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2023

Abstract

Juvenile Probation Officers' Perceptions of the Effectiveness of Evidence-Based Programs Among Gang-Involved Youth

by

Shacourtney Jackson

MA, Saint Leo University, Walden University, 2021

BS, Clayton State University, 2010

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Criminal Justice

Walden University

August 2023

Abstract

Gang activity has become widespread in the United States, totaling over 1.5 million juvenile gang members. Often, male African American youth join gangs at higher rates than any other race or ethnicity, and these juveniles are likely to reoffend. To reduce recidivism in Georgia, policy and lawmakers have attempted juvenile justice reform, but gang activity and recidivism among this population continues to persist. This qualitative study was conducted to determine probation officers' perceptions of evidence-based programs effectiveness in reducing recidivism rates for gang-involved youth. Data were collected through interviews with 10 juvenile probation officers with at least 3 years of experience working with gang-involved youth in metro Atlanta counties in the state of Georgia. Data were analyzed and the following themes emerged: (a) having a positive mindset improves effective strategies with the evidence-based program when there are positive support systems and proper resources for gang-involved youth; (b) effective communication increases the effectiveness of evidence-based programs and reduces recidivism rates; (c) financial barriers can impact a youth's ability to succeed in evidence-based programs; (d) barriers that result in ineffective strategies to reduce recidivism for gang-involved youth; and (e) reasons that increase recidivism and take juvenile gang members down a path to prison. The findings from this research have potential implications for positive social change by increasing approaches to understanding the effectiveness of evidence-based programs in reducing recidivism among gang-involved youth, which could lead to more effective means of addressing this population.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to those who inspired me to never give up and to continue to achieve my goals and aspirations. To my family, closest friends, and my best friend, you have been in my corner and have supported me. It is because of you that I have come this far. With every day that goes by, knowing that I have support and guidance from you has been what mattered the most on this journey, and I am forever grateful.

Acknowledgments

I want to thank everyone who has been there for me on this journey to completing my dissertation. I am profoundly grateful and would like to dedicate this to you. I would also like to thank the Lord above because if it were not for him, I would have never made it this far.

To my grandmother, Dorothy Jackson, you have been an asset in my life. I love you and appreciate you assisting me with my daughter when I had papers to submit and could not be a parent at the time because of pressing deadlines. You have truly been there for me as I obtained my associate degree until finally obtaining my Ph.D. Thank you for helping me be the person I have become, and I will try to instill the same in my daughter.

To my mother, Rosetta McCallister, thank you for allowing me to vent when assignments were due and being that shoulder to cry on. I love you and thank you for always providing the encouragement needed and assuring me that I would be okay no matter what obstacles I faced. Thank you for taking the time and pulling me from writing to take me to lunch, dinner, or to enjoy life. Thank you for your wisdom that motivated me to get this far.

To my aunt, Trina Toomer, my rock and my ace, words cannot express how much you mean to me and how far I have come because of your wisdom and laughter that got me through trying times when writing. I am genuinely thankful to have someone in my life like you. Whenever I had doubts and was under stress, you guided me to the light and gave me the strength to press forward.

To my dad, Troy Jackson Sr., and my brother Troy Jackson Jr., the leading men in my life, thank you both for being there for me when I needed it. Whenever I needed anything, you did not hesitate to assist. During those trying times, I knew I could count on you. I am forever grateful to have you both in my life.

To my best friend, Delquis Olivo, words cannot explain how much you mean to me and how you have helped me on this journey. Thank you for motivating me and pushing me to become the person I am today because, without you, I know I would not have come this far in my life. I can depend on you for anything, and I am so grateful for you and everything you have instilled in me to succeed. I am so thankful that I will forever have you in my corner because the sky is the limit with you.

I want to thank Joy C. Dandridge, who has been there for me since obtaining our first master's degree at Saint Leo University. You have stuck by my side since, and I am so grateful to call you one of my closest friends. You are the reason I even thought about obtaining a Ph.D. because you pushed me to move forward. I just want to say thank you for always being there for me and motivating me to take this journey.

To my fantastic daughter Kaleah Jackson, words cannot explain how much I love you. Everything that I do, I do it for you. You are my motivation and inspiration to keep looking ahead. You have taught me the true meaning of motherhood, and I have loved every minute since the day you were born.

Lastly, thank you to my friends Rocky Ed Simmons, Yulonda Rhodes, and Shanice Moore Webster. The weekly text messages, check-ins, and phone calls assisted me through this process. I also want to send a special thanks to Dr. Haynes and Dr.

