

2021

Exploring the Employability of Ex-Offenders: Employer Perspectives

Carolyn Diane Smith
Walden University

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Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Carolyn Diane Smith

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Walden University
2021

Abstract

Exploring the Employability of Ex-Offenders: Employer Perspectives

by

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MA, Webster University, 2005

BS, Limestone College, 2002

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Public Policy and Administration

Walden University

November 2021

Abstract

Due to an increase in the number of convictions for minor crimes in Tennessee, a larger number of people are reentering society with the ex-offender label; there is a general lack of awareness among employers regarding their role in enhancing employability of ex-offenders with minor offenses, which limits employment opportunities for this population. Three main theories that explain the integration of ex-offenders into society underpinned this study: avoidance theory, social control theory, and labelling theory. The purpose of this general qualitative study was to explore the perceptions and practices of 10 human resource managers of middle-to-large companies in Tennessee related to hiring ex-offenders with minor offenses. Thematic analysis involving NVivo software was conducted to extract key themes associated with perceptions of employers regarding hireability of ex-offenders with minor crimes. Findings indicated employers in Tennessee acknowledged that ex-offenders of minor crimes should not be denied employment opportunities, but rather should be selected or rejected based on their level of skill and experience. However, due to the ex-offender label attached to them, previously incarcerated individuals may only be employed if the magnitude of their offenses was minor and unrelated to their employment. Employers should help reduce chances of recidivism among minor ex-offenders by granting them employment opportunities. The implications for positive social change included raising awareness and informing employers of the Federal Bonding and Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) programs to help ex-offenders obtain employment.

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Dedication

“Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.” —Proverbs 3:5–6

First and foremost, I dedicate this dissertation to myself. I never expected I would write a dissertation in my lifetime. Next-to my husband Alfred-my daughter- Amanda, my brother-Robert Lee Smith Jr, my sisters-Brenda Gail Thompson, and Teresa Smith Nash, who have inspired, supported, and encouraged me throughout this journey. I also dedicate this dissertation to my deceased parents-Amanda Ruth Smith and Robert Lee Smith Sr, my deceased brother-Bobby Dean Porter, my deceased sister-Helen Ruth Peake, and my grandparents-Lugenia W. Smith and John E. Smith. Thank you for all your love and support throughout my life to achieve my dreams.

“But seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.” —Matthew 6:33

Acknowledgments

I want to express my sincere and deep appreciation to my husband, daughter, family, and friends for their excellent and sincere cooperation during this difficult time of my academic endeavors.

I will be indebted to my husband, Alfred Sylvester Edwards, who fulfilled the promise to support me unconditionally and financially throughout this entire journey. I thank him for believing in me and being patient with unconditional love. I am forever grateful to all those at the University, including Chaplain Prince A. Ordu, Ph-D-and Dr. Walter R. McCollum, for encouraging me to pursue this doctoral degree-to Dr. Elizabeth McMullan, who gave me permission to use her copyrighted instrument-and to everyone else I did not mention-but who contributed in some fashion to the successful completion of this dissertation.

I will owe a tremendous amount of gratitude to Dr. Gregory Campbell, who is serving as my committee chair and mentor. I also wish to express my gratitude to each of my committee members: Dr. Dana-Marie Thomas-and Dr. Richard DeParis for their time and advice. My deep appreciation also goes to those whose interviews will strengthen this research.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

The number of ex-offenders released without employment has rapidly grown since 1980 (Heathfield, 2017). Roman and Link (2017) identified lack of employment as a significant problem for ex-offenders 1 year after release. Therefore, there is a need to identify strategies that might help ex-offenders successfully reintegrate into their communities and reduce recidivism. According to the Tennessee Department of Corrections (2020), approximately 4,500 ex-offenders were released from federal and state correctional facilities in Tennessee during fiscal year 2019-2020. Some individuals' transition into the community is more challenging than others and exploring ex-offenders' reentry experiences may lead to a comprehensive understanding of the success or failure of their reintegration. Ex-offenders need to find employment that contributes to their successful reintegration, which will also affect the prosperity of their community.

The decision of an employer to hire ex-offenders with minor offenses depends on the employers' needs and organizational culture. Many explanations can account for unfavorable attitudes of employers toward employability of ex-offenders, but employers' perception of hiring ex-offenders with minor offenses has received less attention. Researchers have not investigated the effect of employer position and organization size on employer attitudes toward employing ex-offenders. The gap in literature related to employer perceptions, attitudes, and ex-offenders form the basis for this study. Cerda et al. (2014) said having a legitimate job lessens the chance of reoffending following release

from prison, and recidivism is less likely among those with higher wages and higher quality jobs.

Employment provides the means for basic survival and is critical in rebuilding a conventional lifestyle and belonging in a community (Cerda et al., 2014). Employment contributes to daily behavior and patterns of interactions and has become a vital source of informal social control for ex-offenders (Rukus et al., 2016). This study will help ex-offenders with minor offenses foster positive social change by finding employment that contributes to successful reintegration. Obtaining employment is challenging for most ex-offenders with minor offenses because of barriers presented by attitudes of potential hiring managers within those communities, and individual characteristics of ex-offenders such as limited job skills. Cerda et al. (2014) said many offenders released from prison return to the same neighborhood in which they resided before incarceration. Typically, the structure of these communities with large numbers of ex-offenders is such that employment opportunities are lacking. The clustering of ex-offenders with minor offenses in concentrated geographic areas also limits or negatively affects their ability to obtain employment. The impacts of these barriers remain unknown due to a lack of research on these aspects of ex-offender reentry.

The barriers to gainful employment, coupled with likely public safety consequences of high levels of unemployment among ex-offenders with minor offenses, have led to effective interventions that have the potential to increase employment for this population. Employment interventions can include rehabilitation programs, education courses, and vocational training which focuses on one or more of the obstacles to post-release employment (Baldry et al., 2018). The period of incarceration can also serve as an opportunity to build skills and prepare for placement. This study involved understanding perceptions and attitudes of employers about hiring ex-offenders with minor offenses. Also, I explored the extent to which potential employers were willing to hire ex-offenders with minor offenses. Further, results of the study would indicate any strategies and approaches that ex-offender with minor offenses can leverage to find job opportunities. In this chapter, the background of the study, problem statement, purpose of the study, research questions, nature of the study, definitions, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, significance, and a summary are presented.

Background of the Study

A gap exists in the literature concerning perceptions of employers regarding employment of ex-offenders, and researchers have not adequately researched levels of underemployment in ex-offender populations. People with a criminal history face barriers in gaining employment. Nally et al. (2014) said 37% of 6,561 prisoners released in northeast Indiana within the first year found employment.

Cerda et al. (2014) postulated that in Alabama recidivism rate was women 21% versus men 31% primarily due to ex-offenders' inability to obtain employment upon

release. Oliver (2017) said 60% of hiring managers did not want to hire ex-offenders as they perceived this group as lacking responsibility and having bad attitudes toward work; this caused employment problems for many ex-offenders. This study explored perceptions of employers regarding hiring ex-offenders with minor offenses within the state of Tennessee. Statistics regarding the number of Tennessee employers who will not hire ex-offenders with minor offenses are unknown. Pager (2006) aligns with Cerda et al. (2014) deduction that 60% of employers claim they would not knowingly hire an applicant with a criminal background. The findings of this study might lead to the role that employers can play in improving the ex-offender reintegration process.

Ramakers et al. (2015), surveyed 80 employers and found that only 12% would knowingly hire ex-prisoners. The trend of refraining from hiring ex-offenders with minor offenses persists among hiring managers despite government initiatives to prepare offenders for the workforce. Government programs provide pre-GED and GED classes, as well as interview skills training, resume preparation, and job application preparation. Investigating barriers to successful reentry of former offenders is essential to prepare inmates for community integration, primarily because a previous criminal history can deter employability and contribute to the high unemployment rate of this population. In addition, lack of education, job skills, and interpersonal and communications skills are barriers to employment that can contribute to the unsuccessful reintegration of ex-offenders transitioning back into society (Ramakers et al., 2015). Ruckus et al. (2016) said former offenders faced obstacles in obtaining employment. 70% of these offenders are high school dropouts, and most have limited work experience, low cognitive skills,

and suffer from substance abuse and other physical and mental health problems that hinder employability (Soloman & Arvanites, 2014). Having a criminal history is a significant barrier to employment, as employers are less willing to hire former offenders than any other disadvantaged group (Taylor & Spang, 2017). Oliver (2017) said employer bias limited the employability of ex-offenders. Investigating what factors contribute to employers' hiring decisions to address the high unemployment rates of this population will help increase their quality of life and reduce recidivism.

Lichtenberger (2006) said a reduction in the recidivism rates of ex-offenders occurs when ex-offenders have jobs. To help give ex-offenders a fair chance of reentry into the workforce, over 130 cities in 35 states have adopted a ban-the-box policy that requires employers to postpone background checks for job candidates until later in the hiring process (Solinas-Saunders & Stacer, 2015). Solinas-Saunders & Stacer (2015) said the ban-the-box law targets individuals who are offenders, especially those charged with minor crimes.

Solinas-Saunders and Stacer (2015) said some employers might be supporting fair-chance laws for financial or political benefits rather than helping the cause of ex-offenders. Indifference among hiring managers toward fair-chance laws may be due to racial issues or lack of awareness (Solinas-Saunders & Stacer, 2015). This study adds value to strategies and policies that employers should use to improve their attitudes and reduce barriers to employing ex-offenders with minor offenses. Findings from this study might contribute to raising awareness of fair-chance laws among hiring managers in the state of Tennessee.

Problem Statement

The incarceration rate of 853 per 100,000 people in the state of Tennessee continues to grow due to an increase in convictions for minor crimes (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018). Shivy et al. (2007) said because minor crimes lead to short-term sentences, an increase in the conviction rate results in a larger number of individuals reentering society with the label ex-offender. The general problem was that there were few employment opportunities for ex-offenders with minor offenses as well as an ongoing lack of skill-building opportunities for these individuals who are attempting to reenter society. According to Prison Policy Initiative (2018), 37% of ex-offenders could not find employment and had no idea how employers viewed ex-offenders. There was a lack of awareness among employers about their role in developing an environment that affects the employability of ex-offenders with minor offenses.

Employers' perceptions have a discriminatory impact that might result in fewer employment opportunities for ex-offenders (Petersen, 2015). To increase the employability of this population, cities including San Francisco, Minneapolis, and Boston have launched ban-the-box campaigns to encourage employers to voluntarily eliminate boxes on job applications that ask whether an applicant has been convicted of a crime (Solinas-Saunders & Stacer, 2015). This study contributes to the body of knowledge by identifying issues that restrict prospective employers from hiring ex-offenders with minor offenses. Results of the study include data that policymakers could use to improve programs designed to help individuals reenter society in addition to developing outreach

efforts to prospective employers who would help ex-offenders with minor offenses transition back into society.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this general qualitative study was exploring the perceptions and practices of employers (Human resource managers or equivalent) in Tennessee related to hiring ex-offenders with minor offenses. Hiring perceptions is the term used to refer to perceptions of hiring managers toward hiring ex-offenders with minor offenses.

The objective was to gain a deeper understanding of perceptions and thought processes of hiring managers when faced with deciding to hire an ex-offender. A general qualitative approach was appropriate because qualitative researchers examine problems that involve investigating a central phenomenon. Moreover, a general qualitative study design was appropriate to gain a deeper understanding of employers' perceptions and practices regarding employing ex-offenders with minor offenses. The study included interviews with 10 hiring managers who have experienced interviewing and hiring ex-offenders with minor offenses. Interviews continued until data saturation was obtained. Results of this study will facilitate how communities process the transitioning of ex-offenders with minor offenses.

Participants included a purposive sample of employers in the state of Tennessee. Research served as a practical contribution to professional practice by increasing the employer's best practices for determining employability and how they align with specific components of hiring. Fresh insights regarding underemployment of ex-offenders with minor offenses are necessary to identify problems for employers or the government to

remediate. Also, the proposed qualitative study revealed what employers identify as hiring strategies to reduce unemployment within this population.

Research Questions

The phenomenon of interest in this study was how employers' perceptions influence the employability of ex-offenders with minor offenses and their assimilation into society. The study included interview questions to obtain data about perceptions of human resources managers or equivalent roles. Furthermore, I sought to establish an understanding of perceived social norms of participants. Data collected to answer the research questions may reveal if hiring managers in the state of Tennessee led to perceived difficulties in terms of hiring ex-offenders with minor offenses. The following research questions were addressed in this study:

RQ1: What are the perceptions of employers about employing ex-offenders with minor offenses in the state of Tennessee?

RQ2: What are the practices of employers (including hiring protocols) regarding employing ex-offenders with minor offenses in the state of Tennessee?

RQ3: How does the type or level of offense influence hiring decisions?

I developed a set of interview questions that would help obtain data about perceptions of employers. Interview questions are a valid data analysis tool for gathering information about a phenomenon. Interview questions in this section generated data-rich content needed to answer the overarching research questions.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework provides the foundations for any qualitative research by providing parameters of behavior and attitudes that apply to the phenomenon under exploration (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The theoretical framework for this research is the social control theory. Russell (2015) explained that according to Weber's social action theory, bureaucratic organizations are the dominant institutions in society, therefore, individuals within institutions may carry out rational actions such as being morally sensitive to align with achieving organizational goals. For this research, I used the social action theory as well as literature involving the social control theory, labeling theory, and avoidance theory to develop theory triangulation.

According to Agnew (2005), social interactions create social beliefs and value systems that form the foundation of personal moral code. The social control theory provided the perspective for this research with a focus on exploring perspectives of hiring managers regarding their role in providing ex-offenders with minor crimes a second chance. The literature review section of this proposal includes a detailed explanation of the social control theory.

The labeling theory involves the fact that social groups define good, bad, and deviant based on values accepted as social norms (Becker, 1963). The labeling theory served as the foundation for exploring if hiring managers had any biases toward providing ex-offenders with minor crimes a second chance. The avoidance theory involves both coping mechanisms and behavioral conditioning that shape an individual's response to a stimulus (LeDoux et al., 2017). The avoidance theory served as the basis

from which to explore behaviors of hiring managers toward providing ex-offenders a second chance from a social conditioning perspective. These three theories are connected. The literature review section includes a discussion of the three theories and areas of convergence and connection.

Nature of the Study

This study involved using a general qualitative design to explore perceptions and practices of human resources managers or equivalent roles in the state of Tennessee related to hiring ex-offenders with minor offenses. A qualitative study design provides a way to understand human behavior by gathering perceptions from relevant individuals (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016). Specifically, this study involved identifying and reporting participants' experiences within selected business organizations.

The general qualitative design was deemed most appropriate in qualitative research when exploring participant since it taps into their intrinsic experiences (Christensen & Johnson, 2019). Christensen and Johnson (2019) said the focus of qualitative research is understanding inside perspectives of people and their cultures, which require direct, personal, and participatory responses from research participants. Therefore, qualitative researchers do not collect data in the form of numbers; rather, they collect data through observations and in-depth interviews, and data are in the form of words (Christensen & Johnson, 2019). This design was appropriate for the study because the purpose of the study was to gain a deep understanding of experiences. The design was also suitable because analyzing data regarding perceptions of employers and their hiring

behavior led to strategies that improved employment opportunities for ex-offenders with minor offenses.

A purposive sampling method was suitable for identifying participants. By conducting interviews with human resources managers or equivalent roles, an opportunity arose to explore the gap in literature as it related to businesses in Tennessee and their lack of employing ex-offenders with minor offenses. The study included a set of five demographic and 12 validated open-ended guiding interview questions adapted from a previous quantitative study by McMullan. McMullan worked with the Jacksonville Reentry Center in Florida to provide data that would assist ex-offenders in gaining employment upon release from prison. The goal of the Jacksonville Reentry Center was to increase public safety by reducing recidivism rates and providing employment opportunities for ex-offenders after their release. McMullan provided permission to use and modify the instrument (see Appendix A). According to Creswell (2013), a sample size of five to 25 is suitable to attain saturation with interview data. A sample size of 10 to 15 human resource managers or equivalents operating in for-profit/nonprofit organizations in the state of Tennessee had at least 5 years of experience was used in the study.

NVivo 12 software was used to organize and code responses before analyzing them into themes and patterns to report experiences involving perceptions of employers regarding employing ex-offenders with minor offenses within business organizations in Tennessee. For my selection criteria, I requested a taxpayer list from a state of Tennessee court clerk of medium to large size employers, which included but was not limited to

retail, manufacturing, construction, independent service stations, and nonprofit organizations with 50 to 150 employees that had been paying taxes for 5 years. From this list, I selected 10 to 15 employers to email or call and requested to speak with a human resources manager or equivalent role. During this initial contact, I introduced myself, explained my research study, provided the university-approved informed consent form as well as my contact information and an invitation to participate in telephone interviews at dates, times, and locations that were chosen by the Human Resources Managers.

Definitions of Terms

For this study, the following key terms were defined:

Criminal record: An individual's criminal background that can deter employability and contributes to prosecution (Solinas-Saunders & Stacer, 2015).

Employability: The ability of an individual to gain employment in terms of skills or attributes (Cerda et al., 2014).

Employer perception: Beliefs of a person or a business employing one or more persons for wages or salary; perception is closely related to attitudes (Buckingham et al., 2014).

Ex-offender: Individuals with criminal histories from correctional institutions who reintegrate back into communities after incarceration (Nally, et al., 2014).

Minor offenses: Crimes committed by individuals who as a part of their conviction are sentenced to diversion-which requires that offenders accept responsibility for the crime committed, instead of jail time. These individuals are often referred through networking to available community services such as crisis intervention and social

services agencies, as well as crisis intervention, outreach, residential, vocational training, family support, and case management, and other community support services (Kratcoski, 2017).

Reentry: Transitioning from incarceration back into society as an ex-offender (Atkin & Armstrong, 2013).

Assumptions

The study included four assumptions. The first is that those interviewed responded honestly to all questions. Second, it was assumed that participants had no motivational factors that may influence or shape their responses. The third assumption was that responses to interview questions did not negatively influence current hiring practices of participating hiring managers. Fourth, employers had personal perspectives that had a direct impact on their hiring decisions.

