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Effects of Rehabilitative Programs on High Louisiana Incarceration Rates

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Abstract

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MA, Grambling State University, 2013

BS, University of Louisiana at Monroe, 2001

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

Felony offenders may face incarceration as a result of their offenses, which takes them away from their families and communities and causes financial burdens for all stakeholders for extended periods. The purpose of this ethnographic study was to explore reentry programs in Louisiana through the accounts of ex-offenders. Reality testing and social learning theory formed the theoretical foundation. The study examined what reentry topics ex-offenders feel needed to be addressed to ensure habitual offenders successfully transition back into society and what role ex-offenders felt reentry programs played in reducing recidivism rates among habitual offenders. Data collection focused on firsthand knowledge, experience, and learning. The sample consisted of 10 ex-offenders no longer under the supervision of the Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections. Each participant was formally incarcerated for no longer than 10 years and was willing to be interviewed about their experiences with reentry programs in Louisiana. The key findings were that although reentry programs can reduce recidivism, they are not the only factor behind recidivism. Other motivating factors, such as family support and religion, play a substantial role in successful reentry, and offenders must be willing to change their behavior. If correction can truly change behavior patterns, it will create positive social change by improving the quality of life not only of ex-offenders but also of their families and the taxpayers who fund offenders' care.

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Dedication

I dedicate my dissertation to my family who have supported me through this challenging journey. I would like to give a special sense of gratitude to my spouse, Yvette McDowell, whose sacrifices and encouragement kept pushing me through each step. My mother, Sadie, who has always provided motivating words of support so that I could reach each milestone.

I also dedicate this work to other special family members who have also made sacrifices on my behalf. My children, D.J., Aidan, and Addison for their understanding when my absence was a necessary component of this journey. My sister, Erica, who has been there with me throughout the entire program. Finally, the Almighty who has answered a many number of prayers, even when I had serious doubts.

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Finally, I would like to thank the administration and support staff of the Department of Corrections for their assistance in making this an enjoyable experience. Their assistance was indispensable in this journey and will never be forgotten.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Recidivism and prison population control have been ongoing problems in the state of Louisiana (Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections [LDPSC], 2017). In 2015, the Louisiana State Legislature passed House Concurrent Resolution 82, which formed the Louisiana Justice Reinvestment Task Force to address high incarceration rates and reentry initiatives to reduce the prison population and recidivism (LDPSC, 2017)The task force consisted of legislators, judges, attorneys, law enforcement officials, educators, community members, and other criminal justice professionals interested in reducing recidivism. The focus of the task force was reducing the prison population to save taxpayer dollars while ensuring public safety.

The task force discovered that Louisiana had the highest incarceration rates per capita in the United States (LDPSC, 2017). According to the U.S. Department of Justice, Louisiana's incarceration rate was double the national average (National Institute of Corrections, 2017). These statistics caught the attention of national media outlets, demonstrating the seriousness of the problem (Associated Press, 2017). High recidivism rates along with annual spending of $666 million did not provide an acceptable return on taxpayer dollars in terms of public safety. The task force compared several southern states and discovered that Louisiana sent people to prison for nonviolent crimes, property crimes, and drug offenses at twice the rates of neighboring states (LDPSC, 2017).

Reducing recidivism has several benefits, including lowering the crime rate as well as reducing the cost of investigating and prosecuting crimes and housing, feeding, clothing, and providing health care for incarcerated offenders (Orrick & Vieraitis, 2015).

Reducing recidivism creates positive social change by improving the quality of life not only of offenders but also of taxpayers who fund offenders' care. Recidivism was a significant factor in prison reform in Louisiana because more than half of those sent to prison in 2015 did not succeed on probation or supervised parole (LDPSC, 2017).

This chapter begins with the background of the problem, Louisiana's high incarceration rate. This section addresses the problem in this study, recidivism in Louisiana, and the purpose of the study, which was to explore rehabilitative measures through reentry programming in Louisiana by interviewing ex-offenders who had successfully completed such programming. The chapter continues with discussion of the nature of this study, which involved exploring reentry programs from the perspectives of ex-offenders, before concluding with a discussion of the significance of the study, which related to the effectiveness of reentry programming as assessed by offenders.

Background

According to the National Institute of Corrections (2017), Louisiana's crime rate in 2014 was approximately 37% higher than the national average. In the same year, Louisiana's incarceration rate was approximately 108% higher than the national average (Antoon, 2016). The Louisiana Department of Corrections (LADOC) had a $416,200,000 annual budget, $4,160,000 of which came from self-generated revenue (Antoon, 2016). Louisiana's penal system also had an annual budget of approximately $345,000,000 as of December 31, 2014 (National Institute of Corrections, 2017). Most of the revenue for LADOC was generated through tax dollars. The department allocated $9,000,000 for reentry programs for 2,955 offenders and had a total budget of $215,500,000 for 38,296

incarcerated inmates (Antoon, 2016). With increased criminal activity comes an increased incarceration rate, which is a significant public safety concern (National Institute of Corrections, 2017).

A gap in the existing literature identifies the assessment of reentry programming by offenders. McKay et al. (2014) examined how support staff collaborated with treatment counselors and officers while rating their performance and progress; however, they did not include evaluations from or interviews with ex-offenders who successfully completed the program. The perspectives of ex-offenders are important because they are key stakeholders in and beneficiaries of reentry programs. The findings of some studies do explain the methods that contribute to ex-offenders' success or failure in reentry programs (McKay et al., 2014). However, few scholars have explored ex-offenders' views of what they need to reenter society and become productive citizens. The findings of a study of ex-offenders enrolled in Arizona's Bridging the Gap Offender Reentry program indicated that nine of 78 participants graduated after release (McKay et al., 2014). Staff members reported that some participants complained that class participation interfered with their work schedules and that they had to choose between work and successful participation in the reentry program. However, the researchers did not include any direct information from the participants.

Nally et al. (2014) conducted a cohort study and examined at-risk participants who successfully completed reentry educational programs. Nally et al.'s study covered a period of 5 years after the release of each ex-offender. Many of the participants in their study were unsuccessful and committed new crimes within 1 year of release. The

researchers did not explore the perspectives of study participants regarding why they were unsuccessful and reoffended.

Incarcerated offenders have ample time, limited distractions, and motivational rewards (such as diminution of their prison sentences) to encourage them to successfully complete reentry programs. Ex-offenders participating in reentry programs after release are subject to additional time constraints that can impede their participation in those programs. Ex-offenders under community supervision who are ordered to participate in reentry programs must attend group and or individual treatment sessions while managing parole obligations, employment, and family. In many situations, treatment takes precedent over all other commitments (McKay et al., 2014). Researchers have not accounted for the perspectives of ex-offenders in the development of reentry programs. With this study, I addressed this gap in existing literature and extended the literature regarding reentry. Interviewing ex-offenders several years after they had completed their sentences allowed me to develop firsthand knowledge of what, if anything, could have been done differently and whether additional services would have helped.

<p align="center">**Problem Statement**</p>

The issue examined in this study was the impact of reentry programming from offenders' perspectives. Reentry programming has played an intricate role in LADOC, so much so that the department has been working with state officials to create laws and secure funding to support reentry programming to help ex-offenders transition back into the community (LDPSC, 2017). The goal of LADOC reentry programming has been to meet ex-offenders' needs with minimal impact on ex-offenders, families, taxpayers, and

communities as well as reduce prison overcrowding (Hall, 2015). Successful reentry programming stops the cycle of removing an individual from their family, which causes emotional stress and places financial burdens on other family members. Successful reentry programming promotes and supports financial stability for ex-offenders by helping them secure employment before or on release (LDPSC, 2017). Such employment immediately lifts some financial responsibility off taxpayers. Ex-offenders who successfully complete reentry programming and do not return to prison do not contribute to prison overcrowding. Early release of nonviolent offenders into community supervision began with the Criminal Justice Reform Initiative (LDPSC, 2017). If an ex-offender has not received rehabilitation through reentry programming within LADOC, the cycle starts over, contributing to recidivism and public safety concerns for the communities these individuals are released into (Hall, 2015).

Numerous researchers have examined the impact of reentry programming quantitatively. For example, after monitoring approximately 6,561 ex-offenders after release in the United States, Nally et al. (2014) discovered that nearly half reoffended within 1 year. Nally et al. also found that the majority of those who did not reoffend had excellent educational backgrounds and real employment opportunities. The problem is that reentry programs may not achieve their intended goals, which results in recidivism. However, researchers have not sought the perspectives of ex-offenders regarding whether reentry programming could have helped prevent them from reoffending. Alper et al. (2018) examined recidivism patterns for ex-offenders 9 years after release and found that those arrested for property crimes were more likely to be rearrested than those who

committed violent crimes. The fundamental cause of high incarceration rates is repeat offending (National Research Council, 2014).

Examining the impact of reentry programming from the perspectives of ex-offenders had the potential to provide new views on the effectiveness of reentry programs. Addressing this gap in the literature revealed the factors that help ex-offenders successfully reenter society, conform to norms, and not commit additional felony offenses.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore reentry programs in Louisiana through the accounts of ex-offenders. The research paradigm relied on ex-offenders' perspectives of the components of a successful reentry program. Using the data gathered from ex-offenders, I explored what can help ex-offenders gain specific skills during and after incarceration to reduce their chances of returning to prison. Education has been the focal point of reentry programming, the overall goal of which has been to ensure that offenders conform to legal and social norms (Hall, 2015). The education of offenders has come in many forms and has covered topics, such as substance abuse, mental illness, theft deterrence, and job readiness. Hall (2015) identified factors that contribute to recidivism and tools needed to reduce recidivism rates, such as education. In my study, I explored ex-offenders' journeys through reentry programming and extended the qualitative literature regarding reentry programming, especially the impact of Louisiana's reentry programming.

Research Questions

Two research questions guided the study:

RQ1: What reentry topics do ex-offenders feel need to be addressed to ensure habitual offenders successfully transition back into society?

RQ2: What role do ex-offenders feel reentry programs play in reducing recidivism rates among habitual offenders?

Theoretical Foundation

The exploration of reentry programs through the perspectives of ex-offenders in this qualitative study relied on two theoretical foundations: reality testing and social learning theory. Both theories involve acquiring firsthand knowledge, experience, and learning. If an offender can learn criminal behavior, an ex-offender can learn to return to the community and conform to positive norms.

