

2022

Former Offender Perspectives on the Effectiveness of the Missouri Reentry Process

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Walden University
2021

Abstract

Former Offender Perspectives on the Effectiveness of the Missouri Reentry Process

by

Brian Clay Roper

MS, Colorado Technical University, 2018

BS, University of Central Missouri, 2015

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Criminal Justice

Walden University

November 2021

Abstract

The criminal justice system in the United States has tried to reduce repeat offending through various tactics over the years including reentry/rehabilitation programs in the past two decades. The state of Missouri was one of the first states to participate in this type of transitional model. While the recidivism rate has dropped, it is still one of the highest in the nation. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to determine if a program called the Missouri Reentry Process (MRP) has been effective at aiding men at (re)integrating and (re)acclimating in society. Social disorganization theory and desistance theory informed this study. Fifteen adult male participants were interviewed and asked a series of 24 questions. After the interview process, the collected data were analyzed by using coding and developing themes to determine the findings of the study. Based on the findings, it was determined that the MRP has been mostly unsuccessful in its mission and goal. While many of the participants were able to learn and gain valuable information while taking programs under the umbrella of the MRP; most felt that there was little to no help at (re)integrating into society. These break downs in the prison system and MRP give the biggest opportunity for social change. Making the prison safer and providing more opportunities for learning healthy lifestyles helps develop well-rounded individuals. By building better relationships within the community, former offenders can experience success after release and build better and stronger communities. Ultimately, when the individual becomes healthy they will help change the communities where they reside making them safer and more productive for generations resulting in positive social change.

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Acknowledgments

First, I would like to thank God for giving me the strength to complete this goal without him this would not be possible. Secondly, I want to thank my wife, Menneka, for supporting during this journey it has not always been fun. I would also like to thank all my family and friends who have been supportive during this process. Lastly, I would like to thank the participants of this study and my dissertation committee.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Recidivism rates have become a growing concern in the criminal justice system, especially in the state of Missouri. In 2004, the recidivism rate in Missouri rose to 54.6% making it the third highest recidivism rate in the United States (Pew Center on the States, 2011). While this data is 16 years old, it is important to use as a base to form an understanding of the statistical impact of the Missouri Reentry Program (MRP). Missouri was one of the first states to take part in a nationwide trend of revamped rehabilitation/reentry programs. In fact, Missouri became the first state chosen to work in conjunction with the National Institute of Corrections (NIC) to demonstrate the “Transition from Prison to Community Model” now known as the MRP. It is important to note that despite Missouri’s early efforts to combat recidivism by using programming, that Missouri continues to face a significant problem with recidivism. Another issue that can be identified from earlier studies was the percentage of prisoners who were released but returned to prison for technical violations. Of the 54.6% returned to prison, 40.3% were due technical violations making Missouri number for the highest percentage of parole violators. This factor alone increased Missouri’s recidivism 12% between 1999 to 2004. In 2006, Missouri made policy changes which included a new vision and set of goals, and as part of this new direction, probation and parole officers were provide extensive training (Pew Center on the States, 2011).

Missouri has employed numerous strategies to encourage and/or compel offenders to actively participate in the reentry process including legislation. According to Revised Missouri Statue 217, many of these programs are mandated and all offenders must

complete or show a “good faith effort” in completing at least one of these programs before release. While these programs helped reduce recidivism 3% overall as of 2011, the programs had at that point been unsuccessful in reducing the recidivism rate drastically (“Pew Center on the States, 2011). Based on this quantitative data to reference the significance of the problem, this qualitative dissertation study conducted an in-depth exploration of how valuable reentry programs are at aiding men reacclimate and reenter into society. Chapter 1 will provide a brief background on the subject. I also discuss the social problem and the purpose of the study and present the research questions along with the theoretical framework to understand the lens through which the research was conducted. Chapter 1 also includes a description of the nature of the study and provides necessary definitions. Last, I address the assumptions, limitations, and significance of the study.

Background

Researchers have discussed recidivism for many years in attempts to provide explanations to why some offenders reoffend and others do not. Because of that research, the criminal justice community has established rehabilitation/reentry programs as the primary tool to fight against recidivism. Although rehabilitation/reentry programs play a role in the successful reentry of many offenders, there appears to be a significant disconnect between what offenders say they need to be successful after release and what criminal justice professional have deemed important.

Iudici et al. (2018) discussed the perspectives on reoffenders from different points of view, including reoffender, non-reoffenders, the public, and criminal justice

professionals. The results of their study revealed just how different the perceptions are between criminals and non-criminals in relation to reoffending. In fact, three different perceptions arose during this study. Iudici et.al. (2018) revealed non-reoffending and prison employees believe those who reoffend do so out of necessity or as way to make fast money. This group believes that those who reoffend do so to gain financial stability and continue to do so because it is easier. The second group, Reoffenders, believes that recidivism happens not only because of the difficulty finding work but also due to a lack of family support. This lack creates a situation where reoffenders think that criminal behavior is their only viable option for survival. The third and final group, the public and prison employees, viewed reoffending as a result of pre-existing mental health issues that prevent the offender from understanding the situation. This final groups believes an offender will reoffend because that person is incapable of changing due to a psychological problem that prevents them from following social norms.

These responses provide a glimpse into the differences in thinking between offenders and nonoffenders. These perceptions became even more apparent when participants of the study addressed successful reintegration into society. Iudici et. al. (2018) concluded offenders view outside influences as their number one reason for being successful at reacclimating with society. Offenders, whether reoffending or not, listed family support, prosocial network or groups, and consistent employment as the main factors for not returning to crime after release. When compared that to the public and some prison employees, who believe that offenders will eventually return to a life of crime due to an internal deficit, this group thinks that no matter how many reentry

programs individuals in prison take, they will give in to crime at the first sign of difficult times. The prison employees in the study believed that the key element in successful reintegration into society is solely dependent on the desire of the offender to make changes in their behavior. However, the results of the study indicated the importance of strong socioeconomic connections and concluded by stating that offenders and prison workers both placed significant emphasis on the importance of family support, social networks, and employment in the reintegration process. However, the difference in the perceptions on why those things are important directly impacts how effective reentry/rehabilitation will be. The research of Iudici et. al. (2018) highlights the need to question the effectiveness of reentry programs, but it did not focus on the programs themselves, and what impact those programs have on former offenders' lives after release.

The purpose of reentry programs is simple: to provide a process in which offenders, once released from custody, can transition to society by learning how to operate within the social norms of the community in which they will live (Astrada, 2018). Reentry programs should address the basic or essential needs of surviving after prison such as safe and adequate housing, how to seek and maintain gainful employment, and educational and health care assistance. Reentry programs should not only address these typical issues but should have resources or elements that provide mental health and substance abuse counseling. Astrada points out the societal benefits of reentry programs when they help former offenders' transition to law-abiding, tax paying members of the community. Astrada also notes, however, that the success of a reentry programs is not a

simple equation. There are outlying concerns that could negatively impact reentry programs and these “collateral consequences” often hinder the process of reentry for ex-offenders. Collateral consequences are issues that arise for former offenders after release like difficulty finding a job and housing. While some reentry programs will address how to live-in society, they do not necessarily have the resources to help former offenders secure employment or housing.

Most offenders have unique situations before going to prison making it difficult for prison officials and the general corrections community to develop and evaluate reentry programs that address the needs of every offender. This factor causes measuring and/or evaluating reentry/rehabilitation programs to become a tedious and painstaking activity. The question of how to create and evaluate reentry programs looms heavy in the research world, both from qualitative and quantitative approaches. Some researchers contend that the best way to determine effectiveness of reentry programs is through statistical analysis. However, other researchers of reentry programs tend to want to take a qualitative approach to research. This is because reentry programs cannot be measured by well-defined lines; they are typically not designed to be all or nothing. For example, the Missouri Department of Corrections (MODOC) has over 200 programs designed to aid inmates with the reentry process. It would be an intensive undertaking to determine the effectiveness of 200 different programs simultaneously.

While providing a vast amount of program options, all MODOC programs fall under three categories: community (therapeutic or restorative), educational/training, and reentry (rehabilitative or transitional). Understanding the effectiveness of a reentry

program is difficult because there are other life factors that should be considered. The measure of success cannot just be the recidivism rate. Furthermore, criminal justice professionals have not thus far agreed on one universal definition of what it is to recidivate. Some define it as any new containment within the Department of Corrections, while others define it as reoffending or committing a new offense resulting in a new sentence. Astrada (2018) suggests doing more empirical studies to find answers to address the issue of recidivism, by finding unique ways to evaluate reentry programs. The concern about recidivism and the effectiveness of the correctional system in rehabilitating offenders is a global concern.

Dr. Diana Johns is considered by some as one of the premier researchers in the field. Although most of her work is centered in Australia, her work opens the door to furthering the discussion surrounding building a reentry environment that promotes proper reintegration into society. Johns (2018) explains that the goal of the correctional system, which includes prisons, probation, and parole, and in some cases the court system, is to ultimately transform an unhealthy individual into one that is prepared to be a productive member of society. The research describes the condition of a vast majority of convicted criminal's pre-conviction lives as ones that have been deprived of the normal and healthy conditions of the overall or general society. She goes on to claim that the prison environment only serves to make these conditions worse. By interviewing both former inmates and post-release workers, she sought to understand how prison often amplifies the damage of those already entrenched with unhealthy living styles. The research describes the harm that occurs to inmates as violence, in the fact that it causes

harm. Johns (2018) believes that prisons in Australia should more closely adhere to the principles of therapeutic justice. The therapeutic justice concept is remarkably like the restorative justice model used in the United States. These concepts require the correctional system to turn prisons from places of punitive retribution to institutes of rehabilitation. Currently most correctional systems are unable to provide an environment which is healthy enough to develop healthy individuals come from it. In fact, for the men in Johns' study, the only good that came from prison was they were able to clean up or get off drugs for a period. For others, prison served as a time to get healthy with proper eating and exercise. Some stated that they feel safer in prison than they did when they are released, and others discussed being able to function in prison but not being able to adapt socially once released. Johns' study found that the damage from prison can cause harm after release unintentionally, and this damage includes hypervigilance, isolation, general distrust, and structural dependency

Prisons are very structured institutions with strict rules and policies to maintain order. Often inmates get used to that structured and enforced discipline and not having to be responsible for making decisions. Johns' study digs beyond the surface harms that prison can cause and allows former inmates to discuss some of things they truly found difficult once they were released. One such inmate discussed the physical violence of prison becoming a part of his nature and when on the "outside," he couldn't handle things the same way as he would if "inside." Most of the men that Johns interviewed were previously incarcerated and had enrolled and successfully completed some type of rehabilitation/reentry program either in prison or post-release or both. Based on these

interviews, it is clear the programs in Australia, like Missouri, are not working. Johns points out rehabilitation programs assume that the individual has some understanding and development in social and cultural norms. The reality is that most of the incarcerated population comes areas of high levels of social dysfunction. As such, Johns concluded that the more violence, or harm, done while in the prison environment, the less effective rehabilitation/reentry programs become. While Johns does incorporate the thoughts and feelings about what prison does, they did not engage the ex-offenders in discussion about what they feel could be improved with the rehabilitation process.

These articles conclude that the current rehabilitation/reentry process is flawed, at best, and completely broken, at worse. Understanding what works in rehabilitation/reentry programs is essential in curbing the epidemic of reoffending. Although the authors of these articles were able to interview ex-offenders, both reoffending and non-reoffending offenders; they were unable to obtain insight on what works with current programs and what does not. Additionally, it remains unclear what former offenders would want to see more of in these programs. In fact, this gap in the literature excludes the one population that has lived through the entire criminal justice process: former offenders. The goal of this study was to fill that gap in the research by accessing the unfiltered voice of the former offender. Gathering information from this population is extremely valuable because it will allow the criminal justice system to identify where resources should be dedicated.

Problem Statement

Recidivism is a major issue across the United States and has been a plague for the criminal justice system in recent years. Alper et. al. (2018) revealed the results of a study produced by the U.S. Department of Justice that tracked offenders from 30 states from year 2005 until 2014. The study showed that 83% of all offenders released within that 9-year time span were arrested at least once. According to the data collected in this study, 44% of prisoners released in 2005 were rearrested within the first year. This topic is especially important for the state of Missouri, where they have the 8th highest incarceration rate in the nation (Barbee, et.al., 2017). Although in recent years Missouri has been able to lower its recidivism rate from 54.6% to approximately 46 to 49%, it still ranks as one of the highest recidivism rates in the nation. Quantitative studies like the one conducted by Seigafo (2017) highlight the correlation between rehabilitation programs and lower recidivism rates across the United States. Although the research indicates there is a strong relationship between rehabilitation programs and lower recidivism rates, it falls short in revealing how or what programs are the most effective. The Missouri Reentry Process (MRP) boasts of having programs that cover every aspect of need for offenders to be successful after release (“The Missouri Reentry Process”, n.d). The MRP separates these programs into three categories: community, education & training, and reentry. Each of these categories has subcategories or specific programs that have been implemented to give offenders a more individualized rehabilitative experience. Spencer et.al. (2019), while limited in scope, revealed that individualized rehabilitation programs have a huge impact on lower recidivism rates. Though studies

like this have made the correlation between rehabilitation/reentry programs and lower recidivism, these studies do not reveal what specifically works in these programs. Just knowing that there is a correlation between rehabilitation/reentry programs is not enough to continue to lower recidivism rates. The state of Missouri has been involved with the National Institute of Corrections (NIC) since 2002 as part of their “Transition from Prison to Community Model” in hopes of demonstrating the advantage of reentry programs. Since then, Missouri renamed it MRP; MRP has over 200 reentry programs available to offenders, but the core programs are Pathways to Change, Impact of Crime on Victims Class, Anger Management, and parenting class. MODOC and MRP requires any offender who does not have a high school diploma or HISET to attend Adult Basic Education (ABE). They also offer a variety of Vocational Training Programs, that are recognized by the Department of Labor. Some of these programs are mandated and require successful completion or a “good faith effort” to complete before release. Most reentry programs offered in MODOC are completely voluntary and require the offender to specifically sign-up to participate. While these programs have helped reduce recidivism 3% overall, the programs have been unsuccessful in making any major headway in the battle against recidivism. The evidence is clear that reentry programs have an impact on recidivism rates. However, there is a gap in the literature. Recidivism rates are typically all or nothing and when trying to determine the effectiveness whether a person returns to custody is not the complete story. The voice of former offenders is often missing from the evaluation of reentry programs and the literature on the subject. This

qualitative study provided in-depth information on how valuable reentry programs are at aiding men reacclimate and reintegrate into society.

Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative study was to learn the perspectives of former Missouri offenders on the effectiveness of the MRP. As mentioned, early Missouri has a numerous amount of “reentry programs.” The goal was to understand what is working and not working for offenders once they have been released from custody. It is important to note that although all offenders do not attend the exact same program through the MRP, the goal of each program is the same: to provide an avenue where offenders can accumulate additional skills needed to become productive, law-abiding citizens. One of the difficulties in determining the effectiveness of programs in the state of Missouri is that every program is not available at every institution. However, every institution offers reentry programs in one or more of the categories of reentry programs, except for the correctional facility Potosi, which does not offer GED/HISET classes. However, this study was not concerned with the exact program per se but in understanding how programs impact offenders after release. The stated objective of the MRP is to “improve the overall transition process of offenders leaving prison and returning to Missouri communities” (“Missouri Reentry Process”, n.d.). One of the principal beliefs in the MRP is offenders must have to opportunity to participate in treatment, educational, and training programs to better prepare offenders for life after release and to become part of the community. The results of this study could be used to build tailor-made reentry programs based on what former offenders reveal. The interview questions were geared to

discussing the value of the information, skill, or education the participants had received as part of the MRP. The interview question asked the participants to discuss the environment before and after prison, financial status before and after prison, and the difficulties they faced after released, including how they were able to overcome those difficulties or what their breaking point was. Participants were also asked to describe ways the MRP could be improved to make the transition from custody to society better. The study could lead to answering the questions of not only how to stop the cyclical nature of departments of correction but could also help criminal justice professionals develop programs and methods to truly impact how offender successful (re)acclimate and (re)integrate into society. The findings in this study could be the catalyst to more comprehensive quantitative studies. The more that is learned about the lived experiences of former offenders and how reentry programs impact their lives after incarceration, the better. The effectiveness of reentry programs should not just be measured by recidivism rates but by learning what offenders have been able to use from these programs. Former offenders alone can relate what they learned from any given program and reveal how that information or skill benefitted them in the transition from prisoner to a member of society. While the purpose of this study was to uncover information about the effectiveness of the MRP from former offenders' perspectives, the goal is positive social change. The potential for social change due to this research study is far reaching from changing programs directives making programs more effective, from lowering recidivism rates to lowering prison populations, and ultimately producing better, stronger, healthier people and communities.

Research Questions

Research Question: How effective is the Missouri Reentry Process at preparing offenders to (re)acclimatize and (re)integrate with society while overcoming the socioeconomical hardship after release from the perspective of former offenders?

Theoretical Framework

Social disorganization theory (SDT), in connection with desistance theory, was the theoretical and conceptual framework of this research. Although SDT is an “old” theory, it is still valuable when discussing crime, offenders, and former offenders. SDT was developed in Chicago by Shaw and McKay in 1942 in urban core of Chicago. While observing crime patterns in Chicago they noticed that certain areas of the city were more prone to crime regardless of what primary group of people occupied that area at the time (Seepersad, 2016). Shaw and McKay conclude that there are three main structural factors that impact social disorganization. They believed that low economic standing, ethnic diversity, and residential mobility could and would impact the rate of crime in a geographical location. This theory remained popular among criminologists through the 50s and 60s. However, in the 60s and 70s SDT became almost irrelevant as other theories of criminal behavior began to emerge taking the focus away from “group dynamics” to theories centered around the individual (Seepersad, 2016). The SDT was not forgotten and in the 1980s and the 1990s researchers begin to use SDT to explain other connections SDT may have indirectly with other phenomenon in criminology. Bursik, in the 80s, furthered the theory by researching the impact SDT has on neighboring communities. While in the 90s, researchers like Sampson began to connect SDT to new concepts like

“intervening mechanism.” Sampson and his colleagues’ research allowed connections to be made indirectly between SDT and crime rates, including the effect social disorganization has on things such as collective efficacy and family disruption, which are known or widely accepted as conduits of criminal behavior (Seepersad, 2016). From these two researchers and research teams, two additional ideas were developed to explain and further the benefit of SDT in criminological studies. Systemic models of social disorganization (SD) are mainly based off the work of Bursik and the concept of social capital/collective efficacy as the conceptual framework of SD was developed by Sampson and his team (Seepersad, 2016). The theory remains relevant whether discussing the impact of social disorganization outside of urban areas or using it in conjunction with other theories to explain criminal behavior.

Edwards et. al. (2014) used some core elements of SDT to understand the impact that poverty and collective efficacy have on intimate partner violence (IPV) in rural communities. Traditionally SDT has been applied to understanding property and violent crimes in urban areas. However, SDT basic principles of low-economic standing, lack of collective efficacy, and low community involvement is applicable to other geographical locations and crimes (Edwards et. al., 2014). The researchers concluded that economic conditions were a key factor in increased rates of IPV and lack of informal control or collective efficacy increased the likelihood of IPV (Edwards et.al., 2014). These types of advancements within the theory of SD continue to allow researchers to learn more about the origins of criminal behavior. The prevailing factors that made the original SDT

popular are still relevant today. While it may not be the answer to why all crime exist, but elements of SDT are present in and with other theories.

Gau (2014) recognized the important of SDT as crime theory and used key elements of criminal behavior because of the research conducted by Robert Sampson. This 2014 study sought to advance knowledge of informal social control and collective efficacy (community cohesion) in three ways. The goal of the study was to (a) measure what community members would say they do versus what they think their neighbors would do; (b) the second goal was to measure direct intervention versus indirect intervention, and (c) the study wanted to explore the relationship between cohesion and control. In short, the researcher wanted to know if cohesion needed to happen before control. Although this study was confined to one city and participation was low, the results indicated cohesion must proceed informal control. These studies show the relevance of SDT even 70 years later.

Weisburd et.al. (2014) established the importance of continuing using SDT but does not discount opportunity theories, instead recognizes how they intermingle. Their study pointed out that most criminological studies conducted since the late 1960s had been based on the individual. Their study, conducted in Seattle, drew the circle closer and studied street segments and how collective efficacy impacted crime. They concluded that there is some evidence of a relationship between what part of a community or street you live in/on and that the risk of criminal behavior would increase. However, they also concluded that more sound social disorganization variables were needed to improve the study. They wrote about the difficulties of defining true ways to measures social cohesion

(Weisburd, et. al., 2014). While this study is not perfect, it still informs about the need to continue do research on both the individual and community level.

Understanding the impact of economic and sociological conditions is critically important when about discussing recidivism. Offenders become re-socialized while serving time in correctional centers. For many, prison serves as a micro community or an extension of the community from which they come. Regardless of what individual responsibility offenders have for committing the crime, it is necessary to understand the conditions that make crime and criminal behavior acceptable in their eyes. Johns (2018) goes one step further and suggest that since many prisoners have not been properly socialized because of the communities from which they come, that offenders must be totally resocialized using the principles reentry programs. In Missouri, the MODOC also acknowledges that the reentry process is difficult, and that offenders are faced with many of the same challenges that they had before incarceration (i.e., finding employment, housing, and transportation;(“Missouri Reentry Process”, n.d).

One of the difficulties ex-offenders have before and after prison is finding adequate employment. According to Rabuy and Kopf (2015), approximately 52% of the male prison population earned under \$20,000 a year prior to incarceration and 42% of women were under the \$20,000 a year mark before incarceration. The same article claims this is 41% less than the average law-abiding citizen. Offenders make even less after prison, 55% of ex-prisoners reported an income, and the median was only \$10,090 (Looney, 2018). This level of poverty often forces ex-offenders to live in the worst crime-ridden neighborhoods.

Although the primary theory was social disorganization, the secondary theory is just as important. Recidivism is such a broad and ambiguous term, and this study requires a more focused centralized concept to determine the effectiveness of reentry programs. The desistance theory allowed the study to focus on repeat offending and the effectiveness of reentry programs to alleviate criminal behavior. Using desistance theory and the SDT as the conceptual framework of this study allowed me to explore recidivism from a more holistic point of view. The initial research gathered has shown the socioeconomic conditions of former offenders is a significant aspect of the reentry process. Understanding what motivates former offenders to refrain from past criminal behavior under the weight of the social and economic strain is essential to providing the types of services that will benefit the offender and the community the most. Using this theoretical framework guided by the interview process and helped formulate question concerning the effectiveness of reentry programs once an offender is released.

Nature of the Study

This study used a qualitative research method with a phenomenological design. A qualitative research method is consistent with understanding how effective reentry programs are for formerly incarcerated offenders in the State of Missouri. The study specifically used an interpretive phenomenological design, which allowed me to learn the how individuals perceive similar lived experiences. The design allowed for participants to express, in their own words, how reentry programs impacted their lives after being released from prison. The data was be collected by conducting individual interviews with former Missouri offenders. The participants in the study were over the age of 18 at the

time of the interview and were not under any supervision, including court supervision, for pending charges. All data was collected by recording the audio of the interview on a password protected cellular device that only I had access to. To ensure that the participants suffered no harm because of this study, all participants were given pseudonyms that only I and the participant know. Although the sample population for this study cannot have an active sentence, their protection is of the utmost importance. Therefore, after the data has been collected, I sent a secure copy of the interview to the participant. The participant then could clarify all response to interview questions or simply decide they no longer want their responses to be a part of the study. Once the data was collected, it was analyzed by me to group common themes or ideas shared by the participants of the study. Once the study was complete and the results have been published, I must erase all recordings within 5 years.

Definitions

Rehabilitation: any program that strives to reduce criminal behavior by “repairing” the offender by highlighting areas where offenders are deficient (www.bjs.gov).

Recidivism: is based or calculated on three things: rearrest, reconviction, or returning to prison with or without a new criminal charge (<https://nij.ojp.gov>).

Reacclimatize: to readapt someone to a new environment or situation (Merriam-Webster, n.d.)

Reintegration: refraining from criminal behavior while living a prosocial, fruitful, respectful, and responsible life (Tarpey & Friend, 2016; Ward & Maruna, 2007).

Desistance: refers to how an ex-offender reaches the state of non-offending (<https://nij.ojp.gov>).

Socioeconomic status: is “a measure of one’s combined economic and social status and tends to positively associate with better health” (Baker, 2014).

Effective: something that produces the stated or desired effect (Merriam-Webster, n.d).

Assumptions

The primary assumption was that rehabilitation/reentry programs do not have a significant positive effect on recidivism rates. Recidivism rates in the state of Missouri remains one of the highest in the country: around 44% (“Recidivism Rates by State 2021, n.d.). A secondary assumption was that just measuring recidivism rates is not the best way to determine the effectiveness of reentry programs.

Scope and Delimitations

While the social problem the study addressed is recidivism, it specifically questions how well the reentry process works in the state of Missouri. The goal was to view reentry programs in the same manner that former offenders do. By focusing on the reentry process, I was able to create a more in-depth understanding of why some recidivate regardless of the type and amount of reentry programs they have completed. However, this study was limited in scope because it targeted an extremely specific portion of the general population. Participation in this study required that each participant be 18 years of age or older. Participants must have been incarcerated in the Missouri Department of Corrections (MODOC) and must have successfully completed at

least one reentry program while incarcerated or after release. Participants could no longer be under any supervision, including but not limited court ordered supervision, or have any pending felony charge. I sought to keep the sample size of the study relatively small, up to 15 to 20 male participants of all races, with saturation expected between 10 to 14 of participants interviewed, which was consistent with this qualitative research design (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). No women were interviewed in this study nor any adult who had only served sentences in juvenile facilities. During this research, I discovered that MODOC uses different methods and offers vastly different programming options for women and juveniles. Women offenders only constitute around 7.6% of the Missouri inmate population and experiences are often significantly different than the male experience. A separate research study would be more appropriate to understand the woman's viewpoint.

Limitations

The biggest limitation this study was related to identifying the participants. The study only focused on adult age men in the state of Missouri, who had also served time in the MODOC. The study focused on Missouri inmates could result in results of the study not being reliable in other states or regions. Each state's department of corrections could have different rehabilitation/reentry goals and practices. To overcome this limitation, I looked for similar reentry programs to determine if the results of the study can be replicated across the United States. Missouri has so many programs that it would be virtually impossible to conduct interviews or find participants that have participated in each of the programs offered. However, MODOC has separated these 200 programs into

3 categories since each participant had to complete at least one program while under the jurisdiction of the MODOC. However, I determined that the small number of participants would still be able to represent the former offender population. During the interview process participants were asked to specify what programs they completed while in the MODOC. This information was used to determine the category of the program based on the program goals. The appendix section includes a listing of programs taken by offenders and the category of the program to which they belong. This allowed me to gain more information on how the participants view not just that specific program but programs that fit into the same category. No women were interviewed for this study because, while women's reentry process is important, the path to reaching the goal to nonoffending often takes a different course for women than men. The same can be said about youthful or juvenile offenders and therefore the results of this study could/would be invalid for women and juvenile offenders. Some participants could have bias toward the correctional system and reentry programs both negatively and positively. It was important that I recognize biases and to engage the participant to be understand why the bias is there. During recruitment, I had each participant fill out a demographic form that included background information such as number of times incarcerated and how many programs the participant had completed or attempted to complete. This background information helped me make connections with the emotions and to able to relate in known biases during the findings.

Significance

This study helps fill the gap in the literature concerning the effects of reentry programs specifically with the population of former offenders who are no longer under any form of state supervision. What makes this study unique is that it gave insight into the mind of former inmates concerning the reentry programs they have completed. The MODOC has spent a lot of time and effort in lowering the recidivism rate in the state. With the incarceration rate increasing, it is important that the vast majority of the 19,000 offenders released each year in the state of Missouri have been given the necessary skills to survive without criminal behavior. Nationwide, there are over 600,000 ex offenders released from prison each year. Many states operate with the same rehabilitation/reentry philosophy as the MODOC, meaning this study could have huge implications in not only how the MODOC but how United States department of corrections processes offenders when entering the system and how they determine what programs will help an individual the most. It could also be a guiding light into what offenders say they need to be successful after release. This study could open the door for different types of programs provided within the MODOC, the United States, and could even have global impact. The goal of the study was not just to learn what offenders have to say about reentry programs but to use that information to build a more effective reentry system. The community at large relies on the criminal justice system to not only punish law violators but to also rehabilitate them, so they are able to function within societal norms. The findings from this study provides the community and criminal justice professionals with a blueprint that could lead more successful reentry tactics ultimately reducing the recidivism rate and the

crime rate in the state of Missouri, the country, and globally. In general, the findings of this study, by supporting former offenders and meeting their needs, can make communities safer.

