivism rates in Anchorage, Alaska.

Conclusion

Providing permanent housing for ex-offenders is a complex situation that warrants the collaboration of governments, nonprofits, and community members, as all are affected by the current state of affairs with regards to lack of housing for ex-offenders. Improved collaborations will produce housing that is stable and affordable, relevant programs, vital opportunities for nonprofits, build stronger communities, and may reduce recidivism rates for ex-offenders.

The findings of this study showed that there is an increased need for advocacy and mentorship and a plethora of opportunities to work with ex-offenders on basic things like filling out a rental application, looking for housing, how to present themselves better and tell their story. On the housing provider side, there are opportunities for transitional organizations to work with case management between the Department of Corrections and the housing providers. There are increased opportunities for nonprofits to work with coordinating landlords who are willing to rent to ex-offenders. Based on the literature, this appears to be a monumental task which will only grow more challenging, unless aggressive steps are taken on a larger scale to help resolve the issue. Housing is a foundational part of living a stable life that leads to other areas of stability like

employment, education, and self-sustainability. It is a collective challenge that requires everyone to put their differences and fears aside and work together to aid in making a difference for the future of our communities.

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Appendix

Interview Protocol
 Interview Details: Ex-Offenders

Date: _____
 Location: _____
 Name of Interviewer: _____
 Name of Interviewee: _____

Demographic Interview Questions

1. Are you at least 21 years of age?
2. How would you classify your racial or ethnic identity?
 - a. African American
 - b. Alaska Native/American Indian
 - c. Asian
 - d. Caucasian
 - e. Hispanic or Latino
 - f. Pacific Islander/Hawaiian
 - g. Other
 - h. Prefer not to answer
3. Are you currently employed?
 - a. If yes, what type of work do you do?
 - b. If yes, how long have you been at your current job?

Interview Questions

General Questions

1. When were you last released from prison?
 - a. How long was your sentence?
 - b. What were you convicted of?
2. Was that your first time in prison?
 - a. If not, how many times have you been to prison?
3. After release, what was the most difficult challenge you faced?
4. How much money did you have access to after release?
5. How long did it take you to find employment after being released?
 - a. If you are unemployed, how long have you been unemployed?

Housing Questions

1. What is your current living arrangement?
 - a. Living by yourself
 - b. Living with family
 - c. Living with friends
 - d. Halfway House
 - e. Other
2. Where did you stay after you were released?
3. After release, were you ever homeless without a permanent place to stay? If so, describe your experience?
4. How long did it take you to find housing after being released from prison?
5. After release, did you apply for public housing? Why or Why not?
6. Have you ever been denied housing? If so, describe your experience?
7. After release, did you seek help from housing authorities or nonprofits to find housing?
8. Were you prepared for the challenges of finding permanent housing after release? Describe your experience.

Other

1. Is there anything else you would like to offer about seeking housing in Anchorage, after your release?

Interview Details: Housing Authorities/Landlords

Date: _____
 Location: _____
 Name of Interviewer: _____
 Name of Interviewee: _____

Demographic Interview Questions

1. Are you at least 21 years of age?
2. How would you classify your racial or ethnic identity?
 - a. African American
 - b. Alaska Native/American Indian
 - c. Asian
 - d. Caucasian
 - e. Hispanic or Latino
 - f. Pacific Islander/Hawaiian
 - g. Other
 - h. Prefer not to answer
3. Are you currently employed?
 - a. If yes, what type of work do you do?
 - b. If yes, how long have you been at your current job?

Interview Questions

1. What sort of interaction do you or have you had with ex-offenders applying for permanent housing?
2. In what way does having a criminal record affect the ex-offender's ability to secure housing?
3. Describe the steps in processing an application for a potential tenant with a criminal record?
4. How do you feel about the challenges ex-offenders face when seeking permanent housing?
5. How do restrictive public housing policies affect ex-offenders in Anchorage, Alaska from obtaining permanent housing?
6. How do restrictive housing policies affect the landlord's decision to provide permanent housing for ex-offenders?

7. What type of housing policy changes could reduce rental application denials for ex-offenders?
8. What steps could ex-offenders take to improve their chances of obtaining permanent housing?
9. What steps could ex-offenders take to improve their chances of successful community reintegration?
10. How does the political environment affect the availability of housing for ex-offenders?
11. What steps could government organizations and nonprofits take to increase the availability of housing for ex-offenders?
12. What do you perceive as a need in community resources for ex-offender housing?
13. Is there anything else you would like to offer about the availability of permanent housing for ex-offenders in Anchorage, Alaska?