Reality testing, part of Freud's psychoanalytic theory, is the ability to see things for what they are (Blass, 2006). Once an ex-offender is released, reality testing begins with their transition back into society, which addresses RQ1. Reality testing involves using evidence to search for truth (Patton, 2015). When discussing the concept of reentry programming, an ex-offender who has successfully completed a reentry program can explain which reentry topics need to be addressed to ensure successful transition back into society. Reality testing was a necessary theoretical lens for this study because it allowed a recidivist to explain why they committed crimes and focus on what they, specifically, need to cease this behavior. Using the theory, an offender can explain how the real world works, even with reentry programming.

Bandura's (1971) social learning theory relates to human social behavior patterns learned through observation. This theory aligns with RQ2 through the roles of ex-offenders based on what they learned and experienced during reentry programming. According to the social learning theory, an individual can learn new behavior patterns by observing other individuals; however, such observation does not necessarily cause an individual to change their behavior pattern because their mental state affects learning. Bandura's social learning theory has a foundation of four factors: observation, retention, reproduction, and motivation. As a theoretical lens, social learning theory was appropriate for this study because it allowed a recidivist to explain what motivates them to commit crimes and focus on their specific needs. Using the theory, an ex-offender can explain how the real world works, even with reentry programming, as they see it.

Reentry programming has a significant impact on ex-offenders and is a significant factor that can help deter an ex-offender from crime by covering topics that ensure a successful transition back into society. For habitual offenders, reentry programs can help to reduce recidivism rates.

Nature of the Study

Using a qualitative, ethnographic research design in this study allowed me to explore the perspectives of ex-offenders regarding what works and what does not in reentry programming. The ethnographic design afforded me the opportunity to obtain firsthand knowledge of each ex-offender's way of life, criminal history, and rehabilitation through reentry programming. The design placed me, as the researcher, in each ex-offender's life to validate the findings.

For this study, I specifically focused on ex-offenders who had attended reentry programming in Louisiana. Interviews of ex-offenders who fit the participant criteria provided reliable data for this study. Studying ex-offenders returning to a community with high crime rates had the potential to explain ex-offenders' states of mind, realism, attitudes, and behaviors (see Patton, 2015). I recruited a sample of 10 ex-offenders, each of whom had been formally incarcerated for no more than 10 years and had successfully completed a reentry program. Their ages ranged from 24 to 65 years old. I gathered data using ethnographic, face-to-face interviews based on a questionnaire I developed. The resulting descriptive and open data were analyzed using thematic coding software, Otter and Delve qualitative analysis programs.

Definitions

Community supervision: An alternative to incarceration that allows an ex-offender to live and work in the community while a probation or parole officer monitors them (LDPSC, 2017) .

Diminution of sentence: Reduction of a prison or hard labor sentence based on good behavior while incarcerated (LDPSC, 2017).

Ex-offender: An offender who has completed their sentence (LDPSC, 2017) .

Habitual offender: An individual convicted of a second or subsequent felony offense (LDPSC, 2017) .

Incarceration: The state of being confined in prison (LDPSC, 2017).

Offender: An individual convicted of a felony offense in a court of law (LDPSC, 2017).

Recidivism: The tendency of a convicted ex-offender to commit a new felony offense (LDPSC, 2017).

Rehabilitative/reentry programs: Programs that involve a process of restoring someone to good health, behavior, and adherence to legal mandates and social norms (LDPSC, 2017).

Assumptions

In this study, I assumed that ex-offenders who have completed a hard labor sentence have paid their debt to society and been rehabilitated through the criminal justice system. Another assumption was that many of these ex-offenders know what is best for them and how to reach their goals and ensure they will not return to the criminal justice system. Although some ex-offendershave supported these statements, demonstration of their truth is impossible. These assumptions were necessary to support the theory, from the ex-offender's point of view, to formulate better plans and programs for reentry purposes. Ex-offenders' real-world experiences were a primary source for further development of reentry programs to reduce recidivism (Bender et al., 2016). Most prisoners eventually reenter society, which gives them firsthand knowledge of how reentry programming works (Bender et al., 2016).

Scope and Delimitations

I addressed reentry programs and recidivism in this study because they form the foundation of offender rehabilitation. The sample population consisted of ex-offenders who had successfully completed a LADOC-approved, education-focused reentry program within the previous 5 years. This was the time frame within which Louisiana provided the

Justice Reinvestment Reforms Practitioners Guide, which included corrections reform. The ex-offenders studied were no longer under the control of LADOC and had completed their sentences. The target population was habitual offenders, and the excluded population was first-time offenders.

Limitations

The study sample was limited to 10 participants, and the study did not account for the remaining population of similarly situated ex-offenders. The study did not account for individuals who were incarcerated for a period greater than 10 years, and completed a reentry program. Finding ex-offenders to willingly and honestly participate was a challenge. Ex-offenders were not under any form of supervision and, therefore, did not have to worry about any repercussions of participating unless they gave detailed accounts of a criminal violation of the law for which I was a mandated reporter. I explained my status as a mandated reporter in detail to potential participants. Being a mandated reporter may have hampered recruitment of ex-offenders and also the willingness of participating ex-offenders to be forthcoming. Having existing rapport with ex-offenders could have outweighed this limitation. I expected no conflicts of interest because the study participants had completed their sentences.

Significance

This study contributes to positive social change by extending the literature and understanding regarding reentry programs. I examined the perspectives of ex-offenders regarding the essential components of successful reentry programs. The voices of ex-offenders can provide clarity and direction for the development of successful reentry

programs. Studying habitual ex-offenders and their specific needs is an important step toward reducing recidivism and incarceration rates. The findings of this study have the potential to change reentry policies and procedures based on ex-offenders' assessments of their population's needs.

Louisiana has had the highest incarceration rate in the United States (Callaghan, 2017). On November 1, 2017, LDPSC (2017) began releasing nonviolent offenders to comply with legislation inspired by the Louisiana Justice Reinvestment Committee aimed at reducing the prison population. The overall goal was to reduce the prison population through alternatives to incarceration, including reentry initiatives. Therefore, in this study, I examined the impact of reentry programming from the perspectives of ex-offenders.

<div align="center">**Summary**</div>

In this qualitative, ethnographic study, I explored the impact of reentry programs on incarceration rates in Louisiana. An ethnographic design was best suited to this study because ex-offenders have a history of shared behaviors, beliefs, and learned patterns of criminal behavior (see Creswell, 2009). I explored potential causes of high incarceration rates by studying habitual ex-offenders, their crimes, and their experiences of reentry programs designed to lower incarceration rates (see National Research Council, 2014). Those designing reentry programs have aimed to provide what ex-offenders need to become productive citizens, but researchers have not determined whether these programs have been meeting their goals. Habitual offenders have been the target group for recidivism and reentry programs; consequently, they were also the best source for realism

and reality-testing-based studies. Offender education has been the foundation of reentry initiatives, which have included secondary education, job training, theft deterrence, financial planning, substance abuse education, mental health treatment, and sex offender counseling (LDPSC, 2017). The following chapter will detail a review of the literature based on the impact and effectiveness of reentry programming.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this ethnographic study was to examine the impact and effectiveness of reentry programming from the perspectives of ex-offenders. The literature review presented in this chapter encompasses academic and professional literature on reentry programming. For this review, I explored government web pages, dissertations, scholarly articles, and peer-reviewed journals.

Recidivism has been a significant problem in Louisiana. In 2015, the U.S. Department of Justice announced they would release $53,000,000 in grants to reduce recidivism among ex-offenders returning to their communities after confinement (*Justice Department*, 2015). These grants were to help both adults and young people by supporting research programs, providing reentry services, and reducing recidivism. They covered a broad range of services, including substance abuse, mental disorders, mentoring programs, career training programs, recidivism reduction planning, postsecondary education, and other technical assistance programs. LADOC (2017) has been working with state officials to create laws and policies to reduce high incarceration rates through rehabilitative programs.

Researchers have found Louisiana reentry programming to be readily available through state correctional facilities but inadequate in local and parish jails (Bynum, 2013). In 2009, LADOC began expanding reentry programming to local and parish jails to help inmates reenter society upon release (Bynum, 2013). At the time of Bynum's (2013) research, Louisiana had the highest per capita incarceration rate in the world, which was a significant problem.

In 2016, Louisiana had a recidivism rate of 42.7% and the highest per capita incarceration rate in the United States (Antoon, 2016). Recidivism affects offenders, their families, taxpayers, and communities by causing financial complications, prison overcrowding, and public safety concerns (Hall, 2015). Removing offenders from their families causes emotional stress and places financial burdens on family members because offenders contribute no income while incarcerated.

According to LDPSC (2019), the department has been attempting to reduce its incarceration rate for over 15 years. In 2013, Louisiana ranked in the top 10 in the following categories: highest violent crime rate, highest poverty rate, and lowest percentage of adults earning a high school diploma. It also had the highest per capita incarceration rate. In 2015, the total adult prison population in Louisiana was 36,377; half of those offenders were housed at state correctional facilities, and the other half were housed at local penal facilities and in transitional work programs. The total number of offenders on community supervision was 72,176. Approximately 18,000 of these offenders have been released into community supervision in Louisiana annually, where they have faced several challenges, including difficulty obtaining employment, government services, and stable housing.

Although the recidivism rate has remained high, it steadily decreased from 48% in 2008 to 43% in 2009 (LDPSC, 2019). In 2008, the LDPSC began developing evidence-based reentry programs and improving traditional reentry programming to reduce recidivism and incarceration rates and their associated costs. Reentry programs significantly reduce recidivism among ex-offenders if the programs address the key risk

factors that contribute to recidivism (Duwe, 2017). The intention of the focus on cost savings was to benefit the community, families, and victims.

Offenders who were the responsibility of LADOC but housed at local facilities were initially denied reentry programming until the department worked jointly with local sheriffs' offices to create programming for LADOC inmates (CITE). In 2010, the department's standard reentry programming consisted of certified prerelease rehabilitation programs specializing in anger management, parenting, substance abuse treatment, money management, job readiness, and other life skills. Successful completion of these programs contributed to diminution of offenders' sentences.

Over time, LADOC has transitioned from a traditional prison system to a community model based on recommendations of the National Institute of Corrections (2017). The community model relies on risk/needs assessment to identify factors likely to cause an offender to exhibit further criminal behavior. Risk/needs assessment tools support the use of evidence-based reentry strategies, such as supervision levels, in efforts to reduce the rate of recidivism in Louisiana. The department has also incorporated specific programs to address offenders' needs in Louisiana's reentry programming. According to LDPSC (2019), this model focuses on reducing risk of recidivism and building on offenders' strengths and skills through educational training.

