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Volunteer Mentor Perspectives on the Impact of Mentoring Children of Incarcerated Parents

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Abstract

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by

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MA, Central Michigan University, 2010

BA, Rochester College, 2008

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

Volunteer mentors contribute time by serving as role models to numerous children who face challenges that cause them to be at risk for delinquent behavior. Children of incarcerated parents are a growing population in need of special attention and strategies to minimize their risk of engaging in a life of crime. The purpose of this research was to explore the perspectives of volunteer mentors as they work with adolescents who have experienced the challenges and trauma of having an incarcerated parent. This research is grounded in Bandura's social learning theory, which considers how people learn from one another. As mentors work with children whose parents are or have been incarcerated, the mentors' perspective is valuable in understanding (a) to what degree adult mentors believe that adolescents (ages 13–18) with incarcerated parents are more likely to engage in delinquent behavior, and (b) to what degree adult mentors working with adolescents whose parents are incarcerated believe that mentoring programs are effective in keeping adolescents from engaging in delinquent behavior. A qualitative research design was conducted by interviewing a purposeful sampling of eight mentors who have worked with children of incarcerated parents. Responses to the interviews were coded and analyzed for related themes and patterns. One theme included providing mentor training manuals of guidelines and resources to effectively help at-risk youth avoid delinquent behavior. Changes in policy and practice may result in positive social change from understanding the perspective of mentors to strategize more effective mentoring opportunities for at-risk youth so they become productive citizens by minimizing possibilities of delinquent behavior.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my father, Percy Cottingham, who always reminded me to never let challenges get me down. To the memory of my uncle, Percy Chism, who always valued and encouraged education. My family has truly been a blessing, especially my mother, Betty Cottingham, who has always demonstrated strength in having a strong mind and inspired me to strive hard and enjoy life. My sister, Dianne Smothers, who is forever in my corner and cheering me on to accomplish goals. I appreciate the love and support of my children and grandchildren, particularly the constant prayers and encouragement from my son, Charles A. Dilworth. I am grateful for friendships formed through numerous co-workers that have impacted my life. My church family and special friends have rejoiced in advance while holding me up in prayer. I thank God for hearing prayers and never leaving me nor forsaking me. To God be the glory!

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Children of incarcerated parents (CIP) are a unique population requiring special attention and strategically designed programs to address concerns that places them at-risk of becoming incarcerated themselves. The Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) reported in August 2000 that nearly 1.5 million children had a mother or father incarcerated. The U.S. prison population has continued to increase with parent-prisoners (Laakso & Nygaard, 2012). Mentoring programs cannot address all issues faced by CIP; however, mentoring may be a strategy to prevent delinquent behaviors and create positive outcomes of children coping with having an incarcerated parent.

It is appropriate to draw attention to mentors given their underrepresentation and the gap in literature related to the perspectives of volunteer mentors of at-risk youth, particularly CIP. These children are often labeled as being at risk for developing a pattern of delinquent behaviors that cause them to follow the same path as their parents related to having a criminal record. According to BJS, children of prisoners are six times more likely than other children to become incarcerated later in their lives (Laakso & Nygaard 2012). DeAngelis (2001) indicated that children of prisoners "may face an even harsher sentence" (p. 56). The founder and president of Children of Promise, NYC, commented that it is traumatic for children to wear the burdens of their parents' imprisonment and crimes committed that are no fault of the children (Clemmons, 2015).

The purpose of the study was to gain knowledge from the perspective of mentors who work with youth experiencing the trauma of having an incarcerated parent on the degree to which they believe these youth are likely to engage in delinquent behavior and

how effective they believe mentoring programs are in keeping the youth from engaging in delinquent behavior. Many programs attempt to support children and adolescents labeled as being at-risk. According to Keating et al. (2002), the term *at-risk* generally describes youth who have come from single-parent homes, have shown signs of emotional and behavioral problems, and lack the support needed to navigate successfully through developmental task. In this instance, being at-risk includes skipping classes, dropping out of school, using illegal drugs, drinking, telling lies or not being truthful to adults who are advocates for their best interest. The children are also at risk of delinquent actions such as fighting, stealing, vandalism, and other crimes.

In the *Yes, You Can* guidebook for establishing mentoring programs, Lauland (1998), former U.S. Secretary of Education under President Clinton from 1993 to 2001, wrote that mentors can make a difference helping teenagers stay out of trouble. It was also stressed that, as role models, mentors cannot remove all obstacles that challenge youth, but mentoring is an important aspect of the solution. In the same guidebook, President Clinton implied that the one thing people have in common when becoming successful despite growing up in difficult circumstances is a positive relationship with a caring adult (mentor).

In 2014, President Obama implemented My Brother's Keeper Success Mentors Initiative, which was recognized as the nation's first-ever effort to reach out and support high-risk youth through school mentoring (Obama, 2014). Preparing young people for success in their adult life is the main objective (Hall, 2006).

Background

This study was expected to effect social change by providing information that can be utilized by policy makers, social workers, and community leaders, particularly in the field of study pertaining to children. The details may provoke further research and encourage implementation of policies to assist CIP with intervention strategies in support of special needs caused by separation of parents due to incarceration. This includes increasing funding to support mentoring programs and provide caregivers of CIP with additional resources. The support is critical to intervene and minimize trauma experienced by the children because of being exposed to negative environments. Some children may have witnessed the parent being taken into custody. The literature review defines challenges such as maladjustment, the attachment theory, social learning theory, and other concerns. The purpose of defining such challenges was to understand the history and pattern of reactions from children to evaluate how they can be helped effectively and determine appropriate strategies. Bowlby, the founder of attachment theory, together with Ainsworth, suggested that an individual could not be expected to deal with children properly without knowing the child thoroughly (as cited in van Dijken, 1998).

The federal government has provided funding to programs with a mentoring component to assist vulnerable youth, while federal agencies have been responsible for coordinating mentoring issues (Fernandes-Alcantara, 2018). Evans (2005) reported that many mentors would like to know more concerning the background on youth in effort to better to assist, whereas mentoring program coordinators wonder if having specific

knowledge of youths' background might skew areas of the relationship between the mentor and mentee. Mentoring should be about helping the mentee move forward versus trying to fix problems experienced in the past (Evans, 2005). There are numerous questions to address concerning children after the parent becomes incarcerated. Early intervention can reduce the likelihood of these children becoming serious and violent offenders. One intervention includes mentoring programs, which can possibly help children avoid having criminal careers as adults, and ultimately benefit society by experiencing fewer crimes and saving taxpayers money.

The at-risk stigma involves multiple questions concerning whether the children will grow up and live productive lives or become incarcerated. With a parent removed, families must reorganize and restructure their dynamics (Aaron & Dallaire, 2009). The children's grandmother plays the key role along with other family members throughout the incarcerated ordeal (Western & Smith, 2018). Immediate family members and potential caregivers may question who the children will live with and what resources are available to help with the financial obligations that come with raising additional children.

Although there are numerous household concerns to address, this study implied that mentoring CIP has been effective toward helping at-risk youth, but there is little research that proves mentoring prevents behavioral problems across all levels of at-risk youth (Weiler et al., 2015). Children who experience a traumatic separation from parent(s) may later show signs of posttraumatic stress syndrome. The traumatic separation experienced by CIP are compared to children separated from loss of a parent by death, divorce, or intervention from child welfare service (Bocknek et al., 2009). This

form of impact involves social implications that affect communities in a manner that requires development of programs to help children cope with stressors involving the separation from parent(s).

Services coordinated with mentoring programs should be tailored to support children affected by parental incarceration. Learning about the challenges faced by the children and interaction with mentors as a method of intervention to minimize an at-risk perception was worthy of being studied to provide appropriate support. Approval of funding by policy makers can support expansion of programs that assist with recruitment, screening, and training of mentors (DuBois et al., 2011). Additional training could help mentors to understand various risks incurred by CIP, and how mentors might deal with difficult situations (Shlafer et al., 2009).

Having positive role models such as educational leaders, counselors, supportive family members, caregivers, and mentoring program representatives interested in the well-being of children can assist with overpowering the negative encounters experienced by the separation of children from their parents due to incarceration. According to the National Research Council and Institute of Medicine report, multicomponent and multilevel (i.e., child, family, and communities) approaches are important to promote positive development among children (Kjellstrand, 2017).

The intent of this study was to gain knowledge from volunteer mentor perspectives on how likely youth are to become involved with delinquent behavior and the effectiveness of mentoring programs to help youth avoid delinquent behavior. Social learning theory is explained by Bandura (1971) as behavior that is learned by direct

experience or from observing others. Mentors hold an important position as influential role models that can deter children with an incarcerated parent from participating in delinquent behavior. The children can be encouraged by positive behavior and successful actions of the mentor, which is not only admired but imitated by the youth. According to Bandura's social learning theory, behavior is learned from the environment by observing (McLeod, 2016). Mentors are able to evaluate progress of their mentee as they spend time with them and observe their behavior. According to Irby and Boswell (2016), the term "mentor" first appeared with Greeks in Homer's Odyssey between the eighth and ninth centuries. The article further indicated that the word "mentoring" appears to have been used in America in the latter part of the 18th Century. Mentoring became fully actualized in 1910 with the founding of the Big Brothers organization. In 1918, with the founding of Junior Achievement, mentoring of youth moved into the schools. Therefore, when mentoring appeared in America, it was originally targeted toward youth. Discovering this background of information provoked an interest for me to address concerns related to youth attending school and gaining knowledge needed to live productive lives despite at-risk labels when a parent has been incarcerated.

Being aware of and avoiding bias, lessons learned, and experience gained from my employment history and volunteer work in a formal mentoring program enhanced my ability to handle interview sessions for this qualitative study by maintaining confidentiality and sensitivity of information shared by mentors. My previous employment history involved almost 20 years of experience gained while working in a hospital and urgent care facilities. This included being employed at an alcohol and

substance abuse center. Confidentiality of patient, client, and their family information was valuable training and skills learned while working and interacting with people. While currently working with an educational organization for the past 19 years, my skills of maintaining confidentially of information has advanced along with documentation methods utilizing technology. In addition, I am mindful of handling and protecting all interview data of this study, which was obtained utilizing modern technology via phone calls, computer communications (emails), recording devices, and meetings through the Zoom videoconferencing platform. Prior to becoming a volunteer mentor, I was aware of the need to protect sensitive details surrounding youth involved in mentoring programs. My background of work-related experience enhances my ability to be considerate of volunteer mentors and information that they shared during the interview sessions. At the conclusion of each interview session, participants were welcomed to share a personal experience and success story that led them to volunteer time mentoring at-risk children after they became adults. These types of testimonies would be supportive of the benefits of having role models to mentor CIP. This also depicts a degree to which CIP can be influenced in a manner to which they may grow up and give back to the community by rendering service to others.

The foreword written by Wilson in *Saving Children from a Life of Crime* (Farrington & Welsh, 2007) indicated that when youth are raised in homes among abusive families, there is an increased risk of them becoming offenders. The responsibility then falls on other individuals to assist with raising children when parents are absent for various reasons, particularly due to incarceration. This not only affects

children but the lives of individuals that become involved with the children. Mentors take on the challenge of being involved by becoming active role models for the youth.

Problem Statement

An investigation was conducted by several researchers that targeted CIP and their families based on participation in a mentoring program (Shlafer et al., 2009). Numerous articles were located concerning situations faced by CIP and their families. However, there is a gap in the literature related to the perceived benefits of mentoring programs for this specific group of children, especially concerning the mentors' perspective on progress made by the youth.