Scope and Delimitations

Delimitations are restrictions imposed by a researcher to narrow the scope of a study (Christensen & Johnson, 2014). The study was delimited to ex-offenders with minor offenses. The scope of this study included targeted employers representing businesses in the state of Tennessee. The population is Human resource managers or hiring managers from businesses in Tennessee. This research was restricted to perceptions of human resource managers or equivalent roles within Tennessee. I contacted employers via email or phone and requested to speak with a human resources manager or equivalent to participate in interviews. Results explained reasons why employers were skeptical about hiring ex-offenders with minor offenses in the workplace.

This study focused on the employability of ex-offenders with minor offenses according to perceptions of employers. Study participants were purposively selected from an employer taxpayers list according to the state of Tennessee court clerk.

Limitations

Limitations are matters or occurrences in a study that are beyond the researcher's control (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016), and involve potential weaknesses in research studies (Christensen & Johnson, 2014). The key methodological limitations involved sample size, lack of data, reliability of data, and limits associated with self-reported data.

Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling method, and it occurs when “elements selected for the sample are chosen by the judgment of the researcher. Researchers often believe that they can obtain a representative sample by using a sound judgment, which will result in saving time and money”. As such, this research may be hampered by vulnerability to errors in judgment by researcher and cause low level of reliability and high levels of bias, which leads to inability in generalizing research findings

The supervisors who participated in this examination will do as such of their own volition and may accordingly have unmistakable inclinations toward recruiting those with a criminal history. Ban the Box might have increased administrative mindfulness because of possible changes in hierarchical employing rehearses.

What is unexpected by the analyst is the degree of trouble to get the offices and associations to help with the enlistment cycle. The analyst is unaware of the level of trouble that associations are encountering with making contacts with customers, also to

the assignment of connecting for outside purposes. Finally, participants' responses may be influenced by consequences of COVID-19 or restrictions undertaken to mitigate its spread.

Significance

The purpose of this general qualitative study was to explore perceptions and practices of employers in Tennessee related to hiring ex-offenders with minor offenses. Stakeholders can use findings to implement new policy changes and legislation involving hiring ex-offenders with minor offenses. The interview questionnaire included five demographic and 12 open-ended questions (see Appendix B). The data collection approach allowed understanding employers' perceptions involving hiring ex-offenders with minor offenses in the workplace.

This study added to the literature on employability of ex-offenders with minor offenses by reporting experiences of employers. There have been few studies focused on exploring perceptions of employers hiring ex-offenders. The results of this research will lead to increased awareness and lead to employment opportunities for ex-offenders with minor offenses.

Summary

To forestall ex-offender's recidivism, Goldsmith & Groves (2016) recommend employment as the primary means to reintegrate ex-offenders into their families and communities. However, ex-offender's lack education or professional skills needed to gain successful employment. Furthermore, there are issues involving capabilities of ex-

offender job applicants and perceptions of hiring managers about potential of ex-offenders with minor offenses.

This chapter highlighted the importance of the study, which involved exploring employability of ex-offenders from employer perspectives. The purpose of this general qualitative study was to explore perceptions and practices of employers in Tennessee related to hiring ex-offenders with minor offenses. Chapter 1 included an introduction, background information that set the context for the study, the problem statement, purpose of the study, research questions, and the theoretical framework that served as a guide for the study. Chapter 1 included an explanation regarding where the study will take place and what it was expected to accomplish. Chapter 2 includes a review of literature relevant to the investigation and additional background information regarding the evolution and nature of employability of ex-offenders with minor offenses.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Lack of employment opportunities is one of the biggest barriers to reentering society for formerly incarcerated individuals (Cerda et al., 2014). The problem was a lack of awareness among employers regarding their role in developing an environment that affects the employability of ex-offenders. Petersen (2015) identified 73% of unemployment rates among released offenders within the first year of release from prison. The recidivism rate stands at 67% primarily because of ex-offenders' inability to obtain employment upon release (Cerda et al., 2014).

There was a gap in the literature regarding the behavioral pattern of employers involving ex-offenders and their employment. Further, a gap exists involving specific reasons that affect employability of ex-offenders. The Bureau of Justice Statistics (2016) said 6,851,000 persons were under the supervision of the U.S. adult correctional system at the end of 2014, and one in 36 adults in the United States was under some form of correctional supervision. This literature identified extensive research involving barriers to successful reentry into society and includes a focus on reasons employers may refuse to hire ex-offenders. In this study, I explored perceptions of hiring managers regarding reasons discussed in the literature.

This study included semi-structured interviews with human resource managers or equivalent roles in the state of Tennessee who have been operating businesses for 5 years and have experience hiring ex-offenders. The remainder of this chapter includes literature

search strategies, a discussion of the theoretical foundation, literature review related to key concepts, and a summary and conclusion.

Literature Search Strategy

I examined historical research and current peer-reviewed literature to determine how employers perceive employability of ex-offenders. Despite the high volume of information on ex-offenders, there was limited information regarding employment strategies for this population. This chapter includes an overview of literature and the significance of the study's contribution to the existing body of knowledge regarding ex-offender employability. I applied a broad approach to the literature search to confirm the problem in this study and search general theories of employment development to provide a history and in-depth exploration of the problem and explore the nature and significance of employers' roles in society.

This literature review contains information from peer-reviewed articles, books, dissertations, and state and federal web sites such as the Bureau of Justice Statistics, United States Bureau of Labor Statistics: United States Department of Labor, Google Scholar, LexisNexis, Drug Policy Alliance, Prison Policy Initiative, Tennessee Department of Corrections, Journal of Criminology, The Sentencing Project Databases, EBSCO, ProQuest, Criminal Justice Periodicals, Socio-Index, Academic Search Premier and Sage, Business Website Source, and ERIC. All articles were published between 2004 and 2020, and key search terms used to explore the databases were *corrections history*, *employment*, *Tennessee incarceration and employment*, *ex-offenders and employment in Tennessee*, *discrimination*, *employability*, *offender barriers*, *education and offenders*,

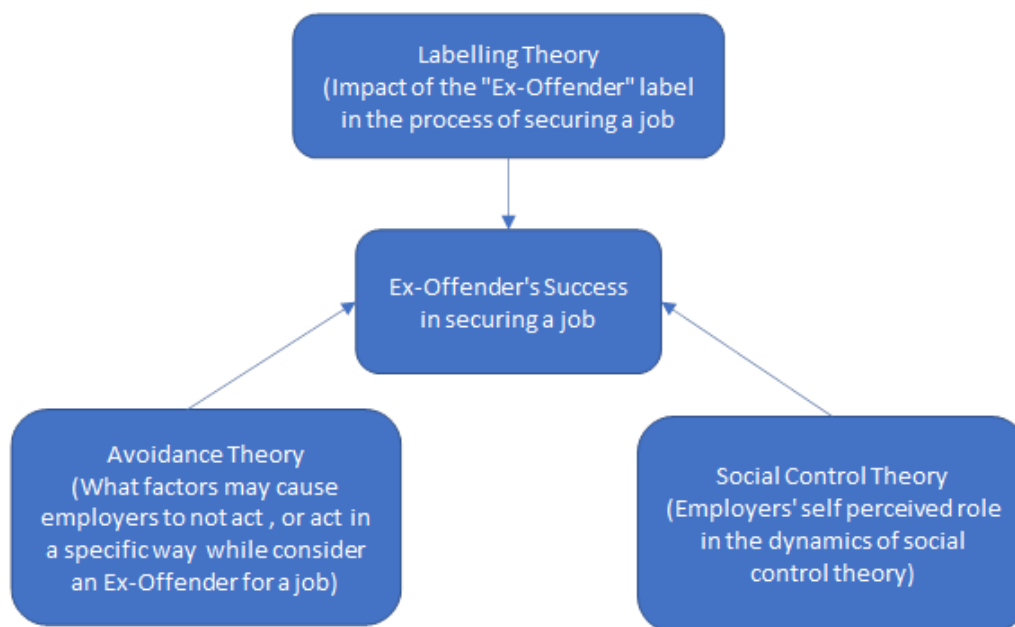
criminal behavior, deviant behavior, offender reentry, human resource managers, employers, employer hiring abilities, employer business practices, employment and offenders, attitudes, ex-offenders, reintegration, recidivism, perceptions, incarceration, deviant labeling and stigma, labeling, various labeling theories, social control theory, avoidance theory, and criminal records. I also obtained in-depth information regarding theories from books and seminal data sources. Searches using combinations of key terms led to 275 articles, of which 145 had content relevant to the study.

Theoretical Foundation

The theoretical basis for this general qualitative study involved three distinct theories that apply to the phenomenon under study: labeling theory, social control theory, and theory of avoidance. Each theory contributed to understanding the perceptions and practices of hiring managers or equivalent roles in terms of hiring ex-offenders in the workplace. This provided guidance for conducting the study. The collective application of these theories contributed to the researcher's deeper understanding of perceptions of employers regarding hiring ex-offenders.

Figure 1

Theory Triangulation for Exploring the Employability of Ex-Offenders



Labeling Theory

The labeling theory involves behaviors exhibited by one group member when perceiving another member (Berk, 2015). This theory was one of the most dominant areas of research and theoretical development within the field of criminology. Originating in the 1960s in the United States during a time of political and cultural conflict, labeling theorists addressed the role of government agencies and social processes in the creation of deviance and crime (Berk, 2015). Individual careers and commitments develop as processes of interaction between individuals and social control agents. According to Thornton (2018) research on the effects of institutional discrimination on the successful reentry of ex-offenders, it was indicated that certain subgroups, such as White males, are more susceptible to effects of labeling than others.

The labeling theory indicates that people can become what society labels them. Although the theory gained popularity in the 1960s, the practice of labeling in the United States goes back much further. For example, the use of labeling occurred in advertising, minstrel shows, movies, and written works. President Donald Trump used labeling with Mexican immigrants to influence voters on immigration reform. Erickson (2014) asserts people are not inherently deviant, nor is deviance inherent in any behavior.

Social Control Theory

The focus of social control theory is the way society controls the behavior of people. Foundational American social values include family values, jobs, relationships, and support systems. Higher levels of family support give a person more chances to support themselves. According to Paat et al. (2018), many individuals grow up in environments with little or no social controls, lack good role models, and live-in communities with concentrated poverty and criminality. Having a strong family support system gives ex-offenders a chance to reintegrate successfully and helps them develop a sense of social control so they do not commit crimes or perform deviant behaviors again. The more people value themselves, the more they can value life.

Avoidance Theory

Avoidance theory was the third theoretical perspective selected to explore the phenomenon under study. According to LeDoux et al. (2017), two aspects of human behavior in current research are active and passive avoidance. LeDoux et al. (2017) defined active avoidance as occurring when individuals act in order to avoid harm, and passive avoidance occurs when individuals do not perform a task in order to avoid harm.

The avoidance theory served as the basis of exploring if hiring managers perceive any social or personal harm while facing decisions to provide ex-ex-offenders with reentry points into society.

Deviant Label and Stigma

Groups of people who connect through social interactions create a society, and organizations facilitate social relations between individuals. Stigma is developed through the labeling process (Thompson & Lefler, 2016); the process is comprised of four components: (a) identifying and labeling differences between individuals, (b) linking those differences to known stereotypes, (c) social labels which separate individuals into groups, and (d) status loss and discrimination (Thompson & Lefler, 2016). Thompson and Lefler (2016) suggested that social labels were necessary before stigmatization from a set of characteristics within this process.

Deviance is socially constructed through reaction instead of action that people, groups, and cultures will consider a certain behavior to be negative while others will perceive it as positive. In addition, categorization is used to recognize and differentiate individuals and groups as well as predict, infer, and decide on outcomes without any additional facts present.

Criminological Process Triggered by Labeling

The delinquency level of one's peer group and actual involvement in delinquent behavior, as reported by subjects, did not appear to be as significant as police contact in terms of explaining an ex-offender increased inclination or orientation toward

delinquency (Ageton & Elliott, 2014). Those in power write and enforce the meaning of criminality.

The labeling theory can include a focus on problems that emerge after the social environment defines or typifies an individual as a deviant, which leads to the question of how labeling can affect different people.

Deviant Self-Concept

Most people assume that low self-esteem can define who they are and what they will turn out to be (Thornton, 2018). People may assume that low self-esteem predicts deviance, but results have been unclear (Thornton, 2018). In studying theoretical patterns of self-concept as it relates to deviance, three principal categories emerged: structural interactionist analyses, socialization-control analyses, and labeling analysis.

Deviant labeling can lead a person to spend time with the wrong crowd and can lead to time spent in jail, institutionalization, and possibly death. Labeling can lead to rejection from typical peers and result in being labeled as a juvenile delinquent. Deviant labeling may result in withdrawal from encounters with typical peers because such encounters may entail shame, embarrassment, and uneasiness (Bernburg, 2019).

Process of Social Exclusion

Link and Phelan (2001) said stigmatization is entirely contingent on access to social, economic, and political power that allows identification and construction of stereotypes, separation of labeled persons into distinct categories, and full execution of disapproval, rejection, exclusion, and discrimination. Stigma that leads to deviant labeling can cause relationships with others to fail. Opportunities can be missed because

of social exclusion. Social exclusion can also lead to withdrawal from family and society. In turn, social disaffiliation may result in constricted social networks and fewer attempts at seeking more satisfying and higher paying jobs.

Labeling and Discrimination

An important aspect of labeling theory is that disadvantaged groups are more likely than other groups to experience labeling. Young people who are in gangs may not plan to stay in these groups for the rest of their life. However, as they become adults, others in society may perceive them to be felons, so they begin to feel like criminals. Thus, the path taken in youth is likely to continue into adulthood, which can lead to jail, institutionalization, and death (Payne, 2012).

Segregation occurred as a result of many factors such as transatlantic slave trade which led to many Whites in the 1900s considering themselves better than Blacks. Separate restaurants, schools, bathrooms, and water fountains served to keep the so-called better from the worse.

Research on the Criminogenic Effect of Labeling

Paternoster and Iovanni (1989) underscored four methodological issues that are particularly important for labeling: (a) while the researchers were using samples of individuals drawn from police records and similar nonrandom sources. The police records contained limited comparisons between formally labeled individuals and individuals that were not labeled formally; (b) Their labeling research failed to study intermediate processes towards effective Labeling of individuals which researchers also needed to investigate; (c) Again their labeling research failed to examine informal labeling and

processes of stigmatization, both of which were core components of labeling theory; and (d) Finally the researchers neglected that criminogenic processes triggered by labeling might be contingent on social contextualization.

Methodological Issues

A distinction exists between behavior such as delinquency and action such as theft in terms of comparing formally labeled people with individuals who have no formal labeling. Braithwaite (2012) said, “most criminality is a quality of the act; the distinction between *behavior* and *action* is that behavior is no more than physical while action has a meaning that is socially given” (p. 2). Incarceration can undermine social bonds and life chances because incarcerated individuals are often unable to participate in social routines and work toward common goals during incarceration.

While the labeling theory was the primary approach for sociologists in the 1960s to create academic acclaim for themselves, the approach does not appear grounded in any society at any time in history. Braithwaite (2012) said, “No act is fundamentally criminal because the meaning of criminality is written and enforced by those in power to write and enforce their written laws” (p. 59). Ever since the Code of Hammurabi, which dates around 1754 BC, humans have imposed laws on themselves by defining deviant and criminal behavior (Braithwaite, 2012). However, the labeling theory fails to consider that ever since the Code of Hammurabi, the interpretation of the law is different for different members or classes of society. If a doctor in Hammurabi’s day killed a wealthy patient, the doctor’s hands would be cut off. If the doctor killed a slave, he would give some money to the slave’s owner. While prominent sociologists have indicated labels might

contribute to crime and deviant acts, a multidiscipline body of experts may have developed a more accurate theory to address desegregation (McGivern et al., 2016). Social context not only shapes the likelihood that individuals will resist or escape stigma, but it also influences other factors, including the availability of criminal or delinquent opportunities and roles (Bernburg, 2019).

Labeling Theory Compared with Social Construct

The labeling method applied to labels, whereas social construction applied categories. The focus of social construction theory is the way individuals think and use classes to explain the structure of their experiences and analysis of the world. An example of a social construct is professional sports in the United States. Labeling theorists argue different careers and commitments develop during an interaction between individuals and social control agents. Critical issues may affect the proper labeling of a person's subsequent alignment toward delinquency (Ageton & Elliott, 2014). Therefore, the meaning given to sports is socially constructed.

The labeling method applied labels while social construction applied theories. Social construction theory is concerned with the ways we think, explain the structure of our experiences, and analysis of the world. A good example of a social construct is professional sports in America. Labeling theorists argued, different careers and commitments developed in the process during an interaction between individuals and social control agents. Critical issues may affect the proper labeling on a person's subsequent alignment toward delinquency (Ageton & Elliott, 2014). The meaning given to sports is consequently socially constructed.

This social construction is conceived as a professional project through which a knowledge domain and the groups' authoritative status are established. Sociologists of sport seek to validate their professional project through appeals to the sociological mainstream and the correlative distancing from physical education (Malcolm, 2014).

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts

Incarceration

Incarceration is imprisonment in either jail or prison when a suspect is convicted of a crime authorized by the federal, state, and local lawmakers (Subramanian et al., 2015). Wagner and Rabuy (2017) indicated that there were more than 2 million inmates incarcerated in local, state, and federal correctional facilities in the United States. Although adult offenses may vary in nature, adults still need the proper tools and resources to maintain a successful life after release. Wagner and Rabuy noted that the primary purpose of detention centers is to rehabilitate offenders and send them into society to be productive members of their community. Ex-offenders released from prison are often more likely to commit another crime because of the treatment they receive once released into the community. Society hinders the transition of ex-offenders into the community because businesses refuse to employ convicted criminals, which leaves them having to find alternative ways to make money that may lead to committing a crime (Subramanian et al., 2015). Being a convicted felon is a barrier to employment (Visher, 2005). A comparison between Georgia State Penitentiary and State of Tennessee Penitentiary later in this chapter shows that although there are slight differences in the causes for incarcerations, the adjustment back into the community is similar.

The criminal justice system is one of the oldest institutions in the Western world. Subramanian et al. (2015) noted that the system's purpose is to serve and protect offenders with rehabilitation, moral support, and preventing other crimes. According to Penal Reform International (n.d.), the basis of creating the prison system was the idea that incarcerating inmates would improve public safety. Because of overcrowding in correctional institutions, this can cause or exasperate mental health problems, and increase rates of violence, self-harm and suicide (Penal Reform International, n.d.). O'Driscoll (2017) noted that prison life can never compare to the outside world. Inmates deal with things such as frequent attacks, and this aggression can lead to them having no emotion to deal with living behind prison walls. Once released, the government expects ex-offenders to rejoin society, yet they lack the preparation needed to deal with what society will expect of them. Incarceration can work on a particular level, depending on the individuals and their mental ability to survive (O'Driscoll, 2017).