The purpose of reentry programs is to change the behavior patterns of offenders, address their needs, and reduce recidivism (Bynum, 2013). The change begins with the use of reentry programming to examine and address certain factors, such as education, substance abuse, and employment (Callaghan, 2017). To combat high recidivism and

incarceration rates, the state of Louisiana has offered offenders incentives, such as sentence diminution, for enrolling and successfully completing reentry programs during their incarceration (LDPSC, 2019). According to LDPSC (2019), the total prison population decreased from 39,867 in 2012 to 32,397 in 2018. Legislation passed in Louisiana has also allowed offenders to receive earned compliance credit, which reduces nonviolent offenders' sentences by half (LDPSC, 2019). This reduction not only takes place during incarceration but also carries over to an offender's community supervision. Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections found that the number of offenders on community supervision has also decreased: The average caseload of a probation and parole officer decreased from 149 ex-offenders in 2016 to 123 ex-offenders at the end of 2018 (LDPSC, 2019).

The review of existing literature presented in this chapter focuses on offenders who went to prison and later reoffended. In the review, I also detail how an offender's culture impacts their cycle through the criminal justice system from arrest to trial, correction, reentry, and recidivism (see Durnescu, 2017). Scholars have discussed how reentry programs cater to offenders' generalized rehabilitative needs rather than the specific needs of particular offenders (Visher et al., 2016). Visher et al. (2016) used a quasi-experimental design to examine male ex-offenders and their recidivism rates in 12 prisoner reentry programs in 12 states. They found that those who participated in the reentry programs remained arrest free for longer and had fewer arrests than those who did not participate in the reentry programs. Visher et al. (2016) argued that services catering to individual needs were more beneficial than those focused on general needs.

In this chapter, I present the search strategies used for the literature review, the theoretical foundation of the study, the concept of reentry, and other key variables related to ex-offenders' needs. Such needs include treatment for substance abuse, anger management, and mental health problems; medication, clothing, transportation, housing, food, and education; and help obtaining their birth certificates, social security cards, or license and identification cards.

Literature Search Strategy

To locate literature for this review, I used several sources of information accessed through the Walden University Library and the internet. The Walden University Library held most of the material used in this review. Through the Walden University library, I searched the Criminal Justice Database, which indexes a variety of journals on rehabilitation and criminal justice, and SAGE Journals, a popular search engine that indexes peer-reviewed journals on criminal justice and rehabilitation. I found other articles—specifically, those providing information about Louisiana's criminal justice programming and similar topics—through an internet search. Google Scholar was also searched for this literature review.

Key search terms included *reentry*, *recidivism*, and *incarceration*. Other search terms used to narrow the results included *felony*, *offender*, *reentry*, *treatment*, *prison*, *corrections*, and *Louisiana*. Articles found using these terms allowed me to create a reference list of resources with which to complete the literature review. Using these search terms, I retrieved relevant, peer-reviewed articles published within the previous 3 years. Other material reviewed related to the variety of strategies that other researchers

have used to discover more about reentry, recidivism, and high prison populations in various communities.

Theoretical Foundation

Social learning theory and reality testing formed the theoretical foundation of this study. The origin of social learning theory is Burgess and Akers's (1966) theory that individuals learn deviant behavior from others. Burgess and Akers argued that the probability of individuals conforming to social norms is greatly reduced when they associate with individuals who engage in deviant and criminal behavior. Bandura (1971) described social learning as the process of an individual learning certain behaviors by observing and mirroring other individuals in their environment. Researchers have examined a variety of criminal justice and criminological issues through the lens of social learning theory. For example, Fox (2017) examined correlations and connections among biological and environmental factors that contribute to criminal behavior, resulting in a model integrating genetic influence, personality traits, and peer associations as potential precipitators of future behavior. Reality testing originated in the theories of Freud (1911). Reality testing is the process of seeing a situation for what it is through real-life documentation of normal life (Freud, 1911). The two theories coincide in that when an individual learns a particular behavior, the behavior undergoes testing through their real-life experiences.

In social learning theory, a process of learning specific patterns of behavior, such as criminal reinforcement, within an environment that predicts future behavior, such as criminal behavior patterns, is described (Tittle et al., 2012). Tittle et al. (2012) conducted

cross-cultural, face-to-face interviews and surveys based on past and projected deviant

behavior of 1,400 randomly selected individuals in high-crime areas of three separate

cities. They collected data on the dependent variable of future criminal self-projected

behavior and the independent variable of past criminal behavior patterns. Their findings

indicated that most individuals studied tended toward past and future criminal behavior,

which explained learned criminal behavior. The findings also indicated that the direct

underlying effect of reinforced criminal behavior needed further exploration.

There are relationships among criminal behavior, criminal friends, and criminal

attitudes that aid understanding of criminal or antisocial behaviors (Boduszek et al.,

2012). Boduszek et al. (2012) studied 133 offenders who had criminal friendships and

identified a direct correlation between criminal tendencies and relapse into criminal

behavior. The researchers analyzed data collected from offenders using a questionnaire

that explored each offender's criminal attitudes and behavior. The main focus of the

questionnaire was exploration of the relationships among criminal friends, recidivism,

antisocial intent, attitudes toward violence, self-entitlement, and criminal attitudes.

Boduszek et al.'s strongest finding was their identification of mimicking of criminal

behavior patterns by association and learning of criminal attitudes, which is consistent

with the social learning theory. A weakness of their study was that they did not explore

any solutions in place to combat recidivism or change behavior patterns to conform to

norms.

Burgess and Akers (1966) argued that criminal behavior is learned; however, an

ex-offender who learns to mirror what is taught within their environment can develop

positive behavior patterns in a reentry program. Reentry programming primarily involves teaching or educating offenders how to conform to society's norms through targeted programs that teach life skills (Bynum, 2013). Social learning theory includes role model behavior, understanding of concepts, imitating superiors, and incorporating close contact with those superiors (Bandura, 1971).

Freud (1951) described reality testing as the ability of an individual to observe a situation for what it is instead of what the individual wants it to be. Reality testing is a theoretical aspect of the corrections field and formed a secondary theoretical foundation for this study. All offenders who receive hard labor sentences (except those with life or death sentences) experience reentry into the community (Bender et al., 2016). The purpose of correction is to rehabilitate offenders so that they successfully transition from penal facilities to the community (LDPSC, 2017).

Boduszek et al. (2012) conducted an empirical study with reality testing as a theoretical foundation to thoroughly investigated prediction of criminal behavior patterns based on environment. Boduszek et al. studied a correctional facility but did not address any rehabilitative programs within the correctional facility.

Bender et al. (2016) thoroughly investigated reality testing of reentry programs through the perceptions of high-risk offenders. Bender et al. took a qualitative approach and demonstrated that high-risk offenders faced barriers upon release and needed help to transition. The researchers used existing data from in-depth interviews of 25 offenders with violent histories to explore how the participants perceived initial and long-term challenges during their return to society. The researchers also evaluated how the

participants perceived the benefits of reentry programs, whether participants would recommend them to others, and how the programs could be improved. Through reality testing, Bender et al. found that reentry programming helps offenders obtain certain skills, such as job readiness. A drawback of Bender et al.'s study was its reliance on offenders' statements because the participants were still incarcerated.

The interview questions for this study gave offenders opportunities to explain what reentry programming needed to provide to ensure their successful transition back into society. The questions also allowed offenders to reflect and focus on how reentry programs can reduce recidivism. I designed the interview questions to align with both reality testing and social learning theory.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts

Researchers have documented that prison education through reentry is critical to successfully reintegrating offenders back into society (Davis et al., 2014). Reentry programming helps reduce the recidivism and incarceration rates (Hanrahan, 2015). Although the effect can be minimal at times, evidence-based reality testing indicates that reentry programming reduces the number of ex-offenders reentering the criminal justice system and assists with offenders' needs (Hanrahan, 2015). Davis et al. (2014), for example, conducted a mixed-methods study and concluded that although several factors can prevent successful reintegration, the biggest such factor is offenders' lack of skills, training, and knowledge needed to successfully return to their communities. Davis et al. primarily relied on empirical studies of (a) reentry educational programs offered within a correctional department, primarily for incarcerated individuals; (b) the effectiveness of

reentry programs based on test scores, postrelease employment, and recidivism rates; and (c) comparisons between inmates who participated in or successfully completed a reentry education program and those who did not. Fifty-eight empirical studies met the criteria, and Davis et al. found that 43% of individuals who participated in reentry programs were less likely to return to prison.

The first strength of Davis et al.'s (2014) study was its focus on education. The return on investments in education, such as secondary education, high school diploma or general equivalency diploma (GED), vocational training, or postsecondary education, outweighs potential reincarceration costs (Hanrahan, 2015). According to Hanrahan (2015), this investment saves states 5 times the amount it costs to reincarcerate an offender. In this sense, education during correction has a broad scope that can be summarized as teaching offenders to be productive, law-abiding citizens while overcoming and managing any disorders they may have. Correctional education programs appear to be the best way to reducing recidivism rates by helping offenders gain lawful employment after release (Hall, 2015).

One of the weaknesses of Davis et al.'s (2014) study was that the researchers did not address the different types of educational needs of incarcerated offenders. The educational level of incarcerated offenders ranges from elementary school through high school to college. Davis et al. addressed educational needs associated with test scores, including reading and math. However, Davis et al. did not address educational needs related to substance abuse treatment, mental health treatment, medical treatment, and housing. The researchers also did not identify specific offenders who had benefited from

correctional education or the particular needs of such offenders. Studying habitual offenders who have successfully completed reentry programs and not reoffended would allow examination of what works and what does not work in reentry programming. Reality testing and interviews of offenders who have obtained gainful employment based on their skills would also allow assessment of the theory underlying correctional education programs. Implementing educational programs in penal systems should be standardized practice. Lack of education contributes to recidivism (Hall, 2015).

Bynum (2013) explored the benefits of reentry programs and compared Louisiana's reentry programming to that in three other states. Using a qualitative case study design based on analysis of documents gathered from the states' corrections departments, Bynum compared the programs based on how they met their mission and vision statements, how cost effective they were, and the impact the programs had on recidivism rates. The limitation of this study was its methodology, which lacked questionnaire surveys through which Bynum could have inquired into participants' perspectives on reentry programming.

