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Positive Perceptions of Mentoring Influences on African American Male Public High School Students

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
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Abstract

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MSW, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, 2006

BSW, Richard Stockton College of New Jersey, 2003

Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Social Work

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Abstract

Many African American males face challenges due to historical and current negative viewpoints of this population. However, urban communities also play a vital role in the obstacles encountered, which impacts this population's well-being. The purpose of this project was to gain knowledge from mentors on how a mentoring program positively affected the cognitions, behaviors, and academic progress of African American, male, public high school students residing in urban communities and effective ways mentorships foster resilience. This qualitative research study used a cognitive behavioral theoretical framework and a resilience theory conceptual framework, and narrative semistructured interviews were conducted. The mentors' positive perceptions of the students' participation in the mentoring program and positive changes in the students' cognitions and behaviors were described. A purposive sampling method was used to identify five participants, via various social media sites, who met the criteria of being an adult over the age of 18, residing and working as a mentor outside of New Jersey, and being either a current mentor or a previous mentor, within the last 5 years of African American, male, public high school students of urban areas. The data obtained were analyzed using eclectic coding, which revealed the common themes of self-awareness, positive development, cultural competence, and supportive relationships related to the research questions and how these components are vital in effective mentorships. Overall, this project gives potential positive social change implications to social work practice pertaining to additional information on effective ways to address maladaptive behaviors and negative influences of urban communities through mentoring.

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Dedication

I dedicate this project to my brother, Evan Dorsey Jr., as he was my inspiration to seek further knowledge regarding this social problem and to bring more awareness of the support needed among African American, male, public high school students. He continues to persevere to pursue his goals, and I am extremely proud him. I also dedicate this study to all African American, male youth in urban communities to give hope for a successful future, despite any adversities surrounding them.

Acknowledgments

First, I thank God for giving me the strength and determination to complete this accomplishment. I would also like to thank Dr. Emmett R. Roberts, Jr., Dr. Kenneth Larimore, Dr. Nancy Campbell, and Dr. Debora Rice for your guidance throughout this journey. To my family, my godmothers Maxine Williams and Pastor Jacqueline Henderson, sorority sisters of Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Incorporated, especially my chapter-Kappa Pi Sigma, and close friends, I appreciate the prayers, support, and encouraging words to push forward. Finally, my biggest thanks go to my mother, Cynthia Houghton, as she has truly been my number one supporter. She has shown support since the first day of enrollment, encouraged me to keep striving to achieve this goal, prayed during tough times, and been a listening ear when I needed her. I am so blessed to her you as a mother, and I hope I made you proud.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study and Literature Review

Urban, African American, high school students are at a higher risk to fail or drop out of school because of various circumstances, such as their environment, maladaptive behaviors, family dynamics, and friends, (Somers et al., 2016). African American, male adolescents are also more prone to engage in criminal activities or exposure within their environment because of the lack of support systems (Harden, 2014). However, Harden (2014) pointed out that having close relationships, including those with other males, are important to African American males who may lack certain male figures within their family dynamics, as this helps with personal growth.

Supportive relationships with adults, including those considered with mentors, assist with the chances of students retaining a desire to continue in school, focus on accomplishments, and decrease their involvement in negative activities within their community (Somers et al., 2016). Mentorships, along with other supportive relationships, enhance resilience despite adversities among African American adolescents residing in urban communities (DiClemente et al., 2018). Therefore, it was crucial to describe what the mentors of African American, male, public high school students perceive as successful mentorships to effectively foster continued change within urban communities.

A qualitative research design using narrative, semistructured interviews was used to conduct the project. These interviews were completed with mentors of African American, male, public high school students who reside in urban communities. This project has the potential to provide additional information on effective ways to promote

positive change in African American, male, public high school students and possibly African American, male adolescents' well-being in general.

Within the first section of the project, the social problem is identified, as well as the purpose of this study and research questions, the nature of the study, the significance of the study pertaining to its contributions to social work, values and ethics, and a review of related literature. In the next section, I explain information regarding the research design, the participants, how data were obtained and analyzed, and ethical procedures followed, leading to the third section of the results. Lastly, the fourth section of this project includes implications to and recommendations for social work practice.

Problem Statement

Urban high-crime environments adversely affect African American, male adolescents attending public high schools, often resulting in maladaptive behaviors such as drug use, gang affiliation, criminal activity, and low academic performance. African American adolescents are frequently affected by negative influences, such as drugs, gangs, and peer pressure, which hinder them from being successful in school and in the community (Butler-Barnes et al., 2015; Harden, 2014). Research has indicated that at-risk youth, especially those residing in urban communities, face many obstacles that affect their decisions, resulting in low academic performance, criminal involvement, mental illnesses (depression and anxiety), and issues with relationships (family and friends; Butler-Barnes et al., 2015; Spencer et al., 2016; Wesely et al., 2017).

Additionally, African American, male students, at times, do not have a good rapport with their teachers, are expected to not do well in school, are viewed negatively

within their community, and experience bullying and peer aggression (Harden, 2014; Konold et al., 2017; Tyler et al., 2016). These experiences pose a risk to their academic achievement, contribute to self-doubt, and can trigger maladaptive behaviors (Konold et al., 2017; Tyler et al., 2016). Studies have shown that African American, male students benefit from positive settings that provide motivation to prosper academically and encouragement to exhibit positive interactions within the community as they transition to adulthood (Gaylord-Harden et al., 2018; Harden, 2014). However, there was a need to explore how mentoring programs influence the lives of African American, male, public high school students residing in an urban community and what fosters resilience through an effective mentoring program, as described by the mentors.

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

The purpose of this project was to characterize the positive effects of participating in mentorship programs, located in urban areas, on African American, male, public high school students' cognitions, behaviors, and academic performances, and what factors have contributed to the resilience within the youth. Therefore, in this study, I describe the mentors' positive perceptions of participation in a mentoring program. I aimed to provide an understanding of what the mentors have found successful in empowering African American, male youth to positively change their thoughts, behaviors, and overall well-being. Thus, this research project was guided by two research questions:

1. What positive changes do mentors of African American, male, public high school students of urban areas report in cognitions, behaviors, and academic progress as a result of participation in a mentoring program?

2. What makes an effective mentorship program for African American, male, public high school students and African American youth, in general, that fosters resilience?

Some research terms used in this project, related to the participants, their environment, and intervention program, are defined to allow for a clear understanding of the data obtained, assessment, and results. The terms are as follows:

At-risk/inner-city youth: Youth who are surrounded by negative influences, such as drugs, crime, and poverty, and who have limited or no support systems (Carothers et al., 2016; Richards et al., 2015).

Maladaptive behaviors: Negative and concerning behaviors that hinder or damage personal growth mentally, emotionally, physically, and socially (Molano et al., 2018).

Mentorship: A relationship that provides guidance and assists with personal growth (Somers et al., 2016).

Resilience: Ability to withstand adversities through positive adaptions (DiClemente et al., 2018; Soleimanpour et al., 2017; Woodland, 2016).

Urban environments: Inner-city communities that consist of majority low-income families (Carothers et al., 2016).

This doctoral study was needed to describe the perceptions of the mentors of African American, male, public high school students of urban areas, on contributing factors of mentorships that have helped with positive changes in the youths' cognitions, behaviors, and academics, and how resilience played a vital role. This study may contribute to social work practice as it provides perceptions of mentorships that have

empowered positive behavioral and cognitive changes, despite adversities within this population, for more effective interventions. There was a need for more research on how to effectively help African American, male adolescents with positive development, despite negative perceptions/expectations of them (see Givens et al., 2016; Watson et al., 2016).

Nature of the Doctoral Project

A basic qualitative research design was used in this study. Qualitative research is based on information gathered, analyzed, and interpreted of people's experiences, which is obtained from interviews, observations, and so forth (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). This design aligned with the purpose statement and research questions by collecting relevant information from mentors of African American, male, public high school students, about their experiences working with this population in urban communities and the students' adversities, along with their perceived success from the mentoring program, as it related to the positive changes in the students' behaviors, thoughts, and academics.

I used narrative, semistructured interviews as the methodology for the study. Qualitative interviewing methods give a researcher an opportunity to obtain direct, in-depth information from participants regarding the social issue being researched (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The use of semistructured interviews allows the participants/interviewees to share information pertaining to their experience but enables the researcher to follow up with questions for more details and to guide the interview to make sure it remains focused on the research study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Significance of the Study

Social change involves actual action from everyone affected by the social problem, such as the participants, the community leaders, and the family(Bent-Goodley, 2017). With that in mind, this study may bring awareness within urban communities regarding the positive effects of mentorship programs (see Wesely et al., 2017) on African American, male, public high school students' cognitions, behaviors, and academic performances, as told by their mentors. In addition, the results may provide additional information to social workers and other mental health professionals on effective methods to address and limit maladaptive behaviors of at-risk youth in high-crime environments (see Givens et al., 2016). It may further contribute to future research on how mentors of African American, male, public high school students perceive mentoring and how it has helped this population make better choices to enhance their well-being in school and within their communities.

Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

I used cognitive and resilience theories to explore the positive effects of mentorship programs for African American, male, public high school students residing in urban communities. According to Wilson and Cottone (2013), there is limited research on the use of cognitive behavior therapy among African American youth due to a lack of resources for clinical treatment, the stigma behind receiving mental health treatment, and the mistrust of clinical treatment. However, cognitive therapy has the potential to assist with maladaptive behaviors and negative thoughts among this population (Wilson & Cottone, 2013). Beck (2019) indicated that cognitive theory shows that when people

change their thought process, their behaviors change as well. Beck's cognitive model allows for an understanding of a person's response to a situation, which is primarily caused by their perceptions of a matter they have experienced, resulting in maladaptive behaviors (Beck Institute for Cognitive Behavior Therapy, 2019). However, cognitive theory informs how changing a person's thoughts can result in a positive change behavior, as it is ultimately how one perceives their situation (Beck Institute for Cognitive Behavior Therapy, 2019). A therapeutic intervention of cognitive theory used is cognitive behavioral therapy, which allows a therapist to assist a client with modifying their behaviors by developing healthy coping skills and changing their outlook/thoughts of their situation as well as how they feel about their situation (Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002; Psychology School Guide, 2018; Walsh, 2013). Lemmens et al. (2016) and Lorenzo-Luaces et al. (2015) also indicated that this occurs by restructuring a person's thoughts and finding positive solutions to the problems. By restructuring cognitions, a person is able to process what they are thinking and feeling, which leads to responding with positive, healthy solutions, rather than resulting in maladaptive behaviors (Adler et al., 2015; Lemmens et al., 2016; Lorenzo-Luaces et al., 2015; Psychology School Guide, 2018; Walsh, 2013). In addition, Adler et al. (2015) conducted a study revealing that clients' behaviors changed due to changing their cognitions, leading to positive responses from the application of cognitive theory interventions. Even so, there are many factors that affect a person's cognitions and behaviors, which relates to their surroundings, support system, and emotions (Walsh, 2013), and how an individual responds to their

situation determines their outcome, based on resilience. Therefore, applying resilience theory provided a conceptual view of the youth's experiences defined by the mentors.

According to Masten et al. (2009), researchers Norman Garmezy, Lois Murphy, Michael Rutter, and Emmy Werner researched the concept of resilience within children in the 1960s and 1970s. Resilience theory focuses on seeing positivity and aiming for a successful outcome regardless of adversities stemming from surroundings, circumstances, and other people, such as family and/or friends (Broussard et al., 2006; Burnham, 2009). Traumatic experiences encountered among adolescents (ages 12 to 17) may pose negativity on a person's cognitions, emotional health, and overall behaviors, affecting personal development during their adult years (Soleimanpour et al., 2017). However, Soleimanpour et al. (2017) and Woodland (2016) pointed out that resilience focuses on ways to withstand adversities by positive reactions. In addition, Cunningham et al. (2018) indicated that resilience is a coping skill involving focusing on positive aspects to get through challenges. Furthermore, it is vital to have a positive support system as it aides in focusing on strengths, resulting in resilience (Soleimanpour et al., 2017). DiClemente et al. (2018) reported that resilience is developed over time through change behavior because of positive influences from a supportive system, whether it is from family, friends, and interactions within the community. This distinction exhibits the connection between cognitive theory and resilience theory. A positive, changed behavior starts with a change in cognition and typically occurs due to resilience and encouragement from influential people. Cognitive theory focuses on the change of one's thoughts and behaviors (Beck, 2019), while resilience theory involves assessing one's confidence and

strength (“assets”), along with one’s support system (“resources”) that assist in overcoming adversities (Zimmerman, 2013).

Therefore, in this study, I sought to understand how mentorship programs have positively impacted the lives of African American, adolescent/teenage males, specifically their cognitions and behaviors that foster resilience to persevere adversities. The use of the cognitive behavioral theoretical framework and resilience theory conceptual framework provided a better understanding of how this mentorship component has influenced the lives of these students, as described by their mentors. I examined how mentorship programs have played a vital role on empowering African American, male, public high school students to make positive choices and perform better academically by changing their cognitions and eliminating maladaptive behaviors.

Values and Ethics

The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics’ principle/value that is important, as it relates to this project, is social justice because social workers are called to serve for social change (NASW, 2019a). However, confidentiality is crucial as a social worker, especially pertaining to disseminating information obtained from research or using the client’s information for other purposes (NASW, 2019b). Therefore, it is important for the social worker to advise the participant of the purpose of the research and obtain informed consent (NASW, 2019b). A mechanism to protect the research participants is not to disclose any identifying information of the participant by using numbers instead of full names, unless consent was granted to do otherwise (NASW, 2019b). Therefore, social justice guides the social

worker's opportunity to advocate for social change and conduct research data to provide evidence of social problem, while ensuring confidentiality is met (NASW, 2019a, 2019b).

The mentorship programs of the mentors in this study were located in urban communities that are potentially considered a high-crime, low-income community and provided mentoring to at-risk youth to address the negative influences of their environment and promote positive development. This project supports the ethical principle social justice (NASW, 2019a), as it serves as a voice for mentors of African American, male, public high school students, by sharing their positive perceptions on mentoring. This project describing their perceptions may create awareness on how to assist the African American, male youth population and advocate for change within urban communities that negatively affect the youths' development.

Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

Several peer-reviewed, academic articles related to African American, male adolescents and mentoring programs were read and are discussed below. These articles also share themes, related to this project, such as society's perceptions of African American, male youth/students, the impact of urban communities and peer influences on the youth wellbeing, the importance of supportive relationships, positive youth development, and mentoring programs effectiveness. The keywords used were *mentorship or mentor or mentoring, at-risk youth, urban environment, African Americans or Black Americans or Blacks, males or boys or adolescent males,* and *public high school*

and were searched within the Thoreau multidatabase search and EBSCOhost via Walden University's library, as well as Google Scholar.

Society's Perceptions of African American Youth

African Americans have endured racial discrimination and racial profiling and have been placed within stereotypical categories for years, making it challenging for African American youth, especially males (Aymer, 2016; Keyes et al., 2015). Ellis et al. (2018) suggested that the history of racism among the African American community has influenced the perceptions of African American, male adolescents' wellbeing, and education. Additional researchers such as Graham et al. (2015) noted that these negative perceptions affect the overall African American, male population, including young boys. It appears that this population faces a difficult time in society, school, and the justice system, regardless of their age (Graham et al., 2015), and they are expected to fail without given a chance to prove otherwise (Ellis et al., 2018).

African American males are often viewed as a threat to the community, as criminals, and as being aggressive (Aymer, 2016; Keyes et al., 2015). Comparably, Gaylord-Harden et al. (2018) along with Givens et al. (2016) discussed how African American males, including youth, are viewed as a menace to society, aggressive, uneducated, criminals, at a higher risk for death and being poor. Laing (2017) also referenced these existing viewpoints of African American males, along with being destined for imprisonment. African American males are also often seen as a threat to law enforcement, which has contributed to the controversies of police brutality, outcries pertaining to the killings of African American males by police, and the development of

the Black Lives Matter movement (Aymer, 2016; Pratt-Harris et al., 2016; Smiley & Fakunle, 2016; Staggers-Hakim, 2016; White, 2019).

As a result, African American youth, in general, must work harder in the community to demonstrate positive characteristics and avoid criminal activities, which consumes urban communities because they face a legal system that is presumed to perceive them as guilty (Givens et al., 2016; Staggers-Hakim, 2016), and they must strive to be successful in the school system, unlike other cultures (Jones, 2018; Newton & Sandoval, 2015). African American males have not been viewed as valuable human beings in society and are expected to fail, as there is more research based on how they are negatively viewed (Laing, 2017). These negative stereotypes that African American, male youth are subjected to and the experiences encountered by African American males overall affect self-identity, hinder success, and potentially cause mental health issues and maladaptive behaviors (Staggers-Hakim, 2016).