When individuals go to prison, they face many challenges that can affect their mental capacity to become productive members of society once they leave confinement. According to Caie (2012), after release, ex-offenders find it hard to adjust to their living situation without the treatment and services received while incarcerated. Former felons receive limited services within the community due to a lack of finances, housing, transportation, and medical insurance (Caie, 2012), and ex-offenders with mental issues face even greater challenges.

While incarcerated, inmates learn corruption within inhumane living conditions that, in the long-term, affect the mind severely. Time incarcerated is a type of agreement

in which inmates remain separate from society to work on their actions through rehabilitation (Penal Reform International, n.d.). Drake (2007) noted that prison staff believes that it is appropriate to provide harsh treatment to ex-offenders. Drake (2007) indicated that this type of treatment affects inmates' self-worth and pride, which keeps them from reacting to rehabilitation positively. The effects of inhumane living can affect prisoners mentally and lead to reentering the criminal system after release (Drake, 2007). While inmates need to be exposed to positive reentry, especially depending on their circumstances and reasoning for confinement, they also need a deterrent from violence and crimes that often happen within prison walls.

Factors That Contribute to the Increase in Incarceration in the United States

Since 2012, the United States has stood as the world leader in incarceration rates. (Incarceration Nation, 2014). According to the American Psychological Association, "One out of every 100 American adults is incarcerated per capita rate five to ten times greater than that in Western Europe or other countries" (Incarceration Nation, 2014, p. 1). Harlan (2015) indicated that various reasons contribute to the increase in incarceration. Some of the factors include the implementation of harsher crime sentences such as mandatory minimum sentences, three-strike laws, and policies that require prisoners to serve 85% of their sentences (Harlan, 2015). Other contributing factors include mental illness, the war on drugs, racial disparities in policing, prosecution, harsh sentences, excessive punishment for nonviolent crimes, and violation of probation (Leslie, 2016).

Harsher sentencing such as mandatory minimum sentences significantly contributes to the rise in the prison population because people who would have shorter

jail time or no jail time face automatic convictions (Marill, 2007). Marill (2007) noted that judges are not able to grant lesser sentences because of the law, and plea bargains cannot be given for crimes. Another problem with the law is that many nonviolent people receive long sentences, which increase the incarceration rate. Policies that require prisoners to serve 85% of their sentences do not take into consideration good behavior (Marill, 2007).

Another contributing factor that has increased the incarceration rate is the policies set forth to combat drug crimes (Visher, 2005). Strict sentencing laws caused an increase in the prison population and created other issues as well. For example, there were more than 1.5 million drug arrests in the United States in 2014 (Urrutia, 2012). In federal prisons, Alliance (2016) found that 80% of drugs were for possession only. The study also showed that drug offenses account for 50% of the people (Alliance, 2016). Between 1993 and 2009, drug law violations were the primary contributing factor to prison arrests and convictions in the United States, with more than 30 million people sentenced for drug offenses (Urrutia, 2012). Furthermore, 25% of the prison population consists of nonviolent drug-related offenders (Solomon & Arvanites, 2014). There are not enough mental health facilities to treat people with mental illness, which has caused many mentally ill individuals to end up behind bars.

Another critical issue that contributes to increased incarceration rates is racial disparities in policing, prosecution, and sentencing. Black and Hispanic men face race-based differences in policing, prosecution, and penalties (Solomon & Arvanites, 2014). They are more likely to be stopped, searched, arrested, convicted, and harshly sentenced

than other races for the same crime (Incarceration Nation, 2014). Blacks comprise approximately 15.2% of the U.S. population (Sasson & Hayward, 2019), while they account for 60% of those imprisoned (Beck & Blumstein, 2018). The jail population grew by 700% from 1970 to 2005, a rate that is outpacing crime and population rates (Solomon & Arvanites, 2014). Incarceration rates disproportionately affect men of color: 1 in every 15 Black men and 1 in every 36 Hispanic men are incarcerated in comparison to 1 in every 106 White men (Kerby, 2012, p. 1).

Preventive Solutions to Reduce Incarceration

There are various ways to reduce the incarceration rate in the United States. One possible solution is to replace mandatory minimum sentences with laws that give judges and prosecutors the flexibility to grant lower sentences to people who did not commit violent crimes (Ageton & Elliott, 2014). Also, judges should be allowed to consider an offender's criminal record and the likelihood of the individual committing a future crime (Petrella, 2014). Another solution is to eliminate the three-strike law (Solomon & Arvanites, 2014). In some states, the law includes a penalty of 25 years to life for minor, nonviolent crimes. For example, in 2012, 4,000 inmates in California were serving life sentences for nonviolent crimes (Petrella, 2014).

A third solution is to change the laws of the war on drugs. Current laws target more people of color and do not adequately address the substance abuse issues (Petrella, 2014). Lawmakers could perhaps avoid applying harsh sentences on individuals who have not committed violent crimes. Other solutions to reduce the problem could consist of improved mental illness programs, substance abuse programs, job training, and

placement for convicted felons, as well as incentives for employers to hire convicted felons (Petrella, 2014).

Mental illness programs can help address mental health issues that may cause people to commit crimes. Program staff can provide counseling, medication, and therapy to patients; they can also provide job training, job readiness, and housing for those who need services (Ageton & Elliott, 2014). These programs could serve as an alternative to incarceration for those who comply with the program rules.

Substance abuse programs can help people who have a drug addiction problem. The substance abuse programs can provide educational services, Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous meetings, and other support groups for people with addictions (William & Hall, 2017). Job training and placement will provide the skills needed to enter the job market. When there is a lack of jobs available and individuals cannot obtain employment due to criminal convictions, they might commit more crimes to survive. Job training and placement could reduce crime by giving convicted individuals who serve their time a second chance (Petrella, 2014).

Providing employers who hire convicted felons with incentives can reduce crime. In many cases, convicted felons or people with even minor offenses on their background checks cannot obtain employment (Petersen, 2015). Visher (2015) noted that rewarding hiring managers who take a chance on hiring ex-offenders could make a big difference in individuals who are willing to change their lives for the better. The incentive could range from tax breaks to financial incentives for hiring a certain number of ex-offenders. Other programs could consist of pretrial diversion programs or first-offender programs as

alternatives to incarceration (Visher, 2005). These programs would be beneficial to those who commit nonviolent crimes. Other programs, such as prison education programs, can lead to a reduction in the number of inmates returning into the system once released into society. Education programs can consist of obtaining a GED and earning higher education credits while in prison. Education can help inmates sharpen their skills and knowledge while preparing to enter back into society (Petrella, 2014).

Another solution to reduce the incarceration rate is to implement and support community policing (Petersen, 2015). Petrella (2014) noted that community policing involves people in the community and in law enforcement working together to police the community to build trust. When law enforcement makes it a priority to get to know the people in the neighborhood and develop mutual respect, problems between police and the community can decrease (Petrella, 2014).

Comparing Atlanta and Tennessee Prisons

In comparing prisons in Atlanta, Georgia, and Tennessee, it was observed that the efforts employed to minimize mass incarceration were the same. For example, Atlanta and Tennessee both had programs that enhanced the re-entry of nonviolent ex-offenders. Although the U.S. prison policy indicated rehabilitation as an essential component, rehabilitation has moved to the back of the line of priorities due to mandatory sentencing (Lee, 2015).

Georgia is currently the fourth largest state with mass incarceration. Former Governor, Nathan Deal addressed the challenging task of building additional facilities to house inmates due to the increase of 56,000 inmates from 1990 to 2011 (Shavin, 2015).

In 2011, Atlanta submitted a reform to the current law to mandate educational resources that included allowing inmates to obtain a high school diploma as well as to remove the checkbox on job applications that indicates whether applicants have a conviction on their record, which could help to eliminate the automatic disqualification for jobs. To assist in enabling ex-offenders to transition back into society, the city of Atlanta invested \$17 million in improving rehabilitation by funding community-based programs for drug and driving-under-the-influence court and other nonviolent ex-offenders (Shavin, 2015).

Incarceration rates in State of Tennessee were much lower than in Atlanta. According to Wagner and Walsh (2016), the population of State of Tennessee rated 10th in the United States concerning incarcerations or residents who had ever been incarcerated. In 2014, Atlanta experienced a 6% decrease, whereas State of Tennessee experienced a 7% increase, in the number of people in prison. Unlike in Atlanta, Legislators in State of Tennessee were considering a change in the law to include an increase in court-sentencing terms for dangerous offenders and individuals with multiple convictions of domestic violence, drug trafficking, and burglary (Locker, 2015). This type of law will increase the tax dollars spent on housing the increased number of inmates incarcerated. State of Tennessee eliminated the possibility for a convict to work toward rehabilitation by incarcerating every felony to a long-term sentence (Wagner & Walsh, 2016). Locker (2015) explained that Legislators in Tennessee would begin to work to pursue policy reforms for criminals. The reforms would include programs to move inmates with mental health and drug addiction issues. The ability to obtain help without being confined in a cell will support prisoners receiving the care needed (Locker,

2015). Additional policies might include reducing some felonies to misdemeanors for nonviolent crimes and, importantly, strengthening the communication with the community. To reduce the chances of inmates becoming repeat offenders, the community plays a large part in providing support for jobs, housing, food, and rehabilitation services (Locker, 2015).

Correctional Institutions is one of the largest institutional systems in the United States. The prison system was set up based on the idea that incarcerating inmates would improve public safety (Muntingh, 2008). The incarceration rate in the United States has grown significantly over the years, and the prison population is considerably higher than in other countries (Wagner & Walsh, 2016). However, a majority of prisoners have committed nonviolent crimes. Various reasons contribute to the increase in incarceration rates. Some of the contributing factors include mental illness, the war on drugs, and the implementation of harsher sentences such as mandatory minimum sentences and three-strike laws (Wagner & Walsh, 2016). Many preventions aid in reducing the number of people incarcerated. Also, a comparison of prisons in Atlanta and State of Tennessee revealed that the efforts to minimize mass incarceration were similar.

Gaps in the Existing Literature

When investigating an issue that is important in society, one of the best sources of information is usually the published literature on the topic. However, there is a lack of published literature on the perceptions of employers toward ex-offenders (Heathfield, 2017). Without published research to support and emphasize the qualities that this population could bring to the workforce, employers may be more hesitant to consider

hiring employees from this group (Visher, 2005). A search of multiple databases, including EBSCO Host, Google Scholar, and LexisNexis, revealed no matching studies focusing specifically on Atlanta, Georgia, or on State of Tennessee, which may limit the ability of hiring managers to make strong, evidence-based decisions regarding employment unique to ex-offenders in these states. Researchers should explore more thoroughly the specific perceptions of employers toward ex-offenders' and pay attention to individual states and the difference between them (Oliver, 2017). This will facilitate a greater understanding of the problem and may provide improved options for many ex-offenders seeking to live better and healthier lives (Oliver, 2017).

The gap in literature referred to the missing information or small parts of research literature that have not been discovered. This information could be something such as the population, size, type, location, research methods, data collection or analysis, or other research elements or conditions (Literature Gap, 2015). When trying to find data that identify the barriers in Atlanta and State of Tennessee, there was a lack of information available. There was also a lack of data on barriers to employment for ex-offenders and the barriers provided also lacked a sufficient amount of information (Pager, 2006).

The effect of a lack of education on ex-offenders is a gap in the existing literature related specifically to reintegration, stigmas, barriers, and perspectives of family members and service providers (Pager, 2006), as well as implications for education, research, practice, and policy changes. Urgent attention is needed to identify and reverse the systemic factors that contribute to the cycle of poverty, incarceration, and homelessness (Heathfield, 2017). The socio-professional uncertainty of former detainees,

and the realities they are facing concern government authorities and civil society. A college education is an effective strategy to reduce recidivism and increase wages and employability. However, correctional agencies are slow to embrace college education for prisoners (Visher, 2005). In instances where programs are delivered, correctional education serves more as an inmate control mechanism and less as a tool for successful reintegration post release. Reintegration of ex-offenders into the community is a problem (Visher, 2005), and the difficulties involved can encourage recidivism. People in prison participating in college education are the least likely to recidivate and the most likely to gain employment after incarceration. Almost no research exists on the negative and often unanticipated consequences of a criminal conviction on access to college upon community reentry (Visher, 2005).

Furthermore, in reviewing mass incarceration and programs to aid in the transition from prison to society without reentry, I found a lack of adequate research on the effectiveness of prison rehabilitation programs regarding preventing reentry (Petersen, 2015). Some inmates have mental illnesses and require treatment, yet Visher (2015) noted that many U.S. states decreased the budget for mental health by \$4 billion from 2009 to 2011. Many inmates are incarcerated for committing preventable crimes. Without the necessary treatment, these offenders are left to reenter society without any help or guidance for a successful transition (Visher, 2005). There is not enough evidence to determine the effects of treatment on inmates' reentry into society, yet Legislators in several states have addressed this issue and are in the process of making a change.

Employers

Many companies are looking for people to fill many positions, and people who are ex-offenders may fill some of these positions (Solinas-Saunders & Stacer, 2015). The working classes of people in the United States include people from many ethnic and racial backgrounds, ex-offenders and rehabilitating drug addicts, and others. The United States does not have a clear picture of the working class (Cerda et al., 2014). Some prominent companies may hire ex-offenders to give them employment opportunities. Examples are companies such as Target, Aamco, Ace Hardware, Aramark, and AT&T (Solinas-Saunders & Stacer, 2015). Hiring managers at these companies look past individuals' criminal history and seek the working skills of people that show their qualifications count. Human resources and other internal regulating bodies in organizations are starting to expand their methods of screening applicants ("Target Changes Mind about Hiring Ex-Offenders," 2013). The retailer has started to do what the government calls ban-the-box. I reviewed McMullan's (2008) study to obtain needed information, and I will use McMullan's interview questions for this study. McMullan indicated that 62% of hiring managers surveyed would hire ex-offenders if they had adequate education and training.

The term ban-the-box comes from a law passed by President Barack Obama in 2015 that allows companies to hire employees regardless of a criminal record and to remove the questions that ask applicants if they have ever been to jail (Fox News, 2013). Employers are creating a wider base for working individuals by giving ex-offenders the chance to find employment after prison. This stepping-stone for ex-offenders can lead to

a decrease in the crime rate and in the recidivism rate (U.S. Department of Labor, 2017). Some factors that bring the class of working ex-offenders to live are work reliability, hiring incentives, and economic impact. Companies can profit from initiatives that can promote marketing and increase retention with reliable and dependable working staff (Solinas-Saunders & Stacer, 2015).

Hiring ex-offenders can be beneficial to the financial status of a company (U.S. Department of Labor, 2017). By government standards, most companies that hire ex-offenders as employees are eligible for Federal Bonding Programs and Work Opportunity Tax Credits (WOTC). The amount of credit that companies may receive helps support them in paying lower taxes on wages for a targeted group of people that may face employment barriers (U.S. Department of Labor, 2017). Atkin and Armstrong (2013) noted that making a living after being incarcerated is difficult, and the challenge of reentering society after being in prison serves as a barrier to forming bonds with people who are willing to trust ex-offenders. The process of having ex-offenders reenter society and be a citizen can be challenging. However, instead of not trusting ex-offenders, some companies are mending the relationship, which is beneficial to both sides (Atkin & Armstrong, 2013). The program at Target can serve as a foundation for many companies to follow and give citizens a second chance at life. Struggling and trying to rise from that struggle is difficult, ex-offenders finding quality employment is a major accomplishment.

Employer Perception

Society has been unjust for years regarding perceptions toward ex-offenders (Blesset & Pryor, 2013). However, when ex-offenders try to reestablish themselves into

the working class, they often face rejection. Although some employment standards and company policies have guidelines that enable hiring managers to give ex-offenders a second chance, this is not always the case (Solinas-Saunders & Stacer, 2015). Employers' attitudes toward ex-offenders can be a dichotomy: either they are hardworking people and want to change the stigma placed on them or they cannot be trusted and are labeled as thieves who will not keep their jobs (Solinas-Saunders & Stacer, 2015).

According to the Society of Human Resource Management (2013), 65–70% of former inmates has trouble finding jobs after being in jail or prison for years and is still unemployed 1 year after release. The amount of time spent in lockdown and solitary confinement is a punishment that some men and women may need in order to reflect on what they have done (Braithwaite, 2012). In November 2015, President Obama banned the box on all federal hiring and pushed the initiative to give ex-offenders a second chance at employment. President Obama stated, "If employers have a chance to at least meet you," you're able to talk with them about your life, what you've done, maybe they give you a chance" (Melber, 2015, p.1). Braithwaite (2012) explained this will allow employers take a closer look at their job applicant's skills instead of their criminal record; they are taking a stand and giving ex-offenders a second chance.

In the United States, there are more than 2.2 million people in prisons and jails which equals to 0.91% of the U.S. population (Kaeble & Cowhig, 2016). Some Americans feel that the individuals in prison belong there because of a crime that they committed; however, for some, the punishment did not fit the crime (Braithwaite, 2012). According to Capelouto (2015), employers must trust ex-offenders and put their hearts

into what the United States is known for: being the land of freedom and second chances. Rukus et al. (2016) indicated that ex-offenders want to have the ability to live and provide for their families. In a personal interview with K. Franklin (personal communications, May 5, 2017), I asked, “How does it feel about going to jail or prison and come back into society?” Franklin responded, “I never think about it and consider it a way of life, but I have to hustle to make way for my family.”

Employers’ Perceptions Regarding Hiring Ex-Offenders

One of the most important roles in the work field is the manager, or employer, who strives to lead employees to success (Luhby, 2016). However, a hiring manager’s achievement depends on effectively choosing strong candidates for a position, which both a hiring manager’s perception and an employee’s the background and history can influence (Lichtenberger, 2006). Locker (2015) noted that through an examination of hiring managers’ perceptions, these perceptions are similar within the Georgia and State of Tennessee prison systems.