Successful Reentry Programming

According to Rogers (2016), 95% of all prisoners are eventually released into the community, which impacts the safety of society. Budgets have been declining at all levels of government, for incarceration and for other activities, and agency leaders have been investigating ways to improve outcomes by determining individuals' risk factors using evidence-based assessment tools and following up with individualized support services, such as treatment for drug and alcohol abuse, mental health services, vocational training,

job searching, and education (Rogers, 2016). Administrators who fail to effectively assess offenders for substance use and mental health disorders cannot ensure the provision of effective treatment programs (Rogers, 2016). Individuals with substance use problems have often not received needed clinical care. According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, only 40% of offenders needing treatment reported receiving it during their incarceration (Rogers, 2016).

Those attempting to identify educational efforts supportive of ex-offenders' successful return to society have reported mixed results (Patzelt et al., 2014). Patzelt et al. (2014) evaluated educational goals focusing on entrepreneurship so that ex-offenders can explore self-employment opportunities. Patzelt et al. conducted a multiple case study of 12 participants in a European prison educational program that promoted self-employment. Patzelt et al. said that without a certain combination of mindset, goals, belief system, and self-motivation, ex-offenders could not identify and develop opportunities to move forward in the entrepreneurship educational program. An entrepreneurship educational reentry program could succeed in some circumstances. However, Patzelt et al. did not address how ex-offenders—most of whom are indigent—could obtain the start-up capital needed to actually fund a business.

Over time, correction has moved away from mass incarceration toward rehabilitation of offenders through reentry programming (Mellow & Barnes-Ceeney, 2017). In the past, offenders serving hard labor sentences risked longer incarceration through loss of early release privileges for technical violations (Mellow & Barnes-Ceeney, 2017). Ex-offenders under community supervision also risked returning to

incarceration for technical violations (Mellow & Barnes-Ceeney, 2017). Mellow and Barnes-Ceeney (2017) discussed modern evidence-based advances and best practices within corrections, such as motivational interviewing, rehabilitative programs, and risk assessment tools; however, they argued that reentry programming should focus on long-term success. Mellow and Barnes-Ceeney concluded that reentry programming succeeds only when all stakeholders working within the criminal justice system and community collaborate and focus on long-term reentry initiatives.

Reentry programming is different from comprehensive reentry initiatives in which reentry programming focuses on assisting ex-offenders with securing employment, housing, substance abuse treatment, mental health counseling, and obtaining other services through a referral process (Mellow & Barnes-Ceeney, 2017). Mellow and Barnes-Ceeney (2017) argued that a comprehensive reentry initiative must include interaction, partnership, and healthy relationships among all stakeholders. These stakeholders include criminal justice professionals, community development programs, and case managers who assist with development of, intervention with, and supervision of reentry participants (Mellow & Barnes-Ceeney, 2017).

Mellow and Barnes-Ceeney (2017) also said that although no two comprehensive reentry initiatives are identical, they should all follow similar guidelines. Mellow and Barnes-Ceeney (2017) argued that every comprehensive reentry initiative should include six key aspects: unified vision and goals, inclusivity, collaboration and trust-building, strategically long-term goals, evidence-based practices, and core components implementation.

An organization's unified vision and goals need to be clear, universal, and specific to the organization's objectives (Mellow & Barnes-Ceeney, 2017). The organization must also encourage stakeholders to buy into the idea or work together (Mellow & Barnes-Ceeney, 2017). The goals should incorporate the best possible outcome that would benefit clients and ensure their needs are met while maintaining public safety (Mellow & Barnes-Ceeney, 2017). The focus of the vision and goals should be comprehensive reentry objectives, such as recidivism reduction, community partnership, or heightened public safety (Mellow & Barnes-Ceeney, 2017).

Inclusivity is an essential aspect of comprehensive reentry initiatives that helps ex-offenders advocate for their needs and give their perspectives (Mellow & Barnes-Ceeney, 2017). Mellow and Barnes-Ceeney (2017) advocated the use of motivational interviewing techniques to establish inclusivity by changing behavior patterns. Mellow and Barnes-Ceeney argued that ex-offenders' supervision goals should involve not only the ex-offenders but all stakeholders, including faith-based organizations, media, private entities, nontraditional networks, community partners, community members, and families.

Creation of feedback loops is essentially an information-sharing technique (Mellow & Barnes-Ceeney, 2017). Communication is essential so that employees can understand what works, for whom it works, and how it works (Mellow & Barnes-Ceeney, 2017). This tactic also underlies the development of evidence-based practices (Mellow & Barnes-Ceeney, 2017). Feedback loops provide primary stakeholders with relevant information to ensure that ex-offenders under community supervision comply with the

rules and receive the proper resources, which only effective communication can accomplish (Mellow & Barnes-Ceeney, 2017).

Collaborating and trust-building involve working relationships with the community, nonprofit service providers, and private and public entities that support individuals reintegrating into communities (Mellow & Barnes-Ceeney, 2017). Collaboration and trust-building should be undertaken not by stakeholders but by those with knowledge of, and expertise in, the issues at hand (Mellow & Barnes-Ceeney, 2017). Comprehensive reentry initiatives rely on trusting all stakeholders to perform their jobs in a manner beneficial to, and aligned with, reentry goals (Mellow & Barnes-Ceeney, 2017).

Comprehensive reentry initiatives require strategically long-term goals because change does not happen overnight. Changing procedures is an extensive process and does not end after funding comes to an end (Mellow & Barnes-Ceeney, 2017). Although an agency's mission seldom changes the direction of the agency, political pressure can lead to continual change. The agency thus needs long-term goals to meet the agency's mission while withstanding most political demands (Mellow & Barnes-Ceeney, 2017).

Promoting evidence-based practices in the context of comprehensive reentry initiatives means promoting the use of risk assessment tools and motivational interviewing as primary ways to determine ex-offenders' needs (Mellow & Barnes-Ceeney, 2017). These tools allow assessment of an ex-offender's risk, which in turn allows development of a supervision plan focusing on the rehabilitative services the ex-offender needs to successfully reintegrate. Mellow and Barnes-Ceeney (2017) defined

evidence-based organizations as entities that develop and use innovative techniques proven to be successful.

Employment

Employment is the most important factor in successful reentry initiatives. Summarizing critical areas of reentry programming, Liddell et al. (2014) listed employment as an "essential element" (p.10) of any reentry or transition plan and stressed the importance of building upon "youths' strengths and assets to promote pro-social development" (p. 389). The employment variable can determine whether an ex-offender successfully reintegrates into society. Reentry programs within prisons provide job readiness courses and employment initiatives. In Louisiana, incarcerated offenders have been able to take job readiness courses, secure employment with an organization through the work-release program, and maintain this employment upon release. Such reentry programs help offenders reintegrate by providing them with the tools needed to secure meaningful employment, giving them a sense of pride, and teaching financial literacy. Job readiness preparation and job placement are rehabilitative measures that allow stakeholders to work together while giving ex-offenders motivational skills, which are key features of comprehensive reentry initiatives (Mellow & Barnes-Ceeney, 2017).

Nally et al. (2014) found correlations in ex-offenders among education level, job placement, and recidivism 12 months after release. The researchers measured postrelease recidivism rates, postrelease employment, and other characteristics in a sample of 6,561 individuals. Half of the ex-offenders who reoffended within 12 months of release were unemployed (Nally et al., 2014). The researchers concluded that ex-offenders who had

received formal education were less likely to recidivate than those who had received minimal formal education (Nally et al., 2014). Nally et al. concluded that funding educational initiatives for incarcerated offenders improve their employment opportunities after release would benefit all stakeholders and align with reentry initiatives. A drawback of the study was that Nally et al. did not address the ex-offenders' personal reasoning regarding what contributed to recidivism.

Education

Education is an essential aspect of reentry initiatives and has been vital to the rehabilitation of inmates; researchers have found that education and employment help reduce recidivism (Rogers, 2015). Education in the context of reentry initiatives has a broad scope that encompasses teaching ex-offenders to be productive, law-abiding citizens while overcoming and managing any disorders they may have. The educational needs of incarcerated individuals vary. The educational level of such individuals ranges from elementary school through high school, which established the need to bring reentry education into prisons (Rogers, 2015). To counter recidivism, education programs were created in prisons and jails to allow offenders to secure GEDs or equivalents.

It has become challenging to secure gainful employment with a college degree, difficult to secure gainful employment with a high school diploma or a skilled trade, and almost impossible without any formal education. Correctional education programs appear to be the best way to reduce recidivism rates by helping offenders gain employment after release (Hall, 2015). Comprehensive reentry initiatives include implementation of education programs in correctional systems (Mellow & Barnes-Ceeney, 2017). Mellow

and Barnes-Ceeney (2017) found implementation of educational programs in a reentry setting is more beneficial when done in partnership with community stakeholders rather than via educational referral.

Hall (2015) conducted an integrative literature review and analyzed 10 empirical studies to determine the impact of education on recidivism. Hall found that educational initiatives successfully reduced recidivism. However, there was also an identified need to promote funding for inmate education programs (Hall, 2015). Hall's findings indicated that correctional education was the most promising tool for reducing recidivism. A drawback of this study was its lack of thick rich data, which could have drawn on personal interviews of ex-offenders.

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Treatment

Recidivism rates among high-risk offenders have been higher among those who have received substance abuse treatment than among those who have not (Evans et al., 2011). Substance abuse treatment has been a decisive factor contributing to reduction in criminal activity (Evans et al., 2011). Evans et al. (2011) evaluated self-reported and administrative data of 78 habitual offenders who received supervised substance abuse treatment in California's Proposition 36 court. Evans et al. confirmed that participants who received shorter courses of substance abuse treatment were rearrested more often after release than their counterparts who received extended courses of substance abuse treatment. A critical factor in these data was continuation of care after release. However, Evans et al. did not specifically explore the reasons for participants' rearrests from the perspectives of the participants.

After offenders enter recovery, they remain in recovery for their entire lives because of the risk of relapse. Falling back into old behavior patterns begins with a relapse. Anything out of the ordinary or outside an individual's daily routine can cause a relapse, such as having a single beer while watching a football game with an old friend. That one beer can be a gateway to earlier learned behavior. Evans et al. (2011) focused on how young male offenders with psychiatric issues had more contact with the criminal justice system than any other group. This supports the theory that recidivism is more frequent among young Black men in less favorable economic conditions (Reisig et al., 2007). There thus appears to be a direct relationship between minorities and recidivism rates, which should be an area of focus.