Urban/Low-Income Communities and Peer Influences

There are implications that minorities and low-income populations have a lower success rate due to the lack of or limited education or skills to develop successful careers (Johnson et al., 2015). Weiss et al. (2019) informed that youth from low-income environments, families with limited or no education, and limited support systems are at a higher risk of failing academically. A majority of the urban, youth population are African American and Latino (Carothers et al., 2016). Research has shown that urban, low-income environments consist of limited community resources, low employment opportunities, government assistance, public housing, poor school systems, limited

school supplies, underqualified school staff, high crime rates, and drugs and gang activities, causing limitations for positive development among the populations who reside there (Galster et al., 2015; Rigg et al., 2019; Sanchez et al., 2018). These environments also enable African American, male adolescents to engage in gun violence, increasing their death toll, because of the prevalence of high crime (Quimby et al., 2018).

In addition, some youth residing in urban areas have encountered traumatic experiences that impact their interactions within society and in school, resulting in concerning behaviors, not limited to poor school performances, gang affiliation, substance use, and mental health issues (Koffman et al., 2009; McDaniel, 2012; Rigg et al., 2019). Although Perry et al. (2015) focused on African American, male adolescents and Molano et al. (2018) studied youth overall, the researchers indicated that being consistently subjected to violence, drugs and trauma causes changes in emotions, negative interactions with others, and academic problems, as this exposure increases the likelihood of displaying maladaptive behaviors.

Adolescents are at a greater risk of indulging in substance use and having anxiety and depression, aggression, and relationship issues as a result of their environment (Kliewer et al., 2016; Trifan & Stattin, 2015). Even so, Graves et al. (2017), along with Green et al. (2019), pointed out that African American males raised in urban communities more than likely to have not received proper services to address their mental health problems, trauma, behaviors, and/or substance issues because of the lack of resources, which generally interferes in their adulthood. Johnson et al. (2015) confirmed that it is important for at-risk youth to have resources/programs that will help with

positive youth development to eliminate or prevent maladaptive behaviors that can hinder personal growth.

Moreover, Konold et al. (2017) and Tyler et al. (2016) suggested specifically how negative experiences and influences surrounding African American, male students result in maladaptive behaviors, self-doubt, and poor grades. Harden (2014), Konold et al. (2017), and Tyler et al. (2016) also focused on African American, male students' challenging relationships with teachers, expectations of low academic performances, and bullying, along with aggressive behaviors. Butler-Barnes et al. (2015) conducted a study using the Fergus and Zimmerman theoretical framework to determine how peer influences have impacted African American, male and female adolescents academically. The findings showed that African American, male students were more influenced by their peers than female students, which caused a decline in interest for school (Butler-Barnes et al., 2015). Blackmon et al. (2016) supported this data as their study revealed that urban communities' youth were highly motivated by their surroundings and peers, more so than youth from rural areas.

Overall, urban communities may pose a high risk for youth to have mental health/emotional issues (Carothers et al., 2016), are associated with negative behaviors and social inabilities for healthy relationships, and may contribute to academic failures among adolescents (Spencer et al., 2016). Youth are exposed to frequent violence, other criminal activities, and poverty, which impacts their wellbeing (Richards et al., 2015). Carothers et al. (2016) and Johnson et al. (2015) have suggested that more programs and

interventions are needed to assist adolescents residing in these environments to enhance positive development, coping skills, and success.

Importance of Supportive Relationships/Positive Youth Development

As previously stated, there is a need for more research on how to assist African American, male adolescents, including public high school students, on being successful, despite their circumstances of where they reside or within a school that may impact them negatively (Watson et al., 2016). Additional research is required to learn more about how to uplift African American males, despite the stereotypical perceptions of them, which can enable healing and positive developments for more successful outcomes (Givens et al., 2016). However, Sanders et al. (2017) informed that at-risk youth are considered susceptible to challenges that hinder living a successful life and that they need supportive relationships.

Supportive relationships can form between family members, friends, service providers, and school professionals, but they are more effective when they provide empowerment, consist of competency of the youth's background and challenges endured, and are genuine (Sanders et al., 2017). These types of relationships help foster positive change and lead to positive development. Youth with supportive relationships are motivated to develop healthy coping skills, change behaviors, and create and sustain lasting relationships with others (Sanders et al., 2017). Eisman et al. (2016) noted that empowerment ignites hope, improves self-esteem, and enhances the drive to push forward for a better future, while decreasing negative thoughts and behaviors.

On the other hand, DiClemente et al. (2018) indicated that resilience and supportive relationships play vital roles in overcoming adversity among African American adolescent males. Both allow for positive development regardless of the existing, negative perceptions and/or their current circumstances (mental health/emotional, social, environmental issues; DiClemente et al., 2018). Hull et al. (2018) further explained that positive youth development generates from dwelling on the strengths to build on, as opposed to the negative behaviors and/or surroundings.

In addition, positive development enables African American youth to discover self-awareness, determine how to overcome their obstacles/challenges, and set achievable goals (Anderson & Mack, 2019). Therefore, programs that are accessible to at-risk youth that consist of supportive relationships, education on life skills, and healthy coping mechanisms, along with encouragement, lead to positive change (Hull et al., 2018). Supportive relationships such as mentorships have been found to help at-risk youth, including adolescents, to deter from maladaptive behaviors and make positive choices to attain their goals desired (Eisman et al., 2016).

Mentoring Program Effectiveness

The overall goal of mentoring programs is to promote positive change within youth (Wesely et al., 2017). However, it is more effective when there is genuine concern for the youth's development, especially among at-risk youth, as they may have limited to no support, besides the mentor (Wesely et al., 2017). Several studies displayed similar, positive outcomes in various ways, but the mentorship programs' dynamics, participants, and/or settings may have differed.

According to Somers et al. (2016), the lack of adult guidance/support contributes to dropout rates and the loss of interest in education among high school students, including those from low-income/urban environments. Weiss et al. (2019) indicated that mentorships are considered support systems within schools, as they produce positive academic results, while Watson et al. (2016) informed that youth who participated in a school-based mentorship focused on cultural competence, learned accountability, were motivated to help one another, and became interested in improving their well-being. Watson et al., Weiss et al., and Wesely et al.'s (2017) findings also supported that mentorships are effective in youth development and within schools. Although Somers et al. focused on tutoring and mentoring being used together, it showed the effectiveness of how mentoring can make a positive impact on high school students from urban communities, by providing much needed support to change their perceptions on life, whether academically, socially, or emotionally. Additional studies provided information on contributing factors that may have played vital roles in the success of mentorship programs.

Spencer et al. (2016) conducted a study on a mentorship program in which at-risk youth were paired with individuals, of their choosing, from their community. However, Watson et al. (2015) gathered data from a culturally based mentorship program involving only African American mentors and male youth. Both studies produced the same results pertaining to successful changes in the youth's confidence, behaviors, and goals due to the mentors being viewed as role models and support systems (Spencer et al., 2016; Watson et al., 2015). On the other hand, Grills et al.'s (2016) study consisted of a

mentorship program based on culture and academics that was used by African American youth within 12 states either in their homes, community settings, or schools. The study revealed similar results, as the ones previously mentioned, but also on how the youth became more culturally aware to give perspective to any possible racially motivated barriers they encountered (Grills et al., 2016). However, Kern et al. (2019) indicated that their study showed success within mentorships due to the relationship developed between the youth and mentor, along with the youth's ability to communicate with someone on issues they were having, regardless of the mentor's race, gender, or age.

Summary

Adversities of urban environments negatively affect African American, male adolescents' academics, behaviors, thoughts, and overall well-being (Carothers et al., 2016) because of the limitation of resources, high crime, racial barriers, and lack of support systems (Harden, 2014; Somers et al., 2016). Supportive relationships, such as mentorships, have assisted with empowering changed behavior among this population for positive development (Spencer et al., 2016). However, Watson et al. (2016) and Givens et al. (2016) explained the need for more research pertaining to how to adequately assist African American, male adolescents in sustaining successful outcomes, despite negative perceptions of them or their circumstances that pose negative influences. Moreover, there are limited studies using cognitive theory and resilience theory frameworks regarding mentors of African American, male, public high school students' positive perceptions on the youths' changed behaviors, thoughts, and academics, as a result of the mentorship program.

The mentorship programs used for this project characterize the successful components that have contributed to cognitive, positive change and resilience, as told by the mentors of African American, male, public high school students. The next section of this project includes information received from the mentors related to their positive perceptions of mentoring, the methods used, the data assessment, and results. I also explain ethical procedures followed while conducting this research project.

Section 2: Research Design and Data Collection

The overall social work practice problem pertains to the impact urban environments have on African American, male, public high school students' well-being, including African American, male youth in general. The negative influences within these communities are interfering with this population's positive development, have disrupted personal relationships, and have caused negative behaviors. Therefore, I sought to gain knowledge on how social workers and other professionals can assist to effect social change with respect to mentoring programs, based on the mentors' positive perceptions.