It was important to explore issues from the perspective of mentors concerning expanding problems of CIP who utilize supportive measures, such as mentoring programs, versus those who do not participate with supportive resources. Doing so was worthwhile to further research scenarios related to CIP and consider the various outcomes that could affect communities in a positive or negative manner. For example, children can engage in delinquent actions of breaking and entering homes, which would affect the communities in a negative manner. A positive effect, as a result of mentors demonstrating mature actions that youth can imitate, may deter delinquent behavior among youth despite living in environments that expose them to criminal conduct and possibly witnessing the devastating arrest of a parent. Children are known to mimic behavior, beliefs, and attitudes of their parents (Krisbergh, 2019). When a parent is absent from the child(ren) due to incarceration, perhaps that is an opportune time to consider that other adults can serve as a role model. According to Stump et al. (2018), nonparental adults can

provide vital support to caregivers and children of prisoners (see also Shlafer et al., 2009).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore and document the degree to which adult mentors believe that adolescents (ages 13–18) with incarcerated parents are more likely to engage in delinquent behavior. The purpose was to gain their perspective to incorporate that into best practices, outcomes assessment, and public policy related to mentoring programs. The study explored to what degree adult mentors working with adolescents whose parents are incarcerated believe that mentoring programs are effective in keeping them from engaging in delinquent behavior. Responses from eight participants who consented to be interviewed were coded and analyzed for related themes and patterns. The results from the data, which was recorded based on the perspective of the mentors interviewed, may be used by leaders and policymakers to make positive changes in the youth-mentor system.

Research Questions

RQ1: To what degree do adult mentors believe that adolescents (ages 13–18) with incarcerated parents are more likely to engage in delinquent behavior?

RQ2: To what degree do adult mentors working with adolescents whose parents are incarcerated believe that mentoring programs are effective in keeping them from engaging in delinquent behavior?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this research study was grounded in the context of a social learning theory and the influence this theory has in connection with the relationship of mentors working with children whose parents are incarcerated. Children tend to move to different homes or living situations after a parent becomes incarcerated. This form of displacement sometimes includes encountering other relatives or caregivers that the child(ren) may not have previously known. Mentors are matched with these youth to assist as a means of support as the children cope during such an emotional ordeal. Attempts to influence human behavior through verbal persuasion are widely used to persuade one into believing they can cope with what has overwhelmed them (Bandura, 1977). Having a mentor to spend time and talk with youth while setting an example of how to behave appropriately is a model of social learning theory. As the children observe the mentor, the strategy is to learn positive behavior despite their situation. Due to their behavior and age, young people are at great risk of danger based on exposure to a variety of sources. Mentors modeling responsible behavior can help youth to be safer and create a better environment (Olwell, 2016).

Social learning theory focuses on behaviors learned in social situations (Schunk, 1996). According to Bandura (1971), many theories have been advanced over the years that have explained why people behave the way that they do. Bandura, a Canadian psychologist, was credited for research in which he concluded that children learn aggression, violence, and other social behaviors from observing and watching the actions or behaviors of others. As a result of this research, I hoped to have gained and expressed

knowledge to benefit the community and credit positive social learning experiences for at-risk children (particularly youth that have an incarcerated parent). Matching these youth with adult role models (mentors), should help youth to become productive citizens free from delinquent behavior as they grow up. Since the essence of this research focused on the behavior of adolescents, the notion of why people behave the way they do has been critical for understanding the effectiveness of mentoring and the impact that mentors perceive as beneficial to help youth avoid engaging in delinquent behavior. The U.S. Senate passed a resolution recognizing January as National Mentoring Month (S.Res.28-116th Congress 2019-2020). Among numerous benefits of mentoring mentioned in the resolution, included is that it reduces juvenile delinquency.

Positive social change can be monitored by the important roles of volunteer mentors as they share their perception of progress observed and project an anticipated outcome based on time spent with the youth. Children who have experienced the trauma of being separated from a parent due to incarceration are at risk of portraying bad behavior. The children can be at an advantage of learning good behavior from a mentor that has been matched with the youth. Considering mentoring options among policies and strategic planning that impact communities and the well-being of families includes how children are affected by the recruitment and support of volunteer mentors. Actions demonstrated by youth result from numerous factors that affect their behavior. This includes behavioral variations influenced by experiences, interaction with others, (including mentors), environmental factors, personal factors, and various settings (Bandura, 1977). Monitoring the impact of mentors is important to justify funding

support from foundations, individuals, and the government to develop and expand mentoring programs. Initiatives aimed toward servicing disadvantaged youth are generally birthed out of government policy, potential employer expectations, or society at large (Evans, 2005).

Nature of the Study

The basic qualitative research approach was selected as the best option to address the study research questions. The key concept and phenomenon investigated related to the interaction and perception of the mentors regarding the degree of which CIP will possibly engage in delinquent behavior. I conducted interviews to gather data to answer the research questions of this study. According to Patton (2002), we cannot observe another person's feelings, thoughts, or behaviors from a previous period; rather, we must ask people questions, through interviews, about specific things to allow us to enter their perspective. To learn more about at-risk youth, particularly CIP, and strategies implemented through mentoring to help youth cope with challenges, mentors were interviewed to gain in-depth insight of the study. The mentors' perspective shared during the interviews was valuable information that allowed entry into the mindset of at-risk youths based on quality time spent with the mentor and observation of their mentee's behavior. I analyzed the collected qualitative data using a coding strategy to recognize themes by comparing the outcomes of significant statements related to mentors' perception of mentees' behavior.

Computer software Otter.ai was used to transcribe interviews. I used Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA) Miner Lite along with a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet to organize

and color code responses and locate themes from statements frequently made by respondents. The frequent comments made by respondents were grouped and compared for patterns and themes. This information allowed me to make informed decisions when interpreting and analyzing the data. An advantage of using a computer program is to store data and easily access material and codes (Creswell, 2007).

Definition of Terms

At-risk youth: Disadvantaged, disconnected, unengaged youth showing emotional or behavioral signs with lack of support to successfully navigate developmental tasks (Van Bockern, 2012).

Displaced: Required to leave interpersonal connections or familiar surroundings (Eades, 2019).

Incarcerated: Not able to access previous home life, separation from the broader community (Eades, 2019).

Mentor: One who offers social support (Laakso & Nygaard, 2012).

Mentoring program: Intervention used to intercede with at risk youth (Laakso & Nygaard, 2012).

Ordeal: A painful or horrific, terrible life experience (de Rementeria, 2017).

Assumptions

Mentoring programs appear to have political popularity due to low cost of volunteer-run programs (Shlafer et al., 2009). It can be assumed that without guidance of a positive role model, CIP will uphold the label of being at-risk. Big Brothers Big Sisters have made effort to define mentoring relationships (Morris, 2017). It is believed that

when children are matched with mentors that can offer positive influence, the youth can avoid contact with the juvenile justice systems and achieve goals, have greater confidence and higher aspirations (Morris, 2017). To determine a truthful outcome of the study related to mentoring, it was assumed that participants interviewed responded truthfully and provided accurate data that was analyzed.

Scope and Delimitations

The study focused on mentors' perception of CIP who are in the adolescence stage of their lives. The CIP groups targeted for developmental resources, such as mentoring programs, are between the ages of 13 and 18 years. Adolescence is among the crucial stages of development (Toufexis, 1992). This is a stage when children can be lost to crime, teen pregnancy, drug abuse, poor self-esteem and other challenges placing them at risk (Toufexis, 1992). Due to the children approaching and being closer to adulthood during this vulnerable stage of adolescence, reaching out and capturing the attention of these youth to deter them from delinquent behavior is a time for action of mentors to match with youth.

It was important to study the perspective of mentors to gain an understanding of mentoring programs and the impact that mentoring has on at-risk youth and the effectiveness of the programs. According to Dowd et al. (2015), mentors have the responsibility of acting as role models for mentees and demonstrating healthy behaviors. As mentors share their perception and first-hand experience of working with youth, the mentors' responses can improve and impact the effectiveness and sustainability, and long-term commitment of the mentoring program (Dowd et al., 2015).

Limitations

A basic qualitative research approach was chosen for this study. An important eligibility requirement for this research study is that participants are adults aged 18 or older. Another requirement was that participants have at least five years of experience as a volunteer mentor working with at-risk youth, particularly CIP who are within an age range above 12; but not over 18 years old. The strengths of this study may be impacted by the background of experience among respondents that participated in this study. The weakness may be from not using a larger sample size or asking additional interview questions that could provide broader directions or other conditions to replicate findings of this study. Geographical locations of volunteer mentors and adolescents they mentor were not discussed. This limits the boundaries concerning the recommendations for policymakers on state or federal levels.

Significance

The uniqueness of this research is that it focused on the perspective of volunteer mentors and their active engagement with at-risk youth, particularly CIP. The 2016 newsletter by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, which was established in 1948 to help disadvantaged children, indicated that parental incarceration takes a devastating toll on kids, families, and communities. This research, which is based on the perspective of volunteer mentors and the opportunities they provide to at-risk youth, may also inspire other adults to volunteer their time and become involved with mentoring children during stages of adolescence. At-risk children who have had to cope with stressors of having an incarcerated parent has been addressed by the work of Snowbeck (2013), a University of

Minnesota researcher who contributed toward creating new material for Sesame Street, a well-known children's program. The material included adding a new character named Alex to teach children how to cope with having an incarcerated parent. Snowbeck noted that "between 1991 and 2007, the number of children with incarcerated parents increased by 80 percent in the United States." Labels are placed on many children as being "at-risk individuals" according to authors Mary and Buell (2007). Learning from the perspective of volunteer mentors may minimize negative connotations toward the future of these children by understanding the impact of positive influences that help youth thrive toward success. Individuals with various professional backgrounds participated in the research interviews, such as law enforcement officials, educators, representatives of mentoring programs, as well as extended family members of CIP who highlighted their roles as volunteer mentors and discussed experiences encountered and improvements to consider for mentoring strategies. Hopefully, the findings of this study will assist with developing or adopting strategic solutions toward positive outcomes of mentoring to benefit at-risk youth, particularly CIP.

The level and accuracy of imitations performed by children based on what they see and hear is partly influenced by how models (mentors) respond to their behavior (Bandura, 1977, p. 32). This relates to an observational theory that is most important to gain further insight of mentors' perspective of how the children respond. The interaction of the mentors with the youth is necessary to solidify and confirm the match. However, there is a gap in documentation that can be quoted directly from mentors based on the relationships. The aim of this study was to learn first-hand from mentors what they

believe will be the outcome of an at-risk child's behavior when given the opportunity to participate and benefit from being involved with mentoring resources.

Summary

As the number of adult incarcerations continue to grow, the number of children affected by the traumatic experience also increases. The incarceration rates rose dramatically in the United States during the 20th century (Cassidy et al., 2010). This study focused on gaining the perspective of mentors concerning the following research questions: (a) To what degree do adult mentors believe that adolescents (ages 13–18) with incarcerated parents are more likely to engage in delinquent behavior? and (b) To what degree do adult mentors working with adolescents whose parents are incarcerated, believe that mentoring programs are effective in keeping them from engaging in delinquent behavior?

Mentoring can be utilized as a strategy to help CIP overcome barriers that could become destructive if not addressed in a manner to benefit the children and ultimately whole communities. As expressed by Mutunga (2019), children are an important part of the community, and exposing them to suffering puts their future in jeopardy. Chapter 2 presents literature retrieved that involves challenges faced by CIP and the role that mentors play in supporting them. This includes how the children live and resources required to help them move forward in a productive manner despite having an incarcerated parent. The strategy of these youth moving forward, based on mentors' perspective, involves relationships among educational leaders, parents, and family members recognizing that these youth are from a range of situations and need to be met

where they are during the transformative process (Hall, 2006). Chapter 2 also include literature review search strategies and the theoretical and conceptual framework of the study, as well as the role of the mentors and a background of information related to challenges experienced by CIP.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

There are questions and complex issues to address related to CIP. These children encounter numerous challenges that can affect them throughout their entire lives. The perspective of mentors helps to understand the direction that the children are headed related to actions and behavior being demonstrated by the youth.