Drug court substance abuse programs have become more popular alternatives to traditional sentencing for individuals in the United States with substance abuse problems (Broussard, 2012). Broussard (2012) investigated drug court programs, exploring factors related to successful completion of these programs by using a retrospective cross-sectional design to study 38 prior participants in Louisiana's 14th Judicial District Adult Drug Court Program (Broussard, 2012). Broussard identified a category of older White participants who had completed high school or received a GED, were employed, were more likely to successfully complete the program than other participants without these specific characteristics. Broussard did not identify more specific dynamics of race, sex, and age of the participants.

Cepeda et al. (2015) explored environmental risk factors among ex-offenders who had substance abuse problems. The purpose of their study was to evaluate the impact of

reentry, relapse of substance abuse, and potential overdose (Cepeda et al., 2015). The researchers recruited 25 participants from a drug treatment center and conducted semistructured in-depth interviews with them. Every participant had been incarcerated within the previous 2 years. Themes highlighted included reuniting with prior associates who had substance abuse issues, residing in the same drug-using environment, negative interactions with law enforcement, and financial problems (Cepeda et al., 2015). Most participants claimed that certain influences caused them to relapse immediately after release, including alcohol acting as a gateway. Those participants who relapsed weeks or months after their release said that they were more motivated to resist. Cepeda et al. found that substance abuse treatment during incarceration and the underlying risk of being released into the same environment were major factors in participants' relapses. A shortfall of this study was that Cepeda et al. did not address other themes relevant to reentry programming, such as employment, community policing relationships, and transitional housing in different areas.

Bourke et al., (2013) explored mental health issues through a psychosocial cognition study of criminal associates and personality traits as attributes of recidivism. Bourke et al. asked 179 nonviolent male offenders to complete self-reports. The reports measured personality traits, criminal social identity, criminal associates, and criminal attitudes. Those individuals who had frequent criminal thoughts were more likely to commit unlawful acts, so frequent criminal thoughts were direct causes of recidivism (Bourke et al., 2013). When offenders think criminal activities are the best way to gain what they want, they tend to think of illegal rather than legal means to reach their goals.

This is based on mental health issues directly related to those offenders who scored high on questions assessing psychoticism and scored low on questions assessing anxiety and personality (Bourke et al., 2013). The criminal justice system has tended to deal with mental health problems the same way as substance abuse problems, and those individuals with mental health problems and substance abuse problems have been at an even higher risk of recidivism than those with only one of these problems. Such offenders are identifiable through measurement of social understanding, criminal associates, and personality traits (Bourke et al., 2013). A drawback of this study was that Bourke et al. did not investigate rehabilitative treatment methods geared to changing behavior and thinking patterns through means other than medication.

Although offenders in Louisiana have received substance abuse treatment during incarceration, they may not continue needed substance abuse or mental health treatment after release. It is essential that offenders continue aftercare treatment for substance abuse and mental health problems on release to ensure that they do not fall back into previous behavior, relapse, and recidivate (Hiller et al., 1999). Although substance abuse and mental health issues contribute to recidivism, other factors—such as an offender's criminal history, education, age, ethnicity, and gender—also contribute (Hiller et al., 1999). Substance abuse treatment is a crucial feature of comprehensive reentry initiatives (Mellow & Barnes-Ceeney, 2017).

Summary

Offenders who participated in or successfully completed reentry educational programs were 43% less likely to return to prison than those offenders who did not

(Davis et al., 2014). Reentry programs have generally been broad and not specific to individuals' needs (Visher et al., 2016). This lack of specificity was a major theme in existing literature. The goal of reentry programs is to educate offenders so that they are prepared when they reenter society. Although reentry programs sometimes have minimal success, they succeed whenever they stop an ex-offender from reoffending.

Social learning theory provides an explanation of the process of learning behavior by mirroring others through observation. Reality testing is the theoretical foundation underlying determination of what is factual and accurate. In this study, I used both social learning theory and reality testing to aid my investigation of reentry initiatives. I explored the specific needs of offenders while they are under the supervision of LADOC. Promoting social change in the context of reentry programs requires studying the problems associated with recidivism. Such study begins with the offenders perspective on reentry programing offered in Louisiana.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate ex-offenders' perspectives of the primary factors behind successful reentry programming and the effectiveness of LADOC reentry programs as tools for reducing recidivism. Focusing on LDPSC and its mission of providing public safety through punishment and rehabilitation allowed me to address Louisiana's high recidivism rate.

In the previous chapters, I addressed Louisiana's prison population, recidivism, reentry, and the state's plans to reduce the prison population. The path of an offender through the criminal justice system is a stressful one. This stress affects not only offenders but all stakeholders, from offenders' family members to police officers, attorneys, court officers, and corrections officers. Government officials guide offenders through the criminal justice system to ensure the protection of offenders' rights, that offenders receive due process, the rehabilitation of offenders, and that offenders pay their debts to society. From the beginning of this process, others tell offenders what to do and what measures they need to take to rectify their offenses. What has remained unknown are the experiences, needs, and opinions of ex-offenders after they successfully complete reentry programs. Reality testing can be used to explain ex-offenders' skills and give officials a better understanding of offenders' needs during rehabilitation. In this chapter, I present the research design and rationale, methodology, participant selection, and data analysis plan.

Research Design and Rationale

Two research questions guided this study:

RQ1: What reentry topics do ex-offenders feel need to be addressed to ensure habitual offenders successfully transition back into society?

RQ2: What role do ex-offenders feel reentry programs play in reducing recidivism rates among habitual offenders?

To answer these questions, I used a qualitative ethnographic approach and focused on, observed, and interacted with the specific culture, criminal in nature, of offenders (see Patton, 2015). Using an ethnographic design provided me with the opportunity to interview participants face to face to identify and address any unexpected issues that arose, which provided an advantage over other qualitative designs in which researchers have no personal contact with participants and their culture. Ethnographic studies involve observations based on the infrastructure of people and their culture (Patton, 2015). Understanding ex-offenders' backgrounds and points of view allowed me to recognize behavior patterns. Some offenders can become involved in a so-called criminal spin, which manifests as shared behaviors and beliefs that influence and increase crime (Ronel, 2011). The purpose of reentry programming is to reverse this type of behavior.

Role of the Researcher

I was an observer, a participant, the primary data collector, and the data analyzer in this study. I not only collected data and analyzed it but also protected the anonymity of the research participants. At the time of the study, I was a probation and parole officer in

LDPSC, and I ensured there were no ethical issues in relation to the participating ex-offenders. Reflexivity was used as a tool to manage my known and unknown biases. All potential participants were thoroughly informed that no penalty would accompany their refusal to participate. I was also a student at Walden University and presented myself as a student researcher during the research. I thoroughly explained to participants that my role in the study was as a researcher and not as an officer. I did not wear any clothing or use any equipment associated with the state of Louisiana during contact with participants. Furthermore, participants were informed that my research was not affiliated with LADOC and that their participation was optional because they were no longer under the department's control. I also explained that participants could stop their interviews at any time without any repercussions.

The participants and data will remain anonymous to ensure no negative consequences for those who participated. I assigned each participant a unique number, which was the only means used to identify them over the course of the study. I stored all data collected on a password-protected hard drive under my exclusive control.

Methodology

Participant Selection Logic

The sample consisted of 10 ex-offenders, each of whom had completed all sentence sanctions and was no longer under the supervision of LDPSC. The participants had also completed a reentry program. Each participant had been formally incarcerated for a period of no more than 10 years. Their ages ranged from 24 to 34 years old. I selected this purposeful sample of ex-offenders' because of the thick, rich descriptions

they could provide (see Patton, 2015). Successful reentry participants supported the

study's purpose because these individuals possessed an abundance of in-depth

information and unique perspectives on reentry programming.

I received permission to post recruitment flyers at the local office from the district

administrator in the Division of Probation and Parole of LADOC. I also placed

recruitment flyers in public areas and buildings and on public notice boards throughout

northwest Louisiana. The flyer specifically asked for participation by ex-offenders who

were not under the supervision of LADOC. At the time of the study, probation and parole

officers did not facilitate any reentry programs, and ex-offenders were not obligated to

participate because they were no longer under the control of LADOC. If I had been

unable to recruit the 10 participants needed within 30 days, I would have taken additional

time to recruit the needed participants.

The research methodology was qualitative and based on promoting social change

by gathering enough natural data from ex-offenders in in-depth interviews to determine

their views on reentry programming.

Instrumentation

The interview instrument was a questionnaire I developed. A pilot test of the

questionnaire was conducted to ensure the questions were clear and demonstrate the

content validity of the instrument. My goal was to have participants tell their life stories

so that I could prepare a written narrative of the impact of reentry programs (see

Creswell, 2009).

Participating ex-offenders were able to provide firsthand knowledge of reentry programming; what ex-offenders need to avoid returning to prison; and reentering the community by studying, testing, and observing the reality of their world (see Patton, 2015). The results of this ethnographic study testing the realities of ex-offenders provided detailed, real-life examples. Each ex-offender's statement of facts yielded details surrounding their life. Ex-offenders could also provide detailed accounts of what they had done to become productive citizens or what they felt they needed in reentry programming to become productive citizens. Studying the behavior patterns of ex-offenders during community supervision and reentry gave me firsthand knowledge of the realities of the ex-offenders. The findings of the study will allow criminal justice professionals to assess and address ex-offenders' needs through realism. Reality testing allowed me to capture ex-offenders' experiences fully, including the emotional complexities of their lives, their involvement in reentry programming, and what suited their needs (see Leap et al., 2016). Conducting this qualitative ethnographic study provided stakeholders with an in-depth view and understanding of the realities of ex-offenders (see Leap et al., 2016).

Participants

The participants were ex-offenders, each of whom had successfully completed a reentry program and left the control of LDPSC. I placed recruitment flyers on public announcement boards in public areas throughout northwest Louisiana. The district administrator in the Division of Probation and Parole of LDPSC also agreed to allow the placement of flyers at the local office for an unlimited number of referrals. This helped targeting of ex-offenders' associates, friends, and family members. I also received access

to the department's resources to verify that participants met the participation criteria. If

an ex-offender was interested in participating, my contact information was available on

the recruitment flyer for scheduling an interview. Before the interviews began, the

participants received copies of the consent form that explained their right to participate in

the study and their right to withdraw at any time. After completion of the interviews, I

kept digital audio recordings of the interviews in a locked safe at my home.

I sought 10 participants of this study because this number would produce

adequate data saturation. Although the sample was small, it was large enough to provide

credible and valid findings. The size of a study's sample should be based on the rationale

and purpose of the study (Patton, 2015). Those who have successfully taken part in a

reentry program have an abundance of in-depth information and unique perspectives on

reentry programming. Creswell's (2009) general guidelines for qualitative research are

based on studying a few individuals or sites and collecting large-scale details about each.