In this section, I discuss the research design used for this project, the methodology that details how the data were collected, participants involved, and any prior information obtained, along with how the data were analyzed. Additionally, ethical procedures related to this research study are provided pertaining to confidentiality and the dissemination of the data. Lastly, I share how the information gathered will be stored, followed by a summary of this section.

Research Design

As previously stated, the social problem identified relates to the negative affect of high-crime, low-income environments on African American, male youth, specifically African American, male, public high school students. This is considered a social work problem because these influences impact school performances; result in maladaptive behaviors, criminal and/or gang involvement, substance use, and mental health issues; and interfere with relationships (Butler-Barnes et al., 2015; Harden, 2014; Spencer et al., 2016; & Wesely et al., 2017). Thus, the research questions addressed in this study

referred to the positive changes the mentors of African American, male, public high school students report in the students' cognitions, behaviors, and academic progress, as a result of participation in a mentoring program, and what effective components of the program assisted with resilience.

A qualitative research design was used for this research study. This design helped me gather data from people's perspectives of a social issue, based on their encounters (see Denzin & Lincoln, 2013), further research, and promote social change (see Erickson, 2011). Using qualitative, semistructured interviewing allowed me to gain direct insight on the participant's experience but also ensured relevant information was obtained for the study by having specific questions (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). During qualitative interviewing, data obtained from experiences are coded in groups and assessed to determine similar patterns and meanings (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Saldana, 2016) as they relate to the social problem. Therefore, a qualitative research design was appropriate for this research project, as it enabled me the opportunity to render more in-depth information, based on some of the positive perceptions of mentoring from mentors, specifically mentors of African American, male, public high school students of urban communities.

Some operational definitions and key aspects are defined to ensure a clear understanding of the research procedures within this project, which are as follows:

Categories: Groups of similar patterns and meanings (Pokorny et al., 2018, Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Saldana, 2016).

Coding: Identifying similarities by descriptive words or phrases (Pokorny et al., 2018, Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Saldana, 2016).

Themes: An analyzed summary of all data obtained based on common patterns and/or meanings (Pokorny et al., 2018, Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Saldana, 2016).

Transcribe: To document information verbatim (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Methodology

For this research project, I interviewed the mentors of African American, male, public high school students of urban communities, located outside of New Jersey. Consent forms were obtained. I met with each mentor via Zoom video chat or via phone, advised them of the reason for the interview, asked for permission to use an audio-recording device to document the interview to later transcribe for accuracy, and took notes. It is crucial to meet with participants in a setting that is comforting, be transparent on the procedures and purpose of the research study, and obtain consent (Laureate Education, 2016a, 2016b; Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Saldana, 2016). Using a semistructured interviewing style, I asked a series of questions and sought additional information and/or clarification on areas discussed. As previously stated, narrative, semistructured interviewing gives the participant the ability to share their experiences but enables the researcher to guide the interview with a set of questions related to the social problem and to follow with questions, if more information is needed (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). As a result, the data and these steps taken

assisted with the overall outcome of sharing firsthand, accurate accounts of what the mentors perceived as positive aspects of the mentoring program that helped change the youths' cognitions and behaviors.

Participants

The population was mentors of African American, male, public high school students of urban communities, outside of New Jersey. The mentors were located in Santa Ana and Palmdale California, Atlanta and Savannah Georgia, Green Bay, Wisconsin, and Mesa, Arizona. This enabled me the opportunity to compare what the mentors of various locations determined as successful/helpful components of the mentoring program. The exclusion of New Jersey mentors ensured that there was no conflict of interest/dual relationship between myself and the participant due to my employment, which is further explained later in the project.

A purposive sampling method was used to identify five participants who met the criteria of being an adult over the age of 18, residing and working as a mentor outside of New Jersey, and being either a current mentor or a previous mentor within the last 5 years of African American, male, public high school students of urban areas. The use of purposive sampling allowed me to specifically seek participants who could provide relevant data pertaining to the research questions and the goal of the research study (see Coyne, 1997; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The sample size was determined based on the number of mentors who fell within the criteria and agreed to voluntarily participate in the study, as I sought participants via internet/social media methods. According to Mason (2010), data saturation is vital as it pertains to having adequate, diverse sampling related

to the study to further analyze the findings. However, some possible limitations and barriers include small sampling size due to mentors not fitting criteria and/or willing to participate in study.

Instrumentation

A guide with interview questions, audio-recording devices, analytic memos, and a coding spreadsheet were the instrumental tools used, along with noting taking, for this research project (see Laureate Education, 2016a, 2016b; 2016f; Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Saldana, 2016). I developed my own set of questions relevant to the study to gain direct insight from the mentors regarding the impact of the program, specifically related to cognition and behavior changes and resilience. Audio-recording devices was used, once permission was obtained, to ensure I captured the interview. The recorded information was transcribed immediately after the interviews were completed (see Saldana, 2016). Additionally, analytic memos were generated from the notes taken during the interview process containing responses from questions, areas needed for clarification, and any nonverbal cues observed (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). I also created coding spreadsheet to organize information gathered for further assessment (see Saldana, 2016). These instrumental tools assisted with capturing and reporting the participant's experience accurately and with analyzing the experiences (see Laureate Education, 2016a, 2016b; 2016f; Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Saldana, 2016). Furthermore, member checking with the mentors interviewed, pertaining to the information gathered and analyzed with the tools mentioned, further ensured that the data were accurate (see Chowdhury, 2015; Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed by coding similarities/themes from the interviews between the mentors' positive perceptions of the mentoring component of the program and cognitive/behavioral changes reported, based on the information gathered (see Laureate Education, 2016c, 2016d, 2016e; Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Saldana, 2016). Using the coding spreadsheet, I tracked "codes, categories, and themes, and or concepts" (see Saldana, 2016, p. 275). I used eclectic coding to document my initial feeling of the information provided, either by a phrase or a word (see Laureate Education, 2016c, 2016d, 2016e; Saldana, 2016). These codes were grouped into categories that were mainly formed by similarities (see Laureate Education, 2016c, 2016d, 2016e; Saldana, 2016). These determined the theme the interviews had in common, which I generated from analyzing the categories formed (see Laureate Education, 2016f; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). This data analysis revealed the overall experience shared, perceptions given of the mentoring program, and change/s identified in cognitions and behaviors of African American, male, public high students told by their mentors.

Furthermore, it was in my best interest to avoid involving participants with any history with me to not compromise the validity and/or credibility of my project. My role as the researcher and current place of employment in New Jersey, which relates to investigating school settings and mentorship programs, may have caused barriers of obtaining information and cooperation if my role as the researcher had not been clarified. It could also have affected the trustworthiness of the research by causing speculation of

the validity of the data and assumption of biases within the analysis if a participant had a connection to me from prior investigations or otherwise (see Chowdhury, 2015; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Therefore, identifying positionality, reflexivity, or any past or existing relationships between the participant and the researcher is crucial, as this may affect the credibility of the study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Nowell et al., 2017). This was obtained by conducting this project outside of my jurisdiction, as the mentors resided and worked outside of New Jersey.

Ethical Procedures

The IRB approval number granted to conduct this research study through Walden University was 04-30-21-0773232. Consent forms were obtained from the mentors, who were confirmed to be over the age of 18, and it explained that participating in this study was voluntary (see Babbie, 2017; Walden University Center for Research Quality, 2020). The consent form also explained the purpose of the research study and the plans to disseminate the information obtained (see Babbie, 2017; NASW, 2019b). To ensure confidentiality was maintained in the research project, numbers were used instead of full names, unless the participants granted otherwise (see NASW, 2019b). All physical research material such as written notes, analytic memos, and tapes from recording devices are stored in a locked safe. All electronic research material including the coding spreadsheet are secured on a password-protected, external drive in stored in the locked safe as well. Materials were accessed by myself. The information will be kept for 5 years and then shredded and deleted.

Summary

The data, mentioned above, were collected using a qualitative design and narrative, semistructured interviews. The five participants were mentors of African American, male, public high school students from a mentorship program located in urban communities, who were identified using a purposive sampling method. The mentors' residence and employment were outside of New Jersey due to a potential conflict of interest related to the role of the researcher. Consent forms were obtained from the mentors. Full disclosure on the research purpose and distribution of information was given to the mentors. Data retrieved were reviewed and analyzed using analytic memos, and a coding spreadsheet was created, which determined the overall common theme of experiences and positive perceptions of the mentoring program and identified positive changes in cognitions and behaviors. To ensure the credibility of the research, my role as a researcher was identified to avoid assumption of biases or questions regarding the validity of the data, which is presented in the following section.