As noted in Chapter 1, according to DeAngelis (2001), these children may face a harsher sentence than their parents. Mutunga (2019) suggested that little attention is given to the impact that imprisonment of a parent has on their children. Mutunga also implied that CIP have become forgotten victims of a system of punishment. Another point of view indicated that stability is often lacking for CIP (Davies et al., 2008). Parents face obstacles related to being incarcerated while their children experience the incarceration of the parent differently (Sherry, 2010). The children may experience many emotions, including anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, anger, and embarrassment caused by stigma that society has associated with incarceration (Sherry, 2010). Sherry also implied that CIP are faced with an increased risk of being involved with substance abuse and the criminal justice system in their future. Separation from parents causes children to experience unfortunate emotions that require programs to be implemented to help them cope. According to Sherry, states should pay for such programs that help mitigate the negative effects of children witnessing their parents' incarceration. Sherry suggested that programs should be implemented through the child welfare systems to help CIP deal with the effects of being separated from their parents. Specific programs

and strategies remain to be studied as they are not mentioned in the article. According to Stump et al. (2018), mentoring relationships can be an intervention with a promising outcome for CIP. Lakind et al. (2014) reported that advocates claim mentoring to be a key determinant to offset negative outcomes in the life course of at-risk youth. Interaction between the two (mentor and mentee) can facilitate or obstruct durability of the relationship (Lakind et al., 2014).

Separation issues may cause the children to act out in a negative manner. Sherry (2010) noted that children tend to act out in school and decline in academic performance because of coping with their parents' incarceration. Review of other literature report on abandonment concerns that were detected by mentors. For example, children experience trauma when adults who they have trusted disappear without notice. As the children cope with such traumatic experiences, the perspective of the mentors is sought to analyze to what degree they, the adult mentors, believe that adolescents (ages 13–18) with incarcerated parents are more likely to engage in delinquent behavior. CIP are faced with a host of difficulties that put them at risk for poor development, which may go undetected in the early stage of a parent's incarceration (Stump et al., 2018). According to Bowlby (see Bretherton, 1992), some family experiences are the basic cause of the emotional disturbance that have affected children. A variety of support is therefore needed for CIP (Davies et al., 2008).

Due to traumatic experiences, mentors might intervene by exposing the children to structured and caring environments as well as meaningful and positive relationships. The perception and views of mentors has been the most valuable contribution toward this

study concerning anticipated adjustments and outcomes for youth involved with mentoring programs. Bandura (1977) explained that diversity fosters behavioral innovation and influences new styles and new forms of evolutionary changes. Mentors may face challenges catching on to technology that youth tend to have a natural tendency to grasp. Being involved with a mentoring program can challenge the mentor to build skill sets that can impact their career and that of the mentee (Olwell, 2016). When mentors serve as role models and spend time with children outside of regular routines, whether remotely or in person, the opportunity for learning is expanded. Actions of spending time together is also expected to serve as social prompts to capture the attention of youth and broaden their mindset toward behaving in a socially acceptable manner. Bandura (1977) explained that modeling plays a key role in developing new ideas and social practices within a society and from one society to another. Therefore, mentors have an important role by helping deter at-risk children from behaviors unfortunately witnessed in negative environments and inspire youth to consider alternative choices to conduct themselves in a productive manner effecting positive social change. As explained by Rhodes (2002), by observing and comparing their performance to that of mentors, adolescents can make changes and adapt to new behaviors. Walker (2021) noted that "none of us makes it through this life alone. We need each other to learn and grow" (p. 32).

Rhodes (2002) concurred that mentors can influence their mentees and enhance social skills along with emotional social well-being and improve cognitive skills through dialog and listening to the youth. Serving as a role model and advocate, the mentor

attempts to engage youth in critical thinking during conversations. Role modeling is an important facet of mentoring programs and can have a strong influence on the behavior of others (Dowd, et al., 2015). As youth move into the adolescence stage, it is not uncommon to expect that they begin to think about the adult they may become and how they fit into the adult world of work and responsibilities (Rhodes, 2002). Mentors provide guidance and seek out resources to help youth reach aspiring goals. Olwell (2016) quoted a comment published in the 1978 Harvard Business Review stating, "Everyone who makes it has a mentor" (p. 16). For example, if a youth expresses an interest in becoming a painter, perhaps visits to art galleries or meeting a professional artist would be a worthwhile outing for the mentor to plan with the youth. The same scenario would be valuable by helping youth become exposed to various career aspirations as the mentor introduces youth to individuals in their field of interest. Awarding youth with an opportunity to observe and communicate with professionals that are skilled and knowledgeable in a field of their interest may later lead the youth to a privilege of working with an apprenticeship model (Ucar, 2017). The goal of the mentor is to utilize strategies to help youth avoid engaging in delinquent behavior. Mentors also attempt to help young people strive toward a positive path such as college or careers. Whether gearing away from a negative direction such as juvenile crime or steering toward the positive path of career or college, both approaches are valid (Olwell, 2016). The mentor may be able to advocate for enrollment and expose youth to organizations such as Project Upward Bound, which is a pre-college prep program, or Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs just to name a couple. In an undebatable

comparison, Olwell (2016) referenced positive mentoring outcomes by Rhodes (2002) that involve social skills, emotional well-being, and cognitive skills through dialogue and listening from role models also serving as advocates.

Mentoring programs have expanded to over 5,000 and are commonly viewed as an intervention strategy to address the needs of young people (DuBois et al., 2011). The effectiveness may vary among program practices and individuals that participate. This study has been to learn to what degree adult mentors working with adolescents whose parents are incarcerated, believe that mentoring programs are effective in keeping them from engaging in delinquent behavior. Among the numerous scholarly articles found related to mentoring, and CIP, a gap exists in literature related to the perspective of mentors concerning these specific research questions:

RQ1: To what degree do adult mentors believe that adolescents (ages 13–18) with incarcerated parents are more likely to engage in delinquent behavior?

RQ2: To what degree do adult mentors working with adolescents whose parents are incarcerated, believe that mentoring programs are effective in keeping them from engaging in delinquent behavior?

Through this qualitative study, an attempt was made to gain additional insight of the challenges faced by CIP, and possible solutions impacted by mentoring to assure that these children can cope and lead positive and productive lives. The mentoring strategies from the perspective of mentors is expected to benefit the outcome of at-risk children in a positive manner as these youth approach adulthoods.

Literature Search Strategy

The Walden University Library was utilized to thoroughly search databases and search engines from Public Policy and Administration, including ProQuest Criminal Justice, Sage full-text journals, Government websites, also Oakland Community Library reference area, Oakland University Library databases of peer-review journals, and Google Scholar. Key terms used for searches included *children of incarcerated parents*, *at-risk children*, *vulnerable youth*, *incarceration*, *prison parents*, *mentors*, *mentoring programs*, *mentor perspective*, *attachment theory*, and *social learning theory*.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Social learning theory relates to human behavior that is impacted by cognitive, behavioral, and environmental determinants. Individuals and their environment are reciprocal determinants of each other (Bandura, 1977). The impact that mentors have on at-risk youth is expected to have positive outcomes. However, the perspective of mentors working with CIP who have observed the environment experienced by CIP has been enlightening related to adolescents with incarcerated parents being likely to engage in delinquent behavior. Bandura (1977) studied adolescent aggression and suggested that behaviors are learned. In 1985 Bandura renamed his social learning theory to social cognitive theory. It was determined that social cognitive theory better explains how individuals learn from social experiences. New behaviors can be acquired through experience or from observing others, which is often referred to as observational learning or modeling (Barclay, 1982). Behaviorism is essentially explained as one's environment causing one's behavior. Bandura (1977) explained that behavior is learned and then

modified by direct experience. If a child witnesses violence and sees the parent placed under arrest, this does not mean the child will reproduce such behavior (McLeod, 2016). Bandura theorized that people learn from one another through observation, imitation, and modeling. Children observe many people around them and the ways in which people behave (McLeod, 2016). Individuals observed are called models (mentors). Children are surrounded by numerous influential models. There are cases where there are no mentors or role models in a child's life to imitate a given behavior. Therefore, an explanation of behavior is not fully explained by social learning theory. However, Bandura (1971) explained that a good example is a better teacher than "consequences of unguided actions" (p.5).

Bowlby expressed a distinction between old social learning theory concept and a new concept of attachment (as cited in Bretherton, 1992). He explained that separation anxiety as a result of threats or abandonment of a child from their parents can later cause the child to develop self-reliance and give an impression of maturity. Olwell (2016) presented a thought-provoking concern that can ultimately have devasting consequences. The author wrote, "In real life, we need to decide if mentoring is better than leaving young people entirely to their own devices" (p. 19). Olwell continued by explaining that research tells us to move forward making effort on behalf of the young people. When a child's parent is incarcerated, it is important to have a healthy attachment to an understanding adult who can respond effectively to the child's needs (Smyke et al., 2017). Matching youth with the best possible mentor is important to increase the chance of a long-lasting relationship. Mentors contribute toward the match by being able to

relate, understand, and have a form of connection upon meeting their mentee. Bowlby suggested that there is an inability to form a deep relationship with others when a succession of substitutes is too frequent in a child's life (as cited in Bretherton, 1992)

According to Rhodes (2002), the key difference between youth being unsuccessful and successful when living in low-income urban communities can be credited to mentoring. Supportive adults, whether teachers, neighbors, extended family members, or volunteers can all contribute toward a positive outcome for youth that are exposed to a high-risk setting.

Background on Children of Incarcerated Parents

When a parent becomes incarcerated, their children may pay the price in some unfortunate manner. If the child is too young to realize the reason for the separation, the emotional stress caused by separation can still be experienced. The dynamics cannot be explained, but children with parents who have been extensively involved with the criminal justice system are 3 to 6 times more likely to become delinquent than other children (Dannerbeck, 2005). Children will identify and relate to several models. This form of identification involves internalizing or adopting another person's behavior. Children do not automatically observe a behavior and imitate it. There is thought prior to imitation. This is called mediational process (McLeod, 2016). Bandura (1977) proposed four mediational processes:

1. Attention – Behavior must grab the attention before it will be imitated
2. Retention – Memory of the behavior is needed in order to imitate later
3. Reproduction – Physical ability may limit performing the behavior

4. Motivation – The will to imitate behavior based on the perceived rewards

CIP are subject to numerous negative outcomes such as behavioral problems, poverty, mental health, and trauma as a result of being placed in several foster homes, and often are at risk of their own incarceration (Griffin, 2017). When mentors are matched with a youth, an important factor in the relationship is being able to capture the youth's attention. Without this connection, it would be difficult for the youth to relate to the mentor and enter a comfort zone that allows conversations between them. Mentors influence youth through dialog, which helps with enhancing social skills and emotional well-being (Rhodes, 2002). Additionally, when the youth is attentive in the relationship, positive behaviors can be retained. Admirable behaviors demonstrated by the mentor that are observed and retained by the youth may be demonstrated later when the youth is faced with making personal decisions. At times, there may be physical limitations that alters a decision to imitate actions observed. According to Bandura (1977), modeled patterns are reproduced not only by observation, but by other impediments, which includes motivational processes. The rewards of imitating specific behaviors will influence or motivate a decision. Physical limitations can cause an individual to reconsider imitating an act based on known and recognized personal limitations. Serving as a role model, the mentor needs to be aware of conditions that may interfere with specific outings planned. For example, if the youth have knee trouble, then skating may not be the appropriate plan unless going to enjoy observing a competition. Therefore, being attentive to mental and physical needs on the part of the mentor and the youth are important.

Motivation based on perceived rewards will influence the actions of the youth. A higher level of observational learning would be achieved when the observer is informed in advance about the payoff value of imitating the modeled behavior (Bandura, 1971). Unfortunately, some youth may participate by imitating specific behaviors after considering the advantages, if there are any.

Role of Mentors

Mentors can be matched through a planned (formal) community-based program. Mentors can also be natural (informal) connected by family relationships or neighborhood friends (Dirkes, 2012). The role of the mentor is to capture the attention of the youth by spending time with them and encouraging them to engage in positive activities. Formal (community-based) mentors will be able to help youth gain learning experiences as they are exposed to activities organized by the mentor and mentoring organizations. The activities could involve interacting in a crowd by attending a movie theatre or participating in events that allow the youth to practice social skills. There are also community service opportunities that mentors can involve the youth in for the purpose of teaching them the importance of volunteering to help others such as sorting food at a foodbank, serving meals at a community soup kitchen, or visiting senior citizen group homes to help elderly residents with chores. Life learning experiences are also gained through time spent during outings planned with mentors in natural matches (e.g., family, friends).

