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The Lived Experiences of Black Youth Who Recidivate in Diversion Programs

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Abstract

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MA, Nicholls State University, 2011

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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Psychology

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Abstract

There are high rates of recidivism among U.S. Black youth when compared to other races, such as Whites and Hispanics. The purpose of the study was to examine the lived experiences of Black youth in the juvenile justice system and in diversion programs. Using a phenomenological qualitative method, twelve Black adults between the ages of 18 to 40 were interviewed about their lived experiences while participating in mental health courts and in-home probation as youth. The conceptual framework of the study was based on the risk, need, and responsivity model. The primary research question examined the lived experiences and perceptions of Black youth regarding their interaction with the juvenile justice system, their offending behavior, recidivism, and treatment with in-home probation and mental health courts. Interview data were coded and analyzed for key themes. Influences that increased offending behaviors were mental health, substance abuse, and peer influences. Participants indicated that their lived experiences following release increased discrimination and changed social status. Participants involved with mental health court were able to improve communication; however, the program was poorly structured. Participants assigned to in-home probation found it to be ineffective and had a negative impact. The findings of the study may allow researchers and practitioners to better understand individual differences and create more focused programs that are effective in reducing recidivism for Black youth involved in the juvenile justice system in the United States resulting in positive social change.

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Dedication

In life, we are faced with many trials and tribulations, these are the things that make us strong. I dedicated this study to all the Black and Brown persons who have made it to the other side of that journey, and the ones who are still in the struggle.

Acknowledgement

First and foremost, I would like to give all praises to God, as he has been my strength and the Savior of my life. I would also like to give thanks for my mother, Joann. Thank you for showing me courage, motivation, and strength. I would also like to thank my children, Tylon, Devin, and Shyariah. Being a father has been one of the best gifts in life and it is my hope that my dedication to this study showed you how to not give up on your dreams even when they seem impossible. Not forgetting a host of different relatives and friends who have given me advise and kept me grounded in my quest. I would like to give a special acknowledgement to Tramyna and Marissa. You have been a great support during this time with your calls, text messages and emails kept me going. You two are an inspiration and I thank you. I would like to extend my deepest appreciation to my committee chairperson, Dr. Greiner, thank you for seeing something in me that I haven't always seen in myself. Your knowledge and expertise have directed me to be successful. Dr. Murray, my second committee member, your view point has always challenged me to looker deeper in the information and that push made me better. And lastly, sending my love and appreciation to all the people who inspired and gave me some life changing advise or admiration that allowed me to propel to the person I am today.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

There is agreement among researchers about the existence of racial disparities for

Black people in the U.S. criminal justice system (Gase et al., 2016; Haskins & Lee, 2016;

McElrath et al., 2016). These racial disparities are also present for Black youth who

become involved in the juvenile justice system (Sidney et al., 2016). From 2002 to 2004,

Black youth comprised 16% of all youth but accounted for 28% of all juvenile arrests,

35% of youth waived to adult criminal court, and 58% of youth admitted to state adult

prison (Hartley & Silva, 2007). Between 2001 and 2015, White youth were incarcerated

at a rate of 86 per 100,000, while Black youth were incarcerated at a rate of 433 per

100,000 (The Sentencing Project, 2017). The Sentencing Project (2017) also reported

that, although the overall incarceration rate in the United States fell by 54% between

2001 and 2015, the rate at which White youth were incarcerated dropped significantly

faster, creating even greater racial disparities.

Because of these disparities, there is a need for policy makers and others

concerned with recidivism to develop programs that address these concerns effectively,

especially for Black youth (Spinney et al., 2014). In this qualitative study, I examined the

lived experiences of Black youth in the juvenile justice system and diversion programs

intended to reduce recidivism. This study provides specific insight into the experiences of

those Black adolescents who move through diversion programs. In doing so, it offers

stakeholders and policy makers some direction when creating diversion programs for

Black youth involved in the juvenile justice system. Chapter 1 begins with background

information, the problem statement, purpose of the study, research questions (RQs), and

overviews of the conceptual framework and nature of the study. Definitions and discussion of the assumptions, social and delimitations, limitations, and significance follow. The chapter concludes with a summary of key points.

Background

Understanding the experiences of Black youth involvement in the U.S. juvenile justice system involves research into the factors that reduce recidivism. Also important is how these youth enter into the system and the experiences and problems they face. A review of the literature supports that researchers must examine (a) factors that increase recidivism, including the risks that Black youth may be faced with, (b) the types of needs that should be addressed in the different kinds of programs (such as mental health courts and in-home probation), and (c) how Black youth may be responding to these programs. Mallet (2013) argued that not addressing the problems faced by Black youth (e.g., education, mental health, and substance abuse) will only escalate the disproportionate rates of recidivism among Black youth.

Although many researchers have sought to identify the factors that influence recidivism (Barrett et al., 2014; Bonta et al., 2014; Espinosa et al., 2013; Gaubert & Olver, 2014; Hoeve et al., 2013; Mallet et al., 2013; Piquero et al., 2016; Videl et al., 2016; Voison et al., 2017; Walters & Crawford, 2013; Wylie & Rufino, 2018), few have focused on the experiences of Black youth. Ryan et al. (2014) discussed the issue of race and the disproportionate ratio of racial minorities who are involved in the juvenile justice system and who recidivate. Mallett et al. (2013) and Piquero et al. (2016) found significant factors that contribute to recidivism for Black youth, which will be identified

later in the chapter. Researchers have addressed some concerns about the use of referrals and the types of services that help reduce rates of recidivism (Hoeve et al., 2013; Ray, 2014; Zoela et al., 2016). Focusing on treatment, Mallet (2014) addressed the role it plays in ensuring that adolescents are well adjusted as they grow into adulthood; the researcher also noted that there are effective treatments to address the factors that increase recidivism, but there is no protocol to address these concerns in the juvenile justice system (Mallett, 2015). James et al. (2013) showed that aftercare programs have small positive effects in the treatment of youth offenders although Schwalbe et al. (2012) showed that treatment programs are not sufficient to treat youth offenders.

In this study, I explored the perspectives of Black youth who are involved in diversion programs (mental health courts and in-home probation) to understand their experiences related to their continued involvement in the juvenile justice system. A more culturally responsive intervention may be helpful in reducing the rates of recidivism for Black youth (Brinkley-Rubinstein et al., 2014). Formal treatment programs such as positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) and gender-responsive services are two culturally sensitive interventions. PBIS is used in education to help address behavioral problems (Bal, 2018). Gender-responsive services focus on girls in the juvenile justice system due to their increasing interaction with it (Bal, 2018). However, there is a lack of research related to culturally responsive interventions for Black youth, according to my review of the literature. I addressed that gap in research to assess the impact of the treatment based on the perceptions and experiences of Black youth. The

goal was to provide insight into what types of programs will be effective in treating Black youth and addressing their high rate of recidivism.

Problem Statement

Black adolescents are more likely to recidivate than offenders from different races (Hartley & Silva, 2007; Ryan, et al, 2014; Sitney et al, 2016). Piquero et al. (2016) found that the most influential factors leading to recidivism in Black youth compared to White and Hispanic youth included having family members with prior judicial contact, previous petitions/arrests, and substance abuse. Recidivism is defined as a person being rearrested, reconvicted, and returned to prison within 3 years after being released from an initial arrest for a criminal charge (National Institute of Justice, 2014). Although there is a research model that describes the predictors of recidivism, the risk, needs, and responsivity model (RNR, Andrews & Bonta, 2010; Hoge, 2002), there is little research into the lived experiences and perceptions of Black youth regarding their participation in the juvenile justice system and effective treatment to prevent recidivism, according to my review of the literature.

Specifically, there is a lack of understanding of the lived experiences of Black youth who are in diversion programs within juvenile justice systems. Responsibility for the successful treatment of juveniles who have offended might be assigned to the adolescent, or to the people who have been charged with the upbringing of the child, including parents, teachers, and other professionals who are in contact with the youth (Mallett, 2014). Regarding professionals who engage with these youth, there is evidence that there are useful programs within the social work profession that can address the

concerns of recidivism in Black youth (Mallett & Kirven, 2015; Schwalbe et al., 2012), but there is a relative lack of research on the lived experiences of Black youth in this context. Ray (2014) found that mental health courts can reduce criminal recidivism and indicated that in-home probation has been a practical approach to reduction in recidivism. I sought to expand the literature on the study topic by conducting this investigation of Black youths' lived experiences related to the juvenile justice system and treatment programs.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the lived experiences of Black youth in the juvenile justice system and in diversion programs. Findings may inform efforts to prevent recidivism. The gap in the literature is that no research has been conducted of the lived experiences of Black youth within juvenile justice who are involved in diversion programs, according to my review of the literature. This research may improve understanding of the lived experiences of Black youth who are in diversion programs to reduce recidivism. There has been prior research on each of the treatment areas to show that they are effective in reducing recidivism (James et al., 2013; Mallet, 2014; Ray, 2014). Still, no study has been conducted on the effectiveness and the impact of the treatment based on the perceptions and experiences of Black youth.

Research Questions

The overall RQ of this qualitative study was, What are the lived experiences and perceptions of Black male and female youth regarding the juvenile justice system, their

offending behavior, recidivism, and treatment with in-home probation and mental health courts? The sub-questions were as follows:

RQ1: What lived experiences or influences do youth identify as increasing their offending behavior that resulted in juvenile justice involvement on multiple occasions?

RQ2: What are the lived experiences and perceptions of Black youth following release from their initial involvement with the juvenile justice system?

RQ3: What are the lived experiences and perceptions of treatment for Black youth involved in mental health courts?

RQ4: What are the lived experiences and perceptions of Black youth involved with in-home probation?

Conceptual Framework

The major factors that are related to the study topic are recidivism and diversion treatment programs, as well as understanding the lived experiences and perceptions of Black youth regarding treatment within the juvenile justice system. The RNR model was the conceptual framework that best fit this study. The importance of relationships between risk assessment and risk management of adolescents using the RNR model is based on the three principles of risk, needs, and responsivity (Andrews & Bonta, 2010; Hoge, 2002). The risk principle is based on problem severity and evaluation of factors known to be predictive of recidivism. This principle states that an individual's risk level and the intensity of treatment services should be matched in the sense that youth at higher risk should receive more resources and those at lower risk should receive fewer (Andrews & Bonta, 2006). The need principle affirms that interventions should target a youth's

significant criminogenic-related needs, those that are involved in offending and

recidivism, and dynamic factors in particular (e.g., attitudes, peer affiliates) rather than

static ones (e.g., prior offense history). Both risk and need are generally considered to be

generated within actuarial models. The third principle, responsivity, asserts that

intervention strategies should be delivered in a way that respects youths' individual

learning styles and abilities (Bonta, 1995).

Using a qualitative methodological design, I developed an interview to understand

the lived experiences of Black youth in terms of risk, need, and responsivity in diversion

programs. I conducted interviews to explore participants' perspectives and opinions on

what they believe comprises risk and need. Participants' explanation of their response

may expand the literature on the study topic. Exploring the youths' experiences about the

factors that resulted in their placement in a diversion program is critical to understanding

individual offender risk levels and types of services that are necessary while in treatment.

Nature of the Study

The nature of the study was a qualitative phenomenological study. This was the

best method to obtain information related to the lived experiences of Black youth who

recidivate. Phenomenology is a qualitative approach designed to develop an

understanding of the lived experiences of the participants; these experiences are usually

gained from participant interviews to provide a firsthand account of those persons'

thoughts and feelings (Gentles et al., 2015). The participants of the study were male and

female Black individuals from the ages of 18 to 40 who had been assigned to mental

health courts and in-home probation programs. All participants were arrested and

convicted in at least two separate criminal offenses. I employed a snowball sampling method. Consent was obtained from the participants to address and reduce the ethical dilemmas of researching this vulnerable population. The parents of these youth were contacted to obtain the approval necessary to allow the youth to participate in the study. I followed informed consent protocols with participants to ensure that they understood any ethical dilemmas that might arise. The participants were recruited from local community mental health agencies and juvenile justice programs.