Section 3: Presentation of the Findings

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to characterize the positive perceptions from mentors of African American, male, public high school students in urban communities that changed the students' cognitions, behaviors, and academic performances and what fostered resilience among the youth. The population was mentors of African American, male, public high school students in urban communities, outside of New Jersey. Therefore, I sought mentors via several social media sites such as LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and the Walden's University Participants Pool.

Five mentors were identified by using a purposive sampling method, who fell under the criteria of being an adult over the age of 18, residing and working as a mentor outside of New Jersey, and being either a current mentor or a previous mentor, within the last 5 years. These mentors were from various locations: Santa Ana and Palmdale, California, Atlanta and Savannah, Georgia, Mesa, Arizona, and Green Bay, Wisconsin. This enabled me the opportunity to compare what the mentors of various locations determined as successful/helpful components of the mentoring program.

Consent forms were obtained. I met with each mentor via Zoom video chat or via phone, advised them of the reason for the interview, asked for permission to use an audio-recording device to document the interview to later transcribe for accuracy, and took notes. I used a cognitive behavioral theoretical framework and a resilience theory conceptual framework and conducted narrative semistructured interviews with the mentors.

The data were transcribed, and the accuracy was confirmed by each participant. The data were analyzed using eclectic coding to determine common themes related to the research questions pertaining to the positive changes perceived by mentors, in urban areas, of African American, male, public high school students' cognitions, behaviors, and academic progress, as a result of participation in a mentoring program and what makes an effective mentorship program for African American, male, at-risk youth that fosters resilience. This section of the project provides information on how the data were analyzed, the limitations and/or problems that occurred during data collection, and the findings.

Data Analysis Techniques

After IRB approval was obtained to begin data collection, the recruitment flyer was shared on the Walden University's Participant Pool webpage. The recruitment flyer was also posted on and shared within several Facebook pages and groups, LinkedIn, Instagram, and Twitter. The timeframe of the data collection was 3 months; however, there was not a high response rate for participation. Nevertheless, five participants volunteered for the study.

The participants were provided a consent form via email to which they replied, "I consent." After consent was obtained, confirmation of preference of a Zoom or phone interview was obtained, and the interview was scheduled based on their time zone. At the beginning of each interview, I obtained permission to record, and I explained the purpose of the research study along with how the information would be disseminated; I also discussed confidentiality. I reminded each participant that I would email them within a

week to schedule a follow-up call to go over my interpretation of the information, as stated on the consent form, to ensure the accuracy of the information. Once clarifications were provided on the procedure, interviews took place, using a series of narrative, semistructured questions. The interviews ranged between 12 minutes to 53 minutes, which was dependent on the responses from each participant.

After each interview, the information was immediately transcribed. Using the Microsoft Word's dictate button, I transferred the voice recordings onto the Word document. I then listened to each audio recording several times to make corrections as needed within the transcript. After reviewing the completed transcript, I completed analytic memos.

All analytic memos consisted of codes generated from the interviews. They were structured to summarize the participants' interviews on how the participants answered my research questions. I compared the participants' information to what the literature review revealed and what the cognitive behavioral theoretical framework and the resilience theory conceptual framework suggested. I documented key quotes from the participants' interviews to use in the final project, as needed. I noted some insights from the interviews pertaining to further research and/or new research questions. These structured memos helped incorporate the data from all interviews while documenting the findings. After completing the analytic memos, the codes generated were documented on a coding spreadsheet.

I created an Excel coding spreadsheet that tracked the number of participants, source of information, date information obtained, location of participants, codes, and

themes. I manually entered the eclectic codes under each participant: 31 codes for Participant 1, 27 codes for Participant 2, 19 codes for Participant 3, 30 codes for Participant 4, and 17 codes for Participant 5. As previously stated, the first set of eclectic codes was noted within the analytic memos for each participant and transferred to a spreadsheet. Eclectic codes were either initial words or phrases prompted from the interviews (see Salanda, 2016). Each set of codes generated from the interviews was compared to the previous interview/s and then organized under common themes, related to the research questions. In addition to analyzing and documenting the information, which was completed within a week of the interviews, a validation process involving peer debriefing and memberchecking was conducted as well.

The transcriptions, analytic memos, recruitment and data collection logs, along with the Excel coding spreadsheet were sent to my committee chair for peer debriefing, after completion of each participant. Furthermore, member checking with each participant was conducted within at least 2 weeks of their scheduled interview. My interpretation of the interview from the data obtained was shared, along with direct quotes, and the accuracy of the information was confirmed by each participant. Peer debriefing and member checking ensure the data are reviewed for validity and credibility (Chowdhury, 2015; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Nevertheless, there were some limitations encountered during the process.

Because this study was conducted in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, there were limitations in participation, gender, and interviewing procedures. Several mentorship programs were not operating during this time either because of lack of

funding and/or related to social distancing protocols in place that hindered agencies' operations, which in turn limited the participation of mentors. Another limitation was gender as all of the participants were women. Therefore, this study does not present the perceptive from male mentors regarding this population. In addition, due to COVID-19, interviews had to be held either on a virtual platform or via phone, rather than in person. These limitations, however, provided more information for further research related to COVID-19 and mentoring, which will be later discussed in the recommendations.

Findings

The five participants for this study were mentors from various states and were either connected through mentoring by a school, a nonprofit program, or court affiliated. The mentors were from various locations: Santa Ana and Palmdale, California, Atlanta and Savannah, Georgia, Mesa, Arizona, and Green Bay, Wisconsin. Their experience in mentoring ranged from 1 to 10 years.

Sample Characteristics

Participant 1 was a mentor located in Santa Ana, California and was working with a student whose family is from Mexico but who identifies as Black. She had been working with this student for 2.5 years. She had been a mentor with her current program for about 3 to 4 years, was a mentor in Florida for 3 years, and was a Sunday School teacher for 10 years. She informed me of her student's background, which involved family trauma, poverty, racism, gun violence, death, gang involvement, lack of education within the family, lack of cooperation among support systems, foster care involvement, immigration, and cultural identity. Prior to COVID-19, they met once every 2 weeks, but

since the beginning of the pandemic, they have been texting about once or twice a week to touch base. The student, at times, also sends her video messages.

Participant 2 was a mentor located in Mesa, Arizona and was working with six African American, male, public high school students. She had been working with the students for a year. She had been a mentor with her current program for 2 years, but overall had been a mentor for 15 years. She informed me of the students' backgrounds, which involved low-income statuses, loss of jobs due to COVID-19, domestic violence, suicidal ideations, self-injurious behaviors, lack of family support, custody issues, and lack of boundaries from the parents. Participant 2 indicated that some of the students were withdrawn, suffered from depression, and had social issues. The students were also experiencing academic issues such as failing classes, no class participation, not turning in assignments, and fighting and being aggressive with peers and/or siblings, which resulted in retainment and other disciplinary actions. Some of the lack of progress in their academics were due to limited resources such as having access to a computer and/or internet for virtual classes, in association with COVID-19. She met with the students for 2 hours a week, but this was based on the students' availability. They were meeting as a group, but due to resources and COVID-19, there were times that one, few, or none of the students showed up.

Participant 3 was a school-based mentor in Green Bay, Wisconsin until June 2021. She worked with five African American, male, public high school students and had been working with the students for a year. Her main role was offering support in classes, addressing behavioral issues, and assisting the students with graduation. She met with the

students every day in school and spent more than an hour a week with them, along with communicating frequently through text and/or emails. Participant 3 informed me that the students were from low-income families, some resided with either both parents or with their grandparents, and some of the students suffered from mental health issues. She indicated that the family relationships were alright but could be better, as there were communication issues and lack of understanding of the students. The students were all considered at-risk youth, as this was the population her agency worked with. According to Participant 3, the students felt that they were not understood by adults and had issues with control as they did not want to listen to authority figures. Some students exhibited anger issues, and some had issues running away from home. In addition, some students were more focused on participating in sports and not their academics and did not realize the importance of their schoolwork; some students were most likely not going to have enough credits to graduate.

Participant 4 was a mentor to three African American, male, public high school students in Atlanta and Savannah, Georgia. She had been a mentor for approximately 5 years. She has been working with the youth since 2017. She spoke with one student every Sunday, the other student every other week, and the third student is on an as-needed basis; however, she maintained frequent contact with his parents. Participant 4 informed me that the students were all sweet, young men, but their backgrounds involved criminal activity, emotional trauma from abuse, anger issues, and academic problems, including reading below grade level. One of the families had State involvement, which could warrant placement of the student in a group home at times. One student was a designated

felon, and the other student was recently incarcerated as well. She explained that the students' families were supportive. However, all of the families were not structured but were actively working on things. The students tended to act out and get into a lot of trouble, which interfered with their academics due to the influences of their neighborhood and part of their home dynamics. As a result, the students had to attend night school as they were not allowed to attend during the day.