Vargo, who helped me tremendously. Lastly, to my dissertation committee Dr. Michael Knight and Dr. Tony Gaskew, thank you for your feedback, guiding me through this process, and being understanding of my frustration at times. This process, which felt like forever, has been a long journey; I made it with these individuals guiding and supporting me. I am forever indebted to you all, and I genuinely thank you for your love and support.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

Gang activity has become widespread in the United States. Studies suggest there are over 1.5 million juvenile gang members in the United States (Walker & Caesar, 2020). As gang activity increases, safety concerns have become an issue for law enforcement officers and the community. In addition, gang activity has increased in the media's attention and has become a major concern at federal, state, and local levels (Walters, 2019).

Gangs originated in the United States in the 1800s in New York City (Howell, 2019). Over the course of several years, gangs began to emerge in communities that had limited resources and low socioeconomic status. Many would call these areas the slums or the projects. Not until the 1990s was gang activity reported throughout the United States (Howell, 2019).

At a young age, juveniles are subjected to their environment, which may lead to a youth joining a gang due to lack of parenting, lack of education, inability to find adequate resources, and lack of skills to seek and maintain employment. Although gang members are subject to abide by the law like every other U.S. citizen, they continue to be mischievous and noncompliant with the rules set forth by policy and lawmakers. Often, male youth joining a gang are of African American or Latino descent.

In Georgia, African American men account for 35% of all arrests. Richard (2020) states, "African American males in the state of Georgia are likely to reoffend, engage in criminal behavior, and become recidivist" (p. 7). To reduce recidivism rates for

offenders, in 2013, Georgia policy and lawmakers developed House Bill 242, or juvenile justice reform. The juvenile justice reform changed the courts and the juvenile justice system by allowing judges to have more discretion to provide more services (mental health, counseling, and community outreach programs) for delinquent youth. This bill was developed to combat gang-related crimes, provide more community evidence-based programs for public safety, and deter harsh punishment for youth who committed status offenses: curfew violation, truancy, and runaway. In addition, the juvenile justice reform created risk assessments and mental health screenings to reduce the number of juveniles going into detention facilities (Cavanaugh et al., 2022).

Although drastic changes were made to increase community evidence-based programs and develop new assessment tools, in 2020, Governor Brian Kemp introduced *get-tough* policies and anti-gang laws to combat gang violence. Kemp's objective is to create new felony laws to prosecute gang members by longer prison sentences, enhancing the fight against human trafficking and increasing the death penalty for gang-related murders (Darnell, 2020). Although Kemp has sought to get-tough policies and harsher punishments for gang-related crimes, advocates still seek evidence-based programs. An evidence-based program is a skill-based approach that has increased positive outcomes for delinquent and gang-involved youth.

Background

Gang activity has become widespread in all 50 states since the 1990s. Studies suggest that states with larger populations have more gang violence. An estimated 1.5 million juvenile gang members are in the United States (Walker & Cesar, 2020).

According to Howell (2019), “Nearly four-fifths of all known gang members were Black or Hispanic, largely owning to racial/ethnic housing discrimination in many cities” (p. 630). Although Governor Kemp and lawmakers have created more get-tough policies, African American male recidivism and arrests continue to increase at much higher rates than any other race (Combs, 2020; Darnell, 2020; Richard, 2020). Because of this continued increase, questions have arisen on whether the department of juvenile justice is doing a sufficient job with juvenile offenders. Thus, to divert youth from going into detention, diversion programs and evidence-based programs were created. Combs (2020) suggested that practitioners and scholars have long debated whether punishment or treatment works to reduce juvenile crime (p.11). Evidence-based programs would assist youth in a manner that improves moral thinking and reduces violent behavior. The Evident Change, formally known as the National Council on Crime and Delinquency (NCCD), has stressed that juveniles should not be treated as adults. In fact, treating them through rehabilitation is in the best interest of the child as opposed to harsher and stricter punishment (Russell & Manske, 2017).

Despite the implementation of evidence-based programs, juvenile gang crime continues to escalate. Research suggests that gang members have the most serious and violent offenses compared to other delinquent youth. According to Walker and Cesar (2020), “These youth typically have the offenses of felony assaults, felony thefts, weapons offenses, and alcohol/drug use offenses” (p. 315). When adolescents join gangs, their criminal behavior typically escalates throughout adulthood. Although the juvenile justice system is designed to treat or provide for the best interests of juveniles, other law

enforcement entities, law and policy makers, task forces, and gang intelligence units have had to assist with this ongoing gang problem to protect the community and reduce future victimizations. Research shows that youth of color typically receive harsher punishment than youth of other ethnicities, and research has shown discrimination when prosecuting these gang-affiliated youth in the courtroom. Often, these individuals are perceived as dangerous and blameworthy (Walker & Cesar, 2020).