Summary

Reentry type programs are considered key in rehabilitating offenders and preparing them for society. The criminal justice system has spent an immense amount of time and energy trying to understand and develop programs that will impact the recidivism rate. This study does not try to reinvent the wheel but instead focused on the group of people who have life experience in being incarcerated, completing reentry programs, and successful reacclimating with society. This study simply asked the question of how effective these programs are at truly helping male offenders reacclimate and become part of society. In the upcoming chapter, I detail the literature search strategy. I also include the theoretical foundation of the study and give rationale on why the theory was selected as it relates to the subject matter. The chapter then provides an in-depth discussion of research on the subjects to further develop the topic and synthesize the literature on the topic.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The criminal justice system relies on the correctional system to carry out sentences imposed by the courts. The expectations are that while offenders are serving their sentences they will be transformed from criminal to law-abiding citizen. Both state and federal prisons spend millions of dollars in the name of rehabilitation each year. Thus far, the success of rehabilitation/reentry programs has been measured by the recidivism rate of those who complete a program compared to those who have not completed any such program. While the chance of reincarceration for the person who has completed reentry focused programs is less, the risk is still high or more than likely. Recidivism is an issue related to a growing problem in the way reentry is handled in the United States, and specifically in the state of Missouri. Over the past decade there have been many studies conducted and recidivism is a growing concern within the criminal justice community across the United States. According to the U.S. Department of Justice statistics, 83% of prisoners released in 2005 across 30 states were arrested at least one time within 9 years (Alper et. al., 2018). According to the data collected in Alper et al.'s study, 44% of prisoners released in 2005 were rearrested within the first year. This topic is especially important for the state of Missouri, where they have the 8th highest incarceration rate in the nation (Barbee et.al., 2017). Although in recent years Missouri has been able to lower its recidivism rate from 54.6% to approximately 49%, it still ranks as one of the highest recidivism rates in the nation. Quantitative studies like the one conducted by Seigafu (2017) highlight the correlation between rehabilitation programs

and lower recidivism rates across the United States. Although Seigafos indicates there is a strong relationship between rehabilitation programs and lower recidivism rates, it falls short in revealing how or what programs are the most effective. Spencer et al. (2019), though limited in scope, reveals that individualized rehabilitation programs have a huge impact on lower recidivism rates. While studies like this have made the correlation between rehabilitation/reentry programs and lower recidivism, these studies do not reveal what specifically works in these programs. Merely knowing that there is a correlation between rehabilitation/reentry programs is not enough to continue to lower recidivism rates. The state of Missouri has been involved with the NIC since 2002 as part of their “Transition from Prison to Community Model” in hopes of demonstrating the advantage of reentry programs (“Missouri Reentry Process”, n.d.). Missouri has over 200 reentry programs available to offenders, but the core programs are Pathways to Change, Impact of Crime on Victims Class, Anger Management, and a parenting class. Many of these programs are mandated and all offenders must complete or show a “good faith effort” in completing at least one of these programs before release. While these programs have helped reduce recidivism 3% overall, the programs have been unsuccessful in making any major headway in the battle against recidivism.

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to gain the perspective of former Missouri inmates on the reentry/rehabilitation system within MODOC. The goal of the study was to learn how effective these programs are once the offenders are released from custody. Missouri has spent years trying to reduce recidivism and improve the quality of life of its offenders after release. This study gathered in-depth knowledge on

life in prison, the impact that reentry programs have on offenders while incarcerated, and what effect reentry programs have in the re-acclimation process. The study used a phenomenological approach and conduct in-depth interviews with former Missouri offenders.

During the course reviewing the literature on recidivism and rehabilitation programs, I discovered that there are many journals and articles about these topics. There have been quantitative, qualitative, and mixed studies done on both recidivism and reentry/rehabilitation programs. This chapter discusses the literature search strategy, including words and combinations of words used to search the databases and will also discuss what databases were used and why. The theoretical/conceptual foundation will also be discussed in the chapter. This section begins with the name and origin of the theory. I provide a literature and research-based analysis on the theory used in similar type studies as the current one. This section of the chapter includes a rationale on why the theory was chosen and how the theory relates to the research question in this study. The chapter also has an exhaustive review of the literature surrounding key concepts in this study. The chapter will conclude with a summary of the major themes found in the review and discuss of the literature and provide a description on how this study fills one of the gaps in the literature. The conclusion of the chapter will include how this study increases the knowledge in the discipline. Finally, the chapter will transition to Chapter 3 where the discussion turns to how the literature leads to the method use in the study.

Literature Search Strategy

Databases used to conduct the search for research provided in this study were in the fields of criminal justice, political science, and sociology. The following terms were used to gain information on this topic: *recidivism* or *repeat offending*, or *recommitment* (and) *reentry* or *treatment* or *rehabilitation* (and) *qualitative* or *case study* or *interview*. A second group of search terms included *rehabilitation* or *treatment* or *reentry* (and) *recidivism* or *reoffending* or *repeat offender* (and) *qualitative* or *case study* or *interview* or *focus group*. To ensure getting the most recent and relevant articles, each combination of terms was viewed through the lens of field of study mentioned earlier.

Theoretical/Conceptual Foundation

Social disorganization theory (SDT) plays a major role in the study of crime in general, however, the ramifications of this theory are rarely discussed when discussing the problems of recidivism. SDT was developed based on research done by Shaw and McKay in Chicago in the early 1940s. By using maps, they were able to tract the geographical locations of youthful offenders throughout the city. What they discovered was that a vast majority of youth adjudicated as a delinquent came from certain areas or neighborhoods where high crime rates already existed. This theory points directly to the social environment in which criminal behavior is most likely to occur. SDT has four unique components that allow direct impact to social and economic situations that offenders face after release. The SDT narrows in on specifics conditions in the neighborhood like unemployment rates, socioeconomic status, education level and general upkeep of houses and surrounding areas (Sikand & Reddy, 2017). Shaw and

McKay concluded that neighborhoods which have higher unemployment rates, lower socioeconomic status, and less education avenues and/or live-in deteriorating houses create a social environment for criminal behavior. Many other criminal justice and social theories have taken specific elements of the SDT and developed even more focused theories. SDT focuses on the community as a whole or the condition of the community in general. While theories such as Sutherland's differential association theory, theorize that there must be an overabundance of criminal behavior to create an environment of continued criminal behavior. While these ideas seemed to be in opposition the opposite is true, SDT assumes the criminal contact in neighborhoods described in their theory produce(s) criminals and the criminal behavior then becomes the norm. Even theories like the general strain theory are conceptualized in SDT. Socioeconomic status is a central component in SDT, and it is the primary component in strain theories. Both theories agree that lower socioeconomic status is a primary cause that can create a psycho-social environment that fosters criminal thinking and behavior. There have been several different theories used to discuss crime, punishment, and treatment. SDT not only encompasses many different socio/criminological thoughts it also speaks to the principles or objectives of the Missouri Reentry Process (MRP). One of the core principles or beliefs of the MRP is the shared responsibility of the ex-offenders, the families, and community agencies to participate in the reentry process to make impactful change. MRP believes that is vital for ex-offenders to find a job that will provide them with adequate pay to provide for themselves, not just employment. Other key elements in the MRP like housing, transportation and social connectedness are all important in the

reentry process. De Giorgi (2017) found that the group of men he was studying had similar circumstances after incarceration. The single most difficult problem these former offenders were faced with was joblessness/inadequate wages. The participants in the study were extremely clear about some of factors that enticed them back to a life of crime. The continual pressure of trying to make a living and provide for your family without getting involved with criminal behavior often can cause conflict within themselves. Social disorganization theory also includes factors such access to educational development programs. Education has been proven through several studies to be one of the primary ways that former offenders have been able to reduce criminal behavior and distance themselves from other criminal elements. SDT does not separate the type of social condition that could lead or has more impact on potential criminals but instead views the overall effects of how the environment itself creates the breeding grounds for criminal behavior. The role of education can directly impact the type of job one qualifies for and/or the rate of pay and individual will make. Hall (2015) list known risk factors that could persuade or lead an offender to recidivate; this list represents several key components or principles that coincide with SDT. Again, socioeconomic status, educational achievements and employment status are key factors in determining or accessing the risk of reoffending. While age and marital status may also influence the likelihood of a person re-offending or not. Another factor that is discussed is racial disparities within the criminal justice system. Correctional education is the primary tool used by many institutions to reduce recidivism rates. After conducting a meta-analysis of over 15 studies it was concluded that the level of education obtained while incarcerated

directly impacts the recidivism rate. In the State of Missouri education is so important that offenders who are required to take GED/HISET classes must complete or show a good faith effort of completing before release from custody is possible. Hall (2015) reveals that depending on the type of educational programs completed while incarcerated or after greatly impacts the level of recidivism. For example, only 10% of the offender population who earned the associate degree will recidivate within 3 years, that percentage drops to 0 when discussing offenders who have gone on to get their bachelor's degree. Overall, 62% of all offenders who participate in some form of academic programs will not recidivate. These statistics seem to indicate that certain programs have more of an impact in moving away from criminal behavior. While the recidivism rate is important it is an all or nothing measurement which does not or cannot truly measure the effectiveness of a program because it does not take in account for life stressors that many former inmates incur after release. While the study will mainly focus on understanding re-offending through the paradox of the SDT and the effectiveness of reentry programs. It will not focus on recidivism, but it is centered around the concept of desistance.

Recidivism is important but for this study the goal was to understand what works and what does not work with the current reentry system and process in the state of Missouri. Social Disorganization Theory and the concept of desistance will bring this study together. Desistance is discussed in many other research studies and is often presented as a viable measuring tool for understanding the effectiveness of reentry programs. The goal of the criminal justice system, specifically the correctional system, chief function is help alleviate criminal incidents and behaviors. Recidivism can only

effectively determine if someone was in custody after being released (Kingele, 2019). Recidivism rates can be impacted by a numerous of things; in Missouri, the recidivism rate was around 54. % a majority of who were considered “technical” violations. When the legislators changed how and when parole officers could revoke parole the recidivism rate decreased drastically. In the past, Missouri used the traditional models of probation and parole; that method of using a combination of treatment and control remained widely ineffective when measuring solely by recidivism rates (Schaefer & Little, 2019). The truth is knowing why people re-offend and what helps them remain from offending is essential to the success of any re-entry program. It is also important to note that many offenders have a difficult time making the transition from prisoner to citizen not because they do not want to remain free, but other environmental conditions make it more difficult to remain crime free. The literature while fragmented supports the use of SDT, in combination with desistance theory, to discover the views of former offenders about the impact re-entry programs have on them living a crime free lifestyle.

Literature Review

Reducing criminal behavior and reducing the number of repeat offenders has been a continual problem within the criminal justice system. Researchers have produced research studies that have led to new theories about why crime happens. Over the years these studies have led to a variety of programs to help offenders break the cycle of deviant behavior. The focus of this study is to learn how effective the MRP is at aiding men overcome past deviant behavior and overcoming the prison environment. To identify what gaps are in the literature it is important to understand how criminals

develop in the community before prison and then to understand what happens in prison and how programs taken within the prison system help offenders overcome the difficult circumstances most offenders will face after release.

Crime happens all over America, SDT specifically targets the urban core to explain why crimes happens or is more prone to happen in certain areas. However, in most urban areas the crime rate has been in a constant decline since the 90s; although there have been “hot” areas where the crime rate has risen. Cantora et.al. (2015) takes a progressive step at understanding why crime persists and how to prevent the phenomenon of crime in the urban core. Using Shaw and McKay’s 1942 definition of a social disorganized neighborhood the studied focused its attention to what high risk for crime neighborhoods look like. Urban areas where you find low economic status, the residents’ turnover rate is high, unemployment rates are high, and racial homogeneity result in less cohesiveness in the neighborhood opening the door for criminal behavior. They point out that this idea of social disorganized neighborhoods is more susceptible to crime has been widely accept in the criminal justice community as one of the primary reasons why crime happens in certain areas. The conditions of neighborhoods play a major role in who lives in and how they invest in the upkeep of their property. If a neighborhood resident population is in constant flux with people moving in and out there is no opportunity to develop social cohesiveness needed to gain social control over that neighborhood. Social control and social cohesion are what creates an environment of likeminded citizens whose values align with the overall social norms in the United States of America. The results of this study conducted in East Baltimore concluded that residents seen four major

problems in their neighborhoods 1) physical disorder, 2) lack of employment, 3) lack of youth programs, and 4) crime and law enforcement response (Cantora, et. al., 2015; Pitner, et.al., 2012; Sampson & Raudenbush, 2004). While every urban neighborhood might not have the exact same problems many urban areas with high crime rates complain of the same type of issues in their respective neighborhoods. This knowledge is useful, however, the limitation of this study and many studies like it is they only learn from the perspectives of people or citizens who generally are not criminals. This void in the literature concerning the impact of the social conditions in which offenders grow and commit their initial offense is important because most offenders will return to the same or similar situated neighborhood when released. Understanding the impact of the social conditions before and after release is essential to providing former offenders with the right type of institutional programming. In Australia, the role of environment has been a focal point of recent research. To reduce continued criminal behavior some probation and parole offices began to use what is known as “environmental corrections”. The goal of this practice is to limit a former offender’s ability to be in or involved with certain elements of the community to reduce to opportunity for criminal behavior based on an individualized basis (Schaefer & Little, 2019; Miller, 2015; Schaefer, et. al., 2016). The results of this study showed that opportunity-reduction strategies show promise in helping reduce the recidivism rates. While this study does inform the readers the importance of controlling offender’s environment while under the custody of probation and parole; it does not examine what happens after the term of parole has been completed. Schaefer and Little (2019), however make it plain that offenders who receive