Definitions

Definitions of the key terms used throughout the study are provided:

Recidivism: The act that is committed by a person who is rearrested, reconvicted, and returned to prison within three years after being released from an initial arrest for a criminal charge (National Institute of Justice, 2014). This would also include those individuals who have been rearrested while participating in probation and parole programs.

Risk, Need, and Responsivity (RNR): An approach used with offenders that posits a relationship between risk assessment and risk management, which is based on the three principles. The principles state that one should match the level of services based on the assessed need and target those needs by tailoring interventions to specific learning styles using cognitive-behavioral treatment (Andrew & Banta, 2010).

Mental health courts: Mental health courts are those courts that have been designed to treat those people who have been identified as having mental health issues in which they are assigned to court-supervised mental health treatments (Ray, 2014).

In-home probation: This is a type of punishment that is used in place of incarceration that offenders must follow particular stipulations to remain out of jail. The National Institute of Justice (2018) describes probation as supervision that happens at home instead of the client going to jail or prison.

Assumptions

There were some assumptions of this study that should be discussed. I assumed that each interviewed youth was truthful and provided an accurate description of their experiences and their experiences alone. Other assumptions were that parents did not coach participants on how to answer interview questions and that participants' responses were based on their own experiences and understanding. I also assumed that participants understood that the study was entirely voluntary and that at any time before or during the interview they could decline to participate. Participant should have been part of a diversion program that involves either in-home probation or mental health courts. Participants were assigned to either mental health courts or in-home probation diversion programs before participation. I assumed that each participant was likely to have mental health issues but may not have been diagnosed with a mental health disorder. I also assumed that participants only identified as African American (Black).

Scope and Delimitations

I omitted from the study those participants who only had one instance of participation in diversion programs. I focused on those participants who had multiple experiences because recidivism was the primary concern of the study. I focused on the experiences of Black youth because this group may have experiences that could be

critical to understanding the high rates of incarceration and reoffending of this demographic.

This study cannot be generalized to all Black youths because the specific experiences of the youth in the study could involve one major consideration or any number of factors that are unique to their situation. However, the findings of this study may provide some insight into the experience of some Black youth and could help policy makers and other stakeholders to create programs for Black youth. The findings of this study could also give some insight to practitioners' ways to assess and address the concerns of this population.

Limitations

One of the significant limitations of the study is that the findings cannot be generalized to all Black youths. With a sample size of ($N = 12$), even with all of the participants being Black youth who have recidivated, the results reflect the experiences of the youth interviewed; they do not reflect the experiences of all Black youth. This information can be used to provide a better understanding of what some Black youth in the criminal justice system experience that has created problems with recidivism. Study findings may show, for example, that there are some racial or environmental challenges that should be addressed in treatment.

Another limitation was participants' ages. The participants of this study ranged from 18 to 40 years old. As a result, there may be some problems in regard to participant understanding of interview questions and their ability to respond. The age of first offense

and the level of experience with the juvenile justice system may have influenced

participant responses.

Significance

In this study, I addressed the gap in the research by examining the perceptions and

experiences of Black youth who participate in mental health courts and in-home

probation treatment programs to address recidivism. James et al. (2013) suggest that

aftercare programs produce small, positive effects on the treatment of youth offenders.

Research demonstrates that referral to treatment services has reduced rates of recidivism

(Hoeve et al., 2013; Ray, 2014; Zeola et al., 2017), but research into the experiences and

perceptions of Black youth regarding treatment and recidivism has not been conducted.

The results of this research may improve the understanding of the perceptions and

experiences of Black youth regarding treatment for juvenile delinquency and recidivism.

The findings may provide critical information to policy makers and stakeholders

on how to design programs for youth offenders, or more specifically, what types of

programs that can be effective to assist with reducing recidivism and which programs

Black youth believe can help them with reducing recidivism. In this way, the study may

result in an increased understanding of treatment program effectiveness based on the

lived experiences of Black youth. The findings of the study may allow researchers and

practitioners to understand individual differences and create more focused programs that

are effective in reducing recidivism.

Summary

In this chapter, I provided an overview of the factors that contribute to recidivism for Black youth and explained why understanding their experiences is essential to improving programs to treat high rates of incarceration and recidivism. The focus of the study on understanding the experiences of Black youth who continue to reoffend and become involved in the juvenile justice system. Understanding how these challenges affect the youth is critical to reducing recidivism rates that disproportionately affect this racial minority population. In Chapter 2, I expand on the factors that affect recidivism and further explore the RNR theory. This theory provides insight into the experiences of Black youth and why these individuals have high rates of recidivism.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Black youth involved in the juvenile justice system in the United States face many challenges, with recidivism being one of the major challenges. Brinkley-Rubinstein et al. (2013) mentioned programs to address the problems that Black youth face related to mass incarceration. Despite the different challenges that are faced by the Black youth, there is a lack of research on the experiences of youth who are involved in the juvenile justice system (Brinkley-Rubinstein et al., 2013).

The literature review addresses studies related to recidivism among Black youth who are involved in diversion programs. I will attempt to increase understanding of the reasons for the high recidivism rates among Black youth. Study findings may contribute to the development of more effective diversion programs to reduce recidivism. The literature review also addresses the conceptual framework regarding recidivism and diversion programs among Black youth offenders in the juvenile system.

Literature Search Strategy

I used only peer-reviewed journals published in the last 20 years in this review. However, some studies published more than 20 years ago were also used, based on relevance to the current research. Specific search terms used included *risk*, *need*, *responsivity*, *recidivism*, *race*, *racism*, *mental health*, *juvenile justice*, *juvenile delinquency*, *in-home probation*, *mental health courts*, *environmental*, *gender*, *Hispanics*, *Blacks*, *adolescents*, *racial disparities*, *peer relationships*, and *comorbidity*. The scholarly research review was completed using Walden University Library's databases, specifically

EBSCOhost's PsycInfo, PsycArticles, SocINDEX with Full Text, and Academic Search

Complete. I found additional articles using Google Scholar, which led to other literature

related to Black youth recidivating in diversion programs.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this research was the RNR model (Andrews &

Bonta, 2010). This model is based on the three principles of risk, needs, and responsivity

(Andrews & Bonta, 2010; Hoge, 2002). The risk principle is based on problem severity

and evaluation of factors known to be predictive of recidivism (Andrews & Bonta, 2010).

This principle states that an individual's risk level and the intensity of treatment services

should be aligned in the sense that youth at higher risk should receive more resources and

those at lower risk should receive fewer (Andrews & Bonta, 2006). The need principle

affirms that interventions should target a youth's significant criminogenic-related needs,

those that are involved in offending and recidivism, and dynamic factors (e.g., attitudes,

peer affiliates) rather than static ones (e.g., prior offense history; Andrews & Bonta,

2010). Both risk and need are generated within actuarial models (Andrews & Bonta,

2006). The third principle, responsivity, asserts that intervention strategies should be

delivered in a way that respects a youth's individual learning style and abilities (Bonta,

1995).

Risk, Needs, and Responsivity

The theoretical foundation of the RNR model is based on the psychology of

criminal conduct theory, which supports the use of the RNR model as a comprehensive

approach to assist in the rehabilitation of offenders (Newsome & Cullen, 2017). Looman

and Abracen (2013) posited that the RNR model is not a theory but rather is used as an

approach to help with the treatment of correctional offenders in a wide variety of

therapeutic techniques. The principles of the RNR model are a small part of the

normative and organizational context related to general and cognitive social learning

perspectives of human behavior (Andrews & Bonta, 2015). Biological/neurological

issues, inheritance, temperament, and social and cultural factors are all considerations in

the RNR model (Looman & Abracen, 2013). Because there are three principles in the

RNR model, it is essential to recognize how each of the principles contributes to the use

of the model in the criminal justice system and how this approach can be used to reduce

recidivism.

Risk

Andrews et al. (1990) mentioned that the risk factor of the RNR model comprises

two major components: predicting recidivism and matching offenders to the appropriate

level of treatment. As a critical initial step for providing treatment and rehabilitation,

practitioners must evaluate which risk is involved using a validated assessment tool that

includes both the static and dynamic risk factors (Newsome & Cullen, 2017). Newsome

and Cullen (2017) described the static risk as factors that cannot be changed through

treatment, while dynamic risks are those that treatment is designed to improve. Research

indicates that one can predict recidivism by determining the static and dynamic risk so

that treatment programs can be selected according to the level of care that is needed by

the offender (Andrews et al.,1990).

Need

Researchers have posited that all offenders have many needs ranging from basic needs including housing and employment to more complex needs such as drug use and mental health issues (Andrew & Bonta, 2015). The need principle is a continuation of the risk principle in which the services that are provided target the dynamic risk factors that an offender has been experiencing (Andrew & Bonta, 2015). The argument with this principle is that recidivism is reduced when a person's dynamic risk factors are changed, thereby causing a reduction in the risk that caused the person to recidivate (Andrew & Bonta, 2015; Newsome & Cullen, 2017).

Responsivity

The responsivity principle is the premise that using the proper treatment delivery is crucial when it includes both the general and specific components (Newsome & Cullen, 2017). General responsivity highlights cognitive-behavioral therapy as the premier therapeutic intervention (Andrew & Bonta, 2015), while specific responsivity is grounded in cognitive-behavioral therapy to assist offenders in recognizing negative thought patterns and curtailing deficits that impede rehabilitation (Vaske et al., 2011). Specific responsivity also considers individual differences that may be hindering the progress of the offender from successful rehabilitation (Andrew & Bonta, 2015).

Literature Review Related to Key Variables and/or Concepts

Juvenile Justice System

There was a spike in the 1980s in the number of juveniles offending that lasted about 10 years with a peak in 1994 (Jordan, 2014). This increase in juvenile offending led

to those youth entering the adult criminal system (Bernard & Kurlychek, 2010; Bishop et al., 1996; Torbet et al., 1996; Winner et al, 1997). With the significant legal changes that were implemented by state and federal governments during this period, there was an increase in the number of youths sentenced to juvenile justice facilities (Shook & Sarri, 2008). This changed the perspective of the juvenile justice system from one that was intended to rehabilitate offenders to one that was more punitive (Abrams, 2013). New concerns that the juvenile justice facilities were being overused, with higher rates of recidivism (Mendel, 2011), resulted in a call for juvenile justice reform (Abrams, 2013).

Juvenile Delinquency

In research, juvenile delinquency is generally divided into four categories: person, property, drug, and public order (Mallet, 2018; Sickmund et al., 2018). Sickmund et al. (2018) found that 1,548,408 Black youth between the ages of 13 to 18 had delinquency cases between 2012 and 2016. Black youth ages 14 or older were involved in about 83% of adolescent cases, and nearly half of the adolescents were 16 or 17 years old (Furdello & Puzzanchera, 2015). Sickmund et al. also found that 824,915 Hispanic youth between the ages of 13 and 18 had delinquency cases from 2012 to 2016. Sickmund et al. established that 1,942,548 White youth between the ages of 13 and 18 had delinquency cases from 2012 to 2016. A greater percentage (68.7%) of Black youth had delinquency cases in 2012 to 2016, making them more likely to offend than Hispanic and White youth, with only 22.9% and 22.5%, respectively, having delinquency cases in the same year (Hockenberry & Puzzanchera, 2018).