Positive and Negative Perceptions of Employers in the Work Field

Many researchers have written and published articles about the effect of employee attitudes in the work field, but few have written about the effect of employer perceptions (Copelouto, 2015). Stakeholders assume that employers have extensive experience and a vested interest in the organization; however, this assumption is not necessarily correct. Many managers and leaders have negatively impacted their own companies (Buckingham & Coffman, 2014). Ashkanasy and Dorris (2017) addressed the role of emotions in the workplace and emphasized that positive attitudes in the workplace can facilitate a culture

that is open, fun, and positive, which can support decreased workplace stress and can predict reduced turnover and increased productivity (Arshadi & Damiri, 2013). In contrast, negative perceptions in the workplace can be devastating and increase the likelihood that both employees and employers will feel stressed, frustrated, dissatisfied, and likely to leave the organization (Ashkanasy & Dorris, 2017).

Regarding the proposed study, employer perceptions toward ex-offenders can vary significantly, including regarding the willingness of employers to hire ex-offenders at all. Atkin and Armstrong (2013) explored whether Human resource managers or equivalent were more or less likely to hire ex-offenders if they were recruited from a community with a higher concentration of parolees and found that the concentration of parolees did not influence the decision. Rather, Atkin and Armstrong (2013) found that other perceptions played a role: conviction offense, employee age, and employee arrest history were more related to the decision-making process, with higher rates of hiring for older or nonviolent crimes, younger employees, employees who had a previous arrest record and firms that had prior good experiences with ex-offenders.

An unfortunate consequence of the bias against ex-offenders in the hiring process is that it may lead to unintentional racial bias (Canaan & Jill, 2004). In the United States, people of color are three times more likely than Caucasians to be arrested, tried, convicted, and imprisoned for their lapses in judgment (Penner & Saperstein, 2015). Ban-the-box legislation has removed the question on conviction history from job applications in some states. Opportunities regarding the available employment opportunities for ex-offenders have thus increased, and employer perceptions have changed to be more open

and receptive to hiring people with a criminal record (Emsellem & Avery, 2016). The next section includes a specific discussion on business views in the Georgia and State of Tennessee prison systems.

Comparison of Employer Perceptions in Georgia and Tennessee Prisons

The number of ex-offenders released in Georgia each year is more than 20,000, which creates a challenge for hiring managers who are seeking the best employees (Capelouto, 2015). Georgia established an office of reentry in 2015 to help return ex-offenders to the workforce through training and job placement. One of the main stakeholder groups for this project is ex-offenders who have been out of the penal system long enough to start a business (Capelouto, 2015). Employers who have had legal troubles in the past are more likely to hire ex-offenders, which makes this pathway particularly attractive for the staff at the reentry office (Atkin & Armstrong, 2013).

In addition to specific efforts by state agencies to rehabilitate and reintegrate ex-offenders into society, there are tax credits, government- and state-sponsored insurance incentives, and community motivation for employers in Georgia to hire ex-offenders (Copelouto, 2015). For example, employers worried about employee theft can have their concerns assuaged by free surety bonds, and companies who employ ex-offenders may be eligible for up to \$2,400 per employee in federal tax credits. Most importantly, perceptions and biases are changing due to the high rates of incarceration in Georgia, nearly 1 in 13 adults admit that they know someone who has been imprisoned. These personal experiences have helped many members of the community, including employers, to realize that ex-offenders are no longer prisoners; they are simply citizens of

the state (Capelouto, 2015).

In State of Tennessee, the focus of imprisonment is not rehabilitation, but punishment (Slingo et al., 2005). The Department of Corrections in State of Tennessee does not comply with the Ex-Offenders Rehabilitation Act of 1970. Furthermore, the State of Tennessee Department of Corrections does not have a decrease of criminal behaviors as their goal for their prisons. Locker (2015) noted that there are no concerted efforts in Tennessee to promote inmate skills, provide halfway-house services after release, or to teach technological or social skills that ex-offenders may have missed out on while in prison, which can make employers less likely to view ex-offenders in State of Tennessee as valuable prospective employees.

Many social agencies and services are in place in Tennessee to help address this problem. For example, Project Return has a goal to help ex-inmates return to society, which includes finding employment (Project Return, 2016). Locker (2015) noted that Project Return is a nonprofit organization that connects ex-offenders with classes to prepare them for employment and with transitional employment services to build resumes and experience. Staff at the organization provide identification and documentation services to establish a legal right to work, digital literacy, clothing and food assistance, and child support services and focus on getting ex-offenders ready to rejoin the workforce (Project Return, 2016). By addressing these shared factors that work as barriers to effective job placement and acquisition, Project Return staff provide employees with opportunities and provide employers with the confidence that newly hired ex-offenders will perform well in their new position.

Employers have many reasons not to hire ex-offenders. For example, ex-offenders that have served their time and made their formal amends to society, employer's still have concerns about hiring them (Locker, 2015). In cases where applicants have violently injured another person, stolen money or goods, or committed minor crimes, employers are likely to be reluctant to hire these individuals (Slingo et al, 2005). These challenges make it clear why many employers shy away from hiring ex-offenders. However, a strong case can be made for hiring ex-offenders. Ex-offenders may be more loyal than other employees, and when employers are open to hiring ex-offenders, they are committing themselves to a workplace that fights discrimination (Lichtenberger, 2006).

Finally, the individual personality, skills, and abilities of any person can be difficult to ascertain without working with that person for a while. Employers who give ex-offenders a chance at employment may find that these employees can become valuable and productive members of the team, or they could miss this opportunity entirely by rejecting the applicant (Lichtenberger, 2006). Although a careful balance is necessary between these factors and the real risks described above, ex-inmates can make valuable and productive employees.

Barriers to Employment of Ex-Offenders

On March 4, 1913, President William Howard Taft signed a bill to establish the U.S. Department of Labor. The U.S. Department of Labor's job is to "foster, promote and develop the welfare of working people, to create better working conditions, and to advance their opportunities for gainful employment" (U.S. Department of Labor, 2017, p. 1). Over time, labor groups in the United States grew out of the need to protect the

common interest of workers. For those in the industrial sector, structured labor associations fought for better wages, reasonable hours, and safer working conditions (U.S. Department of Labor, 2017, p. 1).

According to Williams and Hall (2017), prisoners reentering society face a variety of barriers to success. Some of these obstacles may include unmet basic needs, substance abuse issues, mental health issues, homelessness, lack of education and literacy, and low-income potential (Ramakers et al., 2015). Many employers do not hire candidates because of criminal records. Roman and Link (2017) noted that many ex-offenders return to prison because they feel that jail is the only place for them because they are not able to find employment, regardless of their skills, or education. Employers state that hiring ex-offenders is not a suitable option for their company because ex-offenders lack skills, experience, and trustworthiness (Ramakers et al., 2015).

Effect of a Lack of Education on Ex-Offenders

Carnes (2012) explained that almost nothing is known about the lasting effects on the human personality of long-term imprisonment. Institutional programs are designed to prepare inmates for reintegration into society include education, mental health care, substance abuse treatment, vocational training, counseling, and mentoring (Cedra, Stemstrom, & Curtis, 2014). The effectiveness of these programs is greater because their basis is a comprehensive assessment and diagnosis of offenders. Sometimes community-based organizations deliver these programs that have the skills and resources to track ex-offenders after release and to monitor treatment (Cnaan & Sinha, 2004). Institutional programs are effective when targeting dynamic risk factors or specific needs to prepare

for prison release and foster the social integration of prisoners. As participation in these programs is voluntary, many prisoners abstain and are reenter the community without preparation. However, it is difficult to assess the extent to which these prisoners are prepared to reintegrate into the community (Cnaan & Sinha, 2004).

The law requires some form of education in a large number of criminal justice systems (Cedra et al., 2014). The intention behind providing education in prisons is to prepare offenders for reintegration into society, and these laws require prison leaders to organize educational and cultural activities and to give education the same importance as work (Cromwell & Lee, 2017). Practitioners involved in the treatment and social reintegration of ex-offenders recognize that interventions in support of reintegration require close collaboration between corrections and community organizations (Goldsmith, 2016). It is not enough to direct ex-offenders to community organizations for a smooth return to the community. In the absence of substantive follow-up services, these transfers are generally ineffective.

Individuals under sentence of imprisonment or persons sentenced to the deprivation of liberty are generally referred to as prisoners, while those released are ex-offenders. Ex-offenders face multiple problems that affect their ability to become law-abiding citizens, particularly high-risk ex-offenders with a long criminal record. Attention to the reintegration of ex-offenders into the community is the key element of any prevention program or intervention for which the goal is to reduce the recidivism rate (Goldsmith, 2016). The primary focus of social reintegration programs is the risk factors associated with recidivism, while more ad hoc initiatives address the problems ex-

offenders encounter when they leave prison, such as substance abuse and lack of access to employment.

When released, ex-offenders face a range of social, economic, and personal problems that impede a lawful way of life (Cnaan & Sinha, 2004). Some of these problems relate to the past experiences of ex-offenders, others are directly associated with the consequences of incarceration and difficulties returning to the community (Goldsmith, 2016). Some prisoners have a history of social isolation and marginalization, physical and psychological abuse, precarious employment, or unemployment, or even a criminal lifestyle adopted at an early age. Others may have physical or mental disabilities as well as health problems related to substance abuse and addiction (Goldsmith, 2016). Still others have difficulties in social relations, inadequate schooling, illiteracy, challenges related to cognitive and emotional functioning, or an inability to plan and manage a budget; each of these difficulties can reduce the chances of success in a competitive society. Returning to life at liberty is not without some concrete problems, such as finding suitable housing, having financial support while waiting for a job, and having access to support services.

The time spent in prison is not without collateral effects on ex-offenders (Goldsmith, 2016). Some of them lose their livelihoods and possessions; others no longer have housing for themselves and their families; others lose contact with friends and acquaintances because of their incarceration. Lastly, ex-offenders may have experienced mental health problems during their incarceration or self-defeating trends and attitudes. In particular, housing problems may lead some young ex-offenders to return to crime after

their release from prison (Cnaan & Sinha, 2004). It is therefore important to assess the costs of programs that facilitate the reintegration of ex-offenders into society, considering the high social and economic costs that such programs prevented (Muntingh, 2008).

The factors to consider in therapeutic services in institutional and community settings relate to education, employment, housing, drugs and alcohol, mental health, social capital, cognitive skills, and attitudes. These risk factors, unlike others, are dynamic; that is, they are susceptible to change (Muntingh, 2008). Researchers who have conducted evaluation studies in the United Kingdom have identified some interventions that reduce the impact of risk factors, including preschool education, literacy in the family, information and literacy assistance to parents, acquisition of cognitive and social skills, changes in school organization, and learning to read (Urrutia, 2012).

Social reintegration refers to the assistance granted to ex-offenders after their release from prison to facilitate their return to society. A broader definition covers all interventions following an arrest, including alternative measures such as restorative justice or therapy, that allow ex-offenders to avoid returning to the criminal justice system (Cedra et al., 2014). Such a definition also includes sanctions in the community that facilitate the social integration of ex-offenders, rather than marginalizing them and subjecting them to the effects of imprisonment. For those in prison, the notion of social reintegration refers to all correctional programs as well as to post prison interventions (Jones & Ekunwe, 2011). Finally, some post prison interventions begin while offenders are still in prison to prepare them to adapt to life in society.

Correctional and Community education programs can help in the development of comprehensive interventions based on continuity of care and coherent assistance to ex-offenders, whether inside or outside prison (Muntingh, 2008). Preparing for a return to community life must begin before inmates leave the prison system. Immediately after release, the first step is to ensure appropriate supports facilitate the transition from prison to community life. The next step will be to put in place interventions to help ex-offenders consolidate prison skills until the process of social integration is complete (Muntingh, 2008).

Comparison of Formal Education and Education in Prison

Educators, prison authorities, and staff do not always agree on the purpose of education in prisons (Urrutia, 2012). While some authorities and security officers tend to view the education program as an ancillary activity that contributes to the “good order” of the institution by helping to give prisoners a “useful occupation”, especially educators and “civilian” staff members, generally emphasize the moral dimension of education as an element of rehabilitation targeted by incarceration (Cseko & Tremaine, 2013). Efforts are made to influence the future behavior of offenders by changing their values and attitudes, which is self-evident and seldom mentioned. The adjective “correctional” used to designate these institutions and systems implicitly reflects this objective (Urrutia, 2012).

Education is one of the means to promote reintegration and skills acquisition that will help prisoners build a better life after release (Cromwell & Lee, 2017). Inmates who understand that incarceration is not only about punishment, isolation, and deterrence can

adopt this view. They willingly accept and benefit from the reform element of incarceration vocational education and advice on employment opportunities. Other offenders reject education because it is part of an imposed system in which they feel foreign (Urrutia, 2012). Many detainees initially participate in educational activities for reasons that have nothing to do with education per se, but because it allows them to leave their cells, find friends, or avoid something worse, such as work, for example.

Education in prisons can have three immediate objectives: (a) to give prisoners a useful occupation, (b) to improve the quality of life in prison, and (c) to achieve a useful outcome in terms of professional competence, knowledge, understanding, social attitudes and behavior that will last after release from prison and may lead to employment.

Education might or might not reduce the rate of recidivism (Urrutia, 2012).

Some individuals consider the effect of incarceration to be entirely negative. Urrutia (2012) denied that education can have a beneficial effect, but education can at least mitigate some of the negative effects of incarceration and can teach prisoners to have self-confidence and to rebuild their lives after they leave prison. Basic formal education can address some of the problems caused by low levels of education and poor speech, while social education can help prisoner's better cope with the frustrations of their inability to give up drugs or to live in peace with their families (Cromwell & Lee, 2017).

While research is necessary, but it is difficult to monitor ex-offenders after release to determine the long-term relationship between the educations they received in prison and the jobs they find and their behavior in society (Cromwell & Lee, 2017). Legislation

may consider it incorrect to continue to keep records of those who have served their sentences, through a collaboration of many agencies and preferably the interested parties themselves, to ensure the data collection takes place. In some systems, the links between the prison, parole, and probation services are at best tenuous, and in most of them, follow-up is nonexistent.

It is also rare for inmates to participate in defining their learning needs and in assessing the success of organized education programs to meet those needs, as confirmed by the results of the little research done, as well as the findings of practitioners and ex-offenders (Carnes, 2014). Carnes (2014) found that education facilitates the resettlement process and can help offenders choose a path that is free of delinquency because the program provides basic education and knowledge that makes it easier to survive through the acquisition of both general and vocational skills. These skills make it easier to find suitable employment and to retain it by giving stability and structure to the life of the individual, especially in the first few months after liberation (Carnes, 2014). This period is important, as it broadens the mind and helps to increase maturity.

Employment after Incarceration

The basis of reintegration programs is mainly a “case-management” approach (Visher, 2005). Visher (2015) noted that these interventions help prisoners to prepare for their release from prison by developing the skills and competencies necessary for successful integration into the community and by finding employment by addressing the personal problems of ex-offenders and the factors responsible for their involvement in delinquency. Also, the intervention establishes contacts and relationships within the

community (Visher, 2005). Programs generally develop from knowledge gained on the risk factors associated with recidivism, the needs of ex-offenders, and the problems faced by those released from prison (O'Driscoll, 2017). Programs vary depending on the risk factors considered and the targeted reintegration problems, but lack of employment is the leading factor.

To increase the security of our communities, both governments and local communities must commit themselves to develop effective interventions to help ex-offenders integrate into the community, secure employment, and avoid new crimes (Pager, 2006). Social reintegration programs are currently part of all strategies that advocate a holistic approach to public safety issues (Pager, 2006). The aim of crime reduction strategies developed in the United States, the United Kingdom, and other countries is to integrate the different elements of crime response into the criminal justice system, develop partnerships within the criminal justice system, and coordinate interventions in institutional and community settings (Pager, 2006). This helps to ensure seamless continuity in support services. The basis of such initiatives is cooperation and coordination among relevant agencies on the development of comprehensive responses and partnerships within the community.

According to local public safety priorities, some crime reduction strategies to prevent the recidivism of ex-offenders who leave prison and concentrate their efforts on dangerous offenders (Subramanian et al., 2015). Sometimes communities have realized that the incarceration of ex-offenders increases the risk of new criminal acts. Given that most detainees will return to society, local government authorities can focus on managing

release and socially reintegrating offenders (O'Driscoll, 2017). Education of prisoners and their preparation for integration back to the society would enable a smooth transition and empower them to seek employment opportunities that help them to avoid committing new crimes (O'Driscoll, 2017).

Summary and Conclusions

The review of the literature revealed gaps in the available information on the subject matter. This literature review involved exploring three critical parts of the labeling theory and included a summation of the labeling theory. First, according to sociology, labeling is used to describe a person, group, or society. Second, the labeling theory provides a sociological approach with a focus on the role of social labeling in the development of crime and deviance (Ageton & Elliot, 2014). Third, Sociologists developed the labeling theory to create academic acclaim for themselves. One of the most important approaches to comprehending criminal and deviant behavior is the labeling method, which uses the pretext that no act is fundamentally criminal because the meaning of criminality is written and enforced by those in power (Ageton & Elliot, 2014).

The information presented will indicate that people need a second chance to reintegrate themselves into society. Many women and men in jail or prison across the United States and around the world may not have the chance to reintegrate back into society. With the numbers of recidivism rates increasing dramatically and prisons filling to capacity and beyond, the number of ex-offenders having trouble finding a job after serving time may continue to rise. The issues discussed include how employers will respond to hiring ex-offenders. The data gathered in this study may reveal how employers

view ex-offenders, what types of employers are willing to hiring ex-offenders. More importantly, the literature will compare employers' perception toward employees in Georgia and State of Tennessee. With these states being so close in proximity, many ex-offenders may choose to live or work across the border to re-establish themselves as productive citizens by finding steady employment.

Ex-offenders often fail to reintegrate into society after their release because they face a myriad of issues, including sickness, poverty, and abandonment by their relatives. Economic and social exclusion can lead to recidivism. Ex-offenders who are physically ill or suffering from psychological trauma confront life without money, without a national identity card, and without work. Although the Western society has used imprisonment as a punishment for more than a century and the number of individuals under sentence of imprisonment continues to increase in most countries, research on the effects of imprisonment is lacking. In this study I will explore the effects of a lack of education on ex-offenders and on their inability to obtain jobs after their return to society. Sociologists have noted the structural barriers to successful reentry are professional, family, relational, and material problems and changes in social characteristics, such as level of work, job stability, and length of professional career, social class, and change of residence, among others. Also discussed in this study is a comparison between formal education and education gained while incarcerated, as well as the ability, or lack thereof, to gain employment after incarceration and how these factors correlate with each other. (O'Driscoll, 2017).