Problem Statement

Juvenile gangs have been a complicated social problem for policy and lawmakers, the juvenile justice system, and law enforcement entities in the state of Georgia. Despite the increase in recidivism and gang crime, Georgia has developed a get-tough anti-gang statute to combat this ongoing issue. In this development, the juvenile justice system's mission remains the same: to provide rehabilitation to juvenile offenders. Despite the rise in recidivism, evidence-based programs continue to be used to detour youth from gang violence. Advocates have been encouraging evidence-based programs, but Governor Kemp and lawmakers have shifted their funding toward law enforcement and toughening penalties for gang members (Bluestein, 2021). Georgia has a high recidivism rate for gang members. Perhaps law and policymakers should direct more funding toward improving or providing more evidence-based programs directed toward gangs, which could assist with reducing recidivism. To fill a gap in the literature, I conducted this study to focus on the perceptions of juvenile probation officers regarding whether they believe evidence-based programs reduce recidivism rates for gang-involved youth.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research was to better understand the perceptions of juvenile probation officers regarding evidence-based programs and whether they believe these programs reduce gang activity. Qualitative research helps in providing context that may allow for better targeting of future quantitative outcome research. This study could impact future qualitative research, considering the lack of literature regarding evidence-based programs for gangs and the lack of evidence-based programs available to this population. According to Thornberry et al. (2018):

> Although evidence-based programs for a variety of other problems do exist, no known programs meet standards of demonstrated effectiveness. However, modifying evidence-based programs to gang-involved youth is a reasonable strategy for developing a wider array of effective programs to respond to the challenge of street gangs. (p. 954)

In inner city Atlanta counties, there is a lack of evidence-based programs that target the gang population. Most evidence-based programs only target delinquency, but youth who are gang involved have higher rates of violence and are more likely to carry weapons and more likely to be victimized (Buchanan, 2020). Low socioeconomic areas where these programs are needed the most are where these programs are available the least. Interviewing juvenile probation officers and gaining their perceptions of evidence-based programs could help generate future studies regarding efficacy and outcomes, which could lead to more programs available for this population.

Qualitative and quantitative research are used to enhance understanding and knowledge through a lens of different parameters. Quantitative research is focused on statistics, and credibility is determined by replicability; qualitative research depends on transferability, suggesting the findings of the research rely on the context or population being studied (Tuval-Mashiach, 2021). Although quantitative studies are used more frequently, replication is becoming less successful (Tuval-Mashiach, 2021, p. 367). Tuval-Mashiach (2021) suggested that qualitative work is needed to learn from informants rather than to control them (p. 369). Using juvenile probation officer participants for this study provides them a voice and the opportunity to share knowledge regarding their experiences. Furthermore, this helps to address a gap in the literature because there are limited studies for this population.

Research Questions

RQ: How do juvenile probation officers perceive the effectiveness of evidence-based programs in reducing recidivism rates for African American young men between ages 12 and 21 who are gang involved in the state of Georgia?

Theoretical Framework for the Study

The theoretical frameworks used for this study were the social disorganization theory and the general strain theory. According to both theories, there is significant evidence leading to criminogenic behavior, including gang involvement, low socioeconomic status, and lack of resources, coping skills, education, and social support from family and the community (Errol et al., 2021; Thaxton & Agnew, 2018). Both theories interpret gang affiliation as caused by contextual factors versus intrapersonal

factors. Lack of resources weaken social controls, creating social disorganization and an increase in delinquency and gang activity for juvenile offenders. Without proper treatment and rehabilitation, this violence can lead to a higher likelihood of recidivism.

Social disorganization theory, first established by Shaw and Mckay (1942, 1969), was later updated by Robert J. Sampson (Errol et al., 2021). This theory suggests that criminogenic behavior is influenced by disadvantaged neighborhoods and a lack of social influence. Social disorganization theory can be defined as a means for understanding how without family and community structure, crime often increases, creating a reduction in social control (Errol et al., 2021). Errol et al. (2021) suggested that individuals who grow up in single-parent homes are at an increased risk for crime and delinquency. The presence of a biological father increased the chances for a reduction in crime by 0.3% (Errol et al., p. 521). Furthermore, variables such as ethnic diversity, socioeconomic status, and social relationships can influence criminal activity. Many protective factors, such as family and church, are stripped from youth who reside in low socioeconomic, high crime environments. Many unconventional behaviors are introduced such as crime and deviancy. Many of these areas create a continuous cycle of unconventional values, and gang involvement repeats across generations (Piscitelli, 2019).