Recidivism

Recidivism rates are at an all-time high for Black youths, and successful treatment approaches are limited (Brame et al., 2018). Children are less likely to be concerned with the results of their behaviors, which can lead to an increased risk of adverse reactions, leading to incarceration and rearrests (Tegeng & Abadi, 2018). According to the National Institute of Justice (2014), *recidivism* is defined as an act that is committed by a person who is rearrested, reconvicted, and returned to prison within 3 years after being released from an initial arrest for a criminal charge. Some researchers have used different time frames to determine how recidivism is designed for their research. Brame et al. (2018) found that the median wait time for recidivism was 24 months, with up 80% of participants recidivating in a 3-year time frame. The Pew Center (2011) reported that recidivism occurred when an offender was released, rearrested, and reconvicted of a new crime or when a person's probation or parole was revoked due to not following rules set for probation or parole.

The fact that people who recidivate also come from varying socioeconomic backgrounds with different psychological and rehabilitation challenges must be considered when understanding why a person reoffends (Tegeng & Abadi, 2018). Three major factors are related to recidivism: (a) most youth eventually stop recidivating in the transition between adolescence and early adulthood, (b) recidivism rates are much higher for short-term and medium-term offenders, and (c) most adults who engage in criminal behaviors have substantial juvenile involvement (Brame et al., 2018). Piquero et al. (2016) found that nine measures were statistically significant in determining the rearrests

of adolescents: age, gender, more criminal justice involvement, reported substance use

(marijuana use), recent mental health treatment (within the past year), diagnosis of

depressive symptoms and posttraumatic stress disorder, familial risk factors, situational

risk factors, and peer delinquency. Black adolescents are more likely to recidivate than

offenders from other races (Sitney et al., 2016;). However, Piquero et al. (2016)

determined that the highest indicators of recidivism in Black youth compared to White

and Hispanic youth were having family members with prior judicial contact, previous

petitions/arrests, and drug abuse diagnosis. Tegeng and Abadi (2018) also found that lack

of material and financial support, discrimination or marginalization, lack of supportive

family or relatives, and lack of job opportunities were factors that adult offender reported

as increasing their risk to recidivate. In the current study, I focused on the experiences of

Black adults who offended as youth offenders.

Race

Research indicates that although there are substantial differences in the juvenile

justice system today compared to years before the reform, non-White offenders still have

higher rates of incidence (Mallet, 2018). The U.S. Census Bureau (2018) reported that of

79,963 respondents in 2018, 53,445 were White; 11,081 were Black; and the remaining

were American Indians, Alaska Natives, Asians, Native Hawaiians, Pacific Islanders, and

other persons who identified as two or more races. That same census report revealed that

54% of youth were White, 23% were Hispanic, 14% were Black, and less than 10% were

from other groups (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). Black youth make up about 16% of the

U.S. population, but they accounted, in 2018 for 31% of referrals made to juvenile court,

26% of youths arrested, 44% of detained youths, 34% of formal processing in juvenile

court, and 32% of those who are adjudicated delinquent (Armstrong & Rodriguez, 2005;

Spinney et al., 2014; Hamparian & Leiber, 1997; Poe-Yamagata & Jones, 2000).

Puzzanchera (2018) found that more than 53% of violent crimes involved Black youth,

44% involved White youth, 2% involved American Indian youth, and 1% involved

individuals from other groups; however, no information was reported on Hispanics.

African American youth are more likely to recidivate compared to White and

Hispanic counterparts (Ryan et al., 2014; Smith et al., 2009). Black youth are 6 times

more likely than Whites to offend, and Hispanics are twice as likely as Whites to offend

(Hartney & Vuong, 2009). Minority youth offenders (Black and Hispanic) made up 68%

of the offender population while only making up only 36% of the total population in 2000

(Chassin, 2008; Grisso, 2008; Mears & Aron, 2003; Teplin et al., 2006; Washburn et al.,

2008). Research demonstrates that in crimes related to persons, property, and public

order, Black youths are 140% more likely to be referred to juvenile courts compared to

their White counterparts (Hockenberry & Puzzanchea, 2018; Sickmund & Puzzanchera,

2014).

The number of Hispanic individuals has increased to a point where they are now

considered the largest minority group in the United States (Martinez & Valenzuela,

2006). Even when controlling for socioeconomic factors, African American and Hispanic

youth are more likely than other races to reoffend (Ryan et al., 2013). Given the high

rates of incarceration, Bonczar (2003) and Mauer (2011) predicted that Hispanics will be

more likely to be incarcerated, second only to African Americans. Piquero et al. (2016)

found a significant difference in rearrests between Hispanic and White youth. Piquero et al. also observed that the gap between Black and White youth and Hispanics and White youth was not significant for youth who are rearrested.

Gender

Researchers have suggested that gender is one of the significant predictors of recidivism no matter what the period, age, country, or culture (Baglivio & Jackowski, 2013). While males and females enter the juvenile justice system due to different reasons, and females are more likely to be sent to facility placement compared to their male counterparts (Child Trends, 2018). Other studies have found that male youth have a significantly higher risk to recidivate relative to females (Piquero et al., 2016; Ryan et al., 2014; Smith et al., 2009). Baglivio and Jackowski (2013) found that Hispanic females have the lowest rate of recidivism, while Black males accounted for the highest percentage of those arrested and White males had the highest likelihood to recidivate. Baglivio and Jackowski also found that males were more likely in general than females to reoffend. Ramaswamy and Freudenberg (2012) reported that 70% of youth offenders were Black youth, while 85% of all youth offenders were male (Child Trends, 2018). Rhoades et al. (2016) determined that men exhibited an increased risk for adult arrest related to felony charges with each referral to the juvenile justice system, but, among women, juvenile justice referrals were not significant predicters of adult arrest; instead, family violence, parental divorce, and cumulative childhood risk factors increased risk for arrest in adulthood. While male offenders are more likely to be placed in confinement

in secure facilities, whereas female offenders are twice as likely to be placed in nonsecure placement (Espinoza et al., 2013).

Mental Health

Researchers have found that mental health and psychiatric disorders are prevalent among youth offenders and play a significant role in the rate of recidivism (Collins et al., 2011; Vermeiren et al., 2006; Wasserman et al., 2010; Zeola et al., 2017). Grisso (2008) revealed that the number of adolescent offenders who have a mental illness was increasing at an alarming rate. More importantly, Black adolescent offenders are at a higher risk of psychiatric disorders related to aggressive behavior and violence (Grisso, 2008). Zeola et al. (2017) asserted that recognizing mental health disorders in Black youth is critical. Castillo and Alarid (2011) revealed that race was a substantial factor influencing recidivism among youthful offenders who have a mental illness. Therefore, racial disparity in recidivism rates between Blacks and White delinquent offenders has been strongly linked to mental disorder reducing the rate of recidivism with the population. Zoela et al. (2017) found that recidivism rates were much lower and the time to recidivate was longer when mental health treatment occurred, even though Black youths were found to have higher rates of recidivism in the shorter period than their White counterparts. Turner and Jacquin (2018) also determined that recidivism rates were higher among Blacks with mental health disorders than any other race. Furthermore, diversion training programs for Black juveniles failed to incorporate mental health treatment, resulting in higher recidivism rates (Turner & Jacquin, 2018). Research

indicates that African American youth offenders lack access to mental health treatment, which thus increases recidivism (Turner & Jacquin, 2018).

The research reported an increased risk of recidivism with those youth who had substance abuse disorders when compared to other youth (Hoeve et al., 2013). Even with the results related to substance abuse, the researchers found that youth who presented with comorbidity of both internalizing and disruptive behavior disorder were at six times increased risk of recidivism than those youth who did not have a disorder (Copeland et al., 2007; Hoeve et al., 2013). This study also reported that a specific psychiatric disorder did not predict recidivism in adulthood (Hoeve et al. 2013).

Mallet et al. (2013) reported that people with a diagnosis of conduct disorder were ten times more likely, and those with suicide attempts were three times more likely to recidivate; however, it is unclear why they are such high predictors. However, Barrett et al. (2013) found that adverse experiences that induced mental trauma among juveniles could lead to recidivism during their adult life. Becker et al., (2012) corroborate this assertion that mental issues and posttraumatic stress are among the leading causes of recidivism in juvenile youths. As such, due to their socio-economic background and high rates of incarceration, Blacks with mental illness are more likely to experience recidivism than any other group (Becker et al., 2012). While mental health diagnosis was found to be a significant predictor of recidivism, those individuals who had been diagnosed with a disorder relating to aggressive behavior (using the DSM-IV and included the following diagnoses: impulse control disorder, conduct disorder, disruptive behavior disorder,

oppositional defiant disorder, and child or adolescent antisocial behavior) were three times more likely to recidivate (Barret et al., 2014).

Research suggests that mental illness not related to substance abuse does not show a high indication of recidivism in adults (Bonta et al., 1998; Elbogen & Johnson, 2009; Mullen, 2006; Rezansoff et al., 2013). The same results were yielded that stated that those people who do not have substance abuse disorders were not high indicators of recidivism in youth, while substance abuse was the only predictor of recidivism found (Guebert & Olver, 2014). In contrast, studies also indicate that incarcerated male adolescents with psychiatric disorders emanating from non-substance abuse also exhibiting recidivism in adulthood (Collins et al., 2011). Collins et al. (2011) concluded that severe recidivism was caused by mental disorders among adolescent males more often than their female counterparts.

Environmental Factors

Family adversity, poor parenting skills, parental criminality, parental psychiatric disturbance, abuse, neglect, abandonment, broken homes, violence, overcrowding, and low socioeconomic status have been the prevailing environmental factors that contribute to juvenile delinquency and recidivism (Dembo et al., 1995; Elander et al., 2000; Moore et al., 2013; Mulder et al., 2010; Ryan et al., 2013). A focus group found that family relationships, community stressors, personal victimization, economic hardship, peer relationships, discrimination, school, health, child welfare/juvenile justice, and media/technology were the most stressful factors that contributed to delinquency (Wade, et al., 2014). Fite et al. (2009) found that environmental factors contributed to the

discrepancies between the arrests and detention of White and Black youths. More importantly, the studies determined that many Black youths live in violent neighborhoods, many have fathers with felony convictions, and live in a culture of substance abuse that rendered diversion programs ineffective (Fite et al., 2009).

Researchers have found that those youth who experience abuse/neglect, victimization of crime, and property crime are more likely to recidivate than youth who do not experience these factors (Wiley & Rufino, 2018). Trauma experiences with girls also indicated an increase in the likelihood to recidivate (Espinosa et al., 2013; Wiley & Rufino, 2018). Pasco-Fearon and Belsky (2011) argue that adolescents who lack infant-mother attachment during early development can become delinquent by externalizing their behaviors. Such children might engage in highly aggressive acts such as cursing, stealing, and breaking and entering, and will eventually recidivate once released from the juvenile justice system (Pasco-Fearon, 2011). Many Black youths enter the foster care system at a young age due to disorganized attachment and propensity to are predisposed to risky social behavior and increased likelihood of recidivation during adolescence and early adulthood (Pasco-Fearon, 2011).

Mallet (2015) divided maltreatment into two categories, as those persons who are identified by state agencies and those who go unreported as unknown or hidden. Barrett et al. (2013) posits that parental maltreatment and neglect are high indicators for delinquency, finding that delinquent youth were more likely to have participated in Child Protective Services (CPS) than the control group and 50% more likely to recidivate. There is also a body of research that demonstrates that males are more prone to

delinquency when they have experienced maltreatment due to an increase in violent

behaviors (Chen et al., 2011; Chiu et al., 2011; Cicchetti & Manly, 2001; Crowley et al.,

2003; Maas et al., 2008; McGue & Iacano, 2005).