treatment and have some individual environmental stipulations while on parole are less likely to reoffend. The idea that treatment or reentry programs have an impact on the success or failure of offenders remaining free is not at issue here, however, what conditions or stresses or life circumstances must be present for former offenders to reoffend is. Many offenders will return to the same neighborhoods in which they committed their incarcerating offense. We know that a vast majority of offenders who are released from custody will be arrested at least 1-time within in 9 years. When looking at longer periods of time the research reveals that those offenders who seemed to move away from criminal behavior often re-offend outside of those shorter time frames (Alper, 2019). Based on what is known about criminal behavioral patterns the longer an individual lives free of crime reduces the chances of future criminal behavior. For those who return to criminal behavior after a 3-year period are considered false desisters but again Alper (2019) offers no discussion on why some reoffend, and others do not. The SDT provides the opportunity to view crime and criminal behavior in more than one light. One component of SDT that interlocks with social/community is low-economic status. Most researchers agree that environment plays a major role in how well an offender reacclimates with society. Iudici et.al. (2018) make it plain that prisoners and ordinary citizens believe that those offenders who re-offend are in fact products of the environment and because of that environment they are weak, disadvantaged, and dangerous. The SDT details how homogenous neighborhoods in fact play a big part of how crime and criminal behavior take hold of communities. Combined with higher levels of transient populations and lower economic status these environments become breeding

grounds for criminals. Offenders often return to the same neighborhoods after serving their sentences and often face the same circumstances and conditions they did before their period of incarceration. These conditions that many offenders face after released are often intensified by the results of the incarceration or being labelled a felon. Johns (2018) described the results of incarceration as harmful at the very least and disabling at the worst. She presents evidence suggesting that most inmates have not been properly socialized prior to incarceration making it more difficult for the principles of rehabilitation to take effect. Johns (2018) discusses the results of imprisonment as either bringing the offender a rehabilitative experience or as one that results in the offender suffering further harm. This research clearly shows that incarceration has little effect on whether an offender will recidivate or not. While much of the world still believes that therapeutic justice/rehabilitative justice is the best system of justice the results are disappointing. If, we just look at the recidivism rates across the world it is an easy path to the conclusion that rehabilitation or reentry programs are not an effective tool to prevent crime or crime behavior in the long term. In Australia, the recidivism rate looms around 44% after 2-year period, it is roughly 47% in the United Kingdom over that same period, and in the United States that percentage increases to around 55% after 5-years of being released. Of course, some countries like Sweden and Denmark have a relatively low recidivism rate for that same period some as low as 20%. Johns (2018) presents the fact that many offenders adapt to the socialization of the prison environment. The factors that SDT consider to be risky are often part of the social norms within the prison community. Periods of desistance are natural occurrences just like periods of offending

can be expected. However, there is some evidence that as offenders become more connected to the community the likelihood of reoffending lessens. Key factors such as employment, adequate housing, employment, and marriage increase the gap between offending and non-offending (Metcalf, et.al., 2019; Baldry, et.al, 2003). While these studies show significant relationships to increase desistance, they do not offer the offender perspectives on what was key for them becoming true desisters. In the MODOC, all offenders must maintain a job and those that do not have a high school education or HISET are mandated to attend school and work. Yet, Missouri has had one of the highest recidivism rates in the country. The fact remains that no matter how many fragments are pulled and piece together the voice of former inmates/offenders is drastically absent.

The question still looms large why some offenders can go to prison one time and become true desisters, while others take the same programs and yet become repeat offenders. Some evidence is present concluding that offenders who find good jobs or maintain employment are less likely to become repeat offenders. Lack of employment is a clear variable that could lead to reoffending. What constitutes a good job and livable wage is not universal but rather contingent on the socioeconomical culture in which one was developed.

Most every offender knows or recognizes the importance of working and can easily see the benefits of earning a wage as opposed to commit criminal acts to survive (Iudici, et.al., 2018). The research that has already been conducted overwhelmingly proves that employment is a key factor in ex-offenders becoming true desisters. However,

Power and Nolan (2017) point out in their study having a job or not having a job is an over simplistic way of determining whether a person will return to a life of crime or begin move away from criminal behavior. Like most people ex-offenders want “quality employment” not only to earn a living but also to meet their other needs (Power & Noland, 2017; Gillis & Nakekh, 2005; Rhodes, 2008). One of the key components of a quality job is stability. As discussed in Johns (2018) offenders are used to routines and are programmed to maintain schedules, show up for work assignments on time, and to perform their job functions to the best of their abilities and to the standards set by supervisors. Offenders need to find jobs and companies who are staples in their community or the state or country. Another key element essential for a job to be considered a quality job is relationships, ex-offenders tend to value building pro-social relationship with fellow employees and managers in particularly. Being a valuable member of a team gives offenders pride and confidence. This pride and confidence increase as offenders grow and move up in position within the company (Power & Noland, 2017; Latessa, 2012). However, for some offenders the job becomes a necessary function to remain free and they prefer not to mingle with other employees. According to the results of some of the interviews of this study some offenders view quality employment as the single most important element to remaining free. One participant even discussed what having a quality job did for his self-esteem and made him free like a needed part of the community (Power & Noland, 2017; Scott, 2010). In answering one of the interviews questions the participant mentioned understanding their “offense cycle” and how having a quality job helped break that cycle of criminal thinking and behavior.

Although that study was designed to find the connection between “quality jobs” and rehabilitation programs it is clear by this answer that ex-offenders use what they learn from the programs. The results of the study shed light into the importance of employment from the ex-offender perspectives in remaining crime free. Power and Noland (2017) found four primary that determined if the job was “quality”: (a) extrinsic, (b) intrinsic, (c) working conditions, and (d) interpersonal relationship (Power & Noland, 2017). Another study conducted in the United Kingdom found similar results in when following youth offenders over a 10-year span. The study concluded that there is a significant difference in desistance for the youth working at the Skill Mill in comparison to the control group who did not have the same opportunity. More importantly the study continued the discussion of employment as a “turning point” or “transition” event that helps offenders on the path to true desistance (Long, et. al., 2018). Much like Power & Noland’s 2017 study it was not just employment that create more desistance but quality of employment that helped youthful offenders move toward desistance (Long, et.al., 2018; Rosenthal, 1989). Poor quality jobs have the opposite effect for both youthful offenders and adult offenders this also parallel the results of the study conducted by Power & Noland as well. Some of the same principles or ideas that effect criminal behavior according to SDT also effect how former offenders view employment. Jobs that have high employee turn-over rates, little to no upward mobility, jobs that are low in status like, fast food or heavy labor, tend to be disparaging to offenders (Long, et.al., 2018). It is widely accepted that employment is one of key components in the journey of offenders creating lasting desistance. However, when interviewed offenders often speak of finding “good” jobs as a

difficult task to say the least. Those who might have had some professional experience before incarceration that required holding a license often cannot maintain those licenses after incarceration barring them from working in fields that they have the most experience in. For those who might want to start a new career also find themselves unable to obtain certain licenses also barring them from a career that could lead to true desistance. While others discuss general difficulty in finding employment period because they often are not even considered for jobs. Some former offenders blame this on having to mark yes in the convicted felon box (Augustine, 2019; Harding, et. al., 2014; Nagin, et. al., 1998). During this study it was revealed that several offenders believed that education was key to getting better jobs but even in that at least two participants said that they did not pursue further education because they believed their conviction would bar them continuing their education after release. While this study was not conducted in Missouri it brings into question the effectiveness of MODOC at connecting educational services like vocational training and the reentry process. In a study conducted in the Indianapolis metropolitan area 3,869 former offenders were tracked for five years to determine the effect of post-release employment on recidivism. The researchers of this study made several conclusions based on the data collected. The first conclusion was that employment/unemployment was the most important or consistent indicator regarding recidivism regardless of race or education level (Lockwood et.al., 2016; Vaca, 2004). Another key statistic that this study produced was that most offenders being released to Indianapolis were almost all unemployed during their first-year post-release. This study presented statistics that proved that most offenders who recidivated did so in their first-

year post-release as well (Lockwood, et.al, 2016). However, the study did provide evidence that education played a major role in employability and that there is a significant relationship between education, employment, and recidivism (Lockwood et.at., 2016; Nuttal et. al., 2003). While these studies make it plain that it is widely accepted in the criminal justice community that employment is a key factor in creating desistance for former offenders; these studies did not indicate whether former offenders felt they were prepared during the reentry process to obtain the type of quality jobs that lead to higher levels of desistance. The MODOC recognized the importance of preparing men and women for the work force so as part of the reentry process, they offer programs that are geared at helping offenders enter the workforce. They believe that by preparing offenders for the workforce or at the very least preparing them for interviews, showing them how to write a resume, and by teaching appropriate workplace behavior offenders will have a better chance at not only gaining employment but maintaining it. In addition, the MODOC offers several vocational training opportunities that are recognized by the Department of Labor with the sole goal of providing offenders with a skill that will make them more hireable after release. Employability and education often go hand in hand, so it is imperative that offenders can pursue not only their high school equivalency but also higher education. There has been quite a bit or research on the impact education has on recidivism rates. There are some in the criminal justice field who believe that education has the greatest impact not only recidivism but also true desistance.

In one qualitative study former offenders who participated in higher education opportunities while incarcerated were interviewed and asked the impact higher education

has made in their life. While the sample size was small the results of the study could have a major impact on how correctional centers view higher education in prison. Many of those interviews said that by attending this program that they were able to meet and connect with their peers on a different level, they were able to develop better communication skills, offenders also developed more probity and confidence (Pelletier & Evans, 2019; Baranger et. al., 2018). It was because of these new skills that offenders felt they were able to connect with social institutions outside of institution that gave them job opportunities (Pelletier & Evans, 2019; Duwe & Clark, 2014). The impact of education may or may not result directly in employment opportunities, however; it does seem to help offenders in other ways. Offenders who obtain educational degrees may improve their self-image and the concept of how they could fit into society, education encourages offenders to live differently and desist from crime (Bozick et. al., 2018; Fabalo, 2002). Higher education caused offenders to think on a deeper level and opened the mental door of possibility for many of the offenders interviewed. It afforded them the opportunity to learn about different concepts and how they relate to real world situations. This gave many former offenders the ability to conceptualize problems in a different light therefore make better decision on how to handle life's complications without using criminal thinking and/or behavior (Pelletier & Evans, 2019; Gaes, 2008). Offenders who obtained higher education also felt their communication skills improved, this gave them more confidence when in job interviews and most pro-social settings. Bozick, et.al. (2018) did a study using meta-analysis to understand 37 years of research from 1980-2017. For the meta-analysis, the researchers used 57 studies that measure success of correctional

education programs by recidivism rates and another 21 studies that used employment. When examining the best research designs the researchers found that the likely hood of recidivating was 28% less for those who did receive correctional education when compared to those who did not. However, the likelihood of obtaining quality employment, there was no significant difference between those who received correctional education and those who did not (Bozick, et.al., 2018; Cronin, 2011; Davis, et.al., 2014). This study defined correctional education as programs that had an instructor(s), curriculum, and at completion offenders were awarded a diploma or certificate of completion. Hall (2015) concluded that there was sufficient evidence that correctional education is a variable that could lead to less recidivism and more desistance. Hall (2015) research points to many factors that could reduce or increase the risk for recidivism. Age could be a key predictor in determining recidivism for two main reasons: 1.) Life span: the youthful offender could have many years ahead of he/she so the chance of returning to crime is more likely. 2.) older former offender tend to be more stable or have a stable living environment. Race, race is the simplest way to determine risk of recidivism because African Americans consistently have higher rate than any other race. Gender and Martial Status are two other concepts that play a role in whether an offender will recidivate or desist (Hall, 2015). Hall (2015) meta-analysis of 10 articles using different independent variables of programs levels and the dependent variable re-incarceration. Hall (2015) reported the (Stevens & Ward, 1997) of 60 individuals found that 95% of offenders who earned an associate degree did not recidivate within 3 years. The percentage jumps to 100% for those who obtained a bachelor's degree. Another

study using a sample size of 3000 offenders conducted by (Hull, et.al., 2000) resulted in learning that 62% of participants did not recidivate, 80% of offenders completing academic programs did not recidivate, those numbers remain approximately the same for vocational training and employment (Hall, 2015). This article like many others that were reviewed concludes that education is the most important type of reentry program. Researchers believe that it is education that aids offenders in making better decisions once released. While the literature suggests this connection or even leads us to accept this conclusion there must be more to the equation. The MODOC believes that education in fact is the primary tool to help offenders become desisters once released from confinement. In fact, the MODOC has mandated that all offenders attend HISET classes if they do not have a high school diploma or its equivalency. Yet the recidivism rate lingers between 43-46% each year. Does this mean these studies are not valid or is it the problem more complex than just completing educational programs, restorative justice programs, or some type of cognitive behavioral treatment program?