Mentors also have an important role of offering suggestions and encouragement to youth to help them accomplish goals of success involving school, career aspirations

and other interest. Mentors are responsible for planning outings and providing transportation. Mentors are responsible for presenting auto insurance information upon request to formal mentoring programs to meet program guidelines. In relations to formal mentoring programs, mentors are requested to submit monthly reports to program coordinators regarding the progress of the match (mentor/mentee relationship). Unfortunately, there are negative considerations of mentoring that involves a drain of time. Mentors may have time constraints that interfere with the success of the match. According to Zaydon (2019), it could be difficult to entice professionals to share their limited free time toward benefits of mentoring. The value of the relationship that impact the mentor to discover the path that connects them to the mentee is a component that ultimately keeps the relationship strong. According to Olwell (2016), without a sense of spiritual calling to mentoring, many mentors will experience burn out and become discouraged.

Mentor Perspectives on Children of Incarcerated Parents

According to Hall (2006), a mentor's perspective related to opportunities for youth to succeed is increased by gaining an education. When mentors are involved through school-based mentoring programs, they believe it is important for teachers to take a step back and listen to youth especially those determined to be at-risk. Mentors can assist with navigating issues expressed by the youth and allowing them to have a voice in resolving matters verses mentor and teacher trying to "fix" each concern. Mentors also need to have knowledge of what teachers experience and know about the youth as they work together jointly for the same cause to benefit the youth.

As mentors disclose themselves to their mentees, this can serve as life lessons. Hall (2006) explained that according to one mentor, sharing everyday triumphs and defeats allows mentees to relate and see themselves and respond on a humanistic level. While mentors serve as role models, there are opportunities to share with youth concerning how to handle hostile situations without jeopardizing their own well-being. As mentors share some of their own decision-making challenges experienced in life, a connection is formed allowing youth to experience safe space. In this space, youth are comfortable discussing conflicts and better ways of handling situations by having empathy, concern, mutual respect, love, understanding, attentive ears, and open minds. Without this transition, the delinquent behavior becomes difficult to channel in a positive direction. There has been a heavy stigma and guilt associated with children experiencing parental incarceration. Some mentors advocate by not treating the children any different than their peers to avoid perpetuating the stigma and causing the child to feel abnormal (Davies et al., 2008).

Some youths were taught that if someone pushes them, push back (Hall, 2006). Yet, it is important for mentors to help the youth and adolescents consider practical and realistic solutions for making choices in life. In some cases, the mentors' perspective is that youth select alternatives that may not be favorable to the environment that they are accustom, especially if the teaching was geared toward the mentality of pushing back. Actions vital to success influenced by mentors suggest that youth practice the following alternatives to handle conflict: either (a) accept it, (b) alter it, or (c) avoid it (Hall, 2006).

In addition, mentors can encourage their mentees to resist negative influence and avoid peers that engage in destructive behavior (Rhodes, 2002).

Mentor Perspectives on Mentor Impacts of CIP Youth

Mentors spend time offering guidance to youth to help them make better decision in life and equip them with tools needed to avoid incarceration. To help youth relate, sometimes mentors will share their own personal life experiences. Mentors can demonstrate qualities related to career success that the mentee may desire to emulate (Rhodes, 2002). Mentor perspectives on the impact of mentoring CIP is rewarding for both the mentor and the youth (mentee). Otherwise, a one-sided relationship exist which drains the mentor, and leaves the mentee feeling burdened (Rhodes, 2002). Mentors act as a guide to challenge youth to set higher goals for themselves, build self-confidence, and encourage the youth to strengthen and develop their interest in a unique manner. For example, a youth who was constantly in trouble at school and suspended due to fighting was matched with a school mentoring program. Having knowledge of the fighting history, the mentor obtained consent and sponsors to assist with enrolling the youth in a wrestling program. The training in wrestling became an interest that helped the youth channel negative and delinquent behavior into positive energy impacted by caring actions of the mentor (Rhodes, 2002). Mentors influence mentees by helping them to adapt their behavior to those observed of caring role models. This relates to the framework of social learning theory (Bandura, 1977). There is a reason for mentoring programs to exist. When a positive role model is missing in a child's life, the child's behavior will demonstrate risk of making poor decisions (Dirkes, 2012). According to Rhodes (2002),

the perspectives of attachment theory is another concept that impacts a child to sense their self-worth. It is unfortunate when a match involving the mentor and youth disintegrate with no explanation. The match is on a voluntary basis and could be awkward to terminate the match. However, ending unproductive relationships is key to maintaining high-quality programs (Olwell, 2016). Additional support is realizing that the mentor and the youth (mentee) have different roles. The success of the match is contingent on the behaviors of both the mentor and the mentee (Allen, 2007).

Summary and Conclusions

Chapter 2 provided information on what is currently known on this topic, including how relationships formed between mentors and mentees (at-risk youth) impact mentoring program goals. As mentors spend time with the youth and a comfortable relationship is formed, the development of safe space is developed. This is a comfort zone in which the youth has begun to feel comfortable to freely communicate with the mentor. The literature revealed, along with a comfortable relationship that has been formed, mentors have an opportunity to suggest alternatives for youth to make intelligent decisions when confronted with social conflicts and ultimately avoid delinquent behavior.

Chapter 3 introduced the research design and rationale along with the method of documenting the perceived perspectives of mentors concerning at-risk youth and the impact of mentoring programs.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to identify and document the perspective of mentors related to the degree to which they believe adolescents (ages 13–18) with incarcerated parents are more likely to engage in delinquent behavior as well as how they believe mentoring programs are effective in keeping them from engaging in delinquent behavior. These results are provided to make improvement in mentoring programs and policies focusing on special needs for CIP. Mentoring is a popular intervention that is used to intercede with at-risk youth (Laakso & Nygaard, 2012). This study has provided additional information from the perspective of volunteer mentors to impact the intervention of mentoring at-risk youth, particularly adolescents whose parents are incarcerated. Research design and rationale were presented in this chapter. This chapter also explained the role of the researcher and recruitment of participants attracted for the data collection process. The methodology and how data were analyzed are also described in this chapter along with details related to trustworthiness, credibility, transferability, confirmability and ethical procedures.

Research Design and Rationale

The study was focused on answering the following two research questions:

RQ1: To what degree do adult mentors believe that adolescents (ages 13–18) with incarcerated parents are more likely to engage in delinquent behavior?

RQ2: To what degree do adult mentors working with adolescents whose parents are incarcerated, believe that mentoring programs are effective in keeping them from engaging in delinquent behavior?

The concept of social learning theory relates to human behavior that is impacted by cognitive, behavioral, and environmental determinants. Bandura (1977) theorized that people learn from one another through observation, imitation, and modeling. This traditional style recognized as social learning theory was chosen as a framework for this study connecting the work of volunteer mentors providing positive influence on at-risk youth to deter them from delinquent behavior.

This basic qualitative study was interview-driven with participants (mentors) that have been engaged with children affected by the phenomenon involving incarcerated parents. According to Laakso and Nygaard (2012), mentoring cannot address all the issues faced by CIP, but it can mitigate some of the risk that are associated with being a child of an incarcerated parent. The study included eight participants targeted from a purposeful sampling strategy to take part in individual interviews. Maximal variation sampling (Creswell & Clark, 2011) is a common strategy used to solicit participants that are expected to hold different perspectives concerning a central phenomenon. The rationale for choosing the basic qualitative study design and interview-driven strategy was determined as the best research approach to gain a deeper understanding of mentor-mentee relationships from the perspective of volunteer mentors.

Role of Researcher

My role as the researcher was to conduct the interview sessions. As the interviewer, I was the primary research tool that analyzed the data and provided a description of the findings. To avoid any bias of my interpretation, I securely kept a research journal and recording of each interview, allowing me to reflect on my data-gathering experience and to assure that responses were captured accurately and to minimize bias. My previous work experience in medical environments helped me to gain knowledge and training that included maintaining confidentiality of medical records. I am currently employed with an educational organization and responsible for maintaining confidentiality of student records while providing educational services. Being able to maintain confidentiality of identifiable data from participants of this study and properly secure all data is critical for the standard of professionalism that I continue to pursue. While utilizing these protective skills, I concentrated on being immersed in the rich data from each respondent without regard to my background or intertwining personal experiences of being a volunteer mentor except for skills and practices of maintaining confidentiality.

Methodology

To assure the validity of the research, participants were intentionally selected based on purposeful sampling for this qualitative research. This means that the participants experienced key concepts explored or the central phenomenon of the study (Creswell & Clark, 2011). To take part in this study, mentors met the following criteria:

- have at least five (5) years of experience in this role

- be adults ages 18 and over
- be an active mentor of a formal mentoring program

Upon Walden Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, I sought participants through distribution of approved email and flyer information to attract volunteer mentors for interview sessions to help me learn about their perceptions related to volunteer mentoring and to answer research questions for this study. Interview questions (see Appendix) were developed to retrieve rich descriptive responses based on the perspective of volunteer mentors who have experienced helping at-risk youth. The questions were also composed with Bandura's social learning theory in mind to learn about relationships between volunteer mentors, their mentees (at-risk youth), and involvement of mentoring organizations that organize the matches. Along with understanding how these youth respond to their mentors and imitate positive behaviors shown, the interview questions, specifically Question #8, included an opportunity for mentors to reflect on any personal experiences that allowed them to be impacted by having a mentor during their youth, to further support the theory by Bandura (1977) that people learn from one another through observation, imitation, and modeling. Table 1 shows how the interview questions were correlated to analyze responses to answer the two research questions. The interview questions and protocol (see Appendix) was followed in the same order with each participant.

Table 1

Research Questions and Related Interview Questions

Research questions	Interview questions

1. To what degree do adult mentors believe that adolescents (ages 13–18) with incarcerated parents are more likely to engage in delinquent behavior?	1, 5, 6, 7
2. To what degree do adult mentors working with adolescents whose parents are incarcerated, believe that mentoring programs are effective in keeping them from engaging in delinquent behavior?	2, 3, 4, 8

Participant Selection Logic

Recruitment

A strategy of posting a flyer to social media and networking by searching for email addresses available to the public of individuals to post my IRB approved flyer on their social media sites was carried out as planned, which was noted on the Ethics Self-Check application for IRB, which was approved. The approved IRB flyer was shared and posted by means of social media to solicit participants. Potential participants were under no pressure to respond or participate in the study. The information listed allowed me to be contacted by anyone interested in the study. My first acknowledgment of the flyer was received via phone call from an individual who indicated they work with children and parents in a professional capacity that involves communication through the court system. The caller explained that, due to their work, they had a great interest in helping with the study to ultimately help children down the road because of what is often seen in the court system. The person stated, “After seeing the flyer, I felt compelled to become involved with the study.” Unfortunately, the caller never responded to my emails and voice messages to follow-up and move forward with providing me the required consent to participate. Auto replies indicated the individual was on vacation. The email address was

part of a legitimate social service agency. Therefore, I was still encouraged that the study was worthy of being recognized by someone employed through an agency that is expected to help disadvantaged children. The next contact gave a brief background indicating they were employed through a law enforcement agency, whereas another individual was a former principal of a school district. Each were qualified to participate in the study related to mentoring at-risk youth based on volunteer work and their professional experience of working with children.

A critical part of my role in the study is to protect the identity of individuals that agreed to participate in the study. After being informed of their passion to help at-risk youth and being confident that they were adults as required in the guidelines, as well as experienced with mentoring, I expressed appreciation for their interest and explained that names and locations would not be identified during the study. I also explained that the flyer provided details; however, a consent form to participate in the study included additional information, including how to contact my school, Walden University, if they had questions. I received email addresses to send the IRB-approved email confirming the interview and consent form to each participant and explained that I would need to receive a response to the consent to finalize their agreement to participate in the interview with an estimated time limit of approximately 45 minutes to answer questions regarding data for the study.