Since the 1980's, imprisonment experienced a significant and historic shift in the United States. In 1980, there were less than 500,000 people incarcerated in U.S. prisons and jails. The amount spent on corrections is approximately \$35 billion annually, while funding is lacking for many other government services, including education, health and human services, and public transportation. This literature review included a definition of incarceration, factors that contribute to the increased rate of incarceration, and an analysis of ways to prevent and reduce incarceration (Hultgren, 2017).

The literature review provided a comparison of mass incarceration rates in Atlanta and in State of Tennessee. I designed this study to improve employers' perception of employing ex-offenders. Identifying ways to avoid pitfalls and understanding processes that may lead to success can help hiring managers to hire ex-offenders and to create a sustainable society. Chapter 3 includes an outline of the methodology and research design for the study. I selected a research design that will be suitable for answering the research questions and helping identify areas for future study.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this general qualitative study was to explore perceptions and practices of human resource managers or equivalent roles in Tennessee related to hiring ex-offenders with minor offenses. I conducted this qualitative study to address the perceptions and real-life experiences of human resource managers or equivalent roles involving their hiring practices. Chapter 3 further explains the methodology, research design and rationale, role of the researcher, ethical concerns, issues of trustworthiness, and the data analysis plan. Chapter 3 will end with a summary and transition to Chapter 4.

Research Design and Rationale

This study involved using a general qualitative methodology. The research questions were:

RQ1: What are the perceptions of employers involving employing ex-offenders with minor offenses in Tennessee?

RQ2: What are the practices of employers, including hiring protocols, regarding employing ex-offenders with minor offenses in Tennessee?

RQ3: How does type or level of offense influence hiring decisions?

I used research questions to obtain details involving experiences of human resource managers or equivalent roles who engaged in the process of hiring ex-offenders with minor offenses. There are three types of research designs: quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods. Each methodology requires different decision-making processes and

affects the direction of research. A general qualitative approach was appropriate for this study because the method involves gathering experiences of participants to explore a phenomenon.

. Researchers select the general qualitative methodology to explain a phenomenon and start from a perspective that does not include hypotheses or preconceptions (Ritchie et al., 2013). Marshall and Rossman (2014) said the scope of the general qualitative methodology is to understand meanings of human experiences. In a general qualitative study, researchers tend to choose interviews for collecting data due to their interest in the phenomenon. This involved focusing on individuals and Ritchie et al's claim that subjectivity is a source of knowledge, as well as a group phenomenon.

Role of the Researcher

The interviewer is the primary instrument in a general qualitative study. Interviews served to engage participants directly in conversations involving first-person accounts of participants' social reality. The role of a researcher is to identify participants, apply fact-finding strategies, identify research instruments for data collection, interview participants according to ethical procedures, and categorize and analyze data to present findings.

I received an approval letter from Walden University Institutional Review Board IRB (10-16-20-0292868) before I made any contact with participants to collect data. I requested participants answer questions based on their experiences, and I did not attempt to influence outcomes.

I actively engaged in the data collection process. I worked for Work Force Essentials, Inc., a nonprofit organization in Tennessee as a supervisor from 2014 to 2018. However, no professional relationship existed with any research participants in this study. Participants' answers to questions on the participant questionnaire (see Appendix B) ensured they never worked with or were supervised by me within Workforce Essentials, Inc.

I only interviewed human resources managers or equivalent roles who had no personal or working relationship with me. I did not have any previous experience doing business with human resource managers that employ ex-offenders with minor offenses. I maintained an appropriate tone of voice and suitable body language during interviews to avoid influencing participants' feedback.

Participants did not receive any incentives, and their participation was voluntary. Petty et al. (2012) said qualitative researchers seek to gather the experiences from participants as well as patterns of behaviors. According to Yin (2015), removing potential biases is essential for qualitative researchers to ensure the highest level of objectivity, with minimal potential for skewed data.

Methodology

The methodology involves a detailed research process that includes steps to recruit participants, obtain informed consent, conduct sampling methods, gather data, and analyze the data. I explained the methodology in sufficient detail to permit others to replicate the study, and the description of the method was clear. Further, I used a general qualitative design with a scripted questionnaire (see Appendix B) to carry out this study.

The purpose of this general qualitative study was to explore perceptions and practices of human resource managers or equivalent roles in Tennessee related to hiring ex-offenders with minor offenses.

According to Creswell (2013), a sample size of five to 25 is suitable to attain data saturation with interview data. In this study, a minimum sample size of 10 hiring managers was planned to be the starting point for data collection. The sample size was increased until data saturation occurred. Data saturation occurs when there is repetition of information received from interviews and no new content emerges. The study involved using purposive sampling to identify participants from a population of human resource managers or equivalent role across medium and large businesses. Purposive sampling is suitable for reducing the time required to identify research participants. Purposive sampling was appropriate for this research as I selected participants subjectively. For my selection criteria, I requested a taxpayer list from the state of Tennessee court clerk of medium to large size employers, which included but was not limited to: (a) retail, (b) manufacturing, (c) construction, (d) independent service stations, and (e) nonprofit organizations with 50-150 employees and paying taxes for 5 years. From this list, I selected 10 employers who I emailed and requested to speak with. During this initial contact, I introduced myself, explained my research study, and provided the university-approved informed consent form and my contact information for an invitation to participate in a telephone interview at a date, time, and location chosen by the hiring representative.

The participant questionnaire (see Appendix B) served as an analytical lens for interviewing and understanding perceptions and practices of human resource managers or equivalent roles in Tennessee related to hiring ex-offenders with minor offenses. The study questionnaire included five demographic and 12 open-ended questions, and answers reflected perceptions of hiring managers within their organizations in Tennessee. The interview questions encouraged meaningful answers from participants based on the subject matter. The goal of asking questions was to understand participants' perceptions regarding employment practices, employment barriers, and retention of employees.

Participant Selection Logic

Prior to recruiting participants, I gained approval from the Walden University IRB (10-16-20-0292868). After gaining approval, I contacted participants via telephone to speak with a hiring manager or equivalent role responsible for hiring to request interviews. Hiring managers or equivalent positions were responsible for hiring within each organization and performed duties related to educational training, hiring, operational support, and research. I selected employers using a purposive sampling method and each participant completed a signed consent form before participating in interviews. The purposive sampling method was appropriate for a nonprobability sample and requires data saturation. I interviewed 10 participants after ensuring that saturation was achieved with the sample size.

Sampling and Sampling Procedures

Researchers use sampling methods to obtain a sample of the target population. Purposive sampling allows for selecting participants subjectively. The purposive sample identified for this study were human resource managers or equivalent roles in medium to large size employers which included but were not limited to retail, manufacturing, construction, independent service stations, and nonprofit organizations with 50-150 employees who paid taxes for at least 5 years to the state of Tennessee.

Interview Protocol

According to Schultze and Avital (2011), sampling is critical when selecting participants who enable a researcher to learn about a phenomenon. The goal of qualitative research is to understand experiences of others and ascertain how different aspects of human behavior interact within an environment (Neuman, 2007). Researchers can conduct interviews with participants to collect information about a problem in textual, visual, or audio formats (Schultze & Avital, 2011). A general qualitative design was appropriate because the purpose of the research was to report individual experiences of human resources managers or equivalent positions.

Instrumentation

I used an existing interview protocol for data collection. This study included five demographic and 12 validated open-ended interview questions to explore experiences of human resource managers or equivalent positions (see Appendix B). Participants responded to questions using their personal experiences. This researcher was the only

interviewer for the study. I used NVivo 12 software to analyze and transcribed interviews.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

As previously mentioned, for my recruitment selection, I identified potential interview participants by requesting a list of medium to large employers from the Tennessee clerk of court, which included, not limited to retail, manufacturing, construction, independent service stations, and nonprofit organizations with 50 to 150 employees who paid taxes for a minimum of 5 years in Tennessee (see Appendix D). I contacted 10 to 15 participants (Human Resources Managers or equivalent) by phone, email, or other technology such as Zoom or Skype to explain the nature of my study and provide a copy of the university consent form.

Notably, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I contacted participants via phone and email over a 5-month period due to business closures. Before conducting actual interviews, I called each participant to confirm their availability for interview. Nine participants indicated they were unavailable for a phone or Zoom interview, and instead, requested that I send them the consent form and interview questionnaire via email to review and email back with completed questionnaires. As such, nine questionnaires were written rather than verbal responses. One participant was available for a phone interview.

The process of data collection in qualitative research is systematic and circular. For this study, the following steps were taken during data collection. I obtained permission from the IRB (10-16-20-0292868) of Walden University and then obtained the consent of 10-15 participants to conduct interviews for the study. For participants

who had not confirmed their availability for a Zoom or phone interview, I sent them the consent form and questionnaire via email. The participants who confirmed their availability and interest will be sent a consent form via email. For the participants who conduct a phone interview, I will transcribe the interview with written notes. I will subject the transcription to member checking by allowing the participants to review the content of the transcripts to ensure accuracy of interpretations. I downloaded and saved in a unique folder alongside member-checked transcripts. Finally, I inputted text of files into Microsoft Word for commencement of analysis.

I requested to speak with a Human Resources Manager or equivalent position in charge of hiring and decision-making processes daily. My objective was to schedule dates and times that were convenient for Human resource managers making hiring decisions to collect responses required for this study. Therefore, at the end of data collection, participants were free to ask questions about the study. At that time, I reminded them how to contact me with any questions, concerns, or comments. To ensure protection of the rights of participants in the study, I adhered to the Belmont Report standards established by the Walden University IRB (10-16-20-0292868) on guidance procedures for recruitment, participation, and data collection. Participants' involvement in the study was voluntary, and they had the option to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. I also informed them that no compensation was given, and their responses would remain confidential.

I forwarded the consent letter to gain authorization to conduct the study in selected companies. After receiving approval to conduct the study, the data collection

process begun. Studies that involve human participants must receive approval from an IRB before researchers can conduct research with human participants. The Walden University IRB (10-16-20-0292868) and human resources managers or equivalent roles at selected companies received requests for permission to collect data (Appendix A). Using open-ended questions allowed me to capture sufficient information about employers regarding the subject matter.

Moustakas (1994) noted that perception is the foundation of knowledge in a general qualitative study. Interviews allowed study participants to offer responses not restricted by specific guidelines in quantitative research (Maxwell, 2013). I adhered to the guidelines for studies with human participants, as outlined by the University. I did not use participants' names during data collection or at any other time during the research process. I transcribed the data and followed up with the participants by e-mail, asking them to confirm their responses to allow for member checking.

A researcher uses a standardized interview protocol to support efforts to strengthen the reliability of interviews and data collection in qualitative research (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). An interview protocol improves the quality of data obtained from research interviews (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). Castillo-Montoya (2016) proposed a four-phase process for systematically developing and refining an interview protocol: (a) ensuring interview questions align with research questions; (b) constructing an inquiry-based conversation; (c) receiving feedback on interview protocols; and (d) piloting the interview protocol. I used an interview protocol in this qualitative study. An interview protocol is an appendix (See Appendix C).

Data Analysis Plan

Data analysis is an integral part of a research study (Creswell, 2013). A researcher gains an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon by identifying patterns and themes relating to participants' experiences in the process of data analysis (Vaismoradi et al., 2016). Analysis can vary, depending on the purpose of the research (Zikmund, Babin, Carr, & Griffin, 2012). Data analysis and interpretation are two essential components of the research process (Seidman, 2006).

Coding is a ubiquitous part of the qualitative research process; coding is an analytical process in which researchers break down data to see what they yield before putting the data back together in a meaningful way (Elliott, 2018). I used NVivo 12 to analyze and report the data. The software classifies, sorts, arrange information highlighting emerging themes, and codes data to identify categories (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). I also used the software to interpret the raw data from the interview transcripts. Following the methods of data analysis, the next steps for the responses were from the interview transcripts of the participants were as follows, as suggested by Leedy and Ormrod (2016).

First is to convert the data in a way that is easy to organize and analyze, then organize the data for easily proceeding. Identification of preliminary categories or themes that are helpful in coding follows to the division of the data into meaningful units that will be individually coded. Application of the initial coding scheme to a subset of the data while constructing a final list of codes with any subcodes and defining each code and subcode as specifically and concretely as possible using raters to code the data

independently. Then identification of noteworthy patterns or themes and relationships among the codes is essential to alert for outliers, exceptions, and contradictions within the data set. Finally, the data interpretation based on the research problem ensues.

I analyzed the recurring themes to define and understand how participants perceived the practice of employing ex-offenders with minor offenses. NVivo 12 was the most appropriate tool to assess the strength and direct the relationships in the data because the software allows researchers to explore trends; develop themes to answer questions; and manage and categorize documents, surveys, audio data, videos, or web content for efficient and accurate analysis (Miles et al., 2014). Using database management was an advantage to collecting accurate data. I was able to organize and analyze the collected data efficiently and used the NVivo 12 to make the analysis transparent to other researchers. The primary benefit of using this software is the ability to manage large amounts of data, increase the validity of research, and improve the ability to retrieve data and conduct cross-case analysis (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016).

Data Organization Technique

Data organization refers to the process of selecting, simplifying, abstracting, focusing, and transforming data in research (Miles et al., 2014). This process included interview transcripts, and I stored all interview data in a confidential and secure location. The interview data collected was stored on my laptop in encrypted, password-protected files while transcribing the interviews. I might encrypt the transcripts and interviews and save them in password-protected file. Written transcripts remained stored in a locked office cabinet for five years after the completion of the study, and I destroyed them

immediately using a shredder after expiry of the said date. I interpreted the raw data and have access to the files. Each participant will have a code to protect his or her identity throughout the research. The codes for the participants consisted of a capital P and a number that indicated the order of the interview (P1, P2, P3, and so forth).

Issues of Trustworthiness

Cooper and Schindler (2014) indicated that trustworthiness was associated with qualitative research. Safety was implicit when researchers confirm reliability (LaBanca, 2014). Establishing trustworthiness, which is to maintain validity and reliability, is a concern in ensuring the quality of a qualitative research (Ang et al., 2016).

Reliability and validity are parallel concepts, which include four criteria: (a) credibility, (b) transferability, (c) dependability, and (d) confirmability. Each criterion will be addressed in this study. Researchers later expanded into a set of five criteria: (a) credibility, (b) transferability, (c) dependability, (d) confirmability, and (e) authenticity (Ang et al., 2016). To address these criteria and as suggested by (Cope, 2014; Amankwaa, 2016), the researcher created a trustworthiness protocol with details noting the characteristic of rigor, the process used to document the rigor, and then a timeline directing the planned time for conducting trustworthiness activities. Recording and transcribing participants' responses confirmed the accuracy of responses, and the participants reviewed the transcripts to elaborate on or correct any information. Performing such a cross-check prevented any misinterpretation of data.

Credibility

Credibility (or internal validity) referred to the truth of the data from the participant's views and interpretations (Cope, 2014; Polit & Beck, 2012; Amankwaa, 2016). Each participant received a phone call or email to take part in this study. An assumption was that each participant would respond to each interview question with ease. The assumption was each participant was a hiring manager or equivalent. Credibility also established data gathered by the instrument's validity from previous use by McMullan (2008) experiences of hiring ex-offenders and the researcher to demonstrate engagement and methods of observation and audit trails (Cope, 2014).

Dependability

Dependability is the understanding of data stability over time (Cope, 2014). For this qualitative study, the participants were identified through a participant identifier (P1, P2, P3, etc.,) related to their business, not their personal characteristics. This research process can be duplicated by other researchers in the future under similar conditions. This can be achieved by the researcher establishing an audit trail on how to complete this study for future researchers to replicate (Cope, 2014).

Confirmability

Confirmability is the exact and accurate responses from study participants and not the researcher's biases or viewpoints (Amankwaa, 2016; Cope, 2014). I derived the findings of this study directly from the data by documenting all decisions, taking detailed notes on how conclusions and interpretations were established and exemplified. The original copies of the participant responses were kept secure by storing in electronic

format on a password-protected computer and paper copies shredded. This data was stored for a period of five years as required by the University and access to the data would be available to the researcher and doctoral faculty advisor (s) only.

Validity

A research design should allow an accurate interpretation of data to develop conclusions (Maxwell, 2013). The focus of validity is whether an interview questionnaire measured what a researcher intended for it to measure. Different social scientists have assigned a variety of names to the concept of validity (Miles et al., 2014). The findings of a research study would have no legitimacy if the methods derive from a lack of legitimacy. In a qualitative study, a researcher evaluates how well an instrument measured what it was supposed to measure, as well as the internal and the external validity threats of the instrument (Cooper & Schindler, 2014).

The instrument used in the current study was originally developed by McMullan (2008). McMullan (2008) established that the survey instrument was valid and reliable. Particularly, McMullan (2008) consulted a panel of experts from Jacksonville Re-entry Center and requested them to assess the construct and face validity of the survey instrument. McMullan (2008) established the instrument high construct and face validity hence could be used to collect data on the perceptions of employers about employing ex-offenders with minor offenses. McMullan (2008) also established the instrument was reliable with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.763.

A possible threat to the internal validity of the study was attributed to the failure by the participants to complete their interview questionnaires or to respond to any of the

questions. I attempted to avoid this by listening to and recording respondents as they answered the questions. I explained the instrument in depth to any interviewees who do not understand the interview process. Problems with external validity occur when a researcher gathers incorrect interpretations and generalizes them beyond the controlled sample of the study to the broader population (Neuman, 2007). Threats to external validity include the inability to apply the results taken from the research to the wider environment, and when the experiences of individuals in the larger environment differ from the participants in a study (Neuman, 2007).

I further validated this study by using triangulation. Triangulation is a method that involves using a combination of information sources, such as individuals or different types of data, as evidence to support a premise (Maxwell, 2013). Also, Maxwell (2013) noted that researchers use triangulation to build a coherent justification of themes. In a phenomenological study of employment practices, triangulation may occur by linking interview questions to the theoretical situation and requesting that participants review transcripts to verify their accuracy. Each interview lasted for approximately 45-60 minutes. I transcribed the interviews within 48 hours of the interview and sent an e-mail attachment with the transcript to the participants asking them to confirm that I had reported their responses to the questions adequately. Researchers may implement participant checking when they complete the follow-up.