Adolescents' experience can be divided into two general domains: school and

home; thus, it would make sense that a youth's psychological well-being is positively

correlated with the home environment (Rapheal & K, 2015). Frisk and White (2008)

argue that aggressive and antisocial behavior results from callous and unemotional traits

during of children in their upbringing. For instance, the lack of guilt and absence of

empathy from parents might cause delinquency in children, leading to recidivism in

adulthood (Frisk and White, 2008). Black youth experience more significant stressors in

family and neighborhood resources compared to their White counterparts, in whom a

positive relationship for delinquency was, reported (Booth & Anthony, 2015). Research

has also found that child-rearing practices have a strong correlation with criminal

behavior (Kendler et al., 2016).

Similarly, Hoeve et al., (2009) identified a strong correlation between parenting

styles and child delinquency. The results reveal that parents who are authoritarian,

disapproving, and hostile to establish control cause delinquent behavior among children

(Hoeve et al., 2009). As such, children become antisocial and engage in hostility towards

others to compensate for lack of support from their parents (Baldry and Farrington,

2000). Children who continuously engage in arson activities and animal cruelty are more

likely to come from dysfunctional families where parents are hostile, neglectful, and

continually reject them (Becker et al., 2004). Parents who are loving, kind, attentive, and

supportive can help in moderating aggressive behaviors in children, hence preventing

delinquency (Adams, 2001).

Research has stressed that understanding community factors is critical to

understanding recidivism in adolescents (Baglivio et al., 2015; Grunwald et al., 2010;

Wolff et al., 2015). Grunwald et al. (2010) found that juvenile recidivism was only

correlated with substance abuse charges significantly, but also found that Black youth

made up the substantially disproportionate rate of recidivism cases. These findings

concur with those of Fazel and Yu (2011), which demonstrated that psychological

disorders resulting from substance abuse caused recidivism. Stahler et al., (2013) found

that the socioeconomic environment is a strong predictor of recidivism. The study reveals

that Black offenders are more likely to recidivate upon release because they go back to

poor neighborhoods surrounded by community violence (Stahler et al., 2013). For this

reason, early diversion programs among Black offenders might not be successful in

preventing adult criminal behavior (Dekovic et al., 2011).

Juvenile Diversion Programs

Juvenile diversion programs are used as way to deal with youth offenders as an

alternative to initial or continued interaction with the juvenile justice system

Development Services Group, (2017). Four of the major impacts of diversion programs

include: a reduction of premature involvement in the deep end of the juvenile

delinquency system; a reduction in out-of-home placements, especially for younger

children; maintaining youth connectedness and engagement in the community by keeping

the youth in his/her environment; and a reduction in cost compared to court processing

and/or secure placement (Dembo et al., 1995). Juvenile justice programs include Mental health courts, in-home probation, drug courts, and other specialized programs to meet the needs of youth and broken down into two categories formal and informal programs (Development Services Group, 2017). Informal programs are less restrictive and are used as a way to divert youth away from juvenile justice system while Formal programs happens after an arrest and involve court processing and proceedings (Development Services Group, 2017). Once a juvenile successfully completes a diversion programs, there is no more involvement in the juvenile justice system (Wilson & Hoge, 2012).

Mental Health Courts

Langrehr (2011) reveals that Blacks have complex psychosocial histories of mental disorders due to being targets of police brutality and incarceration. Due to a long history of mental health neglect while in prison, their psychological needs are rarely catered for in totality (Langrehr, 2011). Fisher et al. (2014) revealed that prisoners who received mental treatment during incarceration had lower rates of recidivism than those who did not. However, the study also found that for Blacks who had access to mental health services, recidivism rates remained the same due to other socioeconomic factors (Fisher et al., 2014). Morgan et al. (2012) identified mental health courts as appropriate for addressing high recidivism rates among racial minorities. Morgan et al. (2012) assert that mental health courts are useful for reducing both criminal and psychiatric recidivism for minority offenders. Loong et al., (2016) argue that the number of mental health courts is increasing to help decrease recidivism rates among offenders whose psychiatric conditions landed them in the criminal justice system. However, Loong et al. (2016)

argue that the effectiveness of mental health court diversion programs remains unclear. Honnegar (2015) indicates that mental health court diversion programs are effective in reducing recidivism rates. This assertion is corroborated by Desmond and Lenz (2010), who revealed that mental health offenders experience positive clinical outcomes from using mental health court diversion programs.

In contrast, Schneider (2010) reveals that the effectiveness of mental health court diversion programs is debatable, and the results are mixed. Schneider (2010) argues that the high recidivism rate among Blacks with mental illness is an indication that the court diversion programs are ineffective. Sarteschi et al. (2011) also note that the screening phase of mental health courts is conducted poorly, rendering the diversion programs useless in decreasing recidivism rates among racial minorities. Sarteschi et al. (2011) indicate that the assessment of the mental health needs of African American offenders is inadequate, resulting in higher recidivism rates.

In-Home Probation

Herz et al. (2010) found that many youth offenders found it hard to transition into society once they have been released from the juvenile justice system. The study determined that juveniles who were allowed in-home probation had fewer chances of recidivism due to the strict limitations of their parole (Herz et al., 2010). Intravia (2016) reported that Black adolescent offenders who participated in in-home probation were less likely to engage in delinquent behavior, hence reduced recidivism rates. Kopak et al. (2016) argue that in-home probation could prevent recidivism among substance abuse offenders. In-home probation allows offenders to serve a term while interacting with

friends and families, which serves as a positive motivation against relapse and possible violation of parole terms (Kopak et al., 2016). Langan and Levin (2004) found that of prisoners who were released in 1994, those who engaged in-home probation reduced their recidivism by 20%.

Qualitative Research Approach

Through the qualitative methodological design of the study, an interview will be developed to understand the lived experiences of Black youth related to risk, need, and responsivity in diversion programs. Understanding the youth experiences that resulted in their placement in a diversion program is critical to understanding individual offender risk level and types of services that are needed while in treatment. The experiences of the Black youth will allow researchers and practitioners to understand individual differences and create programs that will incorporate how does differences can play a role in reducing recidivism.

The results of this research study will provide critical information that can be used to assist with developing programs that are catered to the needs of Black youth, with hopes to have social change effected by reducing the rate of recidivism of this group of individuals.

<div align="center">Summary and Transition</div>

High recidivism rates in the criminal justice system are a source of concern to policy makers. More importantly, since African Americans are the most incarcerated race in North America, an increase in recidivism rates points to a failed criminal justice system. The result is that the majority of diversion training programs are rendered

ineffective. Some of the factors contributing to high recidivism are gender, juvenile delinquency, mental health, environmental issues, and race. The literature review also identified mental health disorders, environmental issues, and juvenile delinquency as strong predictors of recidivism among Black youth offenders.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The experiences of Black youth who are involved in a diversion programs (e.g., mental health courts and in-home probation) remain unclear. The purpose of this qualitative study was to provide some insight into factors that have contributed to these youths' continued involvement in the juvenile justice system and understand how in-home probation and mental health courts have increased or decreased the likelihood for them to recidivate. This study consisted of semi structured interviews with participants to understand their experiences in a variety of diversion programs and how those experiences contributed to criminal behavior. In this chapter, I will explain the methodology that I employed in participant selection, recruitment strategies, and the development of RQs. I also discuss the research design and qualitative data collection that were used in the study.

Research Design and Rationale

The overall RQ of this study was, What are the lived experiences and perceptions of Black male and female youth regarding the juvenile justice system, their offending behavior, recidivism, and treatment with in-home probation and mental health courts?

RQ1: What experiences or influences do youth identify as increasing their offending behavior that resulted in juvenile justice involvement on multiple occasions?

RQ2: What are the experiences and perceptions of Black youth following release from their initial involvement with the juvenile justice system?

RQ3: What are the experiences and perceptions of treatment for Black youth involved in mental health courts?

RQ4: What are the experiences and perceptions of Black youth involved with in-home probation?

The research problem is that Black youth have higher rates of recidivism than their White and Hispanic counterparts (Hartley & Silva, 2007; Ryan et al., 2014; Sitney et al., 2016), even though Black youth only make up about 15% of the population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). Phenomenological qualitative interviewing is a method of interviewing that allows for a deep description of information and understanding of people's experiences (Mihas, 2019). It is known which factors contribute to high rates of recidivism (Barrett et al., 2013; Bonta et al., 2014; Espinosa et al., 2013; Gaubert & Olver, 2014; Hoeve et al., 2013; Mallet et al., 2013; Piquero et al., 2016; Videl et al., 2016; Voison et al., 2017; Walters & Crawford, 2013; Wylie & Rufino, 2018), but there is a lack of understanding of the lived experiences of Black youth and how they contribute to these high rates of recidivism. I used phenomenological interviewing questions (see Appendix B) designed to help youth open up about their experiences and how these experiences are related to consistent involvement in the juvenile justice system.

There are varying factors which influence recidivism and the success of diversion programs that have been proven to decrease recidivism due to the methods employed in treatment. However, there have not been many studies that discuss the experiences of Black youth who are involved in treatment programs on multiple occasions. In this study,

I interviewed 12 Black adults who were involved in either mental health courts or in-home probation before the age of 18. I recruited voluntary participants who completed interviews that I conducted. Demographic questions were used to determine if participants were eligible for the study; the questions can be found in Appendix A.

Role of the Researcher

As the researcher, I was responsible for obtaining informed consent from the participants for the study. I conducted semi structured interviews with the participants, completed analysis of the interviews, and reported my findings. At the time of this study, I did not have any prior experience with participants and no prior involvement with the juvenile justice system as an employee or contracted worker.

One of my first steps was developing a competent study design based on the methods used to answer the RQs. While developing the study, I was mindful of my own biases and sought to ensure that these biases are not exhibited in the study. Specifically, I did not want my previous experience working with juveniles to interfere with this study. I took steps in each stage of development to critically analyze how researcher bias can affect a study and to prevent it from interfering with the study.

I was the primary instrument used in data collection for this research. I completed the interview with each participant of the study by asking questions designed to elicit responses that would be helpful in answer the RQs (see Appendix B). Not only did I conduct the interviews, but I also analyzed the data that were collected in the study to ensure that I would present the findings in the most ethical way. Participants were reminded that they could withdraw their participation at any time without any punishment

from treatment programs. Additionally, participants were made aware that I had no connection with the treatment programs in which they were involved.

Methodology

Participant Selection Logic

The population for the study was Black adolescents and young adults between the ages of 18 to 40. Participants in the study were identified as Black men and women. The goal was to have purposive sampling and snowball sampling methods for the participants. Participants in the study participated in diversion programs (i.e., in-home probation or mental health court) on two or more previous occurrences before the age of 18 years old when the interviews were conducted. Participants who were involved in diversion programs only one time were excluded from this study. Demographic information can be reviewed in Appendix A. Because the goal of the study was to understand the lived experiences of Black youth who recidivate in diversion programs, interviewing adults who participated in these programs as youth should allow for a detailed analysis of why these youths are having such a hard time matriculating and becoming uninvolved with the juvenile justice system.

The sample size was 12 individuals. Saturation was obtained at this number as a repetition of themes began to occur. I interviewed the participants using a semi structured interview method to gather data. Prompts were used to encourage participants to share experiences about in-home probation and mental health. The interviews took between 35 and 60 minutes and were conducted virtually on a Health Insurance Portability and

Accountability Act-compliant platform. Participants were given a $20 Amazon gift card to encourage them to participate in the study.