Participation

The participation process was arranged through emails and follow-up phone calls regarding appointments for interview sessions. There were originally nine interviews

scheduled. Two appointments had to be rescheduled due to unforeseen obligations that arose for two participants. However, only one of these appointments was successfully rescheduled. The other individual experienced several conflicts with rescheduling. Therefore, eight participants provided data during scheduled interview sessions. I realized that saturation had been accomplished by the end of conducting eight interviews. Saturation is the determinant sample size of stopping data collection, according to Rudestam and Newton (2007), which is when results have become redundant. In such case, there was no need to pursue rescheduling the ninth individual who was willing to participate but had scheduling conflicts. My final communication with the ninth person involved thanking them for their interest especially in consideration of their busy schedule. The final sample size comprised eight participants who were interviewed separately. All eight participants were thanked prior to the start of the interview session and made aware that the interview could be terminated at any moment they felt uncomfortable or simply wanted to end the session. They were asked to say next question when done answering or if they preferred not to answer. Each participant was informed when the recording had started. At the conclusion of each interview, participants were informed when the recording was stopped. Respondents were thanked and I expressed my sincere appreciation for their valuable time.

Instrumentation

I conducted the interviews via phone or virtually (i.e., through the Zoom videoconferencing platform). A Sony IC recorder was used to record all eight interview sessions. The Interview Questions and Protocol sheet (see Appendix) was positioned

beside me to view and assure that the same format was followed during each interview. In addition to audio recording, I had several pens available and a clip board with paper to write as much data as possible during each interview session while numbering responses in sequence to questions asked according to the Interview Questions and Protocol sheet. This data collection step was taken as a backup in case there was a technical problem experienced with the recording device. In addition, the process allowed for review and comparison of audio recording with written documentation of responses. Each audio recorded interview was numbered automatically by the recording device when turned on. After documentation of each interview, the written data was placed in a binder with a cover sheet indicating P# (Participant) with part of the individual's name matched with a number as well as the date and time of the interview.

Data Collection

Eight participants were interviewed in effort to answer two research questions and achieve the goal of being able to distinguish and code themes and patterns detected from the maximal variation sampling strategy through various experiences from volunteers mentoring at-risk youth. With consent of participants, audio recordings were utilized for additional accuracy with transcribing. Participants were assured that confidentiality would be maintained. Data related to the research interviews are stored in a safe manner and can be accessed only by me. The data will be kept in the secure locked file and password protected computer program for 5 years after completion of the dissertation. The data will be properly shredded and deleted from password-protected computer files after the 5-year limit.

Data Analysis Plan

After completing all interviews, I used the Otter.ai program to transcribe each interview. The Otter.ai transcript format was also converted into a Microsoft Word document for each separate interview. The program and computer where data are saved is protected by a password known only by me. I listened to the audio recording of each interview four times to become engulfed in the rich data. I read my written documentation of each interview numerous times and highlighted information that was duplicated by respondents. This process guided me to the development of categories that were becoming frequent from the data. Based on this strategy, I copied details from the Microsoft Word document into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet for a color-coded visual to assist with further cross-checking accuracy with comparison of transcribed recordings and manual documentations highlighted of details from each interview. The spreadsheet was created with rows and numbers for each question and responses. Columns on the spreadsheet were numbered to represent each participant with coordinating color assigned in the rows for their responses.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Participants in this basic qualitative research were all experienced with volunteer mentoring of at-risk youth. Each participant was informed that their names would not be mentioned during the study. Aliases of “P” for participant with a number were assigned for each respondent regarding data included in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5. The respondents were also assured that no identifiable details would be included that would implicate their location or any youth whom they may have mentored.

Credibility

It was important to establish trustworthiness from participants by being transparent and genuine with my intent of the study to gain their confidence with how data received is securely handled. Participants were not pressured into participating in the study and were free to discontinue at any time. Participants were made aware of the purpose of the interview and the expected time length of the interview session, along with the contact information to reach Walden University if questions or concerns. This information was also documented in the IRB-approved consent form. My intent as the researcher was to record and document thick descriptive data of each participant's volunteer mentoring experiences as they responded to the exact same questions as listed on the Interview Questions and Protocol sheet (see Appendix). The level of transparency and honesty demonstrated in the responses received from participants impacted the credibility of the data that I interpreted. Participants were not discriminated against or influenced by me with their responses. Based on the stage of saturation, when responses were becoming redundant, I was confident that the data received and analyzed was credible.

Transferability

Transferability was dependent upon the accuracy of data shared in response to questions asked of participants. Participants were free to skip any questions that they did not care to answer for any reason they decide. However, participants responded to all questions. Some questions did not receive as in-depth responses as other questions. There were similarities in some interview questions to assure the intended responses were

documented and interpreted accurately when analyzed for variations. The questions were designed to obtain knowledge from the perspective of adult volunteer mentors of at-risk youth and their experiences to help answer research questions related to the likelihood of youth avoiding delinquent behavior as they approach adulthood. It was expected that as each respondent gave accurate accounts of their experiences, the data were analyzed strategically allowing the development of themes to support findings to answer the research questions.

Dependability

Participants were welcomed to share a personal experience from their childhood that impacted their lives and motivated them to become involved with volunteer mentoring as an adult. Each participant shared a different story that was similar in nature and concluded with memories of an adult that impacted their lives in a positive manner by taking interest and encouraging them to do better in life. Triangulation was accomplished by asking each participant the same interview questions. The data was sorted utilizing different methods (Excel, Otter.ai, and QDA Miner Lite) to analyze and code patterns detected from audio recorded and hand-written documentation, which was applied toward answering two research questions. Similar experiences were shared by each respondent as they reflected upon their own childhood, which contributed toward determining the results of this study based on their thick descriptive experiences. Exposure of being engaged in productive opportunities at an early age helped the volunteer mentors to live successful lives and become aware of an importance to give back by helping at-risk youth.

Confirmability

The findings were based on the responses received from participants without any influence or bias interjected from my own experience with volunteer mentoring. I did not engage in any conversation during the interviews, which allowed me to focus strictly on the thick descriptions provided by respondents. The Interview Questions and Protocol form was also followed to keep within the 45-minute time frame of interview session completion commitment to participants.

Ethical Procedures

After passing IRB standards and receiving Walden IRB approval number 10-21-20-0250180, with an expiration date of October 20, 2021, participants were emailed a copy of the approved consent form. Participants were selected based on their interest in response to the IRB approved flyer and indication of their professional and volunteer mentoring experiences as qualifiers and meeting the criteria of being over the age of 18. During an unprecedented time of a pandemic, no signed consent copies were retrieved. Participants responded to the emailed attachment giving consent to participate in the study. The consent form as well as the IRB approved flyer and email communications for scheduling and confirming interview sessions provided all the required details related to the purpose of the study, criteria for participating and permission to audio record phone or virtual meeting. Participants were informed prior to the start of the interview session when recordings were started. Raw data is securely stored in a password protected computer program and locked file, which will be deleted and shredded properly no less

than 5 years from the dissertation completion date according to the guideline requirement of Walden University.

Summary

This study utilizes a basic qualitative research design. The study consisted of eight participants that have a relationship with mentoring at-risk youth, particularly CIP. The purposeful sampling strategy was selected to assure that participants (mentors) have experienced mentoring at-risk children and were able to share their perspective by answering IRB approved interview questions that was analyzed to assist with answering the two research questions of this qualitative study, which ask to what degree do adult mentors believe that adolescents (ages 13–18) with incarcerated parents are more likely to engage in delinquent behavior. Secondly, to what degree do adult mentors working with adolescents whose parents are incarcerated, believe that mentoring programs are effective in keeping them from engaging in delinquent behavior. After the Walden IRB approved email and flyer was distributed and shared on social media sites, I responded to interested parties by phone call or email to schedule interviews and provided the Walden IRB approved email confirming interview appointments and the approved consent form. After receiving the consent to interview, phone or virtual Zoom sessions were held. Each interview session was recorded while utilizing the Walden IRB approved interview questions and protocol outline. Respondents provided a wealth of rich descriptive data that was transcribed from audio-taped sessions to transcript format and a Microsoft Word document using the Otter.ai program. To assist with organizing data and coding for themes, QDA Miner Lite Software, and a Microsoft Excel Spreadsheet were utilized to

assist with hand-coding for a better view to detect frequency of themes. Chapter 4 revisited the purpose of this study and summarized the data collection and analysis methods. Chapter 4 also summarized responses to each interview question based on the data received from respondents.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore and document the degree to which adult mentors believe that adolescents (ages 13–18) with incarcerated parents are more likely to engage in delinquent behavior. The purpose was to gain their perspective to incorporate that into best practices, outcomes assessment, and public policy related to mentoring programs. Gaining an understanding of the effectiveness of mentoring programs and how they impact at-risk youth, particularly CIP, from the perspective of volunteer mentors can assist with improving resources and developing strategies related to two research questions. The first research question was, to what degree do adult mentors believe that adolescents (ages 13–18) with incarcerated parents are more likely to engage in delinquent behavior? The second research question was, to what degree do adult mentors working with adolescents whose parents are incarcerated, believe that mentoring programs are effective in keeping them from engaging in delinquent behavior? Responses to these questions came from data collected from participants who have worked in professions, which steered them to provide years of service volunteering their time to make a difference for at-risk youth, particularly CIP.

This chapter summarized data collection and data analysis methods. Following this summary, each interview question was followed by a summary of responses from respondents.

Setting

There were no personal or organizational affiliations or conditions that influenced participants or their experiences at the time of this study, nor influenced the interpretation of the study results. I was safe in place at my home with no guest during each interview. My outside surrounding was not easily accessible to allow someone to overhear me conducting the interview sessions. After contacting P8 for the scheduled interview, I was informed that someone may stop by to pick up a donation at their home during the interview. This did occur as P8 requested a brief second to hand something out the door. This was handled extremely quick and caused no concern or risk of jeopardizing privacy of data. All participants were interviewed via phone or virtual (Zoom) technology from a location comfortable and safe for them due to a global pandemic (COVID-19).

Demographics

During an unprecedented time involving a pandemic, to assure safety, interviews were conducted via technology from phone or the videoconferencing platform Zoom. The location of each adult participant was not disclosed during the virtual interview sessions. This allowed participants to interview from a location convenient to them. This structure did not provide me with the opportunity to travel and conduct in-person interviews. However, it was obvious that during an unprecedented time, adapting to change did not prevent respondents from sharing valuable rich data. The adult volunteer mentors who participated in the study consisted of two men and six women. Prior to the start of recording, during the greeting, one participant indicated the state where they lived and commented on plans to move to another state within months for a work-related

opportunity. Since interviews were conducted virtually, and confidentiality was maintained, it was important to mask any identifiable details that could implicate the demographic of respondents and their location. Respondents were assured that identifiable data would be kept confidential.

Data Collection

Mentors were sought to participate in the interview process after approval was received by Walden IRB to move forward with this specific area of study. An email and flyer approved by IRB were distributed to attract the attention of participants. In follow-up to email invitations and flyers to attract the attention of potential participants as approved by Walden IRB, I contacted mentors who had expressed an interest in the study and provided them with additional details in an email confirming an interview and the consent form, which were both approved by Walden IRB.

A total of eight participants provided data by responding to the same interview questions (see Appendix). During an unprecedented time and to assure safety, interviews were conducted via technology from phone or Zoom. Participants were aware that they were free to discontinue the interview at any time. With consent of participants, each interview was audio recorded. Interviewees were informed when recordings were started. There were no unusual circumstanced or uncomfortable moments encountered during any of the interviews.

Data Analysis

Interview sessions were translated into scripts using the electronic program Otter.ai. To assist with organizing data and coding for themes, QDA Miner Lite

Software, and a Microsoft Excel Spreadsheet were utilized to assist with hand-coding. All written data are kept securely locked and/or password protected on a computer in my home office space accessible only by me. Online software is also password protected. Data will be properly destroyed 5 years after dissertation is completed.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

All participants in this basic qualitative research were knowledgeable about volunteer mentoring and obviously had an enormous amount of professional experience working with at-risk youth. No adjustments or changes to the strategic process of gathering data were determined to be necessary toward addressing credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and ethical procedures. I was convinced that the data provided by participants was truthful and can be transferable by another researcher as they draw their own conclusion about the social impact that the data revealed from each respondent. Responses to the interview questions included a wealth of experience shared by respondents because of their background and active involvement of helping at-risk youth to engage in positive activities to guide them in a desirable direction to obtain admirable goals as they approach adulthood rather than engage in delinquent behavior.