Transferability

Transferability referred to the ability of an individual reading another researcher's study to transfer the findings or extend the results of the study (Moser & Korstjens,

2018). In qualitative research, it is incumbent on the individual reading the study to determine if the findings are transferable to another setting (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). Therefore, it is important the researcher of the original study provide thick descriptions, methods used, and a presentation of results so other researchers can decide on their own if the results are transferable (Houghton et al., 2013). I provided rich descriptions to aid in transferability. However, the findings of this study had limited transferability to other geographic locations with lower or higher cost of living or better or worse job availability.

Reliability

A reliability test helps assess whether an instrument will produce the same results repetitively under identical conditions. There is a lack of credibility when divergence exists between observers or when an instrument produces different results under identical conditions (Cooper & Schindler, 2014). McMullan (2008) initially determined the instrument's reliability for the measures of employers' hiring practices. I analyzed the data collected during interviews using basic descriptive statistics and present the results in a graphical format in the results section. The instrument used in any study had a strong measurement of validity and reliability to diminish both threats.

Ethical Procedures

Any research needs to meet the minimum ethical standards. Study participants must receive a reasonable degree of care about protecting their identities. The chair of this study and the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed the ethical research procedures of this study to make sure it is following the ethical

guidelines of the University. I made every effort to maintain respect for human dignity of each participant, which is an underlying value for Walden University. Before beginning the study, I asked the IRB to evaluate the safety of the research and the adequacy of the consent that I sought from the research participants.

I also ensured the data collection process met the following ethical guidelines suggested by Leedy and Ormrod (2016) that I do not coerce participation, obtain informed consent, which involves notifying participants that their involvement is voluntary, cause no harm, by ensuring I do not put participants in danger and guarantee confidentiality, which means I will keep confidential of any information collected and eventually destroy it.

Federal regulations mandate that an IRB approves a study involving human participants before researchers can conduct the study (Cseko & Tremaine, 2013). I obtained Walden University IRB's approval before performing any data collection. The role of the Walden University IRB was to ensure and protect the safety and privacy of participants. I addressed any concerns about the privacy and confidentiality of participants' information in the informed consent form that participants signed and described the protections, assurance of anonymity, intended use and security of the research data, and retention and destruction of the data. The study benefitted participants and employers of the selected organizations by providing a dialogue that served as an impetus for change in their work environment.

The research enhanced and influenced leadership strategies for the immediate and future generations of individuals within the organizations. Purposive sampling ensured

power relationships did not exist in the interviews. There was no existing bias based on the current or past relationships. I regularly consulted with the chair of the study committee regarding the ongoing analysis of the data, validation, observations, and findings to ensure there is limited perceived coercion to vulnerable participants. Vulnerable employees were not a major concern for the study because all participants were engaged at some level of decision-making at their organizations within State of Tennessee. I informed the participants they can opt out of the interviews at any time if they felt uncomfortable. As stated, there were no monetary incentives for participants in this study.

Summary

Chapter 3 included detailed information about the methodology of this study. The chapter included an outline of the research methods selected and a description of the instrument development, an assessment of the reliability and validity of the instrument, the data collection and analysis procedures, and trustworthiness. A discussion of the different interrelated components of the research design and their sequential nature is included. The discussion of the research design included a sampling strategy and recruitment procedures. The chapter also included a discussion of threats to validity.

The purpose of Chapter 4 was to present the data and findings from interviews and to discuss the data analysis. Chapter 4 contained a detailed explanation of the NVivo 12 software tool, which I used to analyze the data. Also, Chapter 4 included an analysis of the results. Finally, Chapter 5 included the significant findings, interpretations, and conclusions of the study, as well as the implications of social change for the study,

recommendations of action, and future research. The results were available to all interested groups for use toward implementing positive social change.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this general qualitative study was to explore the perceptions and practices of employers in Tennessee related to hiring ex-offenders with minor offenses. The objective was to gain a deeper understanding of perceptions and thought processes of hiring managers when faced with deciding to hire ex-offenders. The following three research questions were used to guide this study:

RQ1: What are the perceptions of employers about employing ex-offenders with minor offenses in Tennessee?

RQ2: What are the practices of employers, including hiring protocols, regarding employing ex-offenders with minor offenses in Tennessee?

RQ3: How does the type or level of offense influence hiring decisions?

The purpose of this chapter is to present findings from data collection in Chapter 3. The following section includes a description of the study setting. Next, this chapter proceeds with a description of demographic characteristics of study participants, followed by descriptions of data collection and data analysis plans. Discussion of evidence of the trustworthiness of study results is then provided, followed by a presentation of results, which are organized by research question. This chapter concludes with a summary of results.

Setting

This study was originally proposed to be conducted in a face-to-face setting; however, the setting was impacted due to the COVID-19 pandemic. To ensure the safety

of participants and myself, no interviews were conducted in person. This ensured compliance with social distancing guidelines, all 10 interviews were conducted over the phone and all 10 participants denied audio recordings. Therefore, it prevented my observation of participant verbal and non-verbal cues. I took written notes while the interviews were conducted and 9 out of 10 requested follow-ups via email to ensure they express themselves thoroughly. These research settings provided a comfortable environment for the participants to contribute to the study. The participants were not influenced by organizational or personal influences at the time of the study.

Demographics

The 10 participants were Human resource managers or equivalent of medium-large businesses (50 to 150 employees) who paid taxes for 5 years or more to the state of Tennessee. Table 1 indicates demographic characteristics of study participants.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Partici- pant	Gender	Age range	Education	Race/ethnicity	Years of Human Resources experience
P1	Male	50-59	Bachelor's	White/non-Hispanic	22
P2	Male	60-60	Bachelor's	White/non-Hispanic	35
P3	Female	40-49	Bachelor's	White/Hispanic	11
P4	Male	50-59	Master's	White/non-Hispanic	35
P5	Male	60-69	Bachelor's	Black	15
P6	Female	50-59	Master's	White/non-Hispanic	23
P7	Female	40-49	Some college	No response	25
P8	Female	30-39	Master's	No response	11
P9	Female	20-29	Master's	White/non-Hispanic	5
P10	Female	50-59	Bachelor's	No response	30

Six participants were female, and four participants were male. Five participants had bachelor's degrees, four had master's degrees, and one had some college without completing a degree. Five participants identified as White/non-Hispanic, one identified as White/Hispanic, one identified as Black, and three did not indicate their race or ethnicity. Participants reported experiences in human resources ranging from 5 to 35 years.

Data Collection

As previously stated, data were collected from 10 participants for a total of 10 interviews. The primary method of recruitment was a list of employers from the county clerk's office in Tennessee. During recruitment, I attempted to recruit 10-15 participants however, I reached saturation at 10 participants. Due to Covid-19, the majority of the county clerks' offices being closed, the recruitment duration was 5 months. I had 3 additional Human Resource Managers expressed interest but did not meet my study criteria. They either represented a small company or their employer did not allow them to participate. Saturation was reached at 10 participants because the responses became repetitive. The duration of the telephone interview ranged from 25 to 35 minutes. To maintain confidentiality, I removed all identifying information from all documents. I sent all participants the consent form via email, they replied with "I consent". Before the interview, I asked each participant if there were any questions, and informed them the study is voluntary with the option to withdraw at any time. Numbers and pseudonyms were used to identify the participants. No unanticipated conditions arose during data collection.

Data Analysis

I transcribed interviews into separate Microsoft Word documents within 48 hours of each interview, and I emailed each participant their transcript for member verification and I followed up via email as each participant requested to verify the transcript. All participants verified the accuracy of their transcript. I imported member-verified transcripts into NVivo 12 as source files for analysis. NVivo 11 was the version of the software planned for this study but was outdated and replaced by NVivo 12 during analysis. The software update did not result in any changes to planned data analysis procedures.

I analyzed the data using the following ethical guidelines suggested by Leedy and Ormrod (2016) that I do not coerce participation, cause no harm, by ensuring I do not put participants in danger and guarantee confidentiality, which means I will keep confidential of any information collected and eventually destroy. First, I identified preliminary categories to facilitate coding. During this step, I created an NVivo node for each of the three research questions. Creating preliminary categories that aligned with the three research questions helped me ensure alignment of analysis with study objectives. The three research question categories were labeled: employer perceptions of employing ex-offenders with minor offenses (corresponding to RQ1), employer practices related to hiring ex-offenders with minor offenses (corresponding to RQ2), and influence of type or level of offense on hiring decisions (corresponding to RQ3).

Next, data were divided into meaningful units for coding. A phrase or group of consecutive phrases was identified as a data unit when it expressed meaning relevant to

addressing the three research questions. A total of 111 meaningful data units were identified during this step.

During this process, meaningful data units were sorted using the three research question codes. This process also involved the creation of inductive subcodes under the three preliminary codes. When different data units relevant to addressing the same research question expressed similar or relevant meanings, they were assigned to the same subcode. For example, P8 said, “Regardless of when a candidate attained the required knowledge and skills for a role makes no difference in any hiring decision, I’ve been involved in.” P1 said, “I am most interested in the person’s skillset, their experience and what have they done to develop themselves regardless of when their conviction occurred.” Both meaningful data units were identified in participant responses to RQ1. Both meaningful data units were placed in a subcode with five other data units, all of which indicated participants did not perceive the distinction between skills obtained prior to versus after conviction as significant.

The next step of coding involved identifying noteworthy patterns or themes among codes. During this step, all codes and data units assigned to them were reviewed to identify their significance as answers addressing research questions. Codes were grouped under themes that clarified their significance. Table 2 includes a list of preliminary codes, initial subcodes, and finalized themes into which subcodes were grouped.

Table 2*Coding Scheme*

Theme (research question addressed) • Code grouped to form theme	n of participants contributing (N=10)	n of data units included
Theme 1: Ex-offenders should be treated like any other job candidate if they have relevant skills, accountability, and evidence of growth since their offense (RQ1)	10	29
• Ex-offenders are advised to show accountability and growth	4	4
• Ex-offenders need support in identifying in receptive employers	4	4
• Knowledge and skills increase hire ability regardless of when they were acquired	10	21
Theme 2: Ex-offender qualifications and background check results are considered on a case-by-case basis (RQ2)	10	36
• Background checks are conducted and considered	9	14
• Background checks would make banning the box ineffective	6	6
• Banning the box is necessary for fairness	3	3
• Minimal awareness of government incentives	10	10
• Discrepant data - Disclosure disqualifies	1	1
• Discrepant data - Background checks are not conducted	1	2
Theme 3: The date and nature of the offense are considered (RQ3)	9	46
• Length of incarceration is not considered	9	9
• Recency of offense and age are relevant and linked	9	20
• Relevance of convicted crime to position is evaluated	6	8
• Violent, sexual, financial offenses generally disqualifying	9	9
• Discrepant data - Background checks are not conducted	1	3

Evidence of Trustworthiness

The four components of trustworthiness are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Ang et al., 2016).

Credibility

Credibility or internal validity is the truth of data according to participants' perspectives (Cope, 2014; Polit & Beck, 2012; Amankwaa, 2016). Audio recording interviews and transcribing them verbatim strengthened credibility by ensuring no errors were made during transcription that would affect accuracy of findings. The member-verification procedure used in this study, in which participants verified accuracy of their transcripts, strengthened credibility in the same way. The analysis procedure, which involved identification of common themes across responses of all or most participants, further enhanced credibility by minimizing the potential influence of individual participants' biases or errors on major findings in the study. Assuring participants' identities remained confidential minimized any potential distortions in participant responses associated with anxiety about being identified.

Transferability

Transferability refers to the ability of a reader of a study to transfer findings to other populations and settings (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). In qualitative research, it is incumbent on the individual reading the study to determine if findings are transferable (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). In this study, I provided detailed descriptions of the study setting, population, and sample, as well as thick descriptions of findings using participants' own words to assist readers in assessing transferability.

Dependability

Dependability or reliability is the degree to which findings are reproducible in the same research setting at a different time (Cope, 2014). Dependability is enhanced through detailed descriptions of study procedures that allow readers to redo the study in the same setting. In this study, I strengthened dependability by providing detailed descriptions of planned procedures in Chapter 3, as well as execution of those procedures in this chapter.

Confirmability

Confirmability or objectivity is the degree to which findings reflect participants' rather than researchers' perspectives and opinions (Amankwaa, 2016; Cope, 2014). Audio recording interviews, transcribing them verbatim, and conducting member verification strengthened confirmability by ensuring that my bias did not introduce errors into recordings and transcribing of data. In this chapter, direct quotes allow the reader to assess the integrity of my analysis independently.

Results

The findings presented in this section are organized by research question. Under the heading for each research question, emergent themes used to address the question are presented. Thick descriptions of findings are provided in the form of direct quotes from participants to keep all findings contextualized within participants' own words and perspectives.

RQ1

RQ1 was: What are the perceptions of employers about employing ex-offenders with minor offenses in Tennessee? I identified one theme in the data to address this research question.

Theme 1

Participants' perceptions about employing ex-offenders with minor offenses were, overall, in favor of evaluating such job candidates as equitably as their history allowed. However, all participants except one (P5) also perceived a need to consider and account for the ex-offender's criminal record during the hiring process to ensure the individual was trustworthy and would not be detrimental to the business. Participants indicated that in making their assessments of ex-offenders' hire ability, they paid close attention to the attitudes the candidate expressed during the interview. If the ex-offender took responsibility for their offense and described the steps they had taken to grow and move past the conditions under which they committed the crime, most participants formed a favorable opinion of them and were willing to extend to them the same consideration they would give to any other candidate. For applicants who demonstrated appropriate contrition and growth, participants' primary consideration was their knowledge and skills, regardless of when those qualifications were obtained.

All 10 participants indicated that ex-offenders needed and deserved employment opportunities, and that providing those opportunities to an extent consistent with the welfare of the business was beneficial, both to the offender and to society. In describing ex-offenders as deserving of opportunity, P1 stated:

Everyone makes mistakes and no one is perfect, the difference is some have a stiffer consequence for their actions. Everyone has value and the goal is to place the best qualified candidate in the right position that best serves the person and the company.

P4 described equitable hiring practices in relation to ex-offenders as important to society because automatically disqualifying those individuals left them with no alternative but recidivism: "I believe many employers do not consider hiring ex-offenders and that it perpetuates an endless cycle of criminal activity because ex-offenders are not given a chance." P7, whose company did not allow her to hire anyone with a criminal record, said that she would prefer to be more lenient: "Personally, I feel the applicant should have an equal opportunity for getting an interview. There would be no assumptions made about the applicant before the interview process." P10 stated that hiring ex-offenders with minor offenses was important because, "it is about giving someone another chance."

Four out of 10 participants expressed the perception that ex-offenders should demonstrate certain qualities and attitudes before receiving the same merit-based consideration as other applicants. P1 stated that ex-offenders should demonstrate accountability and growth: "Be honest, own your mistakes but explain how you have continually improved yourself before, during and after the mistake." Similar to P1, P4 recommended that ex-offenders demonstrate accountability and personal progress and growth since the offense: "Own your mistakes and address how you have gone about moving forward." P6 provided a response similar to P1's and P4's, and she suggested that

she perceived ex-offenders who did not take responsibility for their offenses as untrustworthy: “[Ex-offenders should] learn from their mistakes, be accountable for their actions, be honest, control improper impulses, and be patient. They must gain people’s trust by being a productive member of society. Don’t play the victim.”

All 10 participants perceived ex-offenders who demonstrated accountability and growth as deserving of the same merit-based consideration as other candidates for the position. Participants also emphasized that whether the ex-offender gained their qualifications during or before their incarceration was immaterial. P1 stated that the source of an ex-offender's qualifications did not matter: “I am most interested in the person’s skillset, their experience and what have they done to develop themselves regardless of when their conviction occurred.” P8 expressed that when and how an ex-offender obtained relevant training was irrelevant: “Really, regardless of when a candidate attained the required knowledge and skills for a role makes no difference in any hiring decision, I’ve been involved in.” P3 stated, “Training would definitely give an applicant an advantage.” P3 added that training undertaken during incarceration demonstrated growth, and that, “Someone showing growth is always considered more marketable.” P4 agreed with P3’s perception of training undertaken during incarceration as evidence of an ex-offender's good character, stating, “Education and training while incarcerated can be an indicator that they are successfully preparing to put their criminal activity in their past.” P9 stated of education while incarcerated that it enhanced the employability of offenders after release: “I would consider education and training [during

incarceration], if they want to be more employable, it's a great opportunity to capitalize on.”

In summary, all 10 participants perceived ex-offenders as deserving of employment opportunities, particularly those with only minor offenses. All participants but one perceived a candidate's ex-offender status as significant, but they stated that evidence of accountability and growth were or should be sufficient to earn the candidate equal, merit-based consideration if their offense was minor. All participants stated that whether qualifications for a position were attained before or during incarceration was immaterial, once the candidate was being considered according to merit. Pursuit of training during incarceration might be considered as evidence of growth and determination to leave past mistakes behind, some participants said.

RQ2

RQ2 was: What are the practices of employers, including hiring protocols, regarding employing ex-offenders with minor offenses in Tennessee? I identified one theme in the data to address this research question.

Theme 2

Eight out of 10 participants stated that their companies required background checks for all job applicants, but that a minor offense was not an automatic disqualifier. Instead, ex-offenders with minor offenses were considered on a case-by-case basis, through a practice of assessing any risk to the company and its employees and customers that the offense might represent. Two participants provided discrepant data. P5 indicated that no background checks were conducted and that his company had “banned the box”

on job applications that candidates checked to indicate ex-offender status, so an applicant's ex-offender status was not known or taken into consideration. P7 indicated that applicants who disclosed or whose background checks revealed a conviction of any kind were automatically disqualified.

Nine out of 10 participants reported that their company's hiring practices required them to conduct background checks on all applicants. Of background checks, P1 stated, "We are required to conduct background checks on all candidates." P3 said of the reason for the practice of conducting background checks: "We perform background checks for all employees and interns before they are allowed to step on site. Background checks allow us to decide if a candidate is a match for the environment, they will work in." P6 said of the rationale for requiring background checks:

The value is in analyzing possible risks to the company, other employees, and overall ability to follow rules, laws, and policies. Someone that has repeated offences can be more challenging to manage and some seem to be more resistant to following rules.