General strain theory, developed by Robert Agnew (1992) has become the leading theory of crime (Thaxton & Agnew, 2018). This theory focuses on crime being committed because of life stressors and emotional factors, including depression, anxiety, and disappointment (Barbaieri et al., 2019). Other life stressors may involve the death of a loved one, inability to accomplish a goal, anger, or mental health issues. Some juveniles

can push through and surround themselves with positive stimuli such as having a mentor, gainful employment, and being involved in prosocial activities. Other juveniles turn to negative coping mechanisms such as delinquency and gang involvement. These coping strategies are negative stimuli and involve engaging in negative relationships and a life of crime. Teijon-Alcala and Birkbeck (2019) stated, "Engaging in negative relationships with others involves a failure to achieve goals, removal of positive stimuli, and subsequently criminal behavior" (p. 412). Negative pressure or strains that lead to a juvenile's basic needs not being met can result in a life of deviant behavior, which can lead to time spent in juvenile detention centers, jails, prisons, and even death. However, interventions such as evidence-based programs may be more proactive at helping juvenile offenders cope in early stages to reduce criminal behavior.

Nature of the Study

To address the research question, I considered conducting a quantitative study, but the specific research design I used was qualitative. Qualitative research is continuing to grow in the criminal justice field. According to Copes (2020), "the percentage in qualitative research in criminal justice has increased from 3.7% to 9.8% depending on how qualitative methods are defined" (p. 1060). Qualitative research was used for this topic because I wanted to look deeper into the problem as it relates to effective and persistent evidence-based programs and gangs. Furthermore, this method would assist with discovering new thoughts and ideas from individual views, insights, and results (see Copes et al., 2020). The qualitative research method leads researchers down a clear path and sets the stage for the topic being studied. The qualitative research design uses

unstructured and structured practices for data collection. For this study, I conducted individual interviews with juvenile probation officers about their subjective experiences. Qualitative research allowed for the active participation of respondents and provided the opportunity to probe socially desirable responses.

Grounded theory was used to collect data. This approach, developed by Glaser and Strauss (1990) was later updated in Chicago schools by Strauss and Corbin. This theory is the most used qualitative method because it applies validity, reliability, and generalizability (Patton, 2012). Furthermore, this theory is used to study individuals and larger societal processes, which is appropriate in this case because my focus was gangs and evidence-based programs in the state of Georgia. For this reason, I selected grounded theory to address the perspectives of juvenile probation officers in relation to effective evidence-based programs broadly examined in the literature. This method provided for the identification of shared experiences among juvenile probation officers who currently work with juvenile gang members on their caseloads.

Definitions

Criminal street gang: Three or more persons having a common identifying sign or symbol or identifiable leadership who continuously or regularly associate in the commission of criminal activities. A street gang is a cohesive group that engages in violent and illegal behavior (Gottschalk, 2017).

Department of Juvenile Justice: Protects the community, imposes accountability for violations of the law, provides treatment and rehabilitation, equips juvenile offenders to live responsibly and productively, and serves youth up to age 21 (Russell et al., 2017).

Evidence-based practice programs: Selection and implementation of programs, practices, or policies that have been shown to work (Lee et al., 2022).

Get-tough policy: Policy that cracks down on rising crime rates by implementing policies, procedures, and shifts in the law to more punitive punishment (Cavanagh et al., 2022).

Juvenile justice reform: Created by the special counsel, issued recommendations to reduce recidivism by investing in evidence-based programs to reduce the number of youth housed in the facility, decrease out-of-home placements, and implement new risk and needs assessments for each youth (Cavanagh et al., 2022)

Juvenile probation officer: Trying to prevent juveniles from further immersion in the system and increase their chances of exiting the system, these individuals address criminogenic needs and foster rehabilitation to reduce recidivism rates among young offenders (Ingel et al., 2021).

Low socioeconomic status/poverty: The social position of an individual or specific group as deemed by their possession of social resources. Youth violence and offending have been well documented when youth reside in disorganized, poor neighborhoods (Yaney, 2022).

Recidivism: Rates based on if evidence-based programming reduces reoffending and can also be defined as a relapse into criminal behavior and a return to detention (Olver et al., 2022; Yanney, 2022).

Assumptions

In this study, I explored whether evidence-based programs reduce recidivism rates for juvenile offenders. Howell (2019) suggested that the field must move forward with the deployment of programs to produce worthwhile reductions in gang involvement and gang violence (p. 996). From my experience as a probation officer, evidence-based programs are put in place to reduce recidivism rates, but for many youths, treatment completion is low. Often, this is due to the youth being unwilling to detach from a gang (see Howell, 2019). I assumed that when evidence-based programs are provided to these youth, they must want to change their behavior and make better decisions. I also assumed that if they have no desire to change, then regardless of the services being provided, no changes in behavior or reframing from gang association will be made.