Instrumentation

I provided each participants a consent for the study before the study to begin the process. Once they entered the room to be interviewed, they were asked to give verbal consent. This verbal consent was given to make sure that participants were still willing to participate in the study and knew the important factors about the study while feeling no pressure to participate. This verbal consent was recorded on audiotapes. I advised participants to answer each of the open-ended questions honestly. Examples of those interviews are as follows: "What do you believe could have been done when you were released the first time that could have helped you stay away from the juvenile justice system?," "What about the program do you believe didn't work?," and "Tell me about your parents and how they supported you in your treatment." Once the interview was completed, the alphanumeric code was tagged to the recording. The recording was then transcribed to protect for content validity to ensure that themes could be captured correctly.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

I recruited participants by using Research and Me (https://www.researchandme.com), User Interviews (https://www.userinterviews.com/), local community health mental agencies, regional juvenile probation offices, and the juvenile court system. I placed flyers on bulletin boards throughout the juvenile courts. In addition, I asked probation officers if they could be posted in their office to ensure that

participants would see the information. Research and Me uses social media outlets such as Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, Craigslist, and Twitter as tools for marketing to assist with finding participants. Research and Me also has an established database to assist with finding participants for research participation. Participants were asked by Research and Me or User Interviews to contact me by email to determine if they met the minimum criteria of two or more interactions with diversion programs at separate time frames. Participants were identified by using alphanumeric code so that their name would not be use in any way once they were determined to be a participant in the study.

Data Analysis Plan

I interviewed the participants using the semi structured interview questions found in Appendix B. The interview was recorded and transcribed verbatim. Once the interview was conducted, the data were processed and recorded to ensure that themes could be identified and nothing important is forgotten. Analysis began after the first piece of data was collected by recording themes and patterns mentally. Data reduction was also a critical step, as not all the data collected were significant to the research. Once the data were collected, I grouped the information based on relevance to the RQs. After being grouped, data were organized so it could be presented and displayed. Once organized, I drew conclusions based on how the data provided an answer to the RQs.

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Issues of Trustworthiness

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Credibility

The credibility of a qualitative study can be obscured due to varies concepts and the creation of not validated measures. For my study, my sample size of 12 was an

appropriate size for a qualitative study to achieve saturation. To ensure the credibility of

the study, I used video recording to assist with gathering and transcribing the data. This

allowed participants the opportunity to ensure that what they said in the taped interviews

was transcribed correctly. If there were any unintelligible parts, I reached out to

participants to gain insight in what they wanted to share.

Transferability

I examined transferability by using thick descriptions of what the participants

stated in the study. The experiences of the youth involved in diversion programs was

explained in the detailed description so that the data collected would provide a better

understanding of the time spent in diversion programs.

Confirmability and Dependability

I used audit trails to assist with confirmability. This was a complete step-by-step

listing of the actions that were taken to complete the study. The semi structured interview

questions that each participant was asked during the interview are included in Appendix

B. Each question was paired with one or more of the RQs to ensure alignment. The

interview was recorded and transcribed verbatim. Each step of the process was also

documented so that it can be replicated by future researchers.

Ethical Procedures

With the study, ethical concerns were first addressed with Walden University

Institutional Review Board (IRB). They reviewed the research study and design and

approved all components before research can be completed. IRB approval was obtained,

with an approval number of 09-24-20-0351658 and it expires on September 23, 2021.

When approval was completed, administrators from juvenile justice programs and community mental health facilities who treat juvenile offenders were asked permission to place flyers in their facilities.

Each participant was provided consent. Each participant was provided with details about the purpose of the study. They were advised that they can withdraw from the study at any time before completion and not be faced with any consequences for non-participation. All guidelines for using human subjects were followed according to the APA code of ethics. Participants were advised of the length of time it will take to conduct interviews.

As the researcher, I was the only person who has access to all information collected. This includes taped interviews and alphanumeric information so that each participant will remain confidential. This information is stored for five years in a locked storage cabinet and will be discarded at that time.

Participants were allowed to speak freely about their experiences. Participants were reminded that the information provided in the study will not be used in any way by the juvenile justice system as punishment. Participants were also told that I will be the only person who has access to the information.

Alphanumeric coding was used to identify each participant to maintain confidentiality. All data collected is secured and only accessed by me. Each participant was required to provide consent before the interview can be conducted. Consent was done verbally before the interview were completed. Subjects were also advised that they could withdraw at any time without being reprimanded by me or the probation officer.

All data collected, including audio tapes, demographic sheets, and transcripts, will be kept for 5 years and be destroyed at that time. The Walden University IRB approved the study before any research was completed.

Summary

The methods of the study and research design were discussed using a phenomenological methodology that were used to investigate the lived experiences of Black youth who recidivate in diversion programs. The use of semi structured interview questions was used to investigate this study. One limitation that should be considered is the generalizability of the study due to the small sample size and the location of the participant of the study. The results of the study will be reported, and themes will be described in the next section of the dissertation.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

Researchers have focused on the disproportionate rate of African American youth involvement in the juvenile justice system (Becker et al., 2012). They have found that targeting treatment programs based on ethnic background can lead to successful treatment programs and reduce Black youth recidivism rates (Abate & Venta, 2018). The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study was to understand the lived experiences of Black youth who have been involved in diversion programs such as in-home probation and mental health courts. I interviewed participants to understand their experiences and their perceptions about their offending behavior, mental health concerns, recidivism, and treatment in mental health courts and in-home probation. The study's overall RQ was, What are the lived experiences and perceptions of Black male and female youth regarding the juvenile justice system, their offending behavior, recidivism, and treatment with in-home probation and mental health courts? This section includes the setting and demographic information. A brief description of the data collection methods and data analysis will be provided after presenting the scenes and demographic. After that, trustworthiness and the results will be provided.

Setting

The participants were located in cities across the United States. I used Research and Me or User Interviews to send emails to participants. Participants who responded to these emails from Research and Me and User Interviews were able to complete a prequestionnaire with questions asking their participation in mental health courts or in-

home probation two or more times before the age 18, they are not currently being involved in diversion programs, and their age. I outlined the data collection procedures in Chapter 3. The participants consented verbally to conducting the interview and having it video-recorded. Participants confirmed that they were in a location that did not compromise confidentiality. Participants completed the interview via live video conference using Zoom. The video call was recorded for each participant. The questions were the same for all participants except in nuanced situations for each participant. I completed each interview in my home office, where no one else could hear any part of the conversation.

Demographics

There were 12 participants in the study. The participants met the criteria of being between the ages of 18 and 40 years old, having participated in mental health courts or in-home probation two or more times before the age of 18 years old, and having completed the program before participating in the study. The participants were Black men and women between 20 and 40 years old. Some participants had minor charges such as truancy, while others had significant criminal charges such as armed robbery. Most of the participants had been diagnosed with mental health disorders such as depression, bipolar, schizophrenia, and posttraumatic stress disorder. Some participants did not have any known mental health diagnosis. Each participant had been involved in either mental health court or in-home probation. Some of the participants also had other juvenile justice involvement where they were incarcerated along with the diversion programs. These figures can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1

Demographics

Participant	Age	Gender	Type of diversion program
AT121220246P	32	Male	In-home probation
CP122920525R	28	Male	In-home probation
DM12123568K	40	Female	In-home probation
GT12820263L	20	Male	Mental health court
HT122720153Z	39	Male	Mental health court
JL11272059B	31	Female	In-home probation
KB11292025D	35	Female	Mental health court
NS11282531C	33	Female	In-home probation
RH122820636X	35	Female	In-home probation
ST112422095A	33	Female	In-home probation
WU12182020203M	28	Male	In-home probation
ZY123020728P	20	Male	Mental health court

Data Collection

IRB approved the study on September 24, 2020. Due to the difficulty of finding participants, my first interview was completed on November 24, 2020. User Interviews and Research and Me sent an email to potential participants using social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, and LinkedIn. Both User Interviews and Research and Me also had a database of participants who also received an email to complete a prequestionnaire to determine if they fit the study's criteria. Once the questionnaire was completed, I was provided each participant's email to schedule a time to complete the interview. I then contacted the participant to schedule the interview. Once a time had been coordinated with the participant, a Zoom meeting was scheduled. Participants were sent a copy of the consent via email to review after the interview was scheduled. The final interview was completed on December 29, 2020. There were no new

emerging themes after the 10th interview; however, because the 11th and 12th interviews were scheduled, the researcher completed those interviews to confirm that saturation was obtained.

The participants completed semi structured interview questions found in Appendix B. The interviews were scheduled for 90 minutes but lasted between 35 to 60 minutes. I recorded the interviews using Zoom recording technology and saved the recordings to cloud storage using a password-protected computer. The interviews were transcribed using Otter.ai transcription service. I then used Microsoft Word to edit any errors made by the transcription service.

Variations in Data Collection

The length of each interview was proposed to be 90 minutes. The variation in the length of the interview was due to participants' willingness to share information. Although each of the participants was very detailed in providing information, some of the participants chose to share more of their personal stories than others.

<div align="center">

Data Analysis

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I used semi structured interviews to gain a more in-depth insight into the participants and gather information about participants' lived experiences. The interviews were transcribed using Otter transcription services. After the transcription was completed, I reviewed the transcripts while listening to the interview to check for accuracy. After checking for accuracy, I completed self-analysis methods described in *Phenomenological Research Methods* by Moustakas. Moustakas (1995) described the seven-step process to analyze phenomenological studies. The steps are reviewing the statement for how well

the experience is described, recording all the relevant messages, removing the redundant or overlapping statements, organizing the invariant meanings into themes, synthesizing the consistent meanings and themes into a description of the experience, reflecting on one's textural description, and constructing a textural-structural description of meanings of the experience. Using Moustaka's seven steps, the following themes were found: lack of coping skills, poor communication, family relationship, community supports, socioeconomic status, and race. Some emerging themes found were gender differences, substance abuse, effects of trauma, and out-of-home placement. I placed these themes into four distinct categories: influences increasing offending behaviors, lived experiences after release, Black youth involved in mental health courts, and in-home probation.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility

Credibility is an integral part of any research project. To ensure the credibility of the study, I used a transcription review. Each of the interviews was recorded. After the recording of the interviews, the interviews were transcribed. I reviewed the transcripts by listening to the recording and going through the transcription to ensure that the information was recorded the same. There were no unintelligible interviews, so I did not have to go back and reach out to participants to discuss the meaning.

Transferability

This phenomenological study has limits due to transferability when considering similar participants of this type of research. Although this study's findings may inform policy makers and stakeholders of the juvenile justice system, the experiences are

detailed enough to be shared across participants. Furthermore, although each participant's experiences were their own, many similarities can be gleaned that could assist programmers in developing targeted programs for current youth involved in the juvenile justice system.

Confirmability and Dependability

I kept a detailed list of all the steps taken in the study. I would also journal important notes from interviews to keep a list of patterns and themes that s emerged from each interview. Each of the interview questions was reviewed as well as the answer. The RQ associated with that interview question was reviewed. The interview questions were reviewed and confirmed that they related back to the RQ associated with the interview question.

Results

Research Questions and the Themes

The overall RQ for the study was, What are the lived experiences and perception of Black male and female youth regarding the juvenile justice system, their offending behavior, recidivism, and treatment with in-home probation and mental health court. From this overall question, four sub questions where identified:

RQ1: What experiences or influences do youth identify as increasing their offending behavior that resulted in juvenile justice involvement on multiple occasions?

RQ2: What are the experiences and perceptions of Black youth following release from their initial involvement with the juvenile justice system?

RQ3: What are the experiences and perceptions of treatment for Black youth involved in mental health courts?

RQ4: What are the experiences and perceptions of Black youth involved with in-home probation?

From these RQs, I created the interview questions as seen in Appendix B. With those four questions, four themes with subthemes within each were identified: influences increasing their offending behavior, lived experiences following release, experiences of those youth involved in mental health court, and experiences while involved in in-home probation. These can be found in Table 2.