Given that background checks were required in nine out of 10 participants' companies' hiring practices, most participants did not believe that an initiative such as "ban the box" to free job candidates of having to disclose ex-offender status on their application would have any effect. P3 said of the ban-the-box initiative: "I do not believe it will move the needle much. Most employers will do a background check and discover the applicant's record anyway." Similarly, P6 stated that mandatory background checks made employer waiver of the applicant's voluntary disclosure irrelevant: "The

information will come out eventually since we do backgrounds. It is best to get it out in the open and discuss what positions would be the best fit.” P10 indicated that that the box could be beneficially banned because background checks would retrieve the desired information about past offenses: “Employers should not be asking about criminal history. If you have a background screening process in place it will work as it should.”

Eight out of 10 participants added that while their companies required them to perform background checks, hiring practices allowed them the discretion to evaluate ex-offenders with minor offenses on a case-by-case basis. P3 said of the hiring practice of allowing a participant to discuss the offense to provide context, “A past record does not immediately remove them from the candidate pool. They are always allowed to discuss the offense.” P4 stated that minor offenses rarely had an impact on hiring decisions: “We do perform background checks which include a criminal history, but it is often not a factor of consideration for minor offenses.” P10 stated that background checks were conducted but that only felonies within the past seven years resulted in automatic exclusion, indicating that minor offenses did not result in automatic denial of an application: “We have a third party that conducts background verifications for new hires. We do not hire anyone with a felony in the past seven years . . . As long as [candidates] could pass [this] background screening process, we would hire them.” P9 reported that her company considered ex-offenders with minor offenses on a case-by-case basis: “It will be case-by-case, based on severity of crime or if it’s a pattern of crimes.”

Two out of 10 participants provided discrepant data. P5 stated that background checks were excluded from the company’s hiring practices: “Since we don’t do

background checks, we don't know if they are ex-offenders or not. Every candidate we consider for employment is viewed equally." P5 said of the rationale for not conducting background checks and "banning the box" that society benefitted from ex-offenders' employment:

I am really not sure if it will reduce the recidivism and crime rate in the community, but I would think it would not hurt. People that are gainfully employed feel empowered, exhibit high self-esteem and worth, and make positive contributions to their communities and society in general.

P7 provided discrepant data indicating that background checks were required and that a record of any offense was an automatic disqualification. Disclosing their ex-offender status on the job application did not earn the candidate consideration, P7 said: "If an applicant discloses [ex-offender status] on their application, it would exclude them from eligibility." P7 added that failure to disclose ex-offender status on the job application resulted in automatic termination after completion of the background check, as in the following example: "I had a young lady that did not disclose on her application that she had been arrested for shoplifting when she was younger. After the background check was completed, it was automatic dismissal for falsifying her application." P7 reported that the company practice did not align with her own preferences, stating, "I have had [ex-]offenders work for me that I would have made exceptions for based on my relationship and experiences working with them. However, I was unable to keep them."

In summary, most participants' companies required background checks, either after the candidate submitted their application or after the candidate accepted a

conditional offer of employment. In nine out of 10 participants' companies, disclosure of a minor offense was not an automatic disqualifier. Instead, hiring practices involved consideration of ex-offenders with minor offenses on a case-by-case basis.

RQ3

RQ3 was: How does the type or level of offense influence hiring decisions? I identified one theme in the data to address this research question.

Theme 3

Eight out of 10 participants reported that the type and level of offense were considered in hiring ex-offenders with minor offenses. Of the remaining two participants, both worked for companies where no characteristics of the offense were considered, either because the company did not request or require disclosure of ex-offender status (in P5's company), or because a record of an offense of any kind automatically disqualified the candidate (in P7's company). The six participants who considered the characteristics of offenses reported that the job-relatedness of the offense was relevant. These participants also stated that offenses of other kinds would typically disqualify a candidate, such as offenses of a violent or sexual nature. Participants reported that they also considered the ex-offender's age at the time of the offense, as well as how long ago the offense occurred. Offender age and recency of the offense were linked, because offenses committed early in life were more likely to be remote in time, giving older ex-offenders who committed their minor offense early in life an advantage. Participants considered youth at the time of the offense to be a mitigating factor because they considered young people to be less experienced and therefore more error prone.

The eight out of 10 participants who considered ex-offenders on a case-by-case basis reported that the primary consideration was the relationship, if any, between the nature of the offense and the job for which the candidate was applying. P1 stated that the case-by-case consideration involved a specific focus on any potential risks to the company indicated by the nature of the offense: “We are only concerned if the offense would be a concern for the essential functions the person would be performing.” P3 spoke in terms of the relevance of the offense to the position sought: “Each case is unique. It depends on how long ago the offense occurred and is the offense relevant to the job for which they are applying.” P6 described a practice similar to the one in P3’s company, but she referred to the “job-relatedness” of an offense: “We look at job relatedness. If they handle money, we wouldn’t want to consider someone with theft on their background.” P2 offered an example like P6’s, stating, “It depends on the job they are applying for. An ex-embezzler wouldn’t be eligible for accounting or banking.” P9 also reported that case-by-case consideration of new hires with previous offenses involved a process in which she would, “Consider the position. Lower risk depends on the position so it’s [any risk that may be indicated by the past offense] not a liability to the company.”

Eight out of 10 participants stated that offenses of a violent or sexual nature would automatically disqualify a job candidate. It should be noted that such offenses are unlikely to occur in the records of persons relevant to the phenomenon of interest in this study (i.e., ex-offenders with minor offenses), indicating that few or no minor offenses would trigger automatic disqualification of a job candidate. P3 stated, “Any type of

sexual or violent offense would be an automatic disqualification for anyone.” P4 stated that automatic disqualifiers included, “A history of workplace violence, rape, or other violence against women, embezzlement, or felony theft against an employer,” although such offenses are not considered minor. P6 described only major offenses as automatically disqualifying, stating that the relevant crimes were, “Murder, rape, drug trafficking, bank robbery.” P6 added, “We scrutinize offenses involving theft, violence, drugs, and repeated offenses.” P9 also referenced serious offenses as bars to employment: “If it’s a severe crime, it would disqualify them from working.” P10 reported that crimes involving theft or violence were disqualifying: “We would fail someone [on a background check] with a violent background, or theft.”

Eight out of 10 participants reported that they considered the ex-offender's age at the time of the offense and the recency of the offense as relevant factors. Young age at the time of the offense and a conviction that was more than “a few years old” were mitigating factors, while more recent convictions and convictions received at a more advanced age were aggravating factors. P3 discussed age at the time of the offense and the recency of the crime as significant factors in stating,

I had a woman explain to me that she was “young and stupid” when the offense occurred, but her record clearly stated she was in her 40s when convicted. She did not get the job. I have seen several cases revolving around the possession of drugs or DUIs [driving under the influence]. If an applicant was convicted several years ago and they have had a solid work history since then, I have often considered and hired the applicant.

P4 also described youthful offenses as less likely to disqualify candidates, stating, “If an ex-offender committed a crime before reaching their mid-20s, I downgrade the significance.” P4 added that more recent convictions elicited more scrutiny during hiring: “The closer the hiring consideration is to the period of incarceration, the more interested I am in meeting with or having a member of my team meet the ex-offender.” P6 suggested that age at time of offense and recency of the conviction were indicators of how much the applicant might have matured since they committed their crime: “We do review how long ago the offense took place and possible maturity of the individual.” P2 described youth at the time of offense as a mitigating factor in stating, “I always consider the indiscretion of youthfulness in evaluating someone’s previous history.”

All 10 participants reported that the length of incarceration was not a significant factor in hiring decisions because they did not perceive it a meaningful indicator of the applicant’s hire ability. P4 suggested that length of incarceration was a stronger indicator of the quality of representation an offender was able to afford than of the severity of their offense: “I find that the length of incarceration has more to do with the economic status of the ex-offender than the severity of the offense, so I generally do not consider that as a determining factor.” P3 stated, “The length of incarceration doesn’t really play a part in my decision.” P2 suggested that the length of incarceration was determined too arbitrarily to be a meaningful factor: “Judges and courts vary in how they sentence individuals, so I don’t think the length of the sentence is an appropriate way to evaluate someone.”

Summary

Three research questions were used to guide this study. RQ1 was: What are the perceptions of employers about employing ex-offenders with minor offenses in State of Tennessee? The theme I used to address this question was: ex-offenders should be treated like any other job candidate if they have relevant skills, accountability, and evidence of growth since their offense. Participants' perceptions about employing ex-offenders with minor offenses were, overall, in favor of evaluating such job candidates as equitably as their history allowed. However, all participants except one (P5) also perceived a need to consider and account for the ex-offender's criminal record during the hiring process to ensure the individual was trustworthy and would not be detrimental to the business. Participants indicated that in making their assessments of ex-offenders' hire ability, they paid close attention to the attitudes the candidate expressed during the interview. If the ex-offender took responsibility for their offense and described the steps they had taken to grow and move past the conditions under which they committed the crime, most participants formed a favorable opinion of them and were willing to extend to them the same consideration they would give to any other candidate.

RQ2 was: What are the practices of employers (including hiring protocols) regarding employing ex-offenders with minor offenses in State of Tennessee? The theme I used to address this question was: ex-offender qualifications and background check results are considered on a case-by-case basis. Eight out of 10 participants stated that their companies required background checks for all job applicants, but that a minor offense was not an automatic disqualifier. Instead, ex-offenders with minor offenses were

considered on a case-by-case basis, through a practice of assessing any risk to the company and its employees and customers that the offense might represent. Two participants provided discrepant data. P5 indicated that no background checks were conducted and that his company had “banned the box” on job applications that candidates checked to indicate ex-offender status, so an applicant’s ex-offender status was not known or taken into consideration. P7 indicated that applicants who disclosed or whose background checks revealed a conviction of any kind were automatically disqualified.

RQ3 was: How does the type or level of offense influence your hiring decisions?

The theme I used to address this question was: the date and nature of the offense are considered. Eight out of 10 participants reported that the type and level of offense were considered in hiring ex-offenders with minor offenses. Of the remaining two participants, both worked for companies where no characteristics of the offense were considered, either because the company did not request or require disclosure of ex-offender status (in P5’s company), or because a record of an offense of any kind automatically disqualified the candidate (in P7’s company). The six participants who considered the characteristics of offenses reported that the job-relatedness of the offense was relevant. These participants also stated that offenses of other kinds would typically disqualify a candidate, such as offenses of a violent or sexual nature. Participants reported that they also considered the ex-offender's age at the time of the offense, as well as how long ago the offense occurred. Offender age and recency of the offense were linked, because offenses committed early in life were more likely to be remote in time, giving older ex-offenders who committed their minor offense early in life an advantage. Participants

considered youth at the time of the offense to be a mitigating factor because they considered young people to be less experienced and therefore more error prone. Chapter 5 includes conclusions and recommendations based on these findings.

Chapter 5: Discussions, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this general qualitative study was to explore the perceptions and practices of employers in Tennessee related to hiring ex-offenders with minor offenses. This study has implications for hiring ex-offenders in Tennessee. While employment is critical for ex-offenders to lead normal lives, many employers avoid employing such individuals. As a result, the general problem in this study was that there are few employment opportunities for ex-offenders with minor offenses. Moreover, there is a lack of awareness among employers regarding their role in developing an environment that could favor ex-offenders securing employment opportunities. The Prison Policy Initiative (2018) said 37% of offenders failed to secure employment and had no idea of what employers were thinking about them. Petersen (2015) said employers' perceptions of ex-offenders' could be somewhat discriminatory and hence result in a high number of ex-offenders failing to secure job opportunities. Despite employment being an important aspect of enhancing ex-offenders' reintegration, only a few opportunities exist. Therefore, this study sought to investigate how hiring managers in Tennessee perceived hiring ex-offenders with minor offenses.

I interviewed a total of 10 participants who were Human resource managers or equivalent of medium-to-large companies in Tennessee and were recruited using a purposive sampling approach. A qualitative approach was used in this study since the research questions were exploratory in nature and could not be reduced to measurable variables. In this chapter, I present a discussion of the results and how they link to

previous studies in addition to limitations and implications of the study both for practice and future research.

Summary of the Findings

The results of this study were presented based on the research questions that I was answering. Participants said it was prudent to employ ex-offenders based on their experiences and qualifications rather than their history of incarceration. Consequently, for most hiring companies and employers, background checks were important before employing individuals. Even though length of incarceration did not disqualify ex-offenders, the level and nature of offence determined whether they were hired.

Interpretation of the Findings

Perceptions of Employers with Minor Offenses in Tennessee

Per results of this study, employers generally believe that ex-offenders incarcerated for minor offenses should not be denied chances based on their incarceration history. According to P1, P4, P6, and P7, decisions to employ or reject ex-offenders should be purely based on their experience and qualifications. Findings of the current study confirm that employers in the state of Tennessee perceive ex-offenders with minor offenses as eligible for employment opportunities like non-offenders. There still exists a scarcity of research on underemployment or representation of ex-offenders in formal employment.

Similarly, findings are consistent with the theory of social control that ex-offenders, after going through incarceration, develop desirable morals and can be absorbed into the labor market with little to no risk of recidivism (Cerda et al., 2014). As

such, employers in Tennessee generally perceive ex-offenders as reformists who are less likely to engage in criminal activities in the workplace. Employers in Tennessee also perceive ex-offenders as persons who need support in reintegrating back into society. Offering them employment is one way through which they can be supported to successfully integrate into society (Ripp & Braun, 2017). Employers in Tennessee generally perceive ex-offenders with minor offenses as eligible for employment.

However, findings obtained in the current study also deviate from literature. Ramakers et al. (2015) said most employers do not hire ex-offenders for reasons such as lack of skills and experiences, as well as the fact that most ex-offenders cannot be trusted. P7 said the company they worked for based their hiring protocol on trust and aimed to assess whether ex-offenders could be trusted to maintain good behavior. Lichtenberger (2006) noted hiring employees based on skills, experiences, and competencies alone without considering their character and incarceration history. However, deviant labelling may only be applicable in situations where individuals in question are renowned criminals associated with major offenses (Urrutia, 2012). Per the labelling theory, deviant labelling may trigger self-conceptions of criminality and cause a person to engage in deviant groups (Braithwaite, 2012). Labelling may also lead to social exclusion, which may in turn may compel a person to seek fulfillment from deviant groups and exhibit recidivism. Consequently, it is essential that employers give ex-offenders a chance to showcase their skills and successfully reintegrate into society.

Even though this study did not examine employers' level of trust, it is evident that most participants had doubts regarding hiring ex-offenders, hence the need for

accountability and growth on their part, according to P1, P4, and P6. While Lichtenberger (2006) argued that there was no way an employer could assess an ex-offender's credibility, growth, and accountability without giving them a chance, Ramakers et al. (2015) said ex-offenders need to demonstrate some level of positive attitude and acknowledgement the previous mistakes. Urrutia (2012) said taking accountability for one's actions is a sign of growth for ex-offenders. Education offered in prisons allows prisoners to gain meaningful employment, improve their quality of life, and acquire professional competence, knowledge, understanding, social attitudes, and behavior important for successful transition into civilian life. Moreover, skills, training, and academic qualifications acquired either while in prison or after incarceration are signs of accountability and growth (Carnes, 2014).

In the current study, I expected the majority of participants would express some fears associated with hiring ex-offenders. It was expected all participants would at least hold some negative perceptions of ex-offenders. However, contrary to my expectations, less than half of participants expressed concerns over hiring ex-offenders (P1, P4, P6, and P7). In order to address employers' potential fears associated with hiring ex-offenders, I would use a survey instead of an open-ended questionnaire. A survey would allow me to confine the findings to a specific theme, which was the potential adverse consequences of hiring ex-offenders from employers' perceptions.

Employer Practices Regarding Hiring of Ex-Offenders with Minor Offenses

Per findings of the current study, employers in Tennessee are more concerned with employees' qualification, attitude, skills, and shows of growth than incarceration history. Protocols sometimes include background checks conducted on a case-by-case basis to assess whether ex-offenders could be assets or liabilities to the company. Consequently, incarceration due to minor offenses may not necessitate absolute disqualification of ex-offenders seeking employment in Tennessee.

Specific retail or industrial hiring managers look into previous ex-offender's criminal history to assess the type of crime they were incarcerated for, and working skills possessed by ex-offenders and whether they qualified them for employment. In essence, background checks enabled participants to evaluate and analyze risks likely to be posed by previously incarcerated individuals to the company and other employees. Additionally, background checks helped participants assess the ability of job applicants to follow rules, laws, and policies. Petrella (2014) said job training and placement may reduce crime by giving convicted individuals a chance to redeem themselves. Visher (2015) said rewarding hiring managers who took chances hiring ex-offenders may encourage many employers to consider employing more ex-offenders.

If the aim of discouraging people from exhibiting deviant behaviors is achieved, previously incarcerated jobseekers should not be treated as persons with questionable character (Cerde et al., 2014). As such, employers are expected to base their hiring protocols on other requirements rather than incarceration history. In fact, automatic disqualification of jobseekers based on their incarceration history may only increase their

chances of recidivism. Previously incarcerated jobseekers should be given equal employment opportunities to reduce their chances of recidivism.

While there are many studies on the impact of background checks on ex-offenders' employability, banning the box in federal hiring allowed ex-offenders to openly converse with employers about their criminal records (Melber, 2015). Brainwaithe (2012) said banning the box allowed employers to take a closer look at their job applicant's skills instead of criminal records. According to P7, possessing a criminal record, no matter how minor the offense was, amounted to total disqualification. P5 said they did not conduct a background check for their job applicants, and past criminal records did not influence their decisions to vet or employ individuals.

As part of the hiring protocol, participants considered factors such as ages of offenders at the time of the offense and how long ago the offense occurred. According to participants, participants considered to be youths at the time of an offense were considered for employment because young people are more prone to make mistakes and are less experienced. This means young ex-offenders incarcerated with minor offenses were likely to be employed compared to adults. Being young a developmental stage during which people are allowed to make mistakes as they search for identity and what works for them. P3 said age was a significant decision-maker for employers in terms of whether they could employ ex-offenders. According to P4, P2, and P6, individuals who commit crimes before their mid-twenties could have been naïve, and this played a role in deciding whether to employ them or not. Atkin and Armstrong (2013) said employer perceptions of ex-offenders' conviction offenses, age, and arrest history records were

more related to the decision-making process, with 73% rates of hiring for older or nonviolent younger employees.