A second assumption was that evidence-based programs for gang involved youth are all effective. According to Thornberry et al. (2018), "although evidence-based programs for a variety of other problem behaviors do exist, currently no known gang programs meet rigorous standards of demonstrated effectiveness" (p. 954). *Evidence based* can have different meanings, and strenuous standards can be used to qualify whether a program works. However, many evidence-based programs have shown mixed results in outcomes.

Lastly, I assumed that quantitative research demonstrates stability and is crucial in research. Tuval-Mashiach (2021) suggested that using quantitative research has become more complicated with psychology. Qualitative research, on the other hand, is becoming more widespread among researchers. Qualitative research allows participants to have

control through transferability and dependability with regards to findings (Tuval-Mashiach, 2021). In my research, the probation officer participants provided their perceptions and human experience with evidence-based programs and gangs.

Scope and Delimitation

This research was focused on whether juvenile probation officers perceive that evidence-based programs reduce recidivism rates for African American juvenile gang members. Furthermore, the study incorporated researching policies and evidence-based programs that have been used to gain an understanding of how evidence-based programs are being executed to reduce recidivism rates. Currently, there are challenges regarding which programs are effective and evidence based on the current research.

In working with gang-involved youth and evidence-based programs, juvenile probation officers are on the forefront. When juvenile offenders obtain delinquent offenses, evidence-based programs are put in place as an alternative to detention and short- or long-term facility stays. Juvenile probation officers are trained and equipped with finding these services. Evidence-based programs are implemented to maximize probation completion and reduce recidivism rates. According to Ingel et al. (2021), "Perceptions about evidence-based programs can impact how juvenile probation officers adapt and use them, and to which evidence-based programs they refer their clients. While there is research that explores evidence-based programs and delinquency, limited studies examine juvenile probation officers' perceptions and use of evidence-based programs" (p. 4). Considering this lack of literature, examining juvenile probation officer's

perceptions could clarify when to apply evidence-based programs and the likelihood of these programs being effective in reducing recidivism.

Limitations

A first limitation that affected this study was how I conducted my research. One aspect was the lack of information on evidence-based programs and gang-involved youth in the state of Georgia. Most of the information available was focused on evidence-based programs and juvenile delinquency not evidence-based programs for gang-involved youth. Another limitation was the scope of the study. Juvenile probation officer participants provided perceptions on whether evidence-based programs reduce recidivism rates for juvenile African American young men who are gang involved. Historically, qualitative interviewing provides an in-depth understanding from individuals who have firsthand knowledge and experiences of a topic. However, bias has been viewed as a problem in qualitative research. When certain topics are being explored, authenticity can be jeopardized. Thus, building trustworthiness with interviewees can encourage open ended questions and credible data (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Juvenile probation officers were interviewed for this study and a small sample size was considered, which did not guarantee generalizability. Generalizability is when a study produces universal knowledge and is considered as a representative of a larger population because a random sample was employed (Hays & McKibben, 2021, p. 178). The goal of this study was not to reach generalizability, but to help build an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon inner city Atlanta counties.

Lastly, interviewing juvenile probation officers does not guarantee authenticity. According to Nunes et al. (2021), "Authenticity is defined as having accuracy, integrity, proficiency, and connectedness" (p. 2). Challenges could have arisen with the participants' credibility. Probation officers could be afraid of losing their job and fear could affect the information they provide. Also, there could be bias, creating untrustworthy interviews. Authenticity comes with building trust, which opens the door for honesty, integrity, and fairness. Rubin and Rubin (2012) suggested that building trust encourages more open interviews.

Significance of the Study

Despite the policies, laws, and evidence-based programs put in place to reduce recidivism rates for juvenile gang offenders, recidivism rates are continuing to rise. According to Spooner et al. (2017), "Unlike recidivism for adults, there are no estimates for juveniles. However, various studies suggests that recidivism indicates that 85% of juveniles and young adults aged 24 or younger released from a correctional facility was rearrested within 5 years" (p. 275). Implementing effective evidence-based programs to prevent youth from joining gangs should be a priority. In this qualitative study, I examined the perceptions of juvenile probation officers and whether they feel that evidence-based programs reduce recidivism rates for juvenile African American young men who are gang involved. My intent was to interview juvenile probation officers and gain their perspectives in this qualitative study. Limited studies have been conducted to examine juvenile probation officers' perceptions regarding use of evidence-based programs for gang-involved youth.