Table 2

Themes and Subthemes

Influences for offending behavior	Lived experiences following release	Experiences of youth in mental health court	Experiences while in in-home probation
Mental health	Discrimination	Improved communication	Ineffective
Substance abuse	Social status	Poorly structured	Negative impact
Peer influences			

Influences Offending Behavior

Mental Health

Juvenile recidivism rates have continuously increased because of the influences of contributing factors such as mental health issues. Many of the participants made statements to assist with understanding how offending behaviors among Black youth are

caused by mental health problems. Participant RH122820636X stated "I had a lot of

anger and trauma because of the abuse I received from my parents and sisters."

Participant ST11242095A mentioned "School was difficult, I was anxious, and I didn't go

to school." Participant NS1128531C stated "I had went to a school for Emotionally and

behaviorally disturbed students because I couldn't go to school with regular kids" while

Participant DM12123568K reported "my whole childhood. She was like a very abusive

person, mentally, physically, emotionally." Participant GT12820263L reported "I was,

like, really stressed out and my parents were on me. And I had like a knife and I hurt

myself." Participant HT122720153Z stated "Well, I did, I was diagnosed with ADHD. I

was from a from a very young age. And I was on Ritalin until I turned 18. Okay."

Participant JL11272059B stated "People would say something was wrong with me

because I was angry." Participant WU12182020203M stated "Before I got in trouble, I

was seeing a therapist for bipolar" while ZY123020728P stated "My parents did all they

could to try to curb that behavior. Child curb their attitude. So when I enrolled for a

mental health program is all about trying to suppress the depression."

Substance Abuse

The findings demonstrate that the offending behavior is attributed to substance

abuse among Black youth. Substance abuse reflects the deeper involvement and increases

recidivism in the juvenile justice system. Youth with substance abuse disorder have more

court offenses compared with those who do not use drugs. Participant DM12123568K

stated "I mean, maybe here and there but not regularly. It could have been once a month

or you know, just depending on if you were in a certain social setting with the friends had

it." Participant KB112920525D stated "I want to recall and say that the alcohol wasn't a thing it was the drugs but for what had happened with me it wasn't about me using the drugs necessarily. So they weren't drug testing me so it didn't affect me have me going to the program." Participant AT121220246p stated "Hanging with the wrong people, I did not consider myself, I was running the streets, hanging with gangs and older people. At 14 years old, I was hanging with 22 and 23 years old. I would sneak and drink, smoke cigarettes. I would smoke weed every now and again." Participant ZY123020728P stated "I tried smoking. Twice. Okay. And for alcohol, I just tried a brand-new drink Budweiser." Participant RH122820636X stated "I never used drugs but my parents both used drugs. My mother was on crack." Participant HT122720153Z stated "When I was on it. I felt like I was out of control." Participant GT12820263L stated "Yes, it did. Okay. Like, I just gotten into smoking weed at that time. Which obviously makes you lazy, and like, unmotivated. So, yeah, I think that was like a big determining factor. I wasn't drinking, that wasn't not something I'm interested in."

Peer Influences

Peer influence increased juvenile involvement in offending behaviors. When juveniles have weakened social controls, there are increased opportunities for becoming involved in substance abuse, associating with delinquent peers, and a lack of interest in obtaining an education that culminates in the increase in juvenile recidivism. Participant CP122920525R stated "Peer relationship got in the way; all the friends I made were a bad influence." Participant ST11242095A stated "She wasn't like trying to help me. It was like, Oh, you know, get out. You know, you're gonna we're gonna continue you know,

kind of be a bad or whatever. We're gonna pick up where we left off at it was it like, she wasn't helping me progress into something better, and she was really just bringing me down." Participant KB112920525D stated "My boyfriend was a bit of the cause as to why. I'm being fast, trying to please my boyfriend and helping him with some things which got me in trouble." Participant JL11272059B stated "So I was 16. Many of them range from the ages of 18 to 21. during which time many of them had already had gun and drug charges. Many of them were known gang members." Participant AT121220246p stated "Yeah, I still was hanging with the wrong people. I was, I was supposed to be, you know. I'm pretty, you know, I made pretty good grades, but I still chose to try to run the street. You know, so yeah, I was still hanging with the gang. You know, hanging out, I usually hang out with older people." Participant WU12182020203M stated "I was involved with Gangs."

Lived Experiences Following Release

Discrimination

The Black youth continue to face discrimination when they leave the juvenile justice system. Most youths from minority ethnic backgrounds experience continuous discrimination after involvement with the juvenile system. Participant NS1128531C stated "There were some stereotypical assumptions made by the courts. My parents are not my biological parents. White kids were doing similar things I was not allowed to do those things. I didn't have friends. I did not feel like anything worked". Participant AT121220246p stated "if somebody say black skin don't matter then that is a lie."

Participant CP122920525R stated "Most males in the program, females were treated differently in the program." Participant DM12123568K stated "African Americans are treated more harsher. And they just think there's probably like this stereotype you the reality these stereotypes." Participant GT12820263L stated "Yeah, I mean, I don't know if just being black was the main thing that played a role or whether it was like, the fact that like, my parents had like an accent. Like, maybe that like, also played a role." Participant HT122720153Z stated "Like, white kids were treated differently than I was." JL11272059B – "I was not given the same opportunities as others" If my dark skin father would have been there, I think that I would have not gotten off so easy being that I am fair skin." Participant ST11242095A stated "so I have a friend, she's white. And she's done more stuff than I have. I've been she was out there." Participant ZY123020728P stated "Well, a lot of people say that you're discriminated? Well, most cases and juvenile system it's actually in the Muslim black Americans. So it's a it's something expected."

Social Status

The Black youths experience multiple disadvantages in various aspects of their life, such as social and economic well-being. Black youth experience disadvantages in education, employment, housing, and health practices, particularly mental health. Participant ST11242095A stated "One, I was in a foster home, well, sorry, I was in a shelter to shelter." Participant AT121220246p stated "shelter myself in my environment, but I chose it. I grew up right by the project is Boulevard project." Participant M12123568K stated "It was a poor neighborhood. Yes, that's Long Island, New York is very hard for us to live in. But, um, like the black and brown communities. You know,

like, if you're looking at like the worst of the worst communities, even Black and Brown was very hard for us to live in." Participant JL11272059B stated "I moved to low-income area when my parents divorces and that's when all of my problems got really bad." Participant NS1128531C stated "So, yeah, like, we live next door to like a crack house, drive bys. Every night. There were a couple of drive bys at my elementary school" Participant RH122820636XIn stated "I was always in survival mood. Poverty was the root of everything."

Experiences of Youth in Mental Health Court

Improved Communication

The mental health courts are an essential part of the diversion programs aiming to improve the youths involved in offences to reduce criminal recidivism and lower the court corrections costs. The mental health courts are perceived to improve their communication with the families and other individuals within their environments. Similarly, the courts improve the skills for emotional regulation and acceptance that enhance their coping skills for improved quality of life. In the process, they develop different skills and understanding about managing sadness, unacceptability, anger, and other related aspects. Participant GT12820263L stated "Okay. Okay. And then. So this is probably why you feel like they sent you to mental health court. Yes. That, uh, maybe probation or something like that? Because it sounds like you were maybe struggling with some mental health issues that were maybe undiagnosed." Participant ZY123020728P stated "I had a hard time communication with my parents and I feel like they didn't understand me" Participant JL11272059B stated "I lack communication and didn't know

how to say how I was feeling" Participant HT122720153Z stated "Anger control? Oh, you know, as far as, and I really didn't have a lot of social skills. You know, I really didn't know how to like, like, unless it was about a school or something. I really didn't know how to like, really, like, have a conversation I really didn't understand. Like."

Poorly Structured

Some Black juveniles perceive the mental health courts as poorly structured platforms, failing to deliver the required positive outcomes of transformation. The mental health courts are a waste of time, money, and other related resources. Participant NS1128531C stated "you know, so for me, it just kind of it was just a waste of time, waste of money. And, you know, so, and I mean, even once I got, you know, once I got to 16, and you started kind of wrapping stuff up when I had that last probation officers like we want to send you to Texas." Participant KB112920525D stated "I don't really think that the diversion program did much it was I'm doing this to check box to be quite honest." Participant JL11272059B stated "Having to go through substance abuse intake was a waste of resource since none of my charges were related to substance and parenting classes had nothing to do with her charges so it didn't make sense why was in that" Participant HT122720153Z stated "Like my counselor. He couldn't, he couldn't connect with me. Like, he couldn't connect me with what I had going on with me. I felt like I needed to, you know, fulfill his obligation fulfill his state obligation."

Experiences While in In-Home Probation

Ineffective

The Black youth involved in-home probation perceive their situation as ineffective and not positively impact their case. Participant HT122720153Z stated "Because, as opposed to asking me what's going on in my life, he came in and was I hear the rules. And it's like, we're already in the detention center, we already been explained things by the judge, and probation officer, are well aware of what the rules are." Participant WU12182020203M stated "I mean, cuz how you really can't talk to a probation officer me, I will feel like it will be more comfortable for a teenager or a kid to talk to a therapist or something." Participant ST11242095A stated "I did not know nothing about the real world, or anything, like I said, when what I what I had got in trouble." Participant RH122820636X stated "No one wanted to get to the root of my anger or help me how to deescalate situations." Participant NS1128531C stated "they're not teaching you anything. They're not attempting to teach you anything." Participant AT121220246p stated "I think it's just a way for them to get more money and keep people in there. So I don't know what I could have going on right. Now my bad."

Negative Impact

The youth perceive the in-home probation programs as insufficient and ineffective in helping them understand and negatively respond to change. Participant JI11272059B stated "So the first time I went through what they were in the state that I live in, it's called teen court. And so, the when it's such a small charge, like I had, no I was a first time offender. It's deferred. So, you go through probation, you have to get drug and alcohol

treatment." Participant ST11242095A stated "it would have been a whole lot different It would have been better." Participant RH122820636X stated "It would have been really helpful if people would have looked past the surface." Participant NS1128531C stated "I mean, there was nothing that really worked it just basically, you know, at least in my opinion, it just really just kind of wasted my time, and just wasted everybody's time didn't change a damn thing." Participant DM12123568K stated "You know, so I mean, you got us you got to go back and forth the court. And then the judge, like, I don't feel like they can really relate for a lot of these kids." Participant CP122920525R stated "The program is meant to make you better but they focused on your differences instead of making you better." Participant AT121220246p stated "You know, we need to reform it some type of way. It starts at the bottom. You know, nobody should have you know, your whole life in somebody's hand and they pissed off that day. You're going to jail. Not right. You're five minutes late use one violation. That's not like, too much power." Participant HT122720153Z stated "So up until that point I was at home, I was just on probation to the diversion program came in, it's like an alternative to, you know, me revoking my case."

Summary

This chapter provided detailed information about who the participants were and how they were identified to be participants of this study. The Black youth had been involved in the juvenile justice system at least 2 times before the age of 18, between 18 and 40, identified as Black male or female, and completed the program before participating in the study. The study's results were broken down into four headers based

on the RQs, and themes were analyzed. Influences that increased the juvenile justice system's risk, experiences after release, and experiences while participating in mental health court or in-home probation. The participants shared their experiences during the interview, which allowed me to identify factors based on the RQ. In Chapter 5, I will provide interpretation of the study findings, consider the study's implications for positive social change, and offer recommendations for future research.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

In this study, I sought to address the critical gap in the literature and advance knowledge-focused specifically on the lived experiences of Black youth involved in diversion programs such as in-home probation and mental health courts. I believe that understanding the lived experiences of Black youth involvement in diversion programs can lead to a reduction in recidivism among this population. In this chapter, I interpret the study's key findings, consider the limitations of the study, offer recommendations for future research, and consider the study's implications for positive social change.