Other theories like life course theory suggest that having strong relationships with family, intimate partners and parenthood are key components in leading offenders to true desistance (Liem & Weggemans, 2018; Nugent & Schinkel, 2016). Theorist like Sampson would argue that these parts are needed to establish social control and that the environment or conditions in the environment could undermine the course of reaching desistance. Although life course theory is not born from SDT it relies on social relationships as a guide to reach desistance. Liem and Weggemans (2018) discuss the importance of social reintegration and how desistance can be achieved through the

reintegration process. However, they do not look at desistance as a singular goal but discuss desistance as a process. Most studies like this focus on primary desistance, which is simply the period of no criminal behavior. However, primary or “act” desistance only describes one part desistance. While “identity” desistance happens on an internal level of knowing or recognizing of one’s non-offending self. Relational desistance refers to other validating their non-offending (Liem & Weggemans, 2018; Uggen et. al., 2004). It is this connection to the overall community and social verification that aids many high-profile criminals reach true desistance. Sweeten and Khade (2018) point of the difficulty using one criminological theory presents when discussing desistance. Most men will desist from crime at some point in their life when you expand the age of participants. This is just one of many variables that change how the literature reflects causes for desistance. The study they conducted want to view desistance through the lens of multiple theories. As part of the study, they used theories like Age-Graded Theory (AGT) much of which was developed by Sampson and Laub (Sweeten & Khade, 2018). Much of this theory was developed because of what was learned in earlier theories like SDT. However, they also include such theories as Identity theory which claims social bonds are not enough to create desistance. This type of research opens the door for more in-depth research to learn why some offenders choose to desist and others choose to persist. Glynn (2015) conducted a study that looked an intersectional model of desistance for black offenders. He believed that there were not enough studies that include race, or the role of race is desistance theories. However, there have been studies that measured the impact of both structural and cultural affects desistance. What Glynn wanted to know was more specific

than that; he wanted to know how these different interaction in different social location where black, Asian, and minority ethnic (BAME) are racial oppressed impact desistance. This study is just another example how understanding social and economic conditions impact desistance. The reality of prison population is that the majority of incarcerated are from these minority groups with the overwhelming majority coming from African American communities (Glynn, 2014). Most American researchers would agree that incarceration often impedes natural pathways of desistance because of prison socialization (McCuish, et. al., 2018; Caverley, 2013). They believed this may not be true of custody experiences for other places especially Canada where that have more rehabilitative-focused custody experiences. Their study was guided by rational choice, life course, and cognitive transformation theories on desistance. The study concluded that contrary to ideas in rational choice theory, the harshness of the punishment or difficulties face during incarceration did not lead to more desistance. However, creating specific rehabilitative tracks while incarcerated and developing an environment that fostered changed both socially and cognitively showed promise in helping juvenile offenders desist (McCuish, et. al., 2018). Understanding desistance has become vital to the criminal justice system and more studies are being conducted every year. Desistance is not just about change but how one changed, how they maintain change and how the message of change is relayed to others (Maruna, 2012; Maruna, 2001). O'Sullivan et. al. (2015) leans on Maruna's research to describe how identity, how one sees self, and telling that story relate to desistance. Becoming a criminal happens in stages moving from "contaminated origins" to "delinquent quest" to the "crash" the event the makes the offender want to

change direction. When an offender is successful at change the story changes to the “redemption in reform” if unsuccessful the story becomes “roadblocks to reform” (O’Sullivan et. al., 2015). The offending cycle often restarts for those who suffer roadblocks to reform. However, much like many other studies there is no definitive answer as to why some people reach the road to redemption easier than others. What programs work for who is really at the heart of these studies. The MODOC and MRP believe it is imperative that all offenders get training, education, and treatment to prepare them for life after incarceration (“Missouri Reentry Process, Nd). This study is not an attempt to measure the effectiveness of each of the programs but rather understand how impactful those programs are after release. There have already been critiques of programs such as “Pathways to Change” that suggest cognitive behavior programs can cause more harm than good.

In 2016 Jacqueline Helfgott wrote commentary of the (2015) Jennifer Schlosser’s *Narratives and Discursive Discipline in Prison: Rewriting Personal Histories through Cognitive-Behavioral Programs*. Previous studies concluded programs like “Pathways to Change” have a significant relationship to reducing the recidivism rate. Schlosser’s book specifically reviewed the MODOC and interviewed offenders who had participated in the program. Schlosser concluded that “Pathways to Change” was largely unsuccessful at aiding offenders’ transition successfully but suggested that it should not be done away with. Schlosser identified that “Pathways to Change” based on her interviews with Missouri offenders that programs like this use what she called “discursive discipline”. This style of program relies on self-blame, degradation, and disconnection and predicated

on the idea that regardless of circumstances the offenders thinking is wrong and that is why they commit crime. Which could very well be true however the program does not educate the offender on how to change their thinking so that they can adjust their behavior (Helfgott, 2016). A deeper analysis of Schlosser's writing reveals how far off based this program is at aiding offenders' transition. In fact, Helfgott (2016) said: "The primary takeaways from Schlosser's analysis are that the MODOC "Pathway to Change" program is an ambiguously implemented, internally inconsistent, poorly implemented cognitive behavioral treatment program that humiliates, degrades, and disrespects inmates through curricular components that ignore the realities of inmates' past and presents situations, engages them in unexplained exercises that put them in precarious situations in a hypermasculine prison environment, fails to link inmates' thinking patterns to their behaviors, and leaves them on their own to determine what it all means and how it is supposed to help them change their lives" (p. 150). However, this program is one that is mandated in the MODOC and is included as one the evidence-based programs that is funded under the Second Chance Act. This brings into question are there some programs that can be counterproductive in the aims and purposes of the MODOC. On one hand Missouri has realized and recognized the importance of employment and education; and the positive impact that education has on the offender over course of their life but still use a program that in its current capacity seems to counteract all the gains from the educational programs available both mandated and voluntary.

Summary

Returning to society after prison presents a multitude of challenges for offenders regardless of programming. Offenders will face difficulties finding adequate employment, housing, and even (re)establishing relationships. Based on the available research trying to determine the effectiveness/impact of reentry programs should not be measured solely by recidivism rates. Since most former offenders will re-offend or be re-arrest it is necessary to know how they eventually desist. While there are many programs across the globe that show promise at aiding men learn how to live a crime free lifestyle, there is no clear and definitive way to determine the effectiveness of the programs and what impact or role these programs play in changing the trajectory of an offender's life. What is clear from the current available research is education, employment, prosocial relationships, positive self-image, and a desire to change are vital in the process of desistance. The data has consistently proved that offenders who take and complete programs are less likely to continue with criminal behavior after release. Based on the research it appears that education has the single most impact in determining the likelihood of desistance or persistence. However, these studies fall short in directly learning the impact that programs have in the change after release. When ex-offenders fall into hardships why can some desist, and others return to criminal behavior.

Conclusion

The previous research conducted about criminal behavior, correctional programs, recidivism, and desistance covers and includes a great deal of different social theories. While some studies seem so definitive in their conclusions on what works and creates

actual desistance and reduces the recidivism rate; what we know about creating a path to true desistance and desisters in the state of Missouri is not known. Why are some Missouri offenders able to overcome the circumstances that initially led them to prison, and others have a more difficult time becoming true desisters if ever? For those who have completed these educational and cognitive behavioral programs and still re-offended was there something missing from these programs that could make the transition easier. The research is clear that the impact of the elements known in the SDT are still there and often intensified post-release. However, there remains a sizable gap in the literature on the perceived impact the re-entry process has at aiding former offenders to reacclimate and reintegrate into society and to become true desisters from the offenders' perspectives. The many studies of desistance and recidivism provide the groundwork for this study because these fragments move us toward understanding the problems offenders face when trying to transition from inmate to citizen. The problem is far too many offenders still become repeat offenders regardless of education, employment, or treatment. The only way to get a more in-depth understanding what the "average" offenders needs while in the MODOC is to ask those individuals who have been incarcerated about that lived experience. Understanding that the lived experience can be different not only while in prison but also post-release. What the research suggest is that there is not enough information to determine what an effective re-entry process looks like for the average offender. Even the studies that take the time to interview offenders leave the door open to go even further into the minds of former offenders. The SDT allows us to view crime and criminals through the lens of the actual living conditions of former offender both

prior to the incarcerating offense and post-release and the impact of those conditions. By viewing the problem of recidivism and goal of desistance through that lens we will be able to get a more complete understanding of what former offenders experience post-release. This study will not only provide information on the Missouri Reentry Process but also provide us with insight on inmates use of the tools provided to them during this reentry process. The closing or narrowing of the gap in literature requires that researcher look at multiple variables that have already been presented in previous research. The goal is learning what combination of educational and therapeutic programs really aid offenders at desisting. Ultimately the voice of those individuals who have gone through the criminal justice system are they only voices that can speak to the effectiveness of the Missouri Reentry Process.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative study was to learn the perspectives of former Missouri offenders on the effectiveness of the MRP. As mentioned, Missouri has a numerous amount of “reentry programs”. The goal was to understand what is working and not working for offenders once they have been released from custody. It is important to note that although all offenders do not attend the exact same program through the MRP, the goal of each program is the same: to provide an avenue where offenders can change and become productive, law-abiding citizens. The results of this study could be used to build tailor-made reentry programs based on what former offenders reveal. The study could lead to answering the questions of not only how to curve the cyclical nature of departments of correction but could also help criminal justice professionals develop programs and methods to truly impact how offender successful (re)acclimate and (re)integrate into society. The findings in this study could be the catalyst to more comprehensive quantitative studies. The more learned about the lived experiences of former offenders and how reentry programs impact their lives after incarceration, the better. While the purpose of this study was to uncover information about the effectiveness of the MRP from former offenders’ perspectives, the ultimate goal is positive social change. The potential for social change due to this research study is far reaching, from changing programs directives making programs more effective to lowering recidivism rates and lowering prison populations and, ultimately, producing better, stronger, healthier people and communities.

This study used a phenomenological design to conduct in-depth interviews with up to 15 participants with an expectation of reaching saturation after interviewing 10 to 14 former Missouri adult male offenders. It is important to recognize that former offenders are part of a protected group of research participants and therefore it is critical that no harm comes to the participants of this study. The first step to protect this group was the requirements to participate. All participants must have been an adult at the time of their offense or adjudicated as an adult before conviction(s); all participants must have given informed consent to be interviewed; participants cannot have been under supervision by either probation or parole or the court; participants must have been involved with one or more of the reentry programs offered to them while in the MODOC. Ethically recruiting participants was also essential part of conducting research studies.

To accomplish this study, it took a great deal of effort to recruit participants from across the state Missouri. However, this was accomplished by using personal and professional social media accounts requesting anyone who is interested in being an unpaid participant in a research study discussing the MRP and programs to email an account that was specific for that purpose. In addition, the research study participant questionnaire was dispersed to probation and parole officials throughout the state of Missouri and research participant fliers were produced and distributed among reentry professionals. All participant information remained confidential throughout the study and no information was revealed that could be used to identify or cause harm to the participant. Interviews were conducted in person when possible and all interviews were recorded using a secure and password protected device and were stored in a password

protected safe. Participants were given a transcript of the interview to make sure they answered the interview questions fully. After the study is completed and approved, all recordings will be erased from the device and factory reset to ensure there is absolutely connection to participants that could in any way cause harm. The results of this study could lead to answering the questions of not only how to curve the cyclical nature of departments of correction but could also actually help criminal justice professionals develop programs and methods to truly impact how offender successful (re)acclimate and (re)integrate into society. The potential for social change due to this research study is far reaching from changing programs directives making programs more effective; from lowering recidivism rates to lowering prison populations and ultimately producing better, stronger, healthier people and communities.

In this chapter, I give more detail about the research design and the rationale for using the research design. The chapter includes a discussion about the role of the researcher, the relationship to the topic including any biases that I might have and how those biases were managed if recognized. The chapter includes any ethical issues that could arise during the study and how those issues were handled. To ensure that the study can be replicated, this chapter includes an accurate description of methodology including how the population was identified and why that sampling strategy was employed. I also discuss the criteria to participate in the study and the verification process that the criteria have been met by each participant. The chapter gives detailed information on the instrumentation used to collect data. I also provide the strategies used to know that data is valid and dependable. The chapter concludes with in-depth information about the ethical

procedures to ensure that no harm will come to any participant and then I preview Chapter 4.

Research Design and Rationale

Research Question

Research Question: How effective is the Missouri Reentry Process at preparing offenders to (re)acclimatize and (re)integrate with society while overcoming the socioeconomical hardship after release from the perspective of former offenders?

This study used a phenomenological research design to address the research question. Phenomenological research designs allow the researcher to gain insight by using perspectives of former Missouri offenders about the effectiveness of the MRP. Phenomenological designs especially work well for studies that speak to events that individuals have lived or experienced but that might not be viewed the same way (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). This design works particularly good for studying that use focus groups or one on one interviewing. I chose this design for this study because the only way to learn the effectiveness of the MRP is to interview individuals who have gone through the process.

Role of the Researcher

As the researcher, I served as an observer/participant. As the interviewer my job was not only be to ask questions but to also observe the behavior of those participating. Although the interview questions will be scripted based on participants responses unscripted follow-up questions may be needed to fully understand the response. This

required that I as the researcher be an active participant in gathering the data. As the researcher it was also important that I recognized any biases that I might have.

There was no connection to the participants based on work relationship or in any other capacity that would create power over the participants. However, as a former Missouri offender, there was the possibility that some participants could be known from my time in the MODOC. It was important to note that because of my time and own experiences with the MODOC and the MRP there could be some biases unknown to the researcher. This topic and research are important to me personally because, as a former offender I completed several of the MRP programs, at least one in each category, and even was the lead facilitator of Impact of Crime on Victims Class (ICVC) for 2 years. During my 15 years of incarceration, I developed some strong opinions about the MRP and why it is not as effective as it could be. To overcome these potential biases, I used strict guidelines when selecting participants and made sure all interview questions are formulated to answer the research question. I also recorded an interview of myself to alleviate any concern of viewing the data solely my perspective. I worked with my committee to ensure that the data collection and result process maintains and follows the proper procedure for this type of study.

Methodology

This study used a phenomenological design to conduct in-depth interviews with 15 to 20 or until saturation occurs, which typically happens between 10 to 14, former Missouri adult male offenders. It was important to recognize that former offenders are part of a protected group of research participants and therefore it was critical that no harm

comes to the participants of this study. The first step to protect this group were the requirements to participate. All participants were adults at the time of their offense or adjudicated as an adult before conviction(s); all participants served one of their sentences within the MODOC; all participants gave informed consent to be interviewed; participants were not under supervision by either probation or parole or the court; participants were involved with one or more of the reentry programs offered to them while in the MODOC. Ethically recruiting participants was also essential part of conducting research studies. To accomplish this study, it took a lot of effort to recruit participants from across the state Missouri. However, this was accomplished by using personal and professional social media accounts (i.e., Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter) requesting anyone interested in being an unpaid participant in research discussing the Missouri reentry process and programs to email an account that was specific for that purpose. The participants will email directly so all identities remain confidential. The research participant fliers used for social media were distributed among reentry professionals. Lastly, snowballing was used by having other potential participants to recruit others. All participant information remained confidential throughout the study and no information will be revealed that could be used to identify or cause harm to the participant. Interviews were conducted in person when possible, all interviews will be recorded using a secure and password protected device (Samsung 8 phone using EZ Voice Recording App) and will be stored in a password protected safe. Participants will be given a transcript of the interview to make sure they answered the interview questions fully. After the study has been completed and approved all recording will be kept for five

years then erased from the device and factory reset to ensure there is absolutely connection to participant that could any way cause harm. Participant's information was verified by conducting an offender inquiry through the MODOC website which will verify that the participants have indeed completed their sentences with the state of Missouri. Although this was a relatively small study it gave me the ability to conduct more in-depth interviewing. Understanding the sample size was small was important because it meant that saturation will be reached at much smaller levels. Saturation was reached when participants answer began to be repeated by most participants.