Summary and Transition

Juvenile offending, gangs, and recidivism are highly relevant topics that have been brought to the attention of the juvenile justice system, law and policy makers, and law enforcement entities in the state of Georgia. These stakeholders have invested time into trying to reduce recidivism rates for juvenile gang members. Although evidence-based programs are an alternative to detention, there is little evidence that signifies their effectiveness for gang-involved youth. Elliot et al. (2020) suggested that evidence-based programs in the juvenile justice system reduce recidivism and provide cost savings. Juvenile probation officers were interviewed to gather data regarding their perceptions whether these programs reduce recidivism rates for this population.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Gang activity continues to increase and has become widespread in America today, with younger youth joining. Gangs create a centrality for violence, cohesion, and respect for their group through threats and violence (Mitchell et al., 2017). With gang violence continuing to increase, there are several factors as to why youth join gangs, such as low socioeconomic status, lack of education, negative peer involvement, and a lack of parental supervision (Babik, 2019). These factors can have a leading effect as gang crime continues to increase, and communities struggle to reduce youth violence. Although the state of Georgia's get-tough policy includes incarceration of gang members, studies suggest that incarceration of youth can lead to mental health issues that could carry into adulthood.

To reduce gang violence, evidence-based programs are strategies used to reduce recidivism. Evidence-based programs that have been used for gang members include cognitive behavioral therapy, gang resistance education and training, family functional therapy, multisystemic therapy, and community-centered programs (Howell, 2019). Despite efforts to reduce gang crime, many young gang members continue to sell and traffic drugs, and they have the highest rates for violent and assaultive offenses. Unlike adult recidivism, statistics for juvenile recidivism are not readily available. Research focusing on juveniles and gangs is limited, but these programs are expected to have large impacts (Howell, 2019). There has been a significant problem with juvenile gangs in the state of Georgia despite the Governor Kemp's get-tough policy and an increase in law

enforcement officers. Evidence-based intervention programs, which are supposed to be responsible for targeting gang involved youth, have not been well studied to show the programs' effectiveness (Boxer et al., 2017).

In this chapter, I provide research on juvenile gangs, the get-tough policies, and recidivism in the state of Georgia. Also, I include evidence-based programs that have been used for gang-involved individuals. Research on this topic suggests a lack of evidence exists proving these programs deter youth from joining gangs and whether these interventions are effective in reducing gang violence (Higginson et al., 2018). I begin with discussing the policies and laws in Georgia related to gang involvement before discussing risk factors, evidence-based programs, and recidivism rates. Lastly, I review several articles that relate to programs and intervention for gang-involved youth and the programs' effectiveness.

Literature Search Strategy

I reviewed the literature on policies, laws, gangs, and recidivism rates in Georgia. I also reviewed other states' statistics and intervention strategies and programs used. There were few articles focused on evidence-based programs in Georgia, but I did find articles regarding evidence-based programs that reduce recidivism in other states. In my review, I considered articles focused on factors that contribute to gang involvement, recidivism, and program effectiveness. All the research was conducted through the Walden University Library, Google Scholar, and Sage Journals. To find resources for this study, I used the following search terms: *gangs, gang involvement, evidence-based programs, socioeconomic status, juvenile justice programs, delinquency, gangs and*

schools, juvenile recidivism, gangs and socioeconomic status, interventions, and *programs*. These terms aided me in obtaining several articles and ideas for this study. I searched databases including Sage Publications, Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice websites, and scholarly journal publications. Most of the articles used in this research are less than 5 years old and focused on juvenile gang members and programs.

Theoretical Foundation

Social disorganization theory was created by Shaw and McKay (1942, 1969) and later updated by Robert J. Sampson (Errol et al., 2021). This theory argues that crime is concentrated in low socioeconomic neighborhoods, decreasing social control and social ties (Lei & Beach, 2020). These disadvantages increase juveniles' desires to join gangs and commit criminal offenses. However, research shows that an increase in social controls, such as family ties, leads to less crime among juveniles living in disadvantaged neighborhoods. This is known as *neighborhood resilience*; with an increase in family ties, a resilience to crime develops. According to Lei and Beach (2020), "To the extent that family integration is greater, this can confer greater family level control, counteracting the disorganization effect of the neighborhood disadvantaged health care systems, lower education attainment, high poverty, and crime" (p. 1802). This theory suggests that family is a protective factor and creates a barrier to delinquency and youth joining gangs.