Interpretation of the Findings

The intent of this study was to clarify the experiences and perceptions of Black male and female participants who were involved in mental health courts and in-home probation as adolescents. I developed four specific RQs to understand these experiences:

RQ1: What experiences or influences do youth identify as increasing their offending behavior that resulted in juvenile justice involvement on multiple occasions?

RQ2: What are the experiences and perceptions of Black youth following release from their initial involvement with the juvenile justice system?

RQ3: What are the experiences and perceptions of treatment for Black youth involved in mental health courts?

RQ4: What are the experiences and perceptions of Black youth involved with in-home probation?

Influences Increasing Their Offending Behavior

Mental Health

In the study, I explored the lived experiences identified by participants as the leading causes of increased offending behavior. Psychological distress among Black youth is partly responsible for increased rates of offending behaviors perpetrated by this group. Psychological incapacity is linked to social disadvantages and structural inequality between Black and White youth, with a high prevalence of incarceration and violence in low-resourced neighborhoods that are majorly inhabited by Black youth (Brinkley-Rubinstein et al, 2014). This result is consistent with arguments by Brame et al. (2018) and Guebert and Olver (2014) that Black youth have high disproportionate contact with the criminal justice system and law enforcement units compared to young White men.

Black youth are emotionally agitated due to the belief that they are unfairly targeted by law enforcement officers leading to increased linkage in offending behaviors. Police stops of young Black and Latino men increase their psychological distress, which positively impacts adolescent criminality (Abate & Venta, 2018). Proactive police targeting of places and individuals to avert crimes and offending behaviors has underlying issues despite being a ubiquitous crime prevention strategy in the United States (Abate & Venta, 2018). Therefore, attention should be paid to the review of crime prevention strategies and the implementation of psychological counseling programs for Black youths.

Disruptive behavior by youth sometimes reflects mental disorders that have not been detected and treated (Mallet, 2014). The results demonstrate that mental disorders

are high in juveniles. Black youth suffering from mental health illness had an increased

risk of harm. Early identification of these risks may ensure that proper support is given to

individuals while in state custody. Although numerous risks assessment methods can be

used to identify such challenges in the juvenile justice programs, the offending behavior

among youth is increasingly experienced. The youth's mental health problem usually

affects youth behavior, academic performance, and relationship with their peers (Mallet,

2014). In some cases, Black youth in the juvenile justice system have a history of

behavioral, trauma, and emotional problems. Therefore, the results imply that identifying

psychiatric disorders within the juvenile justice system is crucial to minimize the

overwhelming prevalence.

Substance Abuse

Substance abuse and mental issues are the primary factors that contribute to

increased involvement in criminal activities by Black youth. For instance, alcohol

consumption among Black youth drives them towards drug and substance abuse. Once

they are intoxicated and addicted to such substances, they are involved in more offending

behaviors that are punishable through prison sentencing than the number of minor

offenses committed before learning to engage in alcohol and substance abuse. This study

is consistent with Zeola et al. (2017), who argue that alcohol use among youth and

adolescents remains a significant public health and social issue in the United States. The

National Survey on Drug Use and Health observed that approximately one in every five-

youth aged between 12 and 17 years consume alcohol, while about 22% of U.S. youth,

including young persons of color, are involved in beer consumption (Zeola et al., 2017).

Early beer consumption among Black youth drives them to indulge in offending

behaviors apart from increasing long-term alcohol addiction risk (Chen et al, 2014). The

other aspect of beer consumption that increases offending behaviors among U.S. Black

youth is binge drinking which is the consumption of five or more alcohol bottles within 2

hours (Chen et al, 2014). More Black youth in the United States indulge in this behavior

(Chen et al, 2014), hence, increasing their involvement in offending behaviors.

Black youth who abuse drugs are highly susceptible to substance abuse,

delinquency, and deviance. Juvenile offenses that occur in adolescents contributes to the

excessive use of drugs. Substance abuse among Black youth leads to multiple problems,

especially poor peer relationships, academic difficulties, mental health, and involvement

in the juvenile justice system. Arrest, intervention, and adjudication by the juvenile

justice system are the ultimate effects for Black youth who engage in substance abuse.

The study results demonstrate that substance abuse among youth is strongly linked to

delinquent behavior and often causes family problems, a lack of neighborhood social

controls, and involvement with negative peer groups. Substance abuse among Black

youth is associated with income-generating and violent crimes, increasing fear among the

community, and the demand for criminal and juvenile justice services. Regarding

families, abuse of drugs among Black youth jeopardizes many aspects of life, and may

eventually drain emotional and financial resources.

Peer Influences

The increase in Black youth recidivism is attributed to social upbringing and peer

pressure. Several studies, such as Hoeve et al. (2013) and Guebert and Olver (2014),

indicate that youth substance abuse increases the risk of developing offending behavior. Growing up in an environment that allows the intake of harmful substances shapes the youth mindset and can contribute to deviant criminal behavior. The social learning environment directly influences Black youths' involvement in offending practices in society. Black youth from poor backgrounds with increased substance abuse are the majority in the juvenile and criminal courts compared to those who do not use drugs (Chassin, 2008). The study participants noted how substance and drug abuse contribute to youths' criminal activity and likelihood of redeveloping the offending behavior after their first involvement in the juvenile justice system. Therefore, the high rates of Black youth recidivism are attributed to substance abuse (Hoeve et al., 2013). Substance abuse contributes to poor social relationships, the development of substance abuse disorders, and offending behaviors that put the youth at risk of recidivism. Other contributory factors that can be associated with the social environment that can contribute to the development of offending behaviors include child abuse, domestic violence, and exposure to emotional torture, among other negative influences (Piquero et al., 2016). This study alludes to the toxic social environment characterized by substance abuse and peer pressure as a contributory factor to the development of offending behavior and increased recidivism.

The results demonstrate that peer influence increases youth offending behavior. Many juveniles are considered vulnerable to offending behaviors because their peers easily influence them. When selecting peers, youth usually base their decisions on prior similarities (Gase et al., 2016); therefore, they encourage other juveniles to engage in

delinquency. Peers who are antisocial foster deviant behavior among youth through deviancy training and direct peer pressure (Barret et al., 2014). In this regard, direct peer pressure among Black youth establishes social norms that encourage antisocial behavior. The strong association between Black youth in juvenile and their delinquent peers influence recidivism.

Black youth tend to self-identify themselves as delinquents, creating a rare experience that makes them develop illegal behaviors that may make them act in ways consistent with this identity. Involvement with the juvenile system increases the likelihood that Black youth will adopt delinquent identities and engage in criminal behaviors at a higher rate than children from other ethnic groups (Barret et al., 2014). Adverse experiences during involvement with the juvenile systems may put Black youth at risk for adolescent delinquency. The outcome of the experience is that other people around them end up perceiving juvenile offenders as criminals. After involvement with the juvenile system, Black youth may have a lack of trust in the justice structures. Therefore, the delinquency identity emanates from racism and other forms of discrimination while in custody.

Lived Experiences Following Release

Discrimination

Ethnic backgrounds create persistent problems before and after release from the juvenile justice system. The ethnic background of Black youth makes their progress difficult. Black youth are discriminated against at a higher rate than White youth after engaging with the juvenile justice system (Wade, et al., 2014). The high levels of

discrimination may emanate from the disproportionate number of Black children entering the juvenile system due to discriminatory police stops and search activities (Wade, et al., 2014).

The rate of discrimination among Black youth is significantly high compared to those from other social backgrounds. When the youth develop mental health disorders, they become likely to engage in the previous criminal and offending behavior. The findings are consistent with Hockenberry and Puzzanchera (2018), who linked the increase in juvenile recidivism to stigma and discrimination that lead to mental health disorder development. Involvement in criminal activities has adverse outcomes regarding stigma and discrimination that prevent offenders from engaging in activities freely with others, thus exposing them to mental health risks.

Social Status

After being released from their first involvement with the juvenile criminal system, the participants experienced a high rate of exclusion in economic and social activities. The Black youth are also overrepresented in the poor neighborhoods where children face challenges in accessing quality education, health, and other social benefits. After being freed after their first involvement with the juvenile system, they receive little attention, thus causing the subsequent entry into the criminal justice system. The experiences of social disadvantage expose the Black youth to bullying because of their ethnicity. Black youth are most likely to be disadvantaged than White children after their juvenile criminal justice release.

The majority of the Black participants were subjected to discrimination while participating in social activities, affecting their interaction with other people. When excluded from the economic and social activities, the participants remained excluded and were exposed to a high risk of redeveloping the offending behaviors. Involvement in social activities such as education lowers the probability of youth engaging in criminal practices. The majority of Black participants in the study lived in dire poverty, which affected their access to education, employment, and other social activities that involve the ex-offender's intent to participate. Inaccessible social amenities to the Black youth have contributed to the increase in juvenile offending. The study is consistent with findings by Tegeng and Abadi (2018), who stated that the high rate of juvenile offending among the Black youth has contributed to the same youth developing into adult criminals due to social discrimination. The ethnic backgrounds present a challenge for the Black youth to create a suitable environment for redeveloping offending behaviors. In the Black youth context, the study findings indicate that the youth are subjected to social disadvantage with minimal assistance from society and authorities, causing them to engage in previous offending behavior. The results are similar to those by Mallet (2018), who noted that there are significant differences in how non-White offenders are supported socially compared to White youth, contributing to high incidence rates. Social support is critical in assimilating the juvenile offenders into constructive activities to enable the youth to change their behavior entirely and become useful members of the country. The analysis links the experiences of Black youth to the development of mental health disorders and increased recidivism.

The participants' criminal activities contributed to an increase in the offending behavior due to mental health issues after the first involvement with the juvenile and criminal system. The mental issues are prevalent because of the high levels of discrimination and stigma exposed to Black youth with criminal activities. The findings concur with Tegeng and Abadi (2018), who pointed out that the ex-criminal activities' stigma leaves most Black youth with mental health challenges. Potential landlords and employers become reluctant in hiring Black youth who engaged in criminal activities leaving the affected to be fearful of remaining unemployed and homeless. The study concurs with Shook and Sarri (2008), who reveal that mental illness among Black youth offenders increases at a high rate due to the stigma. The increase in mental health issues among Black youth leads to recidivism cases, as indicated by Zoela et al. (2017). Authorities have to establish stringent measures to ensure that youth with a criminal record are accommodated into society to prevent increasing forms of discrimination and stigma.

Black Youth Involved in Mental Health Courts

Improved Communication

Mental health courts are associated with individuals' internal growth, which is vital in improving their performance within the society and adjusting to the environmental characteristics. Improved relationships with other individuals within their living environment fosters relational growth, necessary in reformation and general recovery from the health issues (Barrett et al., 2013). The mental health courts' programs have also contributed towards helping the offenders manage the factors of

marginalization such as discrimination that is common among them. The improvement of interpersonal skills is vital to fostering communication and developing positive relationships that improve their general conduct and the relationship with others Barrett et al., 2013). Therefore, the mental health courts are perceived positively as important institutions for reforming the offenders by empowering them with skills towards switching to normality.