Exploration of reentry programming in Louisiana must focus on the human beings

experiencing the programming in a cost-efficient manner (see Rudestam & Newton,

2015).

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Data collection began with providing each participant with an initial informed

consent form to prepare them for the focus of the study; and make them aware of the

research and its risks. After receiving the signed informed consent form from the

participant acknowledging their willingness to participate in the study, I scheduled a time

and location for the participant's interview. I allowed the participant to select the location

and time. The interviews were conducted in person unless the participant wanted a teleconference interview because of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The audio of each interview was recorded using the Otter app and later transcribed using the Delve software tool.

The interviews consisted of the participant answering open-ended questions about their perspectives on reentry programming. I originally sought to complete 10 interviews within 30 days; however, I needed additional time because participants took longer than expected to recruit. Each interview lasted less than 30 minutes.

Following each interview, I uploaded the audio recording of the interview into Delve, transcribed it, and read the transcript to glean information or themes not identified during the interview. Member checking was used to support the credibility of the study. The transcript of each participant's interview was sent to the participant for them to review for accuracy from their perspective (see Patton, 2015). This process also allowed me to address any other concerns or misunderstandings and debrief the participant if necessary. If any participant had requested a follow-up interview, I would have scheduled the follow-up interview at a time and location selected by the participant.

The data collection instruments consisted of the researcher, the actual interviews, and the interview questions. I received a copy of a LADOC-based reentry questionnaire through Probation and Parole, which I used to aid development of the questionnaire (see Appendix A). The interview questions were developed from this questionnaire for accuracy (see Appendix A). Because ex-offenders' experiences with reentry were real and authentic, they produced valid and reliable results (see Patton, 2015).

Data Analysis Plan

Creswell (2013) described qualitative data analysis as reporting findings through data collection strategies. I used Delve to code all data gathered from the interviews. This program allowed me to sort and separate the information into themes. The data analyzed were descriptive and took the form of responses to open-ended questions. I initially picked out key descriptive terminology for the coding process and then created theme codes for the following topics: jail, religion, family, friends, reentry, sex offenders, housing, finance, employment, anger management, substance abuse, treatment, and education. Themes were derived inductively based on the collected data. I used the questionnaire to further explore offenders' behavior patterns and reentry needs. The interviews were unstructured to explore offenders' thought processes.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Credibility

The credibility of research findings depends on the inquiry methods used (Patton, 2015). Asking open-ended interview questions allowed me to determine the credibility of the participants (see Appendices D and E). After verifying that a participant successfully completed a reentry program, I used prolonged, open-ended questions to validate the participant's credibility. The pool of potential participants consisted of those who had successfully completed a reentry program; therefore, they had the knowledge and skills needed to determine their needs. For triangulation of data, participants' answers from the questionnaire (Appendices D and E) were used along with their interview responses regarding reentry programming participation. I could confirm participants' statements

based on knowledge ascertained through the core courses and prior work experience. Triangulation was achieved with member checks; reflexivity; and use of corroborating evidence, methods, and multiple sources (see Patton, 2015).

Transferability

Transferability was established with the data gathered from each participant. The open-ended questions gave me an opportunity to develop a full description of reentry programming for validation (see Patton, 2015). A thick, rich description of the data source took the form of an ethnographic interview with open-ended questions about participants' past cultural experiences (see Creswell, 2013). There were a variety of participants because their selection was random and did not focus on a specific race, age, or background. Evidence was gathered from the data obtained from the participants. These participants had experienced social learning and, therefore, had firsthand knowledge and experience of reentry programming. Some of the participating ex-offenders were habitual offenders, and they varied in terms of age, crime, and social history.

Dependability

I established dependability via triangulation of the methods of data collection and analysis. Data collection triangulation was based on the qualitative interviews, member checks, expert observation, and techniques used to develop a full description from the interviews. Data analysis triangulation consisted of detailed review of the interview transcripts followed by my professional and personal reflection on the interview data

versus my professional knowledge. The final step involved using multiple analysis points when coding themes in Delve.

Confirmability

To establish confirmability, I relied on the data to verify the findings (Patton, 2015). I limited my own bias in the study by including all findings and data in my presentation, regardless of whether I personally felt they were useful. I presented the data so that readers could examine it all and reach their own conclusions. Providing all data collected before analysis ensured there was no misrepresentation of information and limited bias in the study.

Ethical Procedures

The recruited participants were no longer under supervision and received a detailed consent form; therefore, they could participate blindly if they chose to do so. I ensured participants were completely anonymous and did not use their names or identity them in any way. Each participant was coded using the date of their interview, combined, if necessary, with the number of the interview conducted on that date (e.g., "Participant 081121#2"). I explained and displayed this method of identification to the participants before beginning the interviews. The participants were allowed to withdraw from the study at any time without facing any repercussions. Participants also chose the venues of their interviews.

All collected data were locked in my personal safe at my home, where I was the only person with access to them. I reiterated to participants that they would be interacting with a student from Walden University and that all personal information and identifiers

would be safeguarded on a password-protected hard drive. The files would be readily

available for any of Walden University's faculty and staff members. I will destroy the

data at the discretion of Walden University or 5 years after completing the research. The

destruction process will follow Walden University's policies and procedures.

I explained to potential participants the details of the study, how to consent or

decline to participate, potential harms that could result from participation, and how I

would help to minimize these harms. In the event of emotional trauma resulting from the

study, I would have referred participants to a local state facility, the Office of Behavioral

Health, for their counseling needs to be met at no cost. The department covered an array

of counseling topics. If a participant had had difficulty participating in the interview

process, the interview would have ceased, and I would have made any necessary referrals

for the participant.

I also provided a waiver to all participants to waive any liabilities that may occur

on my behalf, which established informed consent. I completed an Institutional Review

Board application for the study, which was approved.

Summary

Chapter 3 summarized the methods used in this ethnographic study that relied on

qualitative methods to answer two research questions. RQ1 asked what reentry topics ex-

offenders feel need to be addressed to ensure habitual offenders successfully transition

back into society. RQ2 asked what role ex-offenders feel reentry programs play in

reducing recidivism rates among habitual offenders. These questions were answered from

the perspectives of ex-offenders, who had an opportunity to expand on what is needed for

successful reentry programming. This chapter also explained why this design was chosen, and how it related to the research questions.

The next chapter explores the application of the design and describes the findings based on the participants' experiences and perspectives of reentry programming.

Chapter 4: Results

In this chapter, I explore the participants' experiences with reentry programs offered in Louisiana. Interviewing ex-offenders allowed me to explore reentry rehabilitative measures from their perspectives and revealed the effectiveness of reentry programming based on ex-offenders' assessments. The interviews also contained factors ex-offenders believed helped them transition back into society and the roles reentry programs played in helping stakeholders reach their goals.

Setting

Two of the interviews took place at participants' homes, three of the interviews took place in an office setting, and the remaining five interviews took place in a teleconference setting because of restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic. No interview exceeded 30 minutes in length. All interviews were recorded after participants gave their consent for me to do so.

Demographics

I did not target any particular demographics during sampling. The participants were male ex-offenders aged 24–65 years old. Every participant had been convicted of a felony and formally incarcerated for no more than 10 consecutive years. Each participant had also completed a reentry program in Louisiana.

Data Collection

It took 6 months to recruit the 10 participants, interview them, and transcribe the interviews. Many potential participants were not interested in participating in this study. There were no notable differences between responses given in face-to-face interviews

and those given in teleconference interviews. I asked follow-up questions during interviews and asked participants to give examples to clarify and elaborate on their responses to the interview questions. Audio of the interviews was recorded using the Otter app, which I also used when transcribing the recordings. I made only two deviations from the data collection process described in Chapter 3. The first was to give participants the option of a teleconference interview instead of an in-person interview. The second was the participant age range, which I extended to include those aged up to 65 years old because of the difficulty I encountered recruiting participants.

Data Analysis

The process of inductive coding began with me uploading the transcribed text from Otter into Delve, the qualitative data-analysis software tool used. Key words, phrases, and topics were selected and grouped to form appropriate categories. After completion of coding, four categories emerged from the data representing reentry topics. The data for these categories yielded two themes: factors that motivated ex-offenders to successfully transition back into society and factors that deterred ex-offenders from returning to the criminal justice system.

Initial specific codes included taught, learned, classes, GED, HI Set treatment, God, church, drugs, alcohol, anger management, employment, jobs, housing, sex offender, mother, sister, boyfriend, counselors, caring, classes, programs, and jail. The four categories were reentry programming (i.e., education and treatment), family and friends, religion, and incarceration (see Figure 1). The categories ex-offenders found helpful were education, treatment, and religion. Participant 072821 stated, "It taught me

the necessary tools to reenter society, because some things, I didn't know". The first of

the two themes that emerged was factors motivating ex-offenders successfully transition

back into society. Participant 070621#2 referred to changing behavior patterns by saying,

"My main opinion, you got to want it! You really got to want to change!" The second

theme was factors that deterred ex-offenders from returning to the criminal justice

system. Ninety percent of the participants said that periods of incarceration were a

significant deterrent.