Social disorganization theory was used to explain why youth join gangs. The environment an adolescent is raised in can dictate their behavior. If a juvenile has more family engagement with less conflict, it decreases delinquency. Most studies have been conducted in metropolitan areas in disadvantaged neighborhoods. According to Lei and

Beach (2020), “More than half of poor African Americans live in disadvantaged rural areas, mostly in the south with disadvantage health care systems, lower education attainment, high poverty, and crime” (p. 1802). This theory suggests that living in disadvantaged neighborhoods increases gang involvement and crime, but active family engagement can reduce it and lead to neighborhood resilience.

General strain theory (1992) can be used to explain life stressors or events that young offenders may encounter and how those experiences could increase youth wanting to join a gang. In homes with limited resources, poverty, lack of education, or lack of parenting, these strains could lead to individuals turning to gangs (Thaxton & Agnew, 2018). Furthermore, when offenders react to those strains, it could be unhealthy and increase criminal offending.

General strain theory is a crucial theoretical foundation when looking to understand why youth join gangs. Because strains can have an impact on juvenile offending, this theory has become well known among qualitative researchers (Thaxton & Agnew, 2018). Strain is a condition or action that is disliked or seen as unjust. Thus, general strain theory argues that those strains—poverty, lack of resources, absentee parent, poor school involvement or lack of education, and lack of social support—lead juveniles to cope by turning to a life of crime.

Literature Review

Juvenile Justice/ Court History

The juvenile justice system was created in the 1800s. Initially, juveniles and adults experienced the same justice process and juveniles were treated as adults. Due to

the harsh punishments of the criminal justice system, juveniles and adults were separated. The first two states to separate youth and adult offenders were Massachusetts and New York (Teske, 2020). Originally, juveniles and adults were tried in the same court room, which did not impact change in improving the court system. Although law and policy makers' overall goal were to provide diversion programs to rehabilitate the youth, rehabilitation gained less attention, and the future welfare of the people gained more attention. From the 1970s to the 1990s, homicide rates increased for African Americans, and get-tough policies came into effect (Feld, 2019).

Georgia Legislation History

Progressive Era

Before the get-tough era, there was the Progressive era, which was established in the first two decades of the twentieth century (Ely, 2019) This era was considered *child savers* because it focused on rehabilitation and therapy. This era also took the blame away from children, citing that children lacked criminal responsibility. However, in the case of *In Re Gault* (1967), the focus shifted from children being in a therapeutic setting to being prosecuted as criminals in court. The outcome of this case was significant because children were provided with the same constitutional rights as adults. Gleason (2019) stated, "Though not addressing the totality of the relationship of the juvenile and the state, the case with Gault asserted a novel proposition: Neither the Fourteenth Amendment nor the Bill of Rights is for adults alone" (p. 361). Although *In Re Gault* changed some of the dynamics with children's constitutional rights, issues remained with

police being able to interrogate juveniles at police precincts or schools before court proceedings without legal counsel.

Get-Tough Era

The get-tough approach moved away from therapy and rehabilitation and created more punishment. This era created the *nothing works* proliferation because law and policy makers tried different strategies to reduce recidivisms rates, but crime continued to rise. Nothing works was created by sociologist Robert Martinson as a retrospective examination to reform the criminal and legal system (Bowers, 2021). Martinson's purpose was not to criticize the reforms already created to combat crime, but for the legal system to do nothing for offenders who had high recidivism rates. This methodology focused more on low-risk offenders and less on high-risk offenders.

Georgia eventually separated their criminal and juvenile justice system following Texas. According to the Honorable Judge Teske (2020), "In 2007 Texas was one of the first states to pass a series of reforms which increased its prison population and costed taxpayers billions of dollars to keep afloat" (p. 1171). Georgia has been a Republican state for centuries and has been led by Republican leaders (Teske, 2020). Politicians fear losing electoral gains, which has been a deterrent for an increase in evidence-based programs (Teske, 2020).

As Georgia continued to rely on get-tough policies, gang crime continued to increase. Prosecutors had a hard time prosecuting gang members under the existing statutes. Therefore, in 1998, HB1391 was created. Initially, this bill focused on adult offenders, but when law makers began seeing more juveniles committing gang offenses,

the juvenile code was updated to reflect felony offenses, including gang crime for juvenile gang members. As a result, more penalties and harsher sentences were imposed. HB1391 became a success and became the heart of the Georgia Street Terrorism and Prevention Act (Pitman, 2021). In 2010, the Georgia Street and Terrorism Prevention Act was amended again. According to Pittman (2021):

Aggrieved by a pattern of gang activity, the subsection now allows any person aggrieved by a criminal street gang or criminal gang activity. Thus, the burden was lowered to what must be proven and allowed more opportunities to establish how the plaintiff was aggrieved. (p. 5). Under the Georgia code, any person involved in a gang or commit gang activity through the commission of offense under this act was prohibited (O.C.G.A. 16-15-4, 2010).