Participant 5 was a mentor to one African American, male, high school student in Palmdale, California, due to COVID-19. She had been a mentor for high school for 2 years and met with the student at least 3 times a week. She shared that she did activities with the student, such as swimming, golfing, reading together, and constructing assignments. Participant 5 informed me that the student was actually an honor roll student and had a good relationship with his family and friends. She explained that due to COVID-19, she had been focusing more on emotional needs, including isolation with the student, rather than just academics. However, she informed me that she also worked with the student on academic assignments, job searches, and future college goals. Participant 5 indicated that to help the student with his emotional needs, she encouraged him to keep in contact with his friends via online or by phone and had conversations with him on how he felt to assist with keeping a positive attitude.

Statistical Analysis Findings

Based on the research question about positive changes mentors of African American, male, public high school students of urban areas report in cognitions, behaviors, and academic progress, as a result of participation in a mentoring program,

there were two common themes. The themes of self-awareness and positive development were discovered. The mentors generally reported how the youth were becoming more confident in themselves, acknowledging and accepting their adversities, and believing in their success, with the mentors' support and guidance assisting in a positive change.

Participant 1 explained how her student changed his thoughts on succeeding in school and with his relationship with his mother. The student also embraced learning more about his culture as his family is from Mexico, but he identifies as Black. He became more confident in himself and speaks up/advocates for himself, when needed. Participant 1 stated the student is now "advocating for himself and finding a voice." He reconnected with his mother, as they were not close prior, and now their relationship has gotten better. He was not displaying negative behaviors and was not influenced by his brother's behaviors as he had a drug problem and was in a gang. However, the mentee has been kind, calm, and positive during her time with him.

According to Participant 1, the student was failing all his classes because he did not think it mattered due to his family's history and the lack of importance of education in his family. However, as his mentor, she has encouraged him to do better in school, pass his classes, and continue until he graduates. He has now passed two of classes with a D, which she informed me is an improvement from getting all Fs. Participant 1 stated, "I told him if you're close enough to a D, you know, get going on those classes and can get that D, because a D is passing you can get your credits. You can maybe graduate so." Overall, it appears that having her as a mentor has positively changed how he views the

importance of knowing his cultural background and advocating for himself, his relationship with his mother, and his performance in school.

Participant 2 explained that she could not report that the students' academics/grades and/or behaviors have positively changed as their performance has decreased due to COVID-19, and this pandemic has caused additional stressors to what the students were already dealing with. COVID-19 has also affected their home environments as the students have to assist with caring for their younger siblings, think of obtaining a job to help with bills, not be just a child, and cope with not having the family's support. She shared that when they were making progress, the pandemic hit. Participant 2 stated, "Just when we were progressing COVID hit. But I saw still where, you know, people are accepting that this is my life, but it doesn't have to always be like this and they talk about it a lot." She also shared, "I will probably have more positive feedback if COVID didn't hit which created another string of stress and problems for them in addition to what they were already faced with."

In addition, Participant 2 felt that the students' situations appeared to be an ongoing cycle, as if they were heading down the same path as they parents. However, she explained that the students were changing their outlook by speaking of either going back to school or discussing plans for college. She explained by stating,

> Like oh, I'll never be anything. I'm this, I'm that, I'm dumb. My mom didn't go. My mom said colleges are for this and colleges for that. I don't hear those words anymore. And now I'm hearing, you know, ok, which college I wanna go or I wanna do this.

According to Participant 2, the students' thoughts have changed positively as they are learning to accept themselves for who they are and the issues they have, to accept others' differences, and to be able to express themselves with more confidence. The students are saying more positive things, unlike previously, regarding their outlook on life and understanding that they can succeed. They are talking to their peers more, considering joining sports teams if grades are better, and exploring ideas with her (mentor) to find their talents, which keeps them motivated. Participant 2 stated,

> The other things we talk about spending time focusing on exploring. I see where it created some kind of, you know, some door for them to be more open about who they are, accept the idea that yes, I have issues and I will face them and I will work hard to change no matter how long it takes.

Participant 3 explained that the students' thoughts and behaviors regarding school changed while working with her as they were now willing to talk about their problems and find solutions, as before they just wanted to do things their way and not listen to authority. She explained,

> I feel like that's kind of why I see a lot of male toughness, like they have this tough attitude, where they have to, you know, have this controlling mindset where they have to be in charge of everything and do things the way that they want to do it instead of listening to us, authority figures.

Furthermore, the students were once not interested in schoolwork and now seeking help to increase their grades and remain on track for graduation.

Participant 3 stated,

> Sometimes it was… the student was really into a certain sports and they didn't care about the schoolwork as much and didn't really realize the significance or the importance of it. So, we kind of had to work on that a little bit.

She informed that some students grades were ok, some were not the best, and some did not have enough credits when she begun working with them. She disclosed, "a lot of the junior males that I was working with were credit deficient, meaning that they didn't have enough credits or probably weren't going to have enough to graduate on time" Participant 3 explained that since she has been working with the students, they now realize that the school does want them to be successful and that someone does care about them. She indicated that she would assist with studying and schoolwork, speak positiveness to them if they feared failing a test, along with making sure they were taking necessary notes for tests, which shows the students support and holds them accountable. Participant 3 further noted,

> Sitting and just having me listen to their situation with their frustration. I feel like that really help understand like that school, school does care about them, that somebody does care and that they do want, umm, you know, that we do want them to be successful.

Participant 4 explained that despite the students' anger issues and or criminal background, they do not have behavioral issues that affect the relationships with their families and friends. However, the students do portray different characteristics of who they are because their neighborhood which impacts their growth and academics. Participant 4 stated,

> Their academics…basically, falls are their foundation and that's the same as with their behavior and because of that they tend to want to betray to be something that they actually are not. So therefore, they do things that are not in the best character as far as their growth, which in turns hinder them in their schoolwork.

Participant 4 informed that since she has been working with the students, their personalities and demeanors had positively changed. Participant 4 explained that one of the students begun going to her daily to get assistance with reading and he is now determined as he plans to become a train driver after completion of technical school. She advised,

> It was more so just believing in who they were and not taking them for their actions. And because of that…I have one, well they said, you probably won't see him for nothing but one time every other two months…what…but no he started coming to school every day. He will come early so I can help him with his reading, like the determination changed, that was my designated felon.

Another student opened up more as she worked with him and realized she was "coming from a loving place." She informed that all of their demeanors changed and "their want and drive for life" as well. Participant 4 further explained that they always had it in them, but she helped them realize it.

Participant 5 explained that the student does not display any negative behaviors. However, she works with him on maintaining a positive attitude, set boundaries, share a mutual respect, takes time to listen to the student, and takes his needs into consideration as this is very important for positive changes. She stated, "so as far as mentorship, it's

just kind of encouraging them. To stay connected with their friends, you know, online or over the phone and keeping a positive attitude." She further advised, "I think that there is a mutual respect and there are some boundaries. Therefore, I think it's important for mentors to know body language. You know, that's very important." Participant 5 believes that being a good listener and a confidant to the student is needed to help the student persevere.

Based on the research question, what makes an effective mentorship program for African American, male, public high school students and African American youth, in general, that fosters resilience, there were also two common themes. The themes of cultural competence and supportive relationships were revealed. The mentors consistently reported the importance of knowing the student's background and adversities, how students need to be understood, being supportive, empowering the youth, working with the family, and showing belief in the youth successes all makes an effective mentor and assist with resilience.

Participant 1 explained that a child needs a support system and at least one person to show that they care. She stated, "just being that one caring individual that hopefully can…make a difference, like help him make a difference in his own life, 'cause it's not me, it's him." She indicated that it is important to be culturally competent as this helps with the relationship with the child. Participant 1 disclosed, "maybe 'cause he sees me as a person, but I'm also kind of similar to his mom." She advised of the importance of training on various issues that could affect the child's wellbeing and to empower the child to continue to succeed. Participant 1 informed, "…he had three or four mentors before

me. And they wouldn't last. He wouldn't talk to them. They couldn't communicate." She also feels being transparent allows the child to see that they can make it if the mentor has a similar/relatable background, stating, "I'm not supposed to tell him about my life. Like how do you make a connection with somebody without telling them."