During the data collection portion of the study each participant were interviewed. All interviews were one on one and conducted either in person over via telephone depending on availability and current CDC recommendations due to COVID-19. Interviews will be audio-taped on a password protect Samsung 8 cell phone using Voice Recorder app developed by EZ Mobile. I will maintain the recorded interviews on the device for 5 years in a password protected safe. All interview questions were developed by me and were specifically geared towards answering the research question. Each data collection event lasted no longer than hour and 15 minutes, unless the participants wanted more time to fully answer the interview questions. The participants were scheduled for one interview session, due to the length of the interview session all participants were offered a comfort break approximately half-way through the interview. After each interview, the participants were debriefed, and it was explained at that time what the next steps would be. All interviewees were sent an audio copy of their interview with an attached transcript for their review. All participants were given a specific amount of time

to re-address any question that they felt needed clarification or further explanation/detail. All recordings will be kept on the password protect device for 5 years and then will be deleted.

Each interview question was analyzed by me separated by themes and saved in Excel. Interview questions were divided into sections, each section was specifically designed to answer the research question. Demographic information obtain via interviews was saved in a separate file in Excel. Demographic information was used as part of this study to help analyze the data collect. In any research study it is possible that outliers may exist. Outliers are participants who responses fall outside of the normal response. Any responses that fall outside of developed themes was considered a discrepancy. Discrepant cases were still used in the study to provide an accurate account of the research conduct.

All interview questions were developed by me and each participant was asked the same series of questions in the same exact order. If a response warranted follow question(s) those follow up question(s) became a part of the interview process for all participants. Participant's responses were put into categories based on what programs they have completed. The program must be included in one of the three categories of programs sponsored by MODOC. All themes were developed by the me and will be discussed in Chapter 4 and a more detailed and inclusive guide was added in the appendix.

Issues of Trustworthiness

To ensure trustworthiness this study met the four markers used to establish trustworthiness: creditability, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Creditability refers to the results of the research being believable, this means gathering more in-depth and information rich data from participants. Creditability was established by using saturation. Saturation was reached when most participants in the study answered the interview questions in a similar manner. The study included those cases that do not fit the norm to ensure that the data analysis was accurate and truly represents the results of the study. Another important aspect of the study was transferability.

Transferability is the degree in which the research can be transferred to other studies or context. For transferability to be possible specific details about the study have been included such as research methods, participants selection criteria, and how and why those tools were used for this study. The more detail given allows other readers of the research to determine whether this study can be used in another context. Another tool to ensure that the study can be replicated is dependability.

Dependability determines that the research conducted, and the research finding are consistent and could be duplicated in future studies. To establish dependability in this study I used an audit trail detailing the actual codes and themes used to analyze the data. Although it would be too cumbersome to include every code or theme in the results chapter a more complete audit was included in the appendix section of the document. Establishing dependability allows others to view the data through the eyes of the researcher and allows other researchers and peers to understand what codes and themes

were used and if those codes and themes reflect the data collected. The idea of other researchers looking at the data collected and coming to the same conclusion is known as confirmability.

Confirmability refers to how the research findings and data collected align. One of the issues with qualitative research is bias, confirmability forces the researcher to overcome those potential biases and analyze the data properly. As the researcher I used reflectivity as a strategy to reach confirmability. I focused on both aspects of reflectivity prospective and retrospective. Prospective requires the researcher to understand preconceived notions about the subject and how those notions can impact the research. It is important to note that using one's values, opinions, and experiences can be a positive when conducting research. While retrospective refers to how the research impacts the researcher. Using these two techniques will give the researcher a clear picture of the data and what it represents. The goal of using reflectivity is to recognize biases and then allow the research to work beyond those biases to collect, report, and analyze the data.

Ethical Procedures

History has taught researchers an important lesson about being ethical while conducting research study. Before conducting a study, it is important to ask does the benefit of the study outweigh the potential risk of the participants or is there a different research method that could lower the potential risk and still answer the research question and can measure be put in place to protect the participants in the study from potential risk and harm. One way to ensure that researchers do not cause any unnecessary harm is by protected vulnerable people. The IRB list several criteria that must met be before

conducting a study including any vulnerable population. I recognized the importance of protecting the participants of this proposed study from any harm. To ensure that no harm came to anyone who volunteered to participate in this the following is a detail description of the ethical procedures put in place to conduct this study.

We should never take lightly the potential risk to a vulnerable class of people when conducting research studies. The goal of conducting research should be to produce social change in our environments and how we conduct that research should be in the best interest of not only the community but the participants as well. Offenders/prisoners are included in that vulnerable protected class and although this research study did not allow participants who are currently under any supervision of any kind; it was important that all offenders were given that same amount diligent care to protect them from harm.

Benefit of the study and proposed method

The voice of the offender is rarely heard in the criminal justice system, this is even more true for those in those who eventually go to prison. While researchers agree that the goal of correctional centers across the globe is to reduce crime and create a path to desistance there persist a problem with recidivism. Many states including Missouri have made the commitment to refocus their efforts in rehabilitating offenders and preparing them to become law-abiding citizens in the communities in which they live. The MODOC was one of the first correctional system to adopt this new rehabilitative system in 2002. However, in 2004 Missouri had the 3rd highest recidivism in the nation at approximately 55% and it was not until legislators limited the power and authority of parole officers to return parolees to prison for technical violations that the rate dropped

below 50%. For many years, the success of programs has been measured by comparing the recidivism rates of those who complete a program(s) opposed to those who did not (“State of Recidivism: The revolving Door of America’s Prisons”, 2011). This all or nothing approach does not truly measure the effectiveness of these programs. The only way to understand the value or effectiveness of a program is to interview those individuals who have participated in those programs. The MRP offers a wide variety of programs design for vastly different purposes, some of those programs are mandated and some voluntary. Understanding what offenders take from these programs once they are released, knowing what offenders say help and why, learning what offender deem a waste can only be gathered one way. By conducting a phenomenological study using one on one interviews I was able to get more in-depth information without putting any participant at risk.

Recruitment and Consent

The recruitment of potential participants took place by using social media platforms such as: Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Participants were recruited via fliers posted at local churches, reentry programs, and probation and parole office where permitted. All fliers contained information about the study, the criteria requirements to participate in the study and my contact information. All volunteers had to meet all the criteria requirements and information will be verified by conducting a MODOC website search to verify that the volunteer is not under any supervision with the state of Missouri. After the verification process, I sent a consent form via email to be eligible to complete

the study participants had to sign the consent form provided by the University in accordance with IRB standards which includes informed consent.

Consent was only considered true and valid by responding to the consent via email. The consent form explained the nature of the study, how the study was conducted, the participants role in the study, and what happens to the information after the study is complete. The participants of this study come from a vulnerable population so as part of consent to participate I included a confidentiality agreement. Once consent was given by agreeing to the consent via email, I began scheduling interviews. Before conducting the interview, I again gained verbal consent and verified they still wanted to participate in the study. All volunteers were notified that they could end the interviews at any point and request their interview not be used for the study. It was also explained to the participants how the data will be stored and how the information they share will be used. All participants names and any vital information that make them recognizable was excluded from the study. I am the only person who has access to the names of the participants for verification purposes only. If a participant says something during the course a pseudonym was used in place of the participants' name.

Data Collection and Storage

All interviews were conducted on a one to one, these interviews were conducted in person or via telephone conference based on availability/comfortability and the up-to-date recommendation of the CDC and the state the participants currently resides. All interviews were recorded using a password protected Samsung device using EZ Voice Recording app and actual tape recorder. All interviews recorded on the Samsung device

will be saved on the device in a password protected file. Both the Samsung device and tape recorder are being stored in a password protected safe that is only accessible by myself. All interview recordings will be maintained for 5 years at which point they will be erased or otherwise destroyed. All participants names will be kept confidential, if the need should arise to quote a participant verbatim a pseudonym was used.

Confidentiality

It was important for participants to feel secure in any all-interview question without fear of reprisal. To accomplish that no participant information was used during analysis of the data. No “real” names were used during the study, in fact the only time participants must use their name was confirming consent. For their protection there is a confidentiality agreement between me and each participant. Taking this extra step helped ensure that all participants didn’t experience any harm or hard ship from participating in this research study.

Summary

The purpose of this study, the research question, and methodology are aligned so I could accurately obtain data from former Missouri offenders. To determine the effectiveness of the MRP, I engaged in a series of individual interviews. The interview questions were centered around their lived experiences before, during, and after incarceration. The goal of the interview questions was to learn about how the MRP has impacted their transition from offender to law-abiding citizen regardless of any social or economic hardship they have experienced since release. A secondary goal was to learn

from former offenders who have lived through the transition what things are of benefit and what are not.

The value of hearing the voice of former offenders is unmeasurable on this topic. To protect them from any harm the researcher has put in place several security measures, including confidentiality clauses. Just as important as no harm coming to participants was creating a study that is creditable, dependable, and trustworthy this chapter makes it clear that the data collected during this study will be presented in a way that will allow others to recreate the study elsewhere. This study was approved by the IRB, the IRB approval number is 06-18-21-0976909.

Chapter 4: Findings

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the MRP and to learn the effectiveness of the MRP. The goal was to get a clear understanding of what is working and what areas of the MRP could be improved. All data collected were used to answer the research question driving this study. The research question asked: How effective is the Missouri Reentry Process at preparing offenders to (re) acclimatize and (re) integrate with society while overcoming the socioeconomical hardships after release from the perspective of former offenders?

This chapter will present the relevant demographics to this study. The chapter discusses the data collection process, including how many participants were in the study and location, frequency, and data collection instrument. After that, the chapter reports the process of data analysis including how the raw data was transformed to codes and themes. This section also describes any cases that fell outside of the norm and how that impacted the analysis. The chapter then discusses the evidence of trustworthiness by comparing the strategies developed in Chapter 3 for creditability, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Finally, the chapter discusses the findings of the study including support from data collection. The chapter closes with a summary of the answer to the research question.

Demographics

All participants of this study were male between the ages 38 to 56. All participants served at least one sentence in MODOC and participated in at least one

program offered in the MODOC. The age range for first felony arrest was between the ages of 10 to 25, while the age of first commitment to the Department of Corrections ranged from 16 to 26. The participants came from a wide range of socioeconomic conditions, educational backgrounds, marital statuses, and wide range of commitment times and number of actual commitments to prison. There was also a variety of races who participate in this study.

Data Collection

This study included 15 adult male participants. Each participant was given the option to meet in-person, via zoom, or via telephone. I met with 10 of the participants face to face and 5 via telephone. I only conducted one interview with each of the participants; after the interview I transcribed the interview and provided the participant with a copy to review. Each participant was given 5 days to review the transcript and contact the researcher for any changes. Data was recorded using two separate devices: one digital recorder and one Samsung device using the EZ recorder app. One unique thing happened at almost all, if not all, data collections events: the participants really opened after the recording devices were turned off.

Data Analysis

The research instrument, the interview questions, were broken into two sections. The first section of interview questions dealt with demographic information and background information prior to incarceration. The second half of the interview questions focused on their time in the MODOC and their life after release. This was the initial step in the data analysis process. After each interview, I transcribed the interview using

Microsoft dictate and personally corrected any errors during the translation to dictation. Once the interview was transcribed, I created an excel worksheet and for every question I recorded keywords or phrases that each participant uses per question. The next step in the data analysis process was to develop themes by first using similar keywords and phrases participants used to answer interview questions. The interview process started with a brief introduction, and I made sure each participant wanted to continue with the interview process once they agreed, I described how the interview would be conducted, and informed them that if they needed to stop for any reason during the interview to just let me know. The interview questions were asked in the same order to every participant.

Question 1 asked the participants their current age. The ages of the participants ranged from 35 to 56. Four participants were from 35 to 39; nine were from 40 to 49; and two were over 50. Question 2 asked their current education level. Five had some college; four earned high school diplomas; four had their GEDs; one was at 11th grade level; one was a college graduate. Every participant who had a GED and above also had at least one vocational trade as well. Question 3 asked the race of the participants; the study included 10 individuals who identified as African American, three who identified as White, one who identified as Arab, and one identified as mixed ancestry (African American and White). Question 4 asked the marital status of the participants: five were married and 10 were single. Questions 5 through 8 specifically asked the participants about their criminal history in very basic terms. Question 5 asked for the number of arrest each participant had. The answers ranged from one to over 75 arrests. Question 6 asked the age of first felony conviction; this question also elicited a wide range of ages from 10 years old to 25

years old. However, the age span can be put into 2 main categories 18 and under (nine) and 19 to 25 (six). Question 7 asked the participants how many convictions they had after the initial convict: 10 had at least one additional conviction, three had two or more convictions, and two had no additional convictions. The last question in this section asked the participants how many times they had been committed to prison and why. Five of the participants reported multiple commitments to prison. Three participants said they were other felony convictions, while two reported that parole violations were the cause of the additional remands to prison. Question 9 asked, describe life prior to incarceration. This question resulted in splitting the participants into categories based on their answer. Those participants who grew up in a two-parent home and those who did not. For those who grew-up in a two-parent household, they described life growing up as good, fun, loving, and in some cases strict. While those growing up with a single parent described their childhood as rough, or hard. Most participants discussed a change during their early teens and became involved in low-level crime. Most described their life prior to incarceration as chaotic and every single participant was jobless right before incarceration.

Question 10: view on crime and criminal behavior prior to prison...a major theme developed most of the participants used phrases like: fact of life, going to happen, part of life, inevitable, means of survival, or as one participant said: crime happens, it was something you seen every day and it was glorified; and if no one was hurt it was okay. While Question 11 asked the participants to give an account on why they started

participating in criminal behavior; some of the main themes were peer pressure, financial gain, and survival.

Question 12: themes: dangerous, life-changing, meant to destroy, one participant called it “a place for nobody” three participants described a sign in one of the prison entrances as reading “leave your hopes and dreams behind”, predator or prey mentality. No significant themes were developed for questions 13, 14, and 15. However, it was confirmed that every offender who does not have a GED or High school diploma is mandated to participate in GED classes.

Question 16 themes: taught me to grow-up, developed empathy, no impact, built confidence, emotional maturity, tools for release.