Figure 1

Primary Reentry Categories
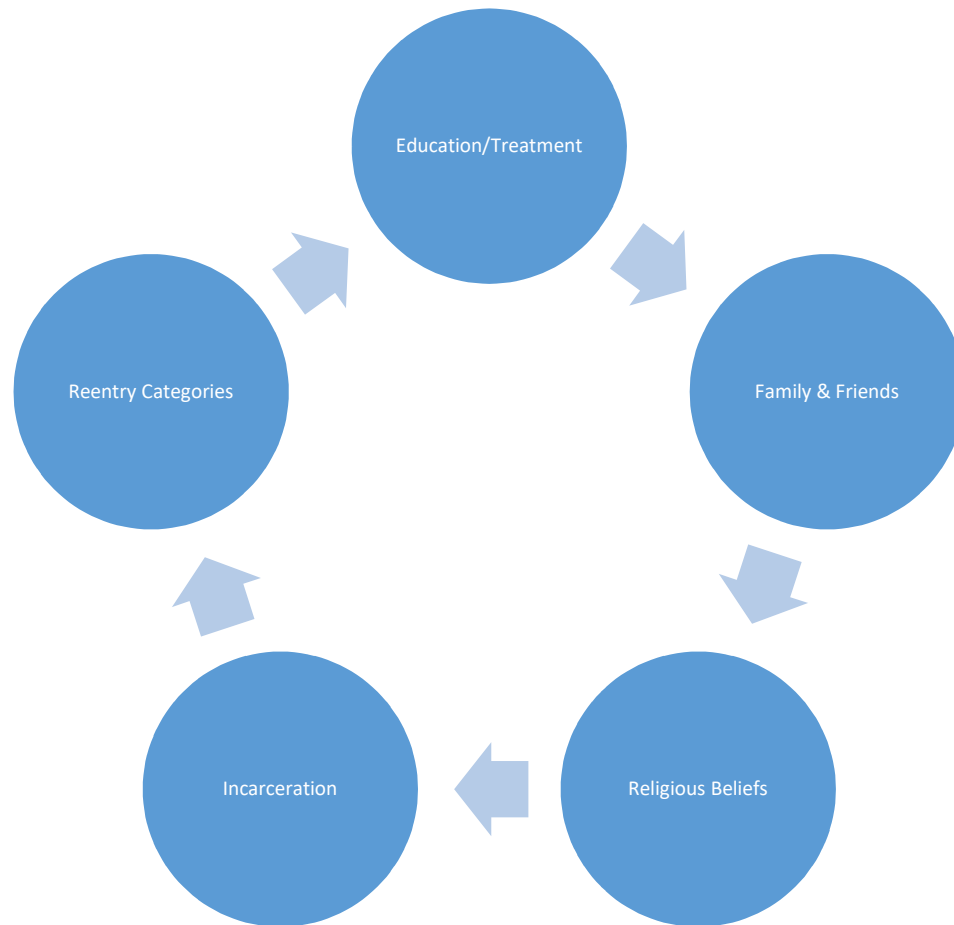
The only discrepant participant was a registered sex offender who said that

LADOC allowed him to attend sex offender treatment but did not allow him to participate

in any other reentry courses: "They wouldn't let me because they thought I was just

trying to get some good time, and because I wasn't eligible for good time, they wouldn't

let me enroll in any of the classes!" (Participant 051321). Although not allowed to

participate in all reentry courses, the participant did participate in sex offender

counseling, which was a certified reentry program. This discrepant case did not affect the

data analysis. Another participant who was also a registered sex offender attended sex offender counseling, substance abuse treatment, and programs based on religious faith.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility

To ensure credibility, I asked the participants open-ended interview questions; all participants fully cooperated. Although not all participants had successfully completed a reentry program and received the proper documentation, all participants had attended a LADOC-approved reentry program. Their participation, verified through LADOC, offered credibility. All participants had the knowledge, skills, and mental capacity required to determine their needs. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, some interviews were conducted in a teleconference setting.

Transferability

Participants provided detailed descriptions of their experiences with reentry programming in Louisiana. Their social learning experiences of reentry programming established transferability of the results. Not all participants were habitual offenders, but every participant had been convicted of a felony in Louisiana and was no longer under any form of community supervision. The participants' ages, crimes, and social histories varied.

Dependability

Establishing dependability began with conducting qualitative interviews of members of one primary group of stakeholders, ex-offenders. Because of their reentry experiences, participants could act as dependable evidentiary data sources. This ability,

combined with my professional knowledge of the topic and ability to analyze the data, established dependability. I used reliable interviews to develop a full description of reentry programming, which connected dependability with confirmability.

Confirmability

Establishing confirmability began with use of the same questionnaire for all participants interviewed. If a participant did not understand a question, I rephrased and clarified the question on request. All interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using the same tools to ensure accurate representation of the information they contained. In this study, I have made the data available to readers so that they could examine it all and reach their own conclusions.

Results

RQ1

With RQ1, I asked what reentry topics ex-offenders feel need to be addressed to ensure habitual offenders successfully transition back into society. For the purposes of this study, I defined reentry programming as processes for restoring someone to good health, behavior, and adherence to legal mandates and social norms (see LDPSC, n.d.). To accomplish these goals, offenders require education about transitioning back into society. Figure 2 illustrates motivational factors frequently mentioned as promoting successful reentry.

Figure 2

Reentry Motivating/Deterring Factors
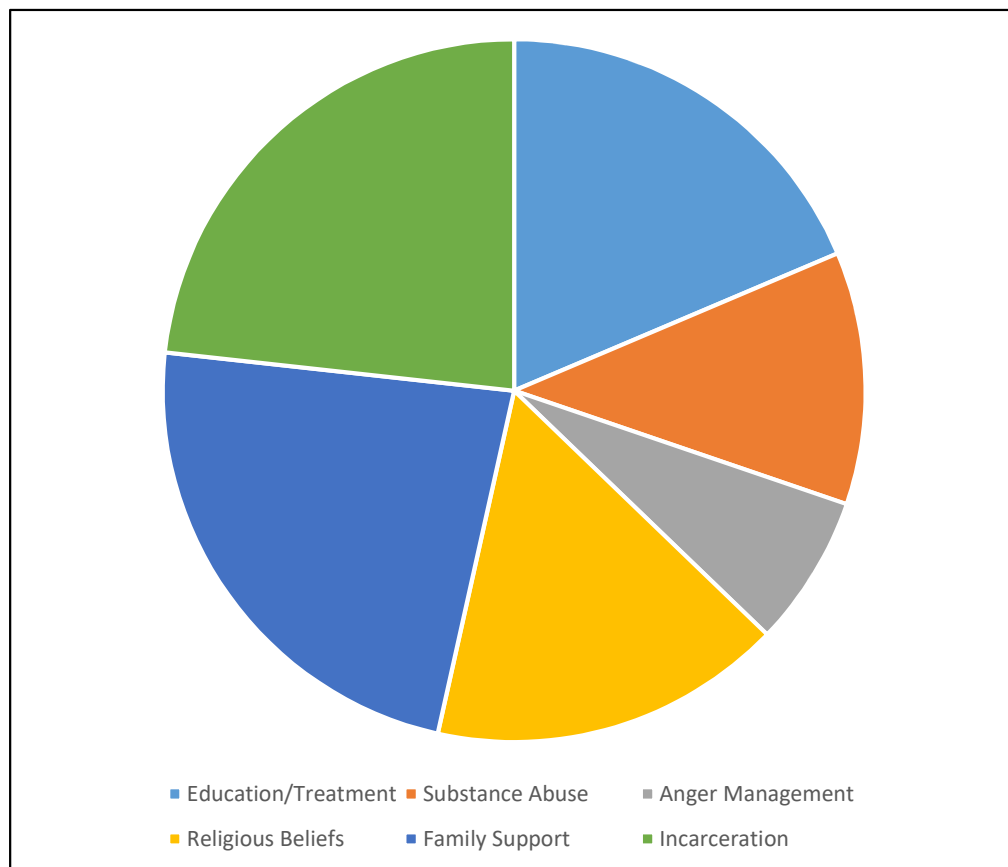
Although all the participants had different needs, each addressed education in some form. One participant secured his GED through reentry programming and was now taking college courses. Five participants indicated that they relied on substance abuse education for successful reentry. Four participants relied on life skills gained through anger management and parenting education. Eighty percent of the participants said that some form of treatment help them reenter. Participant 081121 said that the reentry treatment programs he attended had made him "think about what my actions are and think about what is going on." Fifty percent of the participants said that substance abuse

treatment supported their transition. The three participants who realized they had anger management problems thought that the anger management programs they took part in were beneficial because they taught them to find the underlying causes of their problems, understand those causes, and address the causes of their anger issues.

Employment and financial assistance coincided in the 30% of participants who needed assistance securing employment and 20% who needed some sort of financial support. The financial support came in the form of financial advice and money management training. The participants found financial advice beneficial because it taught them how to open and manage a bank account and credit cards. Employment opportunities were available; however, some participants needed help to secure employment, and others just wanted extra income. Twenty percent of participants needed guidance securing a home. Participants who had family support did not have any issues with housing. Those participants who were registered sex offenders had many restrictions on where they could live. Even if they had family support, it only went so far within the legal mandates they had to comply with.

One participant indicated that reentry programming did not help during incarceration but that reentry programming during community supervision was supportive. One participant said that because he was a registered sex offender, he could not participate in several reentry courses and he suspected certain personnel thought he was trying to get credits for early release. It was not until his release to community supervision that he felt he received more support because there were fewer restrictions and more beneficial opportunities.

Seventy percent of participants relied on religious beliefs for their successful transition back into the community. Those participants who believed in a higher power believed that that higher power was their salvation, which placed them on their ethical path with improved morals. All participants indicated that moral support from family members and friends was a strong motivational factor that ensured their successful transition back into the community. However, every participant also said that his period of incarceration was the greatest deterrent against recidivism and the turning point in his life, For example, Participant 080221 said, "I went through a lot of life lessons, bumping my head and learning from my own mistakes to the point that it woke me up."

RQ2

With RQ2, I asked what role ex-offenders feel reentry programs play in reducing recidivism rates among habitual offenders. All 10 respondents indicated that reentry programs helped them return to the community after their periods of incarceration and helped them use cognitive thinking. Although reentry played an integral part in reducing recidivism among participants, it was not the sole factor in reducing recidivism. All participants said family support was a factor in successful reentry, seven relied heavily on religious belief, and all participants said their incarceration acted as a deterrent that helped them change their behavior patterns.

One participant felt that reentry programming within the community was more valuable than that available during incarceration because there were more courses, and he could choose what would be most beneficial for him. He felt he did not receive any beneficial knowledge or skills from the sex offender counseling he received while

incarcerated. However, he felt similar sex offender counseling that was faith based, which he received while under community supervision, was beneficial.

Eight of the participants had relied on therapeutic educational treatment for substance abuse. This was also an obstacle for most of the participants, many of whom did not want to seek professional help for personal reasons. However, once others revealed factors underlying their problems through reentry programming, these participants were able to address those factors. Participant 081121#2 said, "I would say, basically, going into reentry then, as you know I went in and I was not sober and reentry, basically that was kind of a, it opened my eyes to there's better possibilities in the world."

Many participants were unwilling to attend reentry programs ordered by a court or parole board, and certain factors motivated those individuals to attend, such as sentence diminution or the deterrent effect of incarceration. Participant 081121#2 explained that, "I didn't want to go, obviously, but it's really helped out. It helped me get into a better, better place in my life." Many participants were initially motivated to attend reentry courses because they could earn credits toward sentence diminution if they successfully completed courses. These courses formed the foundation of a potential successful return to the community. Aftercare or other reentry programs were also valuable to the participants.