According to Creswell and Clark (2011), it is important for researchers to understand persuasiveness in qualitative research, including credibility, trustworthiness, and validation strategies. It was also necessary that I address any possible biases on my part as the instrument for gathering data for this qualitative study due to being an experienced volunteer mentor of a formal mentoring organization. I have no knowledge

of respondents being matched with a mentee (youth) related to the organization that I am actively involved. To reduce the risk of any bias that would influence results analyzed for the study, I did not engage in conversation with participants during the interview sessions. The Interview Questions and Protocol form (see Appendix) was strictly followed when conducting each interview. With consent of each participant, interviews were audio recorded and manually documented. Prior to the interviews, each participant was provided a consent form that included details of how to contact Walden University if any questions or concerns related to the study. All effort was made on my part to minimize risk or discomfort for participants by asking only the IRB-approved interview questions and informing participants that they could stop the interview at any time or indicate next question to skip or move on. To protect the privacy of participants, aliases were used by indicating "P" for participant along with a number assigned for each respondent that provided data for the study. The respondents were assured that no identifiable details would be included regarding their location or any youth mentored. Data were safely stored on password protected virtual programs, personal computer, and all spreadsheets, and manual documentation locked in a secured file of my home accessed only by me. Data will be properly discarded no less than 5 years after dissertation has been completed.

Results

Interview Question 1

"What is your perspective related to adolescents (ages 13–18) that have experienced having an incarcerated parent mindset and determination to avoid delinquent behavior?"

Two of the eight participants elaborated on children needing to feel loved otherwise they will have a mindset to behave in a negative manner out of anger, resentment and hurt. According to P1 and P8, youth will act out showing bad behavior because of what is going on with the parent being away. "Feeling unloved, the child will reach out to anything. In their mind, it is as if no one cares so why should they care" (P1). "We need to keep these youth close to our hearts and keep an eye on them and track their moves….be vigilant to track their activities, and who they associate with" (P8). Four participants (P3, P4, P6 and P7) indicated that the mindset of adolescents appear to be positive, and this relates to being involved with mentoring and "positive influence and engagement with community activities" (P6). One participant indicated that the mindset is positive by wanting to break a cycle and not follow the path of the parent (P4). It was also stressed that along with a positive mindset, negative reinforcement is provided in some cases such as the "Scared Straight program that exposes youth to prisons and let them know it is about choices" (P4). P7 indicated that a positive mindset is a "protective factor to offset their lack of control." Another respondent shared an experience regarding a youth who was aware of what caused the parent to be incarcerated. This was a positive

motivator because the youth “wanted to do better and not have the same experience as the parent” (P3). This respondent further stated,

> Something we do not seem to talk much about is drugs, losing a parent, or how to deal with unresolved trauma. These youth need to have a positive role model to show them how to be dependable, keep your word, take care of responsibilities, a family and other commitments. Having these tools through mentoring is so important.

Knowing the reason that a parent is away due to incarceration or lack of knowing details that lead to the incarceration could be a great factor of the hurt. “Until you can tap into the person and recognize the hurt, you will not be able to understand why they are really crying out” (P1). “Not knowing what is happening to their parents, they fail to see the larger picture and how they do not end up in the same place” (P5). Two participants expressed that youth are concerned about their livelihood, who is going to take care of them while their parent is away. According to P5, the mindset is “a lot of confusion and fear.” It was further explained, “Their main focus is how do you get through living day-to-day” (P5). “It is a struggle for adolescents without someone to support them when a parent is incarcerated” (P2). This was explained as contributing toward behavioral issues along with other stress these youth experience that provokes delinquent behavior.

Interview Question 2

“What would you encourage be implemented in the mentoring program to help youth commit to striving hard to avoid delinquent behavior?”

Five participants mentioned implementing peer mentoring groups. Three referred to group sessions that allow youth to talk with each other. “Adolescents working with adolescents” is how P1 described such interaction to encourage having implemented in mentoring programs. All sessions would be monitored by adult mentors. Peer mentoring groups were explained as being a “powerful tool” (P8). The sessions are to boost morale and help youth see that “I’m not the only one going through this” (P1). “There is someone just like me, they have support, if they can get through this, I can too” (P2). Implementing more groups is encouraged so youth can sit around and talk comfortably. “Kids learn better, faster, and more effective from each other” (P8). Other participants (P3, P5) explained implementation of a different type of group. Instead of bringing youth together in sessions as support for each other, this group would be structured among adult mentors helping youth by “teaching life skills such as how to tie a tie or dress professionally for a job interview and how to talk respectfully to their teachers and others” (P3). Life skill strategies were also included to expose youth to learning how to act in settings such as a restaurant or library. “We may take it for granted whereas some youths have never experienced going to a library” (P3). “Learning something new and doing something together such as going to the museum or library, striving hard with continuous interaction helping youth to see that some things can’t be controlled, but fun things youth can control” (P7). As they recognize challenges that they encounter related to having an incarcerated parent and discover that others are having the same experiences, they can develop solutions in support group sessions and “not feel isolated

and will see that life is not different but somewhat normal as they identify commonalities through group discussions" (P5).

Implementing structure among mentoring programs is a theme elaborated on six times by participants. An example of structure expressed by three mentors (P3, P5 and P8) related to updating or creating reference manuals to train mentors on how to handle mentoring at-risk youth. In addition, journals were recommended to be implemented and provide to youth to track their progress and set goals for themselves. The manuals for mentors should include guidelines and resources to effectively provide support to help at risk youth avoid delinquent behavior. According to P5, the manual should be a "go to place" of quick references for topics such as how to communicate with youth based on "how they feel after seeing their parent in jail, or how to help youth address anger or stress frequently made known and help them identify steps so they don't repeat them" (P5). In addition, P5 recommended having workbooks for the youth on what to do when experiencing feelings or stress related to having an incarcerated parent. "Steps at each age level can be outlined in workbooks as a guide of what to do when encountering specific obstacles or setting goals and how to get there, address financial strategies, and emotional situations" (P5). "Enhance structure by having seminars or training for the mentors, especially for striking up conversations initially" (P7).

Another strategy noted was to create and monitor a discussion board utilizing technology for youth to communicate with other youth experiencing the same scenario (P5). In addition, structure should include helping youth to become engaged with community outreach programs. P6 stressed reaching out to community organizations and

implementing a joint relationship with mentoring programs to embrace youth for a semester to show them what their organization offers and "how people do things not just for themselves" (P6). "Facilitate them (youth) being engaged in community activities, whether it's something recreational or something more engaging to keep them focused on what the rest of the world is doing in a positive way" (P6).

Interview Question 3

"If you could implement a change in the mentoring program, what would that be?"

Implementing consistency by convincing mentors to commit to mentoring the same youth over an extended period would be implemented to avoid disruption and disappointment for the youth. "Mentoring youth for a longer period of time will help them to bond and build trust" (P3). P3 further explained that people coming in and out of youth lives creates a level of disappointment in so many mentoring programs. A change would involve program guidance to assist with making favorable matches (i.e., mentors and mentees) to make sure they can relate to each other's culture. Matching youth with the best possible mentor is important to increase the chance of a long-lasting relationship. Another mentor commented about exposing youth to individuals who had similar struggles but "made it through their period of lack and can now turn around and encourage others so they don't fall through the cracks" (P2). Four participants (P1, P4, P5, and P8) referred to Big Brother Big Sisters as a model to be used to adopt change because their long-time existence signifies that the program works. Participant 2 spoke of implementing a change to include psychologists and professional teams to determine if

there are any developmental delays, sleepless nights, bullying, or other abuse that should be addressed. The remaining two participants (P6 and P7) referenced responses to the previous interview question (#2) and indicated that structure and strategies would be implemented as indicated. P7 further commented that along with structure and making plans to do things, "striking up conversations is a way to connect."

Interview Question 4

"Do you believe that mentoring programs are effective in deterring youth from delinquent behavior?"

Five of the participants responded immediately with "Yes." They elaborated on the positive intent of mentoring programs. One of these respondents added that this is conditional because mentoring programs will not deter all youth from delinquent behavior, but "certainly there are the things that can be life-changing" (P6). Two other participants responded with, "Can be." One stated, "Just because it is a mentoring program does not mean it is effective" (P4). The other stated that "there are a lot of variables." (P5). One variable mentioned by P5 involved structure of the mentoring program and how this is being handled to be considered as effective. The final respondent answered, "It depends on the mentor and how much time the mentor is willing to spend with the child" (P8).

Interview Question 5

"What incentives would you push toward making available in mentoring programs for youth that are discouraged due to incarceration of a parent?"

Three of the eight participants stressed the importance of identifying specifics causing the discouragement, and then determine the type of incentive that would "address through positive reinforcement" (P4). All participants were clear about requiring youth to earn the opportunity to receive an incentive that would be presented as a reward. The youth would need to show proof of good grades from school or attendance to specific meetings or positive events. Only one participant (P6) suggested giving a small stipend in addition to other ideas. Another participant suggested obtaining a commitment from community organizations to sponsor youth and assist by having jobs available but "the youth will have to do something to qualify for this opportunity to earn money" (P5). Three participants would like to speak to the needs and interest of the youth if they fulfill expectations by rewarding them with special activities such as attending a spoken word workshop, an amusement park, possibly meeting a celebrity, or exposure to something new such as visiting sites for various career opportunities (P2, P6, P7 and P8).

Interview Question 6

"What is your perception of a youth being more likely to engage in delinquent behavior because of the incarceration of a parent?"

Each participant's response indicated a high degree of delinquent behavior is likely to be expected but could be offset depending on the support system. One participant indicated that "without intervention, they are likely to do the same based on a cycle" (P4). Another participant indicated that these youth are likely to engage in delinquent behavior, "not because they are a bad person, but because of the instability of home" (P5). Two participants (P1, P3) mentioned that anger needs to be addressed while

showing the youth a better way. P1, P5, and P6 pointed out that perhaps no one talked to the youth about what caused the parent to be incarcerated, which has affected the youths' behavior. "Maybe nobody talked about what the parent did… not all (incarceration) is for violent behavior. That bothers a young person" (P6). This causes the youth to be very frustrated and may need counseling or psychiatric help.

Interview Question 7

"Do you believe that mentoring programs are effective to minimize youth engaging in delinquent behavior that could lead them to become incarcerated?"

All participants agree that mentoring helps to minimize youth engaging in delinquent behavior that could lead them to become incarcerated. They also elaborated on a need for more mentors. One participant stated, "There are studies out there that show programs have been very effective. There are grants from federal government and state governments and foundations that recognize the efficacy of these types of programs. If we don't do anything with these young people, it is a very high likelihood that they're going to engage or will be incarcerated. So, programs like these are critical" (P4). Another participant referred to a previous response about mentoring programs being effective and stated that "mentors should be trained across the board, which takes time" (P5). The participant indicated that helping youth with goal setting and how to address anger issues and being aware of the financial status affecting the livelihood of these youth are all important factors. Another participant said, "I think it is very effective, but as I said, it may not touch every person" (P6). It was further stressed that "the right kind of mentors and organizations that mentor can make all the difference in the world" (P6).

The last participant stated that mentoring is critical for a child's growth. And indicated the importance of sharing the same values as the mentors. Additionally, the Scared Straight program was mentioned and again the practice of writing down goals. Taking youth to the prison as part of a program is to let them know "If you want to be in here, this is the way life is going to be" (P8).

Interview Question 8

"Would you like to share a personal story or background of information that motivated you to become a mentor for at-risk youth?"