Poorly Structured

Policy makers devised diversion programs to ensure that youth with a criminal past are supported through the mental courts to lower recidivism cases and reduce costs related to court corrections (Ray, 2014). The mental health courts allow Black youth to access mental health services to reduce recidivism. As a diversion program, mental health centers are suitable for offering social and mental support to Black youth who are often neglected after their initial involvement with the juvenile justice system. Mental health contributes to enhancing youths' quality of life with a criminal record and enables them to cope with their new state of life. Yet, the mental courts lack the appropriate structures to enhance the well-being of Black youth. This study is consistent with Brame et al. (2018), who argued that mental courts' effectiveness is still is unclear. However, the findings are inconsistent with Abrams (2013), who pleaded that mental health courts are critical diversion programs that effectively reduce recidivism rates by improving the mental stability of youth, the majority of them from minority ethnic backgrounds.

Juvenile prisons in the United States were primarily established to reduce crimes and offending behaviors perpetrated by young individuals such as young Latino and

Black men. While this objective has been partly accomplished, the rehabilitation

programs offered to youth released from prisons are inadequate and mostly shortsighted.

The rehabilitation framework provided and supported by the juvenile justice system has

no links with the social roots of juveniles' problems. It pays too much attention to

enhancing the internal thoughts and behavioral patterns of youths through short-term

interventions. This result is consistent with Abrams (2013), who states that since the

juvenile correction system is no longer connected with societal norms linked to

delinquent behaviors among juveniles, it advances a limited and unsustainable framework

for change required by youths.

Consequently, a robust rehabilitation initiative that creates a pathway for

meaningful change in America's juvenile justice system is long overdue. Youth also

perceive therapeutic centers intended to correct juveniles as a form of 'imprisonment'

because of underlying challenges characterizing this rehabilitation technique. In

analyzing the experiences of youth sent to such schools, Hoeve et al. (2013) revealed that

the institutions use strong-arm rehabilitation techniques that are ineffective in advancing

America's youth justice system. In contrast to the above rehabilitation techniques, more

subtle youth criminalization techniques such as civil penalties for minor infractions in the

society and school disciplinary options measures have eased the pressure juvenile justice

system because of better experiences for youth in America. There is a need to consider

factors that cause negative and positive experiences among previously imprisoned youth

to improve youth lived experience in America.

Lack of emphasis on the need for reformation and poorly designed training programs affects the program's effectiveness. The courts exist as alternatives to going to jail; hence, a negative perception affects the courts' usefulness. The instructors within the courts do not give sufficient attention and care to improve the conditions, thus, lowering the program's quality towards changing the offenders. Some violent crimes, weapon-related, and property issues have critical physical, social and economic problems that make individuals unable to manage the externalizing forces effectively.

In summary, recidivism impacts continuously contribute to the growing imprisonment of the Black youth in the United States. Based on the findings, social and personal factors and individuals' characteristics contribute to offending behaviors among Black youth. Therefore, this study's findings can improve how offenders can be successfully integrated into society.

Black Youth involved in In-Home Probation

Ineffective

In most cases, the court makes assumptions about the home state, the relationship of the parents with the youth, and the involvement in activities that children do. The actions and corrective measures adopted do not suitably fit their situation, which lowers the outcome's effectiveness. The Black youths living with disabilities and are on in-home probation find the courts' correct decisions are unsuitable and fail to consider their current situation. Some youth have a unique problem such as the blind, lame, pregnant, and other related conditions that require special attention and consideration to enhance the outcome of the in-home probation approach. Assessment of the current situation increases the

possibility of delivering suitable strategies to change the offenders and avoid re-offending during and after the probation season. Lack of corrective measures that consider the juveniles' specific situation has negatively affected their experiences within the in-home probation. Some youth perceive courts' judgments for in-home probation as unfair because they are not involved in the decision-making process, especially in defining the specific actions that will be undertaken to improve their situation. In some cases, the decisions made where the victims involved are not Black effect the court judgments are increases the failures to consider the specific situation. Some factors such as the availability of the resources for intervention, reform and efficacy, parental awareness, and intervention strategy must be considered in designing the programs for in-home probation.

Some Black youth on in-home probation positively perceive the court decisions and think that they are lucky due to the flexibility and freedom they receive compared to other juvenile justice systems. As an alternative and fairway of correction compared to going to jail, the in-home program individuals tend to appreciate their situation. In the process, some youths are positively impacted and transform towards improving their behaviors as expected by justice systems. In contrast, others have remained negative about the programs, which has reduced their transformation rate. Some juveniles think that the community's involvement in the provision of guidance to in-home probation systems can reduce recidivating and increase the possibility of the exercise's positive outcome. The community's advice can provide alternative support systems; whereby, the family, friends, and neighbors should be involved in the reformation programs.

Negative Impact

In the same way, the church, juvenile administrations, and insurance recommendations should also be at the forefront to support the change process. The Black youth subjected to in-home probation programs involving the community have minimal chances of re-offending because of the increased support they receive. The community increases their engagement and commitment towards the positive change within the juvenile transformation programs. Lack of sufficient contextual knowledge, fear, distrust, lack of advocacy, and support are common concerns associated with the in-home probation systems. After release from juvenile prison, youth offenders are likely to get involved in illegal activities such as substance and drug abuse, violence, and petty theft that could help them return to jail again. Ethnic pride after prison release is linked to the development of positive attitudes towards avoiding violence in conflict situations and feelings of being safe in criminal gangs. This result is inconsistent with Hartley and Silva (2007), who argue that previously incarcerated youths are cautious against committing crimes that would return them to prisons associated with negative life experiences. However, there is no connection between ethnic pride and education, society-based institutions' involvement, and substance abuse among young Latino and Black men in America post-release. Ethnic pride is a potential source of strength that should be exploited juveniles to reenter society and develop positive lived experiences after release from prison. Similar to this result, Mallett (2018) note that relative and absolute transformations in self-control were common among incarcerated young offenders once they left prisons in the state of Florida.

Consequently, there are lower odds of adjudication for perpetrating new offenses. On the contrary, Tegeng and Abadi (2018) argue that the effects of self-control changes are more evident among young female offenders than their male counterparts. Juvenile confinement and imprisonment should be backed up by evidence-based rehabilitation programs to improve self-control among young people of color released from prison. In turn, self-control improvements will translate to changes in behavior and experiences during or after confinement, apart from lowering recidivism rates among juveniles in the United States.

Black youths in the United States face a higher risk for violence exposure compared to White youths. The trend is partly linked to unbalanced representation in regions characterized by limited resources and an increased community violence rate. In this regard, Black youths are encouraged to indulge in a wide range of offending and incriminating activities, including petty theft and drunk driving, as they witness more violence in the community. Policy makers have attempted to reduce societal crime rates through strategies such as the formulation and implementation of more stringent anti-crime policies. Like this result, Hockenberry and Puzzanchera (2018) stated that the rate of crimes perpetrated by Black youth is still high due to weak policies and policy implementation gaps.

Moreover, Brame et al. (2018) argue that when Black youth with past criminal history complete their sentences, the criminal justice system believes that they have reformed from indulging in offensive behaviors. However, increased youth recidivism, especially among Black youth, is a cause of concern across the USA. Apart from

recommitting crimes that took them to adult and juvenile prisons in the first instance, more Black youths indulge in offending behaviors they never attempted before, thereby increasing the rate of criminal activities in the United States.

The incorporation of training programs that specifically target the juvenile's needs and requirements can improve the probation's outcome and reduce the possibility of recidivating. In the same way, the integration of positive associations can help shape the youths' characters and actions to foster positive outcomes. The court's ability to design in-home probation systems that align with the transformation goals helps to improve the results of the exercise and the impacts of the transformation process.

Limitations of the Study

This study provided an in-depth look at the experiences of Black youth involved in the diversion program. There is a particular limitation of the study that should be discussed. First, I had to go into the interview and believe what the participants have stated is the right and accurate reflection of their experiences while involved in the diversion programs. There is no way to confirm or deny that these experiences are what the participants described. Another limitation of the study involves around the age of the participants. No test was given to make sure that there are no concerns for the memory of the youth. Most of the participants were over the age of 28-year-old. Since there was a great deal of time since the juvenile justice system's involvement, some memories could be based on other experiences. Participants were asked if they were no longer involved in the diversion program, but the research did not investigate if the participants had any experiences with diversion programs as adults. If the participants were involved in

diversion programs as adults, this could also account for some of the experiences reported in his study.

Recommendations

This study was conducted to understand the lived experiences of Black youth involved in diversion programs. While Black youth are known to have higher recidivism rates, it would be essential to understand the experiences of other minorities such as Hispanics. A qualitative study understanding the lived experiences of Hispanic youth involved in diversion programs can be critical in reducing recidivism in this group. These findings can make the study more general to other minorities' who may also have high recidivism rates.

Many of the youth who participated in this study discussed how their parents were involved in diversion programs. A qualitative study to understand parents who have children involved in diversion programs should be completed to understand the lived experiences of parents. This type of study can give a different perspective of what skills the parents need to assist their children in diversion programs.

There are other types of diversion programs besides in-home probation and mental health. Drug courts or truancy courts are just a couple. A qualitative study about the youth's lived experiences in drug court or truancy court or some of the other programs would be critical to understanding Black youth experiences who have been involved in the juvenile justice system.

Implications

The findings of this study can have a positive impact on Black youth who are involved in the juvenile justice system with more than one occurrence. This study's population was unique due to the overwhelming disproportionate rate of Black youth who recidivate. These findings can help create diversion programs such as in-home probation and mental health courts that can create a positive environment that can reduce recidivism among Black youth. This study can inform stakeholders and policy makers on what can be done to assist this population. The practitioner can benefit from the results of the study as well. The practitioner can create an assessment tool that considers the individual risk factors that cause the individual to recidivate and become involved in the justice system. These types of programs could also be instrumental in helping Black youth transition to adulthood and become productive, law-abiding citizens. Creating new programs that specifically address the unique needs of Black youth can be vital for individuals and also their families.

Conclusion

One of the most significant challenges faced in the world today is finding ways to reduce incarceration among the young by finding appropriate treatment programs that can provide the services needed. This can also be said for youth involved in diversion programs who recidivate. While initial arrests have been decreasing for Black youth, this group's recidivism rate is still disproportionate compared to Hispanic and White youth. Future research should examine different types of diversion programs, how families

perceive youth involvement in diversion programs, and how these families can help create a positive environment to assist with recidivism rates among minorities.

This research served its purpose of filling the literature gap to understand the lived experiences of Black youth who recidivate while being involved in diversion programs. The findings suggest that Black youth have a unique set of challenges that should be addressed to reduce recidivism rates. Moreover, this research provides an analysis to successfully assist Black youth in successfully integrating back into society after being involved in the juvenile justice system and diversion programs such as in-home probation and mental health courts.

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Appendix A: Demographics

Demographic Information

1. Age

2. Race

3. Gender

4. Any known mental health diagnosis or mental health treatment.

5. Number of criminal charges that have you have had

6. Type of diversion program you have participated in

Appendix B: Interview Questions

Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your life at home during the treatment program.

2. Tell me about your friends while participating in diversion program?

3. Tell me about your educational experiences.

4. Did drug and alcohol use impact your participation in diversion programs?

5. What type of neighborhood do you live in while involved in the treatment program?

6. How has your family played a role in you reoffending during the treatment program?

7. How do you feel that your gender played a role in your treatment?

8. Tell me about your parents and how they supported you in your treatment.

9. What lead you to a history involving the juvenile justice system?

10. What do you believe could have been done when you were released the first time that could have helped you stay away from the juvenile justice system?

11. How do you feel that your race played a part in your reoffending?

12. What skills did you lack when you were discharged from the diversion program?

13. Did peer relationships get in the way or help you with your participation in the diversion programs

14. What about the program that worked for you?

15. What do you believe was effective about the treatment program?

16. What about the program you believe didn't work?

17. What skills did you obtain that will be useful to assist you with not reoffending?

18. Was there anything you feel could have been done differently about the treatment program?

19. Can you tell me about your time while you were involved treatment program?