Question 17 themes: intellect over emotions, nothing, empathy and remorse, confidence

Question 18 themes: life after prison was chaotic, hard, no jobs, no housing, sensory overload, overwhelming, good

Question 19 themes: no help, able to find more services upon release, overcome pride, ask for help

Question 20 themes: no change, grew-up, matured, humbled, more appreciation, emotional development part 2 programs played major role, no role in change

Question 21, themes: does not condone, done out ignorance, out of control, does not participate, does not have to happen

Question 22 themes: freedom, God, nothing, will power, no desire to commit crimes, prison conditions

Question 23 themes: no transitional process, no preparation for society, DOC is failing, ICVC great program, more educational programs, work with community more, more professional parole officers, system does not work

Question 24 themes: more transitional programs, uniform programs, more up to date vocational trade, separate prison from rehabilitation.

Table 1*Demographic/Background Characteristics*

Questions	# of participants
Current Age	3
30 to 39	9
40 to 49	3
50 to 59	
Education Level	
No diploma	1
Highschool/Hi Set	10
Vocational Trade	5
Some College	4
College	1
Race/Nationality	
African American	10
White	3
Latino/Hispanic	0
Middle Eastern/Asian	1
Mixed Race	1
Marital Status	
Single	11
Married	4
Number of arrests	
1 to 5	4
5 to 10	4
10 or more	7
Age of felony Conviction	
Under 18	4
18 to 21	5
21 to 24	4
25 or older	2
Subsequent Convictions	
0	1
1	10
2	3
3 or more	1
Number of D.o.C. commitments	
1	10
2	4
3 or more	1

Evidence of Trustworthiness

In Chapter 3 I discussed using saturation to establish credibility. The initial proposal set the sample size between 20 to 25 participants with the hope of reaching saturation between 10 to 15 participants. This study actual met the saturation requirement after the 10th interview however, I continue to interview to ensure that I might include any potential outliers. However, after conducting the 15th interview I concluded that saturation had been met and I was receiving no new information. In fact, participants were practically using the exact same language to answer many of the questions. This study did not deviate from its purpose and followed the guidelines established in Chapter 3. Any researcher should be able to take this document and based on my detailed account of the research methods, participants selection criteria and why and how I used those tools for this study transfer this study and use it in a different context.

When discussing dependability in Chapter 3 I thought I would need to appendix my codes or themes. However, because saturation was reached, I was able to put the code and themes in this chapter. The research instrument is now in the appendix section so that other researchers can read the actual interview question in comparison to the codes or themes that were developed based on the participant's answers. Going into this study I knew it was personal for me. To overcome any remote biases, I stuck to the proposal. Based on performing my duties of collecting, analyzing, and reporting the results of this study could be replicated.

Results of the Study

The results of this study do answer the research question. The overwhelming conclusion is that MRP and the programs under that umbrella only help those who want to be helped and have a mind for change. However, when I took a closer look at the data I found some remarkably interesting things out about the MRP. Before I delve into the MRP, I must first discuss the backgrounds of the participants.

Most of the participants involved with this study had multiple arrest and convictions. Some even had multiple commitments to the MODOC both for new crimes and parole violations. Of the 15 participants 11 come from 2-parent homes while only 4 come single-parent households. Although most of the participants had 2-parents many lived in urban areas during their younger years but were well provided for. They described their childhood terms like fun, and loving, they talked about being cared for by both parents. They talked about how hard their parents work to provide. While the 4 participants from single parent homes grew-up in what they described as poverty and while they said that had plenty of love they had very little in material possessions. All but one participant discussed their view on crime prior to prison as something that happened or means of survival. A vast majority of the participants revealed that although crime might not have been in their household it was all around them, and nobody made a big deal about it unless they were the victim. Seeing criminals getting away with crimes and seeing the rewards of crime often superseded the lesson taught by parents, or teachers. Participants also referred to peer pressure, wanting to fit in, and wanting nice things as factors for their criminal behavior, while those who came from the worst environment

committed crime as a means of survival. Based on what on every participant, except for one, said the environment(s) in which they lived played a major role in their eventual criminal behavior. Participant #2 even talked about seeing his dad work so hard driving cabs and coming home too tired to really enjoy life. He said just watching his father work like that made him want to try a different avenue. Most of the participants talked about the older guys who profited from illegal business, who never went to work but had nice things, people respected (feared) these guys in the community. For many these were people who the participants wanted to imitate. One participant said: "My parents did everything they could to ensure that me and my siblings needed or wanted for nothing, and they provided us with a good life. Just seeing them work so hard and seeing younger men having so much more while looking like they did nothing was much more appealing." While another participant discussed living in the suburbs but having cousins who lived in the city and how when he would go spend the night with them how much different things were. He said it was like people were just living life and they did not concern themselves with how the next person survived. They did not call the illegal stuff that was going in the neighborhood as crime or the people who were involved in it as criminal but as hustlers. He said he learned quick in those visits that everybody had a hustle; he said: "some people cut grass and other's sell grass" just a means to an end. Participant #1 spoke in very vivid terms when discussing the factors that lead him to crime and why. He talked not only about seeing criminals in the neighborhoods but also spoke specifically about how the community responded to certain crimes and the community viewed certain criminals. He talked about growing in an inner-city

community in Kansas City during the mid to late 70s throughout the 80s and early 90s. In his community neighbors rarely called the police, in fact most of the community seen the police as the enemy. The community he lived in categorized criminals as good or bad; the bad criminals were killers, burglars, robbers, child molesters, and some drug dealers, and the good were shoplifters, some drug dealers, and hustlers. Nobody called the police back then and it was not until the mid-80s when crack cocaine hit that thing really started to change. He recalled at the same time a lot of movies coming out about drugs and gangs, he specifically mentioned the movie “Colors”. He said in his neighborhood everyone wanted to be like the character “Rocket”, but nobody wanted to play the role of “Packman”. He went on to say the environment he grew up in, seeing criminal behavior overlooked by community members, and the only strong black males’ figures in the movies where criminals were key factors in his path to criminal behavior. After the interview was complete Participant #1 revealed that by the age of 12, he was already committing Class A felonies.

The second half of the interview, questions 12 to 24, focused on the participants lived experiences within the Missouri Department of Corrections (MODOC). IQ #12 asks the participants to describe their life in the MODOC. It is important to note that every single participant’s body language changed when asked this question. During the first part of the interview participants were relaxed but excited to help, it seemed like IQ #12 agitated the participants. Most of the participants described prison as a horrible place that is designed to destroy a person. Several of the participants recalled a sign that every inmate seen when entering “The Walls” Missouri State Penitentiary (MSP), the sign read:

“Now entering MSP leave your hopes and dreams behind”. While others recalled their first day in prison and discussed how humiliating it was, one participant shared in detail this experience. He recalled being shackled hand and feet, getting off the transport bus and being rushed into a room with around 50 other male offenders. He went on to say after the handcuffs were removed they moved to another room where they were instructed to undress, the guards then sprayed them down with some type of chemical and then were forced to take a cold shower all while in the view of other and staff male and female. He said it was like day one they are trying to strip you of your dignity or break you down. Almost every one of the participants said that going to prison is a life changing experience. Part IQ #12 asks the participants how they adapted to prison. Most describe adapting to prison as a dual process, meaning you have the institution itself and the rules that come with it and then you have the inmates rules you must adhere to even more so than the institutional rules. Many of the participants describe having to play the game in order to survive prison. Some said there are only 2 types of people in prison: predator or prey; while others said there are three types: predator, prey, and those who learn how to appear as predators. While they all agreed that prison was horrible, they also said that it was a life altering experience and that they would not be the people they are today if they had not gone to prison. While they all believed they would have matured out of some of the things they were doing, prison or the conditions in prison made them realize their actions or the benefits of crime did not equal the punishment. One participant’s response really stood out to me, he said: “Imagine being in a foreign land with the tension of potential war every day and the enemy could be in the same room with you wearing the

same uniform”. He went on to say: “You don’t adapt to war, you survive it!” In some form or fashion every single participant said they survived prison. IQ #13 The participants of the study had a wide amount of time served depending on whether it was a parole violation or initial sentence. The overall range was from 2 months all the way to 30 years.

Questions 14 to 17 specifically asked the participants to talk about the Missouri Reentry Process (MRP). IQ #14 Ask participants to discuss what programs they took (See chart 2 in Appendix II), while in MODOC. All participants took educational program either to earn their GED or for vocational trades. All mentioned taking anger management, ICVC, ICT, or some form of therapeutic/restorative program. Only 5 participants took classes in all three categories, for a comprehensive list of programs that participants took part in refer the chart in Appendix II. IQ #15 had mixed results a lot of the participants took programs on voluntary basis but many of the programs would have been mandatory and required for most offenders. IQ # 16 proved difficult for many of the participants to answer directly. Many answered that the programs they took made no real impact on them as a person but rather gave them some additional tools to make life easier once released. To get a more complete answer I asked each participant to explain why they felt the way they did. For those who said no impact the general answer to why was the goal of the programs are to change a person from one thing to another thing. This group all said that these programs cannot change a person has to want to change in his mind and heart first. This group of participants concluded that when you look at yourself and the life you had lived that led to prison, you must decide to do you want to keep

doing the same thing over and over. This group of participants also discussed things like; being forced to take programs that they felt they did not need, or only taking certain programs to look good for the parole board, and many in this group of participants felt that the programs were just another way for the state to make money off them. While another smaller group said that every program, they took had some type of impact on them as a person. When asked why? The overwhelming response was because they gave them the tools they needed to grow-up and make the type of changes within themselves that they didn't know how to make by themselves. IQ #17 responses seemed to contradict what many participants had just said in the previous question. Everyone said they learn something whether it was a new skill from vocational trades, or learning how to communicate more effectively, or processing emotions better, developing empathy and taking accountability for their actions. I will discuss this further in Chapter 5 when discussing the findings of this study.

The last group of questions, 18 to 24, transitioned to life after prison and final thoughts about the MODOC and the MRP. IQ #18 asked the participants to describe their life since release. In general, all the participant's said life has been good. They talked about how some ups and downs especially financially. Most said finding a job was difficult and finding one that would allow them to be independent was next to impossible. They also said finding decent housing was extremely difficult after release. Housing seemed to be the most difficult of the hardships to overcome. Quite a few of the participants describe their biggest hardship being parole officers, who made life more difficult. Most of the offenders said the programs they participated did not help them at

all overcome the real-life conditions they faced once released. Every single participant acknowledge that are not the same person they were when they first went to prison. However, only three participants attributed this change in part to the MRP and the programs it provides. Most, in fact, attribute their change to the natural maturation process and said they became better people despite the conditions in prison and lack of help after leaving prison. This change was reflected in how they currently view crime and criminal behavior. The participants all said that crime is not necessary, that there are always other solutions to problems in life, and to commit crime only hurts yourself and the people around you. The participants also said that nothing about the MRP is keeping them from re-offending; most simply said that God, family, free-living and no desire to commit crime is what prevents them from re-offending. The participants when something is taken away from you, you place more value on it. When critiquing the MRP the participants agreed the MODOC and MRP does a good job at making sure every offender has the opportunity of getting their GED (HI SET) and all the participants think that education is one of the most important elements in surviving after prison. However, most believe that more opportunities need to exist to continue your education beyond the GED program. Those who participated in vocational trade programs agreed that having those types of educational programs are transformative. However, many of those who participated also talked about needing more up-to-date trades that can translate into actual employment opportunities after release. Most of the participants discussed the MRP in negative terms and believe that programs are about the state getting federal funding to run the prison and to line their pockets. Many of the participants said while some of the

programs are well designed programs; how, when, and where these programs are presented determines the effectiveness of the programs. The participants also discuss things like going to a program for an hour but having to live the rest of the day in the reality of prison. Participant #13 said “the biggest failure of the MRP is trying to rehabilitate someone in the same place you punish them.” Another participant pointed out that not every program is available at every institution in the MODOC, making it difficult to get the exact type of program that will aid the offender the most. Most of the participant said the MRP is failing because there is no actual reentry process in place. They said most people are forced to take certain programs based off the type of case they were sentenced for. Another failure that was repeated frequently was that programs that were emphasized were not going to help get and keep a job. However, everybody agreed that the biggest failure in the MRP is that it stops the moment you leave the MODOC. One participant discussed how difficult it was for him to get a home plan approved. He said he literally had no place to go a week before his release, it was an outside Christian ministry that helped but they were not a part the MRP network and therefore no one knew the services they provided existed. At the close of the interviews, I asked every participant to add anything they felt was important about their experience with the MRP. Those who choose to add something repeated the same sentiments that the MRP is failing overall because there are too many different programs, access is too limited to programs, programs plans are too uniform, and the programs have little value in helping offenders’ actual transition and (re) integrate into society. The biggest failure was the lack of actual transitional assistance no real assistance finding adequate employment or housing.

Another sentiment that was echoed was that you cannot force people to change and by mandating people to take certain programs you block people who want the tools needed for them to change.

Table 2

Key Findings

	<i>Single parent</i>	<i>Programs had impact</i>	<i>Learned something from programs</i>	<i>MRP is effective</i>
Age at conviction				
Under 18	2	3	4	0
18 to 21	1	2	5	0
21 to 24	1	0	4	0
25 & up	0	0	2	0
Education Level prior to incarceration				
No diploma	5	4	5	0
Diploma or Equivalent	5	1	5	0
Vocational Trade	2	0	2	0
Some college	3	0	3	0
College	0	N/A	N/A	N/A

Table 3

Programs Attended by Participants

Type of program	Number of participants
Educational/Training Programs	(5 GED/Hi SET) (6 Vocational Trade)
Therapeutic/restorative	12
Rehabilitative/transitional	3

Summary

After conducting interviews with 15 participants, I determined that the study had reached saturation and nothing new would be learned by interviewing 5 more participants

to reach the goal for the studies target population/sample size. I did expect to reach saturation between 10 to 15 participants and meets the standards agreed upon by this research committee. Based on a careful examination of the data collected from the participants I believed there was sufficient evidence to answer the research question.

Based on the data I concluded that the Missouri Reentry Process has been ineffective at aiding offenders (re)acclimatize and (re)integrate into society. It was clear based on the data collected that although there were some good programs available in the MODOC, in the eyes of these participants the system is broken. The resounding theme throughout the data collection process was that no rehabilitation exists in the MODOC because they are too busy punishing offenders for their crimes. If the MODOC and the MRP really wanted to help offenders, they would help actual transition to society.