Six participants reflected on their younger days and explained that someone took the time to share their personal time and resources to expose them to opportunities that would not have happened without these individuals stepping in and spending time with them. One justified this theory by saying there were so many siblings in their home and clarified by indicating that the resources were not available financially. Therefore, if not for a special uncle and aunt taking time to help, the opportunities would not have been possible. As another participant reflected on their childhood and commented that "neighbors who did not have the official title of a mentor is still remembered and appreciated for their roles that made a difference" (P3). Another talked about adults from a high school career program that hand-picked a few students to participate with an opportunity to work with computers. That made a memorable impact and encouraged them to help other youth (P5). Two of the participants explained that they were drawn to mentoring based on a passion from just seeing at-risk youth and wanted to help. One of the respondents stated, "If you don't experience good things, you begin to think there is

no better way" (P2). The other spoke in a prophetic manner stating, "What you put into the universe, comes back…giving back helps to have a better society" (P8). After the recording had ended and interview concluded, one participant indicated that they wanted to also mention that having a spiritual relationship is important (P1).

The findings based on the questions presented and responses received from participants were analyzed for frequency and patterns of data. Table 2 shows themes aligned with data from participants narrowed to topics indicated most frequently. These topics related to 1) structure, 2) consistency and 3) long-term commitment of mentors matched with youth. Emphasis was made by five participants among the eight (63%) concerning improvement to structures that would impact the success of mentoring at-risk youth. Consistency of being involved with the youth (mentees) was another important theme stressed by six of the eight participants (75%). Long-term commitments to build trust, allow youth to feel safe and comfortable being around mentors to help youth become confident and learn better ways to handle situations was indicated by each participant (100%).

Table 2

Themes Aligned with Data from Participants

Themes	Participants								Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
Structure to improve mentoring programs and train mentors			X		X	X	X	X	63%
Consistency of mentors spending time with at-risk youth to avoid further disruptions in the lives of these youth	X		X		X	X	X	X	75%
Long-term commitment to bond, build trust, feel safe and learn a better way	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	100%

Summary

Eight participants were interviewed to obtain data from the perspective of volunteer mentors that have dedicated a significate number of years mentoring at-risk youth. One respondent commented that mentoring can be effective but "may not touch every person" (P6). Ironically, another participant responded with a similar comment that "everyone cannot be saved" (P8). It was further explained that "some youth will gravitate toward the negative and I don't care what you do, they're going to find it" (P8). The founder and president of Children of Promise, NYC, expressed that it is traumatic for children to wear the burdens of their parents' imprisonment and crimes committed that are no fault of the children (Clemmons, 2015). This appeared to be supported by an interviewee that stated, "These children felt there was a stigma on them when they had not done anything" (P8). Each participant was aware that at-risk youth have unique

struggles. The benefits of mentoring programs being effective in helping these youth are contingent among variables (P5) as indicated by responses to the fourth interview question. Patterns and themes appeared to emerge clearly through brief responses to Question #4: “Do you believe that mentoring programs are effective in deterring youth from delinquent behavior?” Respondents pointed out that mentoring programs can be effective depending on how much time mentors spend with these youth and how the program is structured. In response to interview Question #3: “If you could implement a change in the mentoring program, what would that be?” Respondents elaborated on several changes they would implement, which included strategies for consistency to promote long-term matches (mentor and mentee). During the data collection process, a pattern of themes developed early and continued related to the following:

- Structure to improve mentoring programs and train mentors
- Consistency of mentors spending time with at-risk youth to avoid further disruption in the lives of these youth
- Long-term commitment from mentor to bond, build trust, allowing youth to feel safe and learn a better way

The respondents concluded that because someone took time to guide them in a positive direction when they were younger, paying it forward has been a mission to make a difference in the lives of at-risk youth. Respondents credited the outcome of their lives and the successful direction they achieved due to individuals who took time with them without an “official title of mentor” (P3). “The environment may not dictate who a person will become, but it can influence” (P6). Based on the neighborhood in which they

lived, a different (negative) turn could have easily been made had it not been for consistency of positive role models pushing them in the right direction (P6). The discussion and conclusion presented in Chapter 5 indicated an overview of responses from participants to integrate and synthesize the results of the literature review incorporated with the findings based on interview data.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this basic qualitative research was to explore the perspectives of mentors as they work with adolescents that have experienced challenges and trauma of having an incarcerated parent. Exploring concerns of at-risk youth, particularly CIP, from the perspective of volunteer mentors can help to create or improve supportive measures that could impact the future of these youth and benefit communities in a positive manner. Based on responses to the IRB-approved interview questions (see Appendix) eight respondents provided sufficient information to assist with answering two research questions related to mentoring at-risk youth. Responses to interview Question #8 leaned more toward the positive benefits of mentoring as respondents reflected on their past and personal experiences as a youth. Each participant recalled an experience with someone or several individuals that impacted their lives by taking time with them during their childhood. Appreciation was expressed toward those individuals for the impact they made that led the volunteer mentors of this study to live successful lives and be willing to pay it forward. Perhaps the overall significance of this study is to encourage other adults to become volunteer mentors.

Volunteer mentors reported perceiving that providing effective mentoring of adolescents (ages 13–18) can deter youth from being likely to engage in delinquent behavior according to analysis of results demonstrated in Table 1 and Table 2. In addition to having the proper structure in place, the effectiveness of mentoring programs may

prevent these youth from engaging in delinquent behavior. There are various components considered to determine:

RQ1: To what degree do adult mentors believe that adolescents (ages 13–18) with incarcerated parents are more likely to engage in delinquent behavior?

RQ2: To what degree do adult mentors working with adolescents whose parents are incarcerated, believe that mentoring programs are effective in keeping them from engaging in delinquent behavior?

According to responses, mentoring was noted as being particularly important, but respondents were reluctant to stress that programs were totally effective. It was clearly expressed that not all programs are adequately structured in a way that benefit youth to reach their fullest potential. The importance of structure was a theme detected from the data collection. Chapter 1 revealed that mentoring programs cannot address all challenges faced by CIP. Based on data from the perspective of volunteer mentors, not all youth can be reached or be deterred from engaging in delinquent behavior. According to literature, mentors cannot remove all obstacles that challenge youth; however, mentoring is an important aspect of the solution (Lauland, 1998). As indicated by two respondents, mentoring can be effective but "may not touch every person" (P6). "Some youth will gravitate toward the negative" (P8). Literature revealed that although mentoring cannot address all the issues faced by CIP, it can mitigate some of the risk that are associated with being a child of an incarcerated parent (Laakso & Nygaard, 2012).

According to literature in Chapter 2, gearing away from a negative direction such as juvenile crimes or steering toward the positive path of a career or college, both

approaches are valid (Olwell, 2016). Mentors contribute toward the match (mentor assigned to youth) by being able to relate, understand, and have a form of connection upon meeting their mentee. Understanding the youth's values, their culture as well as challenges faced and being able to address needs by providing supportive measures could result in a long-lasting relationship between the youth and adult mentor. Having consistency with long-term mentoring relationships between youth and mentor appears to be crucial for success. Respondents commented on the importance of being successfully matched and that "mentoring youth for a longer period of time will help them to bond and build trust" (P3). According to literature, Bowlby suggested there is an inability to form a deep relationship with others when a succession of substitutes is too frequent in a child's life (as cited in Bretherton, 1992). Chapter 2 literature revealed abandonment concerns that may affect youth. Separation issues may cause the children to act out in a negative manner. Children tend to act out in school and decline in academic performance because of coping with their parents' incarceration (Sherry, 2010). Coping with this separation does not improve if mentors are frequently assigned to come in and out of the lives of these youth. Mentors are to set an example and be a role model for stability. One respondent (P3) elaborated on youth needing a positive role model to show them how to be dependable, keep their word and take care of responsibilities. Literature noted that mentors have the responsibility of acting as role models for mentees and demonstrating healthy behaviors (Dowd et al., 2015).

According to Bandura (1977), diversity fosters behavioral innovation and influences new styles and new forms of evolutionary changes. All participants

interviewed during this study elaborated on ideas of exposing at-risk youth to positive environments and showing them a better way to handle situations and behave appropriately to succeed in life. The success is based on living a productive life and avoiding criminal behavior that leads to incarceration.

Interpretation of the Findings

Research Question 1

RQ1: To what degree do adult mentors believe that adolescents (ages 13–18) with incarcerated parents are more likely to engage in delinquent behavior?

Based on an analysis of data from respondents, the degree adult mentors believe that adolescents (ages 13–18) with incarcerated parents are more likely to engage in delinquent behavior is unfortunately at a high risk due to living among a familiar cycle and being exposed to a negative environment. Without intervention, youth will likely do the same as the parent. Positive intervention through mentoring can be an alternative. Social learning theory (Bandura, 1971) is explained as a behavior that is learned by direct experience or observing others. According to Rhodes (2002), mentors influence youth through dialog, which helps with enhancing social skills and emotional well-being. Additionally, Rhodes suggested that mentors can demonstrate qualities that youth may desire to emulate related to career success. Responses to interview Question #8 allowed participants to share personal experiences that motivated them to become volunteer mentors. All eight participants (100%) as shown in Table 2, indicated that someone took special interest and time during their childhood to guide them in a direction that later impacted their current career status. One participant expressed gratitude of remembering

caring neighbors and adults that stepped in to help and stated, “I turned out alright” (P3). This is also evidence of the long-lasting influence that volunteer mentors contribute. P1 stated, “I have a lot to give and owe it to society to give back just as someone took time with me.” In answer to Research Question 1, my findings from the perspective of mentors concerning the likelihood of adolescents engaging in delinquent behavior is that with structured mentoring strategies, the risk can be reduced to a successful rate.

Bandura (1977) also explained that behavior is learned and then modified by direct experience. This does not mean that negative behavior is always imitated by children. McLeod (2016) explained that if a child witnesses violence and sees the parent placed under arrest, this may have a long-lasting and devastating impression on the child. However, this does not mean that the child will reproduce such behavior. When a child is exposed to an unfavorable or bad environment, this does not diminish their opportunities to become successful and productive individuals. Literature revealed that new behaviors can be acquired through experiences or from observing others, which is often referred to as observational learning or modeling (Barclay, 1982). The perspective of volunteer mentors concluded that delinquent behavior among at-risk youth is likely to be expected but could be offset depending on the positive support system, which includes implementing guidance through structured mentoring strategies.

Research Question 2

RQ2: To what degree do adult mentors working with adolescents whose parents are incarcerated, believe that mentoring programs are effective in keeping them from engaging in delinquent behavior?

The degree to which adult mentors working with adolescents whose parents are incarcerated, believe that mentoring programs are effective in keeping them from engaging in delinquent behavior was analyzed as being contingent upon how well-developed the mentoring program is with structure for procedures and resources provided and the amount of time that adult mentors are committed to the match (mentor and mentee). Structure and commitment were shown among the themes in Table 2. Literature noted that mentoring has been effective toward helping at-risk youth, but there is little research that proves mentoring prevents behavioral problems across all levels of at-risk youth (Weiler et al., 2015). According to participants of this study, mentoring is important. However, volunteer mentors believe that all mentoring programs are not effective. Structure was among the biggest concern. For an organization to be effective, it must be organized. Meaningful structure with beneficial strategies and resources are necessary for mentoring programs to thrive and be successful to help youth reach their fullest potential and avoid engaging in delinquent behavior.

Numerous scholarly articles were located related to mentoring, and several articles regarding CIP. However, there was a gap in literature related to the perspective of mentors concerning this topic. Mentoring CIP requires specialized knowledge and training that would benefit mentors with handling experiences encountered by at-risk youth that involve negative outcomes related to behavioral problems, mental health, poverty, trauma of being placed in foster homes and often the risk of their own incarceration (Griffin, 2017). In response to Research Question 2, from the perspectives of volunteer mentors, analyzed data showed emerging themes related to structure,

consistency, and long-term commitments from mentors as a contributing factor for improvement. Literature notes a belief that when children are matched with mentors who can offer positive influence, the youth can avoid contact with the juvenile justice systems and achieve goals, have greater confidence and higher aspirations (Morris, 2017).