Participant 2 explained that her program focuses on the positives and are consistent with services without disruption. She informed that her program meets the student where they are and do not take a general approach with all students. She advised of her program's focus by stating,

> The focus is positive and it is more… it meets the individuals where they're at. So you know, we don't group people in a box or have this general approach. We deal with them based on who they are, specific issue they face at any given time.

Participant 2 indicated that they encourage the students to accept who they are, what issues they have, and where they are in life, knowing that they can succeed regardless. She explained the youth are now "understanding themselves, understand that they're different, understanding that they can succeed regardless."

Participant 3 explained that she believes getting the students to realize that they are not alone in the struggles that they face and that others have been through similar experiences or have similar backgrounds helps the students persevere. She stated that this allows them to realize someone cares and want them to be successful. She noted,

> And I think that, you know, sharing my story of my background and my ethnicity, I think that kind of help them realize that, like you know, yeah this person does care and that they do want me to be successful.

Participant 3 indicated that her program is school-based and offers support to the youth in classes. She stated that other programs would benefit from integrating a mentor in the schools, as this allows the mentors to gain a better understanding of what the students face on a daily basis and so that the students realize that they are not alone. Participant 3 informed, "I think that really would be beneficial to other programs out there to kind of integrate somebody, just a mentor in the school, in the classrooms so that they realize that they're not alone in what their struggles are."

Participant 4 explained that she speaks positive things to the students, shows belief in them, and provides hope. She informed that this helps the students believe in themselves despite how they are described by others. She stated that the students need structure but also love and be understood. She noted, "they are awesome young men though. They need a little more structure. They need to be shown something different. They need love." Participant 4 indicated that, at times, she takes the students out of their environment to show them another scenery, talks to them and have others talk to them as well, along with providing assistance with job searches. She also explained that she gives the students incentives when they increase their grades and gives them things as motivation. However, she emphasized that she works with the youth and does not tell them what to do as she meets them exactly where they are. She disclosed,

> They all pretty much just…their demeanors just changed and even their want and drive for life, just changed. And I wouldn't say it changed because I honestly believe it was always there; it was just I was able to help them bring it to the forefront.

Participant 4 further explained that it is important for other programs to take the time to learn who the youth are and what they have been through because it is much deeper than just mentoring.

Participant 5 explained that she also feels that it is important for mentors to know the student and understand their body language. She indicated that mentors should simply ask what it is the students wants to do and how they would like the mentor to help them. She stated, "it's very important for him to have a good listener and as a mentor, I provide that because sometimes children just what a good listener." Participant 5 informed that mentors should take this approach, rather than dictating to or demanding from the youth. She pointed out,

> One of the things here is I believe respect, uh, mutual respect. Not so much as the mentor dictating…dictating, you know, or you know, being let's see… demanding, forceful…dictating. I think being a good listener and taking the child's needs into consideration is very important.

Data Interaction

The literature informed that African American, male youth residing in urban areas face several challenges due to lack of resources, lack of support systems, family dynamics, exposure to violence, drugs, economic status, racism, and peer influences, which negatively affects their academic performances, personal relationships, cause mental health issues such as depression, and hinders their success and personal growth. The literature also informed that supportive relationships from family, friends, and other influential adults can empower these youth to push through the obstacles and have a

positive outlook, resulting in the youth being resilient and achieving their goals. By applying the cognitive behavioral theoretical framework to research question one, based on the literature review, it would suggest that if the mentor/s assist the students in changing their perception of their circumstances, it would render a positive change in their behaviors affecting their wellbeing, relationships, and academics. By applying the resilience theory conceptual framework to research question two, based on the literature review, it would suggest that an effective mentoring program that fosters resilience would involve supportive relationships that helps build healthy, coping skills to persevere through adversities by having a positive outlook on their future.

Participant 1's interview confirmed and illustrated the information obtained from the literature review and both frameworks as the student involved has a traumatic background which affected his wellbeing, personal relationships, and academics. The student faced internalized and externalized racism as well. Due to the influence of the mentor, the student has changed his thoughts of himself by seeking to learn more about his culture, mended his relationship with his family specifically his mother, changed his view on school and is striving to get better grades, and remains positive despite his situation. The relationship between the mentor and the student has been supportive and she tries to provide him hope that he can make a difference in his life.

Participant 2's interview confirmed and illustrated the information obtained from the literature review and both frameworks as the students involved have experienced traumatic events which affected their wellbeing, personal relationships, and academics. Although, Participant 2 informed that the students' grades did not improve due to

stressors of COVID-19, the overall change of the students' perceptions were positive as they are now accepting themselves, the issues they are facing, and having a positive outlook to succeed despite of. The students are still working on progressing in behavioral and academic issues, but based on the cognitive behavioral theoretical framework, the mentor assisting the students with changing how they view their circumstances will change the negative behaviors and the mentor/participant has managed to do this, despite the impact of COVID-19. Furthermore, the mentor has, through her program, encouraged the students to understand and accept their circumstances and to know that they lives can change in time. She has also encouraged and motivated the students to express themselves and talk more to their peers and to her which builds acceptance and confidence.

Participant 3's interview confirmed and illustrated the information obtained from the literature review and both frameworks, as students involved were from low-income families with communication issues, exhibited anger issues, mental health issues, had problems with listening to authority, have a history of running away, and had academic issues, hindering graduation due to their lack of interest in schoolwork. According to the participant, the students' thoughts and behaviors about school changed positively, as they were now communicating about their problems to find ways to handle them and seeking assistance to better their grades. Their thoughts also changed as they now realized the importance of school and that they have support. They now realize that they are not alone in their struggles and that others want them to be successful. Participant 3's interview

also confirmed that speaking positiveness, being aware of the students' struggles, and showing constant support, within the school setting, encourages the students to persevere.

Participant 4'**s** interview confirmed and illustrated the information obtained from the literature review and both frameworks. The students' background involves criminal activities, emotional trauma from abuse, anger issues, and academic problems including reading below grade level. The students have to attend night school as they are not allowed to attend during the day. Despite, the students' anger issues and or criminal background, they do not have behavioral issues that affect the relationships with their families and friends. Since the students have been working with the mentor, their personalities and demeanors had positively changed. The students are more determined, their want and drive for life has changed, and have more open communication with her. One student**,** in particular**,** began getting assistance for reading and plans to go on to technical school. Participant 4 confirmed that speaking positive things to the students shows belief in them and provides hope. She confirmed that this helps the students believe in themselves despite how others described them. She stated that the students need structure but also love and be understood. The participant indicated that, at times, she takes the students out of their environment to show them another scenery, talks to them and have others talk to them as well, along with providing assistance with job searches. She also explained that she gives the students incentives when they increase their grades and gives them things as motivation. However, Participant 4 emphasized that she works with the youth and does not tell them what to do as she meets them exactly where they are. She further explained that it is important for other programs to take the

time to learn who the youth are and what they have been through because it is much deeper than just mentoring.

Participant 5's interview refuted the literature review related to challenges faced by youth in urban areas yet confirmed and illustrated the information obtained from the literature review related to the importance of supportive relationships and both frameworks. The student's background did not involve any negative behaviors that affected the relationship with his family and friends influenced by his environment, but the mentor has been working with him on his mental health related to emotional needs due to isolation as a result of COVID-19 to maintain a positive attitude. While working as his mentor, she has conversations on how he is feeling and encourages him to keep in contact with friends as well. The student does not have academic issues and is an honor roll student. As his mentor, she assists with academics, job searches, and future college plans. Participant 5 confirmed that she believes that having mutual respect, being a good listener, and a confidant for the youth is important to help with persevering and staying positive. She informed that she does activities with the student such as swimming, golfing, and reading. She indicated that she believes that other mentors should take into consideration of what the youth wants and how the youth would want the mentor to help them, rather than dictating or being demanding.

Although there were similar themes related to both research questions among the interviews, there was an unexpected finding. The impact of COVID-19 was an unexpected finding during this study, as the pandemic begun in 2020 and continued to affect families and mentorship programs in 2021. COVID-19 was a consistent code that

was developed throughout the interviews. However, these mentors were able to inform of ways they were able to outcome the challenges of connecting with their students to maintain a supportive relationship.

Summary

The five participants who were mentors to African American, male students in Arizona, California, Georgia, and Wisconsin revealed two common themes for both research questions. The common themes related to the positive changes reported by the mentors on the students' cognitions, behaviors, and academic progress after participating in a mentoring program were self-awareness and positive development. The youth became more confident in themselves, acknowledged and accepted their adversities, and gained belief in their success. In addition, cultural competence and supportive relationships were the themes related to an effective mentoring program fostering resilience in the youth. The mentors reported importance of knowing the student's background and adversities, understanding and supporting the youth, empowering the youth, and believing in the youth. With that said, the next section will discuss how the NASW Code of Ethics relates to this social problem discussed within this study, recommendations for social work practice based on the findings, and the implications for social change.