In Chapter 5, I summarized key findings of the study. I also interpreted the findings and discussed how certain findings were determined and I connected these findings to research presented in Chapter 2. Next, I analyzed and interpreted the findings in the context of the theoretical/conceptual framework. This chapter also discusses the limitations of the study, recommendations, and implications, specifically discussing the potential for social change and I also discuss implications for future studies. The chapter concludes with the overall take away from this study.

Chapter 5: Conclusions, Discussions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to take an in-depth look at the MRP and to determine the overall effectiveness of the programs offered in the MODOC. The study specifically sought to identify how effective or impactful the MRP was at aiding adult males at (re)acclimatizing and (re)integrating into society, considering the socioeconomic hardships many ex-offenders face upon release. The study used a qualitative research method and a phenomenological research design. The study was conducted to gather information about what works and what does not in the MRP in hopes to produce a better system based off or including the input of former offenders.

This study yielded some great data and after carefully analyzing the data there were four key findings. Although I listed the keys findings, the order does not indicate any significance: (a) The conditions in the MODOC interfere with the rehabilitation process; (b) SDT is still a valid theory; (c) maturation and education are key factors in desistance; and (d) the MRP is failing.

Every single person who participated said you cannot expect to really rehabilitate someone in same place they are being punished. The data indicated that the social conditions in prison could be causing harm to offenders. The environment intensifies the predator nature of some offenders, while others either become predators or wear the mask of a predator, and the “weak” become prey (victims). The data indicated the staff are also adversarial toward inmates, also making it difficult to retain the tools gained from the programs offenders are engaged in.

The participants of the study came from all different areas in Missouri including rural, urban, or suburban settings, but most mentioned the environment or better the conditions and the things they saw going on in their neighborhoods as part of what led to their criminal behavior. Most participants talked about living in neighborhoods where crime was a normal thing and people just minded their own business. Most of the participant were high school dropouts and they discussed moving from one neighborhood to another, always seeing the same thing: a hopeless existence with no way out but crime. Interesting enough, even when moved out of negative environments, the data showed they maintained the mind-set from the previous more crime-ridden area. Most of the participants had been out of prison over 7 years at the time of the study, and data showed that all the participants attribute reaching desistance or nonoffending to maturing and education. However, when asked to critique the MRP, the overall general critique is that it is failing. The data indicated that all the participants learned something from the programs they were involved in but overall, the MRP did not aid them in reintegrating with society.

Interpretation of the Findings

The data from this study affirmed previous research discussed in Chapter 2. The research already showed that education is one of the most important factors in reducing the recidivism rate and helping former offenders become true desisters. Education is one of things that most agreed that MRP was doing a pretty good job on, but just not enough. The studied confirmed that the value of education cannot be measured in recidivism or even desistance.

Pursuing education or obtaining education gave the participants of this study confidence. Those who obtained a GED while in MODOC felt like they accomplished something and knowing that they were able to complete something they once quit gave them the confidence to keep learning and trying new things. Although the sample size is small, certain patterns started to develop. Those participants that had achieved their high school diploma prior to incarceration saw education in prison as lacking because they could only get a vocational trade and while learning a trade would provide them with an additional skill set, it was not as valuable as continuing their education beyond high school. Conversely, those participants who achieved their GED while incarcerated experienced a different level of satisfaction and an immediate impact in their lives. MODOC places a financial benefit on having a high school education/GED. Those who either had a high school diploma or earned their GED were given a dollar more on their “state tip” but also became eligible for premium jobs which paid as much \$200 to \$300 a month. For many, this gave them a reason to take their education serious because they were able to recognize that the same would be true once they were released from prison. Missouri offenders who did not have the basic educational requirements could not participate in any of the vocational trade programs until they had completed their GED. The impact of education, or the ability to obtain new skills, for those who prior to incarceration had little education was greater than those who did. In fact, those who had more education found the conditions and the systemic failures of the MODOC far greater than the impact of educational programs offered. However, those participants who had some college prior to incarceration all were tutors at some point during their sentences

either for the GED program or for the trade programs after they complete it. For those tutoring the GED classes they often discussed the failures of the GED programs being that the offenders seen no purpose in getting an education because a GED was not going to help them once they got out. The inability to connect education to success after release directly impacts the significance of education in the mind of the offenders. The social environment in the MODOC is one that is marred with depression, aggression, hopelessness, and violence making it difficult for some offenders to place any value in their education. For those who did find value in education and sought to pursue their education often did not meet the criteria to participate in those types of programs either due their crime or because they were not close enough to a release date. It was scenarios like this they were constant during the data collection process whether talking about educational programs or programs in general. One of the principles of the MRP is that rehabilitation must start the moment an offender reaches the Department of Corrections. By going against this principle those who desire to do the work, participate, and change, are often left to figure out how to do it on their own. Therefore, some of the data look contradictory; programs were said to have no impact on most of the participants, however, all the participants said they learn something from the programs they participated in. Looking beyond the recorded data as the researcher I noticed something about the participants who did face to face interviews. When the discussion changed to the Department of Corrections so did their body language, tone, and rate of speech. Some participants even became visibly upset talking about living in the DOC. So, when discussing the MRP they did so in the context of the feelings or the emotions they felt

about prison. The juxtaposition between punishment and rehabilitation in prison seems to hinder the rehabilitation process for many offenders in Missouri. Beyond the life changing experience of prison and learning how to adapt to that environment the participants discussed in detail how they grew up and how the neighborhood in which they lived influenced their criminal behavior.

SDT includes lack of education as one the key elements in criminal behavior, lack of social cohesiveness or lack of social control, transient populations, and economic instable. The data indicated that for most of the participants that at some point in their life they lived in that type of neighborhood. Based on the literature in Chapter 2 we might assume that the data would indicate the all the programs in MODOC through the MRP would actual help once released but not in this case. The data was clear, and it extends the knowledge on the subject, while the data showed most of the participants learned something from the programs that they took but did not give credit to the MRP for their success after release. Many said that it was their desire to change and all that programs did was provide them with some tools to prevent them from making the same mistakes. However, the data showed that the MRP stops at release which is the time that every single participant said they needed the most assistance. Dr. Johns discussed the harm that happens to offenders while incarceration and how that harm interferes with the (re)habilitation process. The data from this study confirmed the idea that prisons cause harm to offenders and often impede on the rehabilitation process. The data also revealed that reaching desistance is a choice and that no program can make you make the right choice. However, those participants that were arrested before they reached the maturity

believed that some programs should be taken because of the transformative tools provided during those courses. The data showed that most participants in this study believed the maturity, family, and their relationship God were the key factors keeping them from re-offending.

Limitations of the Study

The study was designed with some strict limitations put in place. The goal was to interview a sample population between of 20 to 25 adult males. However, the interview process was completed after 15 interviews because saturation was reached, this fit the parameters of study discussed in the proposal. The study only included adult males who had served at least on sentence in the MODOC and participate in at least one program within the MRP.

Recommendations

This study was small in nature, but it yielded some very interesting results. I would recommend expanding this study to a larger population pool to include as many counties as possible in each state. After reviewing the data, I recognize a somewhat natural gap in the research occurred, there was zero participation from anyone 35 and under or 55 and older. This study only included individuals who were no longer under supervision, based on the results of this study I would recommend replicating this study but allowing participants who are under currently under supervision to participate as well. One of the patterns that began to emerge doing this research indicates there could be a relationship between age of incarceration, level of education, and the impact of programs. I would recommend doing a quantitative study to see if there is an actual correlation.

Beyond replicating or conducting future studies I would recommend some immediate changes in the MODOC.

One of primary things that was learned from this study is the role the MODOC plays in the reentry process. Since the role of DOC seems to be punishment, I would recommend that offenders after serving specific percentage of their sentence be transferred to facilities that strictly prepare them to reenter society. Based on the results of this study I would also recommend that programs be offered to every offender and that those programs be available at every Correctional Center. The MRP must be involved on both sides of the fence; therefore, I recommend that continued services be offered to offenders after release without cost to the offender. Lastly, employment and housing were primary concerns for most of the participants of this study. Many cited having to reveal their status as a former offender/felon hinders their ability to find and maintain good employment and adequate and safe housing. I, therefore, recommend state legislation be adopted to remove the question concerning felony convictions from both job application and housing applications. Also, tax credits for those who hire felons or allowing felons to rent should be more widespread.

Education should be the most important aspect of the reentry process. Offenders need to be able to continue their education beyond a GED regardless of age or crime, MODOC should partner with more community and state colleges to try to increase the educational level of offenders. More up-to-date trades are needed so that men have the necessary skills to go straight to work after leaving the DOC. I would also decrease the number of programs and combine the best practices of the existing program and create

one relapse prevention program, like the one used in Missouri Sex Offender Program. Lastly, I would require the MODOC and the MRP to network with other reentry programs outside of prison to ensure former inmates have the best opportunity for success.

Positive Social Change

The results of this study have far reaching implications for positive social change not only in the state of Missouri but the country as well. This study revealed several break points in the correctional system in the state of Missouri. These break points are opportunities for positive social change. The results of this study revealed that offenders do not feel or know about continued services to aid them in the reentry process. This means that there is an opportunity for the community to become more involved with the process and could potentially increase the opportunities for employment and housing for ex-offenders, which is one of the primary concerns of ex-offenders. Another thing that was learned because of this study is that there are too many programs and that programs are not offered at every institution in the State of Missouri. By streamlining these programs and only using programs that are based on scientific results, and best practices we can change the dynamics of the reentry process. We now know that what transpires while living in the DOC causes more harm than good. The results of this study should be used to make sweeping changes in how department of corrections function. If the results of this study are duplicate, then we know that we cannot rehabilitate offenders in the same places we punish them. There is potential for real social change when the prison system is releasing healthy individuals back into society who are prepared to tackle the

challenges they will surely face after release. Creating healthy individuals before release changes the dynamics in neighborhoods, communities, cities, states, and the nation. By providing offenders with the right type of reentry process we can potentially change the violence in the neighborhoods, build stronger families and better communities in general.

Conclusion

Crime, punishment, rehabilitation, recidivism, and desistance; these words hold so much weight in the State of Missouri and many states across the nation. The criminal justice community has gone back and forth and how to prevent people from becoming repeat offenders. Many criminal justice researchers and professional believe that programs are the most effective way to help curve cyclical nature of criminal behavior. Missouri has over 200 programs they offer to offenders, yet Missouri still has one the highest recidivism rates in the country. Although many of these programs offer offenders the tools necessary to be successful after release this studied concluded that the MRP is failing at the job of helping men get reintegrated into society. There are very few services that are connected to MODOC but provided on the streets, this gap often causes former offenders to have difficult times. It is those difficult times that often allow for relapses. Education, opportunity, and housing are the three main elements this the study discovered that ex-offenders needed to the most after release. Nobody wants to go back to prison, and most do whatever than can to never return but without the proper resources many will commit another crime, that is the current reality. However, if we conduct more studies like this, we could forever change how we deal with crime and criminals.

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Appendix A: Research Instrument (Interview Questions)

Demographic/Background Questions:

1. What is your current age?
2. What is your current educational level?
3. What is your race/nationality?
4. What is your marital status?
5. How many times have you been arrested?
6. How old were you at the time of your first felony arrest/conviction?
7. How many subsequent convictions do you have, if any?
8. How many times have you been committed to MODOC or any other state or federal facility? If you have multiple commitments please explain the circumstances surrounding them, i.e., parole/probation violations or new crime.
9. Describe in detail your life before incarceration including your economical(financial) condition and the environment in which you were living prior to arrest.
10. How did you view crime and criminal behavior prior to your incarceration?
11. What factors do you believe lead you to criminal activity?

Missouri Reentry Process Evaluation Questions:

12. Describe your experience in the Missouri Department of Corrections, including how you adapted to that environment.
13. How long was your most recent stay in the MODOC?
14. The MRP has three (3) categories of reentry programs: educational or training, therapeutic or restorative, and rehabilitative or transitional. Would you please discuss what programs you participated in?
15. Of the programs you participate in which were voluntary and which were mandatory?
16. Describe the impact each of the programs you participated in had on you as person and why?
17. In general, what did you learn or take away from those programs?
18. Describe your life after release.
19. In what ways did the programs you participated in help you overcome those hardships while you (re)integrated into society?
20. How have you changed as a person since your first commitment to prison and what role did the MRP play in that change?
21. What is your current view of crime and criminal behavior?
22. What are the factors that are keeping you from re-offending?

23. Now that you are no longer under any supervision in the state of Missouri... Would you please critique the Missouri Reentry Process, describe what it does well, where it could be improved, and where it is failing from your perspective.
24. If there is anything else that you would like to add about your experience with the Missouri Reentry Process please feel do so.

Appendix B: Offender Programs and Organizations

Program Name/Program Description

Academic Education: Educational class to help offenders to obtain their GED/HSE

AA: AA is a fellowship of offenders who share their experience, strength, and hope with each other solve their common problem and help others to recover from alcoholism

Anger Management: This is a 14-week class designed to help the offender in learning constructive ways to express and control his anger.

Automotive Mechanics: Vocational Education- 12-week class covers introduction to Automotive Repair Technology

Basic Welding: Vocational Education instruction in Tig welding, Gas welding, Mig welding, Plasma cutting, and Plastic welding

Criminal Thinking: This program is about criminal thinking and how offenders' criminal thoughts lead to their choices.

Employability Skills/Life Skills: Ten-week course covering subjects such as career exploration, job applications, and the wide variety of skills needed to obtain and maintain a job and information on general life skills, parenting, and money matters.

Culinary Arts: Vocational education 12-week class which covers the food service industry

Electrical Wiring: Vocational education covers basic electrical wiring techniques and safety

Gavel Club: Division of Toastmasters-members learn communication skills, how to better express themselves verbally.

Hospice: This program teaches offenders to provide basic services to other offenders during end-of-life care. Offenders learn compassion and to care for individuals other than themselves.

Impact of Criminal Thinking: A highly confrontational program facilitated by offenders and supervised by staff that digs deep into the criminal thinking, violent behavior, and unhealthy self-esteem patterns of offenders and forces them to face their liabilities.

Impact on Crime Victims Classes: An interactive offender-facilitated program (supervised by staff) that addresses the truths and myths of crime and encourages accountability for offender's actions.

MoSop: treatment for sex offenders