Limitation of the Study

Chapter 1 indicated the criteria for mentors that were being attracted to participate in the study. An important eligibility requirement for this research study was that participants are adults aged 18 or older. Another requirement was that participants have at least 5 years' experience as a volunteer mentor working with at-risk youth, particularly CIP who are within an age range above 12, but not over 18 years old. There were no concerns involving the criteria among respondents who provided data analyzed for results to answer the research questions. Participants were knowledgeable and highly qualified from various professional backgrounds and status of working with youth. In addition, each participant expressed a passion for mentoring youth and have volunteered their services for numerous years. A basic qualitative research approach was chosen for this study. Volunteer mentors provided a wealth of data for this study. However, geographical locations of volunteer mentors and their mentees (at-risk youth) and mentoring organizations were not disclosed. This limits the boundaries of data that can be distributed to claim and present recommendations beyond local communities in general concerning this study. Recommendations to policymakers on state or federal levels would exceed the sample size and other data retrieved based on interview questions and analysis.

Recommendations

It is recommended that policy makers evaluate local community needs concerning resources or lack of support toward preventative strategies that can benefit mentoring programs to assist at-risk youth, particularly CIP. Knowledge gained from volunteer mentors' responses to interview questions and their insight and perspective on how to structure mentoring programs to better serve youth should be considered according to each detail, such as helping youth to engage in peer mentoring, develop life skills, participate in group discussions using technology, create manuals to discover coping skills, and assist mentors with training sessions concerning at-risk youth. Supportive literature noted, additional training could help mentors to understand various risks incurred by CIP, and how mentors might deal with difficult situations (Shlafer et al., 2009).

It is recommended that financial support be provided to mentoring programs to expose youth to community outings and training possibilities as well as provide material needed for maintaining a consistent and long-lasting relationship with the program and volunteer mentors. I recommend that policy makers utilize information from this study based on the perspective of mentors to approve and distribute available funding that can impact preventative strategies and mentoring opportunities for at-risk youth, which can ultimately help these youth become productive citizens by minimizing possibilities of delinquent behavior.

Implications for Social Change

When at-risk youth participate in positive structured mentoring programs and are matched with mentors who share their values and are willing to spend time and teach them a better way of life, this benefits entire communities in a positive manner. These youth can contribute to society in a positive manner instead of breaking into homes or engaging in other criminal activities. Funding is required to maintain prisons and to develop and maintain rehabilitation programs after prisoners are released. Policy makers can approve funding to assist programs that advocate for children that the adult prisoners leave behind during their time of incarceration. As governmental policies are made and funding is distributed toward incarcerating and rehabilitating adult prisoners, policy makers can implement social change that affect youth in the category of being at risk of imitating negative actions of their parents. Literature indicated that children are known to mimic behavior, beliefs, and attitudes of their parents (Krisbergh, 2019). Mentors can provide an alternative option for learning and experiencing positive opportunities if parents are absent from a child due to incarceration, divorce, and other situations that cause separation. According to Bocknek et al. (2009), incarceration of a parent is a traumatic experience similarly compared to a child's traumatic loss of a parent due to death, divorce, or intervention from child welfare service. Supportive coping strategies are required to help children move forward and beyond a stage of depression. Adult mentors can be the supportive strategy to help youth during such a devastating period.

According to literature, Bandura's (1977) social learning theory explained that people learn from one another, which is done through observation, imitation, and

modeling. Children tend to observe many people around them and the ways in which the people they encounter behave (McLeod, 2016). After being shown a better way, these youth can become involved in areas of interest supported by mentors and mentoring programs to help them reach educational and career goals. One respondent (P5) spoke with great enthusiasm about giving youth an opportunity to earn money while working for employers offering a training program in support of helping at-risk youth. Youth would be required to meet specific obligations such as maintain certain grades or attend a few select meetings in order to participate in the work program. Another respondent elaborated on exposing these youth to organizations that serve the community allowing them to experience positive interaction and "see what the rest of the world is doing" (P6). According to literature, awarding youth with an opportunity to observe and communicate with professionals who are skilled and knowledgeable in a field of their interest may later lead the youth to a privilege of working with an apprenticeship model (Ucar, 2017). Exposing youth to career opportunities can develop their interest and keep them occupied in a constructive manner and deter them from idle time engaging in negative thoughts and delinquent behavior. Two respondents (P1, P2) commented during the interview session that "it takes a village" to raise and nurture children. "Everybody should be able to get involved" (P1). This undoubtedly implied that everyone has a part to help improve social change by investing in our youth. This includes involvement by governmental leaders. According to Evans (2005), initiatives aimed toward servicing disadvantaged youth are generally birthed out of government policy, potential employer expectations (mentoring industry), or society at large.

Recommended Actions

In effort to improve strategies and implications for social change surrounding this study and prevent this research from becoming dormant, actions to replicate and further this study is recommended. The study can be advanced by taking the following actions:

- Gaining the perspective of children, their parents or caregivers related to the benefits of mentoring.
- Gather relevant data from mentoring programs regarding strategies to match youth with volunteer mentors on a long-term basis.
- Interview mentoring program coordinators to gain their perspectives.
- Consider how matches based on cultures, gender, economic and other status may improve longevity of the mentor-mentee relationship.
- Regularly track the interest of youth related to their educational goals and positive activities and monitor interactions with community events.
- Study how the mentoring industry can gain funding to support areas of interest for the youth and volunteer mentors.

These actions are recommended to further this study and contribute toward positive growth from perspectives beyond the volunteer mentor by connecting other parties involved.

Conclusion

The impact of mentoring CIP from the perspective of volunteer mentors has been enlightening and inclusive of various at-risk youth considered for assistance to cope with traumatic experiences. It is understood that mentoring programs have political popularity

due to low cost of volunteer-run programs (Shlafer et al., 2009). Without guidance of a positive role model, CIP will uphold the label of being at-risk if no action is taken to assist these youth with strategies to become productive citizens. In answer to both research questions, early intervention can reduce the likelihood of these children becoming serious and violent offenders. Administrative functions to keep track of youth in need of services, including collaboration with school counselors and representatives are important to maintain mentoring programs. Whether utilizing peer mentoring, Scared Straight, Big Brother Big Sister mentoring as role models to set examples for at risk youth, these strategies were found to be patterns stressed and recognized among volunteer mentors as valuable resources. There is always room for improvement of programs. According to literature, mentoring became fully actualized in 1910 with the founding of the Big Brothers organization. In 1918, with the founding of Junior Achievement, mentoring of youth moved into schools. An updated view from the prospective of volunteer mentors that participated in this study can move the mentoring industry forward based on what is observed among youth encountered today and an awareness of their mindset to help them avoid delinquent behavior.

Another theme discovered while analyzing data involved spending time with youth on a long-term commitment made by mentors that can allow youth to develop trust and a feeling of comfort and safety to share and set goals through a good rapport and communication with mentor. This will encourage the safe space where youth can discuss conflicts and better ways of handling encounters by having empathy, concern, mutual respect, love, understanding, attentive ears, and open minds. These are important

strategies that youth are to be shown and taught. P1 and P2 indicated that youth need to be shown compassion and that someone cares. Otherwise, they will reach out and gravitate toward the negative (P8). The bond between the mentor and at-risk youth (mentee) is developed over a period. This was justified by respondents encouraging a long-term commitment be implemented among mentors. According to literature, Bowlby suggested there is an inability to form a deep relationship with others when a succession of substitutes is too frequent in a child's life (as cited in Bretherton, 1992).

This study was expected to affect social change by providing information that can be utilized by policy makers, social workers, and community leaders, particularly in the field of study pertaining to children. The benefits of local government, state and federal funds being allocated to support mentoring programs is that the financial support can allow mentoring agencies to serve as advocates to connect appropriate matches of mentors with at-risk youth while monitoring the needs through structured and confidential reporting of specific and sensitive details such as psychological, physical or educational needs of the youth that can be addressed with the help of mentoring relationships. Literature revealed that the success of the match is contingent on the behaviors of both the mentor and the mentee (Allen, 2007). Participants elaborated on the importance of consistency and being committed to mentoring over an extended time with the same youth to avoid further disruption of a child's life. This included implementing change in the mentoring program that would assist with making favorable matches (mentors and mentees). According to Morris (2017), it is believed that when children are matched with mentors that can offer positive influence, the youth can avoid contact with

the juvenile justice systems and achieve goals, have greater confidence and higher aspirations.

Suggestions provided in this study from the perspective of volunteer mentors is valuable information that can be embraced by policy makers to advocate on behalf of grant funding and various resources needed to maintain successful mentoring programs. Hopefully, the outcome of this study will implement changes in policies and practices and provoke further studies in addition to attracting funding to support the work of volunteer mentors and mentoring agencies that have established a service to benefit at-risk youth in communities. Volunteer mentors do not receive nor expect to be financially compensated for their participation as a mentor to at risk youth. However, structures needed for the mentoring industry to develop and process for distribution valuable materials such as resources and reference manuals, journals, and specialized workbooks for at risk youth, and securing psychologist and clinical professionals will require allocation of financial funding. Staff needed to organize data and maintain accurate record of mandated files for certification of mentoring programs can be an investment that will minimize the burden on local communities, state and federal levels when mentoring is observed and proven to be effective as a result of preventative measures implemented concerning the structure and involvement of mentoring programs and mentors as they set an example by being a positive influence for at risk youth, particularly CIP, and provide guidance to deter these adolescents from engaging in delinquent behavior and live productive lives contributing toward positive social change in communities. According to Sherry (2010), states should pay for programs that help

mitigate the negative effects of children witnessing their parent's incarceration. Programs should be implemented through the child welfare system to help CIP deal with the effects of being separated from their parents (Sherry, 2010). Among preventative programs that help mitigate the negative effects experienced by CIP include the mentoring industry.

A narrowing of themes detected that could improve mentoring programs and best prepare mentors to impact the lives of at-risk youth, particularly CIP, is to improve the structure that provide training for mentors. Allowing caregivers an opportunity to participate in the training would also help to benefit the home settings where children have been placed. According to literature, (Western & Smith, 2018), children's grandmother plays the key role along with other family members throughout the incarcerated ordeal. Allowing these individuals to participate in supportive training will further benefit the structure of mentoring programs and collaboration among the whole group. This refers back to responses of participants (P1, P2) stating, "It takes a village." This includes policy makers contributing toward change to support initiatives as well as community leaders being actively involved along with mature residents of communities taking part in helping to improve social change by investing in the needs of at-risk youth. This is further supported by literature (Kiellstrand, 2017) that notes, according to the National Research Council and Institute of Medicine report, multicomponent and multilevel (i.e., child, family, and communities) approaches are important to promote positive development among children.

In addition, the theme of consistency that involves mentors spending time with youth to avoid further disruption in the lives of these youth is an important factor

concerning separation trauma that these youth face. As indicated in literature (Smyke et al., 2017), when a child's parent is incarcerated, it is important to have a healthy attachment to an understanding adult that can respond effectively to the child's needs. According to Rhodes (2002), attachment theory is another concept that impacts a child to sense their self-worth. This self-worth along with self-esteem is not out of reach when at-risk children are exposed to spending time with mentors on a long-term basis as they demonstrate positive influence helping youth to attain high goals that impact social change in spite of their challenges and strive to become productive citizens as they reach adulthood.

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Appendix: Interview Questions and Protocol

Researcher:

The purpose of this interview is to gain knowledge from a mentor's perspective to answer research questions in my dissertation related to the Impact of Mentoring Children of Incarcerated Parents. I appreciate that you have agreed to participate in this study by allowing me to conduct an interview. Your time is valued and appreciated. The interview should last approximately 45 minutes.

Interview Questions:

1. What is your perspective related to adolescents (ages 13–18) that have experienced having an incarcerated parent mindset and determination to avoid delinquent behavior?
2. What would you encourage be implemented in the mentoring program to help youth commit to striving hard to avoid delinquent behavior?
3. If you could implement a change in the mentoring program, what would that be?
4. Do you believe that mentoring programs are effective in deterring youth from delinquent behavior?
5. What incentives would you push toward making available in mentoring programs for youth that are discouraged due to incarceration of a parent?
6. What is your perception of a youth being more likely to engage in delinquent behavior because of the incarceration of a parent?

7. Do you believe that mentoring programs are effective to minimize youth engaging in delinquent behavior that could lead them to become incarcerated?
8. Would you like to share a personal story or background of information that motivated you to become a mentor for at-risk youth?