Section 4: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Social Change

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to conduct narrative, semistructured interviews to characterize the positive perceptions from mentors of African American, male, public high school students in urban communities that changed the students' cognitions, behaviors, and academic performances and determine what makes an effective mentorship program foster resilience among the youth. The key findings of the study were the common themes pertaining to the importance of self-awareness and positive development of the youth, along with cultural competence and supportive relationships related to the effectiveness of the mentoring relationship. These findings extend to the knowledge of social work as themes exemplify the roles of social workers and how these key components are crucial when working with and/or advocating for clients. It is important for mentors of African American, male youth, especially public high school students in urban communities, to be culturally competent on the adversities this population face and to provide a support system, while empowering the youth to become more self-aware to avoid being negatively influenced, which could hinder their positive development. Mentorship programs should require trainings to ensure their mentors are well-informed to be more effective on making a positive change within the African American, male youth population.

Application for Professional Ethics in Social Work Practice

The NASW Code of Ethics' values related to this project are social justice, dignity and worth of the person, importance of human relationship, and competence (NASW, 2019a). Social workers are called to assist with social change among vulnerable

populations and fight against oppression (NASW, 2019a). Social workers are also required to meet the clients where they are and empower the clients to address their problems independently while advocating on their behalf for social change as needed within the community (NASW, 2019a). Additionally, social workers work together with others to build a supportive system for their clients, which enhances change as well (NASW, 2019a). However, it is crucial for social workers to be knowledgeable to demonstrate the necessary skills to effectively assist their clients (NASW, 2019a). Therefore, the Code of Ethics guides the clinical social work practice pertaining to the social problem among African American, male, public high school students, along with African American, male youth overall.

The mentors were located in urban communities and provided mentoring to at-risk youth to address the negative influences of their environment and promote positive development. The Code of Ethics provides information on how to effectively promote positive changes among this population by being culturally competent, working with the youth while empowering them, building supportive relationship, and promoting social change. The findings of this study can impact social work practice as it characterizes the voices of the mentors on how to assist African American, male, public high school students in urban communities, what made an impact in the lives of these youth, and the importance of all professionals to withhold these values to make a difference. Furthermore, these findings bring awareness of how vital it is for mentors, social workers, and other professionals to be culturally competent regarding this population when working with them by showing support, empowering the youth to become self-

aware to eliminate maladaptive behaviors, and encouraging positive development, to foster resilience.

Recommendations for Social Work Practice

Based on the information obtained from the findings, there are a few recommendations pertaining to action steps for social work professionals who work with this population. The first step is to ensure that all professionals are culturally competent on the adversities faced among the African American, male youth population in urban communities through trainings. It is clear that mentors and other social work professionals are more effective when knowledgeable and skilled to promote social change and adequately address the social problems. Another action step that is beneficial is working directly with the families and other partnering agencies to increase the supportive network, which could improve the resources within urban communities to eliminate the oppression of African American, male youth that adversely affects their personal growth and to assist with addressing mental health issues developed. Lastly, another action step would be for all mentoring programs to consider working directly with school officials to positively impact the youths' school performances to increase the graduation rates, thereby decreasing the dropout rates and poor school performances. The study findings also impact my social work practice.

These findings can impact my social work practice as an advanced practitioner by improving my interactions with this population by becoming more effective in working with the youth to increase a positive change and decrease maladaptive behaviors, along with fostering resilience to persevere. It can also impact my practice by allowing me to

provide further education on the findings to other social work professionals on what the mentors perceive as beneficial in making change when working with African American, male, public high school students and within the American, male, youth population in general. These findings are also transferable to social work practice and have usefulness to the broader field of social work as well.

The transferability of the findings from this study to the field of clinical social work practice helps with providing additional information on working with African American, male, public high school students involved with mentoring and suffer with clinical diagnoses. This can enable clinical practitioners to develop a more effective plan of action to address maladaptive behaviors and the importance of meeting the youth where they are essential to positive change, while applying a cognitive behavioral and resilience theory approach. The findings are also useful for the broader field of social work as the main themes of self-awareness, positive development, cultural competency, and supportive relationships can be applied with helping a diverse population of youth facing adversities and/or exhibiting maladaptive behaviors, which is hindering their personal development that affects their success as an adult. The limitations, however, from this study do not provide perceptions from male mentors or additional mentors due to the limitations of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, there are recommendations for further research grounded in the strengths and limitations of this study.

The recommendations for further research revealed from this study evolve around the mentorship relationship dynamics, COVID-19, and overall mentorship programs' operations. It would be beneficial to look into the paid/volunteer dynamics of the

mentorship on how it impacts the effectiveness of the relationship and involvement of the mentor. In regards to COVID-19, there should be further research on the changes the pandemic caused in the functioning and success of mentorship programs, the changes occurred within family dynamics/relationships due to COVID-19 restrictions on outside activities, resulting in quarantining as a family unit, and on what emotional issues developed among youth as a result of isolation due to COVID-19 in which mentors are addressing. Further research should be conducted on the overall operation of mentorship programs as it pertains to boundaries related to financial/gifting contributions to students, communication and networking with other outside agencies and school support staff, cultural competency trainings, and if having access to student's history enables a supportive relationship. In addition, further research the effectiveness of group setting mentorship relationships as opposed to individual mentorship relationship, determining if school-based mentors have a greater impact on the overall academic success and personal growth of the youth, compared to a community-based mentor's influence, and the effectiveness of mentoring involving youth already in the juvenile system in reference to effectively decreasing further criminal activity and helping with personal growth. Lastly, there should be further research on the use of incentive programs within mentorship programs to promote positive behavior and to determine if incentives create potential boundary issues and the effectiveness of mentoring involving youth considered honor roll students related to if mentoring enhances positive development among honor roll students or if this causes a struggle within the relationship because the youth is already

succeeding. With that in mind, the dissemination of the information obtained from this study is vital.

Dissemination of the information gathered from this research is beneficial in bringing additional awareness to the social work field regarding effective ways on working with African American, male, public high school students and youth in general. Disseminating data is crucial after conducting research as it provides the findings to better serve the population and enables further research to other practitioners (Erickson, 2011). Therefore, two ways of disseminating the findings from this study would be to share the information with the participants involved to distribute to their prospective agencies and to share the results to local mentoring programs and social service agencies by sharing a brief but detailed report of the findings.

Implications for Social Change

As previously stated, this study has the potential impact for positive social change as it can bring awareness on the positive effects of mentorships programs pertaining to African American, male, public high school students' cognitions, behaviors, and academics. It can provide additional information to other mentors, social work professionals, and mental health professionals on successful methods to address maladaptive behaviors, promote positive development, and foster resilience among this population. It can also contribute to further research on how mentors of African American, male, public high school students perceive mentoring and how it helps this population make better choices to enhance their well-being in school and within their communities.

Summary

This research study has characterized the positive perceptions of mentoring on African American, male, public high school students' cognitions, behaviors, and academic performances in urban communities and what makes an effective mentorship program foster resilience. Although there were limitations within this study pertaining to not providing perceptions from male mentors or involving additional mentors due to the limitations of the COVID-19 pandemic, there are two vital messages from this study. One message is that self-awareness promotes healthy choices and self-expression regardless of negative influences, which potentially decreases or eliminates maladaptive behaviors. Lastly, cultural competence can encourage self-awareness among the youth, which is developed and sustained through a supportive relationship, resulting in positive development and resilience.

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Appendix A: Questions Guide

Interview Questions Guide for Mentors:

1. Are you currently a mentor for African American, male, public high school students? If not, have you been a mentor within the last five years to this population?
2. How long have you been a mentor?
3. In what city/state is the program located?
4. How many participants do you currently or have previous mentored?
5. How often do you meet/see your mentee? What are some things you do with the youth?
6. What are some of the problems, pertaining to academics and behaviors, the participants have in school? How has those problems changed since they enrolled in the program?
7. Describe the participants' family/home dynamics.
8. How would you describe the participants' relationships with their family and friends?
9. What are some of the behaviors the participants are addressing that affects their relationships with family and friends?
10. How does your role, as the mentor, assist with positively changing the participants' thoughts and behaviors?
11. How has this program helped encourage the youth to persevere despite any challenges around them?
12. What are the positive things of this mentorship program that you believe other programs can benefit from?