Impact of Offense Level and Type on Hiring Decisions in Tennessee

Among employers in Tennessee, length of incarceration is an insignificant determinant of ex-offenders' hire ability. However, the nature or level of offense may be an important consideration when hiring ex-offenders. Notably, minor offenses such as reckless driving and shoplifting are considered not weighty enough to warrant automatic disqualification for ex-offenders. However, major felonies such as sexual harassment or violence may sometimes warrant automatic disqualification of offenders. Apart from the nature of the offense, the number of times an individual has involved themselves in the same offense warrants automatic disqualification, as such individuals are likely to exhibit recidivism. For instance, per current findings, employers in Tennessee are less likely to trust persons previously convicted of major crimes such as murder, robbery, drug trafficking, and rape.

Slingo et al. (2005) research on barriers of adult literacy observed that private sector employers were reluctant to offer employment opportunities to ex-offenders previously incarcerated for violently injuring a person, stolen money, or goods. Findings in this study add new knowledge to existing literature. Particularly, findings indicate that while only serious felonies warrant automatic disqualification, there are instances in which a person could be disqualified even following incarceration with misdemeanors. For instance, a jobseeker previously incarcerated with embezzlement of funds may not be eligible for accounting or banking jobs. Additionally, individuals incarcerated for

mismanagement or misbehavior, or offenses related to their previously held positions are highly likely to be disqualified unless they prove beyond a reasonable doubt their attitude and behavior are redeemable. While employers have expanded their employment suitability for ex-offenders, some crimes such as violence, theft, and sexual offenses are still automatic disqualifications. More should be done to ensure that ex-offenders previously incarcerated for violence, sexual offenses, and theft secure employment. Training such ex-offenders and putting them through psychiatric education may help them.

Limitations of the Study

In this section, I discuss different limitations and setbacks that influenced the study's results. According to Leedy and Ormrod (2016), limitations are occurrences that are beyond the researcher's control and significantly influence the overall results. Christensen and Johnson (2014) said limitations are potential weaknesses that more often guide future research. For this study, the first limitation was methodological. The methodology selected for this study was a general qualitative study design. While qualitative studies allow participants to explain themselves, this study does not involve numerical information compared to mixed method designs regarding employers who consider employing ex-offenders versus those who do not. A statistical representation of crimes that employers overlook versus those that are automatic disqualifiers is important for preparing ex-offenders who are looking for employment after incarceration. In addition, many businesses designated as nonessential were closed during the time of this study. Other workplaces remained open, but with precautionary restrictions on their

operations to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. Assessing differences, if any, between how participants might have responded to interview questions during normal operations versus during the pandemic was outside the scope of this study. In this study, I interviewed a total of 10 Human resource managers or equivalent of medium-large sized companies in Tennessee.

Although the 10 participants provided a rich source of data and information, their findings were not a reflection of a larger population. Similarly, participants selected were limited to Human Resources Managers or equivalent from The State of Tennessee meaning the results of this study could only be applicable to the State of Tennessee. Selecting participants from a single area limits the generalizability of the results to a wider population. The inability to generalize the results obtained was also linked to the limited data collected from the 10 participants which were not enough in addition to the results were largely impacted by the current coronavirus pandemic that generally limited the number of participants who were willing to participate in this study.

The current study was also limited by data reliability. To answer the research questions designed for this study, the researcher developed a survey questionnaire with open-ended questions that allowed participants to exhaustively answer the questions based on their understanding. The questionnaire I designed was self-reporting and there were high chances of respondents falsifying the answers they would not want to expose their hiring protocols. Additionally, participants were also likely to be biased and provide wrong answers either as a means of protecting their organizations or failure to understand what the questions require affecting the credibility of the provided answers. Linking data

reliability, credibility, and availability, the researcher tailored the questionnaire to human resource managers, and no previously incarcerated individuals were included in the study. Failure to include ex-offenders with minor offenses seeking employment tainted the quality of the collected data and consequently the results. On data credibility and quality, the coronavirus pandemic discouraged one-on-one interviews that would have helped the researcher gauge the credibility and honesty of the answers provided by participants by observing their body language. Another limitation that impacted the results of this study is the time allocated for its completion. Another significant limitation was based on the researcher. In qualitative studies, researchers are instrumental in collecting, analyzing, and presenting the data.

Recommendations for Future Studies

While most scholars agree that ex-offenders deserve equal employment opportunities, there are only a few studies have examined employer's perceptions of hiring ex-offenders. From the above findings, it is evident that ex-offenders' past minor offenses did not influence their ability to gain employment. As per the participants, all ex-offenders with minor offenses deserved the benefit of the doubt and second chances provided they exhibited remorse and the willingness to change. While the current study shows that ex-offenders may be eligible for employment, only a few studies exist to support the findings. Overall, the current study adds knowledge to the existing literature on employer's perceptions and considerations when it comes to employing ex-offenders. Therefore, the first recommendation for future studies is that more empirical literature is

required to support existing literature and expand more employer's perceptions on employing ex-offenders with minor offenses.

The second recommendation emanates from the limitation that the current study only investigated the perception of employers and did not include ex-offenders.

Therefore, future scholars should repeat this study, but they should include ex-offenders to get their perception on why it is difficult to secure employment post-incarceration.

The current study was limited by setting and number of participants. For instance, only 10 employers from Tennessee were included in this study. Future studies therefore should consider using a larger sample from multiple places to diversify the results and enhance the generalizability of the findings. Finally, although the current study sought to explore the perception of employers on hiring ex-offenders, future scholars should consider conducting a quantitative study on the same topic to establish the relationship between type or nature of offense and ease of securing employment one-year post-incarceration.

Implications of the Study

Implications for Positive Social Change

According to Heathfield (2017), the number of ex-offenders released without employment has experienced an upward trend since 1980. Employment provides a means for basic survival and is an important element in rebuilding a conventional lifestyle and a sense of belonging in the community (Cerda et al., 2014). Rukus et al. (2016) asserted that employment contributed to an organized behavior and pattern of interactions for ex-offender's post-incarcerations. Based on the brief background, the findings of the current study significantly contribute to a positive social change in the sense that employment

decreases the rates of crime and recidivism. Ex-offenders who secured employment after incarceration were less likely to engage in criminal activities as they had means of meeting their daily needs compared to ex-offenders who failed to secure such opportunities.

According to Subramanian et al. (2015), the perception that the community holds towards ex-offenders hinders their smooth transition into the community. Moreover, the inability of businesses and companies to hire ex-offenders (Ramakers et al.,2015) has left many ex-offenders unemployed exposing them to crime. Another positive social change based on the above findings is that when employers employ ex-offenders is a show of good faith that they can be trusted. While the community holds a biased opinion against accepting ex-offenders, the current findings show otherwise. According to the current study, ex-offenders can compete for employment opportunities based on their qualification, level of education, and training.

On the organization, employing offenders has its own merits. According to Solinas-Saunders and Stacer (2015) companies profit from initiatives that can promote marketing and increase retention with a reliable and dependable working staff. Moreover, the US Department of Labor (2017) indicated that those companies that had ex-offenders as employees were eligible for Work Opportunity Tax Credits. On top of preventing them from recidivism, organizations provide ex-offenders the opportunity to begin afresh. According to the second research question, ex-offenders are trained and educated while in prison, and as such tapping into this workforce may provide the much-needed workforce for improved productivity.

Empirical Implications

The findings of this study have empirical implications in the sense that only a few current studies exist on employer's perception of employing ex-offenders. The current study adds to the literature that employer's perceptions on employing ex-offenders tend to shift depending on the nature of the offense. For instance, the findings of this study showed that ex-offenders with a history of violence, sexual offenses, and theft were less likely to secure employment.

Recommendations for Practice

The current study indicated that giving employers second chances helped decrease crime rates and the possibility of ex-offenders offending again. Moreover, providing ex-offenders with employment opportunities helped put their behaviors in check in addition to cultivating a more community-centered behavior. One key aspect of this study's findings is that ex-offenders with experience, training, and required education stood a chance of securing employment. Therefore, as a recommendation for practice, ex-offenders should be trained on the relevant skills needed for life outside the prison. On policymakers, this study is important in that it provides the opportunity for policymakers to draft policies that will guide the development of programs that will aid in preparing ex-offenders to face life outside prison. On ex-offenders, the results of this study provide a baseline for what employers are willing to observe to offer them employment opportunities. For instance, the participants reported that ex-offenders who showed remorse and accepted accountability for their actions were more likely to be considered for employment opportunities.

Chapter Summary and Conclusion

Although ex-offenders find it challenging to secure employment post-incarceration, the participants included in this study have shed some light on this problem. According to the participants, ex-offenders with minor offenses and who have shown remorse and taken responsibility for their actions were likely to secure employment. Moreover, ex-offenders with some form of training and experience were also more likely to be employed. On recommendations for future studies, the current study suggested that future scholars should consider increasing the number of participants and expand the settings of the study to enhance the generalizability of the obtained results. As a recommendation for practice, the results of this study provided that ex-offenders should be trained on relevant skills and qualifications that will boost their chances of securing employment post-incarceration.

In this chapter, I provided a discussion of results presented in Chapter 4 connecting results of previous studies. Additionally, I presented limitation of the study, implications, and recommendations for future research and practice.

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Appendix A: Permission to Use Instrument

Sent from my Verizon, Samsung Galaxy smartphone

----- Original Message Publications. -----

From: Elizabeth Dretsch

Date: 8/29/16 9:11 AM (GMT-06:00)

To: Carolyn Smith

Subject: Re: Employer Study @ UNF

Hello Carolyn,

Absolutely. No problem. The instrument should be included as an appendix.

Best wishes,

Elizabeth Dretsch

On Aug 29, 2016 10:00 AM, "Carolyn Smith" wrote:

Hello Dr. McMullan,

My name is Carolyn Smith, a Doctoral student with Walden University majoring in Public Policy Administration/Homeland Security Coordination. I came across your Dissertation during my research. I would like to request from you, permission to use your Instrument for my Dissertation Proposal.

The title of my Dissertation is: Exploring the Employability of Ex-Offenders from the Viewpoint of Employers. Your study is similar to mine.

I left you a Message Publications. on voice mail from the number I found on the internet from your Profile. In addition, I entered a comment on your LinkedIn page.

I can be reached at xxx-xxx-xxxx. If I'm unavailable, please leave me a Message Publications. of time to call you back to discuss. Hope to hear from you soon!!

Thank you,

Carolyn D. Smith

Doctoral Candidate-Walden University

Public Policy Administration/Homeland Security Coordination

Elizabeth Dretsch

Today, 7:41 PM

Hi Carolyn,

Absolutely! Best of luck as you continue working on your dissertation.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Dretsch

Thank you so much for your support. Thank you and all the best. Thank you so much for your encouragement.

Report inappropriate text

Carolyn Smith

Today, 6:33 PM
Hello Dr. Dretsch,

On August 29th, 2016, I sent you a request to utilize your survey tool as part of my dissertation work and you approved, thank you!

I'm writing to request if I can modify your survey tool to fit my qualitative study?

Thank you for your permission and assistance.

Carolyn D. Smith

Appendix B: Employer Questionnaire

Interview Guide

Opening Statement:	Feedback from Reviewer:
<p>Thank you for participating in my research study on Exploring the Employability of Ex-offenders: Employer Perspectives. There are no right or wrong answers. I am interested in learning about your experiences.</p> <p>Do you have any questions before we begin?</p> <p>As a reminder, I will be recording the interview, and all the information will be kept private. The information you share will only be shared with my dissertation committee. If at any time you do not want to continue, or you do not want to answer a question, please let me know.</p> <p>The interview is anticipated to take 45 to 60 minutes.</p>	

<p>I would like to begin with a few background questions:</p> <p>Demographic Questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What is your name? 2. What is your age? 3. What is your nationality? 4. What is your education level? 5. How long have you worked in the Human Resources field? 	<p>Feedback from Reviewer:</p>
<p>Research Question: What are the perceptions of employers about employing ex-offenders with minor offenses in State of Tennessee?</p> <p>Research Question: What are the practices of employers (including hiring protocols) about employing ex-offenders with minor offenses in State of Tennessee?</p> <p>Research Question: How does the type or level of offense influence your hiring decisions?</p>	<p>Feedback from Reviewer:</p>
<p>Interview Question: What is your position or title in your organization?</p>	<p>Feedback from Reviewer:</p>
<p>Interview Question: As a hiring official, what is your policy for hiring ex-offenders with minor offenses?</p>	<p>Feedback from Reviewer:</p>

<p>Interview Question: Describe the value that you believe background checks play in hiring ex-offenders with minor offenses and at what stage, if at all, do you perform a background check?</p>	<p>Feedback from Reviewer:</p>
<p>Interview Question: Based on your experience, are there crimes that would automatically disqualify an applicant for hire? Explain?</p>	<p>Feedback from Reviewer:</p>
<p>Interview Question: What are your experiences related to the hiring decisions of ex-offenders with minor offenses when considering the age of an offender at the time a crime was committed?</p>	<p>Feedback from Reviewer:</p>
<p>Interview Question: What are your perceptions about the length of incarceration as an indicator for qualifying or disqualifying an ex-offender with a minor offense for hiring?</p>	<p>Feedback from Reviewer:</p>
<p>Interview Questions: What are your experiences with hiring ex-offenders with minor offenses and how long after incarceration would you feel comfortable hiring an ex-offender with minor offenses? As a hiring official, how do you feel about the usefulness of education and training that the ex-offender receives while serving their sentence?</p>	<p>Feedback from Reviewer:</p>

<p>Interview Question: As a hiring official, how do you feel about the usefulness of education and training that the ex-offender with a minor offense receives while serving their sentence?</p>	<p>Feedback from Reviewer:</p>
<p>Interview Question: How would you feel about ex-offenders with minor offenses who already attained the knowledge and skill required for your company prior to serving their sentence? What are your perceptions about the financial incentives provided by the State government to hire ex-offenders with minor offenses?</p>	<p>Feedback from Reviewer:</p>
<p>Interview Question: What are your perceptions about the financial incentives provided by the State government to hire ex-offenders with minor offenses?</p>	<p>Feedback from Reviewer:</p>
<p>Interview Question: As a hiring official, how beneficial do you think the Ban-the-Box initiative will be towards reducing recidivism and the crime rate in the community?</p>	<p>Feedback from Reviewer:</p>
<p>Interview Question: Based upon your experience, what recommendations, if any, do you have for providing ex-offenders with a minor offense a second chance for employment to integrate into the community?</p>	<p>Feedback from Reviewer:</p>

These are all the questions I have to ask you. Thank you very much for your time and have a nice day!!

Appendix C: Interview Protocol

Interview: Exploring the perceptions and practices of employers in State of Tennessee, related to hiring ex-offenders with minor offenses.

1. I will start with greetings and a brief introduction.
2. I will thank each participant for accepting my invitation to participate in the interview.
3. I will ensure that participants have read and understood before signing the informed consent form.
4. I will inform participants that the interview will last no more than one hour, and the interviews will be audio recorded.
5. I will begin interviewing.
6. I will explain to each participant that as part of member checking, I will present my interpretation of the interviews to them for validation.
7. I will conclude the interview, stop audio recording, and thank each interviewee again for taking part in the interview.

Appendix D: Request for List of Businesses

RE: Carolyn Smith - Walden University School of Behavioral Sciences data request...

Davidson County Businesses for Doctoral Study

Inbox



Taylor, Bill (Assessments)

Nov 18, 2020,
4:17 PM

to me

Good afternoon Ms. Smith,

I submitted your request for approval Monday and I will begin assembling the data as soon as I get the approval. Hopefully I will have it done by the first of next week.

Thank you,

Bill Taylor,

Metro Nashville Davidson County Division of Assessments

From: Carolyn Smith

Sent: Saturday, November 14, 2020 10:37 AM

To: Taylor, Bill (Assessments)

Subject: Carolyn Smith - Walden University School of Behavioral Sciences data request... Davidson County Businesses for Doctoral Study

Attention: This email originated from a source external to Metro Government. Please exercise caution when opening any attachments or links from external sources.

Greetings Mr. Taylor,

As we previously discussed on Friday November 13th, 2020, I'm requesting a list of Davidson County Businesses to conduct my Doctoral study entitled: **“Exploring the Employability of Ex-Offenders: Employer Perspectives”**.

I'll be using the Businesses' that have paid county taxes (5 years or more) to call and speak with the (Owner, Human Resources Manager or Equivalent to interview on hiring **"Ex-offenders "** in the workplace. I chose Davidson County because it's one of Tennessee's oldest Metropolitan districts and has always been the middle regions center of commerce, industry, transportation, and culture (Tennessee Historical Society, 2018).

I'll need a list (Excel or Word) in electronic format on Davidson County (Letterhead or Davidson County Logo) of Businesses in Davison County for the following:

1. Name of the Business
2. Address of the Business
3. Owner's Name of the business
4. Email & Phone number (if applicable)

I have attached my "**Consent Form**" approved by my school (Walden University) that I will provide to the businesses when I call/and or email them requesting an interview to participate in my study. If additional information is needed, please feel free to contact me at xxx-xxx-xxxx.

Thank You,
Carolyn D. Smith, MA, MPhil
PhD Candidate
Walden University School of Behavioral Sciences/Public Policy
Administration/Homeland Security Coordination

P.S. On November 13, 2020, I signed a Public Record Request Policy request at the Davidson County Trustee's Office (with Charis Quarles & Mitzi Cripps) & Tax Assessors' office (drop box) requested by (Wes Thomas) on Friday November 13th, 2020.

Nov 19, 2020,
11:44 AM

Taylor, Bill (Assessments)

to me

Hello Carolyn,

I just sent you an email with a large attachment. I'm sending this email in case the other one was blocked because of its size. Please let me know if you didn't get it.

Thanks,
Bill Taylor

Metro Nashville Davidson County Division of Assessments

Nov 19, 2020,
11:43 AM

Taylor, Bill (Assessments)

to me

Good morning Carolyn,

I will be out of the office tomorrow so I got the go-ahead to do your request.

Please find attached the Excel spreadsheet named Davidson_County_Businesses_2020-11-19.xlsx containing all businesses in Davidson County. This is an accurate representation of the records of the Metro Nashville Davidson County Assessor of Property as of November 19, 2020.

If you have any questions please let me know.

Thanks,
Bill Taylor

Metro Nashville Davidson County Division of Assessments