At the time of the study, all participants were applying what they had learned in reentry courses daily throughout their lives. The overall goal of these courses was to ensure that ex-offenders acquired support or knowledge that helped them successfully transition back into society. The participants indicated that reentry programming can

help; however, individuals must be motivated to attend, willfully participate, and have the desire to change their behavior to ensure they do not reenter the criminal justice system.

Responses to Interview Questions

This section summarizes the responses to the interview questions. Interview Question 1 asked, "How has reentry programming impacted your life?" All participants indicated that reentry programming was a positive factor in their lives. Interview Question 2 asked, "Who influenced you the most, to help get you where you are today and why did you choose this person?" Each participant indicated a specific family member or friend who helped them at some point during reentry. Interview Question 3 asked, "What was the turning point in your life that placed you on your current path?" All participants referred to their arrest or period of incarceration. Interview Question 4 asked, "When did you notice that you were heading on your current path and what changes, in your life, you were required to make?" The participants addressed disorders and other issues that led to their incarceration. Interview Question 5 asked, "Where there many obstacles you had to overcome and what were they?" Many of the obstacles discussed by the participants specifically related to their disorders. Interview Question 6 asked, "How has reentry classes, courses and or programs you participated in assisted you in meeting your goals?" The participants explained the benefits of reentry programming. Interview Question 7 asked, "Why do you think you are on your current path and where do you see yourself in 10 years?" None of the participants had any long-term goals. The majority of the participants were living day to day. Interview Question 8 asked, "What reentry topics

were most beneficial for you?" The participants addressed motivational reentry factors in response to this question.

None of the interview questions could be answered with a simple "yes" or "no," and the questions were open ended to elicit detailed responses. The questions focused on "who," "what," "when," "where," "how," and "why." The responses to the questions established the foundation for answering the two research questions.

Summary

The main mission of reentry programming is to help individuals successfully transition back to the community after incarceration. This transition is so onerous that LADOC has allocated $9,000,000 for reentry programs for 2,955 offenders out of its total budget of $215,500,000 for 38,296 inmates (Antoon, 2016). Although every participant had his own needs, each addressed education in some form. Eight participants indicated that some form of treatment helped them through reentry. The education provided via treatment programs gave participants the knowledge and skills needed to successfully return to the community.

Most of the participants felt reentry programming helped them successfully return to the community regardless of whether they took part in the programming voluntarily. The most significant factor was participants' willingness change their behavior patterns. Exploring reentry programs from ex-offenders' perspectives provided firsthand knowledge of the components required for a successful reentry program.

 Chapter 5 will begin with continued discussion of reentry programming in Louisiana, which leads, via recommendations and implications of the study, to the conclusion.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusion, and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to explore reentry programs in Louisiana through the accounts of ex-offenders. Using these data, I examined what needs to be in place to help ex-offenders gain specific skills during and after incarceration to reduce their likelihood of returning to prison. Education is the focal point of reentry programming, the overall goal of which is to ensure that offenders conform to legal and social norms. Offender education comes in many forms and covers such topics as substance abuse, mental illness, theft deterrence, and job readiness. Hall (2015) identified factors that contribute to recidivism and tools needed to reduce recidivism rates, such as education.

Using a qualitative ethnographic design allowed me to gain the firsthand perspectives of ex-offenders regarding what works and what does not in reentry programming. The participants described what they felt to be true from their points of view. The participants also explained their past behaviors, what needed to be addressed, and self-assessed complications that they personally had to address. One key finding was that although reentry programs can reduce recidivism, they are not the only factor affecting recidivism. Other factors, such as family support and religion, played substantial roles in the successful reentry of the participants. Another key finding was that ex-offenders who want to transition back into society must be willing to change their behavior patterns.

Interpretation of the Findings

The findings of this study confirmed that educating offenders on how to transition back into society aids their successful reentry. Davis et al. (2014) conducted a mixed-

methods study and concluded that although several factors can prevent successful reintegration, the most important such factor is offenders' lack of skills, training, and knowledge needed to successfully return to their communities. Although participants identified several factors that motivated their successful reentry, they also indicated that education—in a form of skills, training, or knowledge—was valuable.

The findings indicated that factors such as family support and religion provide substantial motivation for ex-offenders to conform to social norms. Other researchers have also addressed such motivating factors. Mellow and Barnes-Ceeney (2017) argued that ex-offenders' supervision goals should involve not only the ex-offenders but also all stakeholders, including faith-based organizations, media, private entities, nontraditional networks, community partners, community members, and family members.

LADOC allows many offenders to participate in reentry programming during their incarceration (LDPSC, 2019). The department also gives offenders good time credits, which can lead to early release, for participating in reentry programs during incarceration. Once ex-offenders are released and placed under community supervision, the officers in the Division of Probation and Parole assess the ex-offenders to determine whether further reentry programs are needed and refer ex-offenders to community programs if appropriate.

Many of the community programs are faith based while others are private. Some reentry programs are free, and some are for profit. Individuals who provide these services are community members, and many have personal stakes in the outcomes. Some are recovering addicts and ex-offenders who provide these services as community partners.

Many reentry programs rely on LADOC for referrals, and others use the media to advertise and attract and community support.

Ex-offenders must also be involved in and make decisions about their own recovery and reentry back into society. According to the participants, family support is essential and can cover a variety of needs, including a place to live, upkeep of an existing residence, and financial support throughout correction and reentry, which are essential upon initial release. Family members can also supply employment opportunities, references, and necessities.

Social learning theory, which formed part of the theoretical foundation of the study, contains an explanation of the process of an individual learning certain behaviors by observing and mirroring other individuals in their environment (Bandura, 1971). Reentry programs typically occur within group settings in which those taking part learn behavioral modification techniques, which is the overall goal of such programs. These programs work; however, those taking part must want to change to ensure they do not recidivate.

Five participants chose to move to different areas on release to ensure they did not recidivate. Four of these participants moved out of their old neighborhoods and ceased contact with old neighborhood friends. The fifth participant moved across the state, from south Louisiana to north Louisiana. All indicated moving was necessary to ensure their successful reentry. Those same four participants indicated that they had to sever ties with old associates who could have caused them to reenter the criminal justice system. They had similar backgrounds and explained that their behavior before incarceration was

learned from their associates, who had grown up alongside them. Those 4 participants also said that reentry courses had taught them how to identify and recognize patterns that could cause them to recidivate.

Reality testing, based on Freud's psychoanalytic theory, is the ability to see things for what they are (Blass, 2006). Several participants said that they could not acquire mood-altering substances while incarcerated, so they had a clear outlook on life and were able to clearly understand why they were in their current state. They learned cognitive thinking skills through reentry programming to prepare themselves for life outside the criminal justice system. This process helped them develop skills needed to identify behavior patterns or situations that could cause them to recidivate. Reality testing prepared participants to think logically and view situations as they actually are instead of emotionally. This was especially beneficial for those participants with anger management problems. One participant said he had serious anger management problems and problems fitting in with others. He realized the foundation of his issues and worked daily on processing and controlling them.

Limitations of the Study

The study sample was limited to 10 participants; therefore, the study did not account for the remaining population of similarly situated ex-offenders. No interview lasted more than 30 minutes, with time allocated for small talk before the interview and after the interview to develop trust and establish a dialogue with each participant. The brief time I had with each participant was a limitation of the study because it prevented me from gathering an abundance of thick, rich data.

Another limitation was the difficulty of knowing whether participants were honest in their responses. Although I was able to rely on my interviewing skills to determine whether participants were truthful, I cannot guarantee the accuracy of these determinations. The participants were no longer under any form of supervision; therefore, they had no reason to worry about repercussions unless they gave detailed accounts of criminal violations. I was still a mandated reporter. If any participant had doubts about speaking with a mandated reporter, those doubts could have hampered his willingness to be totally forthcoming.

Recommendations

Future research should include a larger sample of individuals participating in a reentry program, for a more accurate mean value. The researcher should also be a stakeholder not employed by the reentry facilitators, to reduce any bias. Future research should also include follow-up of participants after several years to assess their progress. There should also be a partnership with specific stakeholders to ensure successful transitions rather than a referral system for services.

One participant suspected he was not allowed to participate in reentry courses because others suspected that he had enrolled to receive good time credit. If this is true, any policies in place that prevent offenders from participating in reentry courses should be revisited. An offender should be allowed to participate in any reentry course they feel would be beneficial, unless there is a disturbance or concern for safety, regardless of whether they will receive good time or any potential early release credits. These courses

should be encouraged, and offenders who willingly participate should receive some type of incentive, even if small, for participation and good behavior.

Implications

This study impacts public policy in the field of corrections by promoting reentry programming. Reentry programs lead to positive social change by motivating offenders to change their behavior patterns. Changing these behavior patterns can lead to positive social change by reducing recidivism. Reduction in recidivism rates keeps ex-offenders with family support, promotes public safety, and has positive effects on all stakeholders. If professional practice takes into account the findings of this study and the needs identified by ex-offenders, it can promote strong partnership bonds, which benefits stakeholders. If correction can truly change behavior patterns, it will create positive social change by improving the quality of life not only of ex-offenders but also of their families and the taxpayers who fund offenders' care. For these reasons, I recommend that all reentry programs be made readily available to any offender, regardless of their conviction.

Conclusion

Louisiana's per capita incarceration rate was so high that government officials created a task force to address the issue, and reentry was a primary focal point of the task force (LDPSC, 2017). The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of reentry programming from the perspectives of ex-offenders. Although the study sample was limited to 10 participants, it allowed for the collection of data from a number of similarly situated ex-offenders. According to the participants, reentry programming is only one

factor in reducing recidivism and requires offenders to willingly participate and be ready

for change. Reentry alone will not work, and other motivating factors, such as family,

faith, education, and treatment, are needed encourage positive social change. This

programming, combined with the deterrent of incarceration, reduces recidivism,

according to the participants.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol

Date:_____

Location:_____

Name of
Interviewer:_____

Name of
Interviewee:_____

Interview Number: One

1. How has reentry programming impacted your life?

2. Who influenced you the most, to help get you where you are today and why did you choose this person?

3. What was the turning point in your life that placed you on your current path?

4. When did you notice that you were heading on your current path and what changes, in your life, you were required to make?

5. Where there many obstacles you had to overcome and what were they

6. How has reentry classes, courses and or programs you participated in assisted you in meeting your goals?

7. Why do you think you are on your current path and where do you see yourself in ten years?

8. What reentry topics were most beneficial for you?