Juvenile Court History/House Bill 242

After the change in the court system separating juveniles and adults, issues arose in Georgia with how juveniles were treated. Many of these youth were being charged as adults if they committed one of seven crimes: murder, rape, armed robbery, aggravated child molestation, aggravated sodomy, aggravated sexual battery, and voluntary manslaughter (Peterson, 2006). In 2013, Governor Nathan Deal created House Bill 242/juvenile justice reform with many changes in the juvenile justice system. This bill was responsible for separating Class A and Class B felony juvenile offenders. Class A felony offenders were committed to the Department of Juvenile Justice for 5 years, and Class B offenders were committed for 3 years (Teske, 2020). Previously, Class A and Class B felons had been treated the same and given the same sentence. Also, this bill

focused more on at-risk youth opposed to those who committed minor status offenses, such as running away or truancy. The courts did not commit low-risk offenders to the department of juvenile justice and prohibited out-of-home placements for youth who were low-risk offenders. Lastly, evidence-based programs were put in place to provide services and treatment to juvenile offenders as an alternative to detention.

Since taking office in March 2017, Governor Kempt has taken a different approach to handling crime in Georgia. Kemp does not base crime reduction on evidence-based programs and has unveiled new penalties to combat crime. Kemp's leadership relies on get-tough policies to handle the increase in crime, including gangs and drug/sex trafficking. In 2020, the governor advised Georgians were under siege because of the increase in gang violence (Bluestein, 2020). The Office of Juvenile Justice reported that there are nearly one million gang members—now three times more than previous estimates (Merrin et al., 2020, p. 624). Research suggests that most gang offenses are created by juveniles, suggesting the governor's get-tough policies effectiveness is doubtful (Bluestein, 2020). Because politicians and law makers focus has been on get-tough policies, limited resources are available to address the ongoing gang problem among juveniles in the community or reentering the community from detention. According to Spooner et al. (2017), "Upon release from juvenile detention, gang involved youth often recidivate more frequently and sooner than their non gang counterparts" (p. 275). Strategies to reduce crime with evidence-based programs has shifted with Georgia's current governor, and the focus is less on validated programs to assist with lowering recidivism rates.

In addition to the reduction in evidence-based program, several cuts have been made in Georgia's court system. Cuts were made in the public defender sector and accountability court (Bluestein, 2020). Communities have been impacted by this decision because accountability courts hold juveniles accountable for the crimes they commit and implement practices and programs to restore a juvenile offender reentering the community. Limited funding created limited discretion for judges, decision making, and a decrease in rehabilitation programs (Arnett, 2018). Cut funding also affected savings of taxpayer dollars and eliminated programs that work (Bluestein, 2020). The previous governor's plan was aimed at success in reducing recidivism, but law makers are skeptical about the success of the current governor's plan to crack down on crime.

Five Domains of Gang Membership

In gangs, particularly in neighborhoods with a low socioeconomic status, membership entail juveniles gaining social and cultural needs. Gang memberships has increased from 2% to 37% (Lenzi et al., 2019, p.563). Often, these youth need financial stability and protection to overcome residing in poverty. There are several risk factors that have been determined to influence juveniles joining a gang: peer groups, family, school, and community factors (Higginson et al., 2018). When youth join gangs, they believe that they are making a rational choice, and they see it as a personal advantage.

Ethnicity and Gang Involvement

A juvenile in a street gang could be violent, aggressive, and show more representation such as symbols, tattoos, graffiti, or committing an illegal act that is against the law (Gottschalk, 2017). Gottschalk (2017), states "Gang members are

typically violent, young, urban males with tattoos or other visible symbols—basically someone to be feared. A criminal street gang is a troublesome group that is readily identifiable and evokes reactions from the public" (p. 1268). When a juvenile commits a criminal act, it puts the community at risk, and it increases their criminal ability to reoffend.

Ethnicity and race have become an important factor when it comes to gang involvement. Youth who have joined a gang has experienced higher rates of trauma, neglect, and maltreatment than youth who are not in a gang (Mendez et al., 2020). Often, these youth are less acquiescent to receiving evidence-based treatment. Research shows that ethnicities who experienced trauma and maltreatment the most, and are more susceptible to joining gangs are Blacks, Latinos, and Native Americans (Boxer et al., 2022; Mendez et al. 2020). Studies also show that minorities are less fearful of crime than their White counterparts because they have resided in neighborhoods with high volumes of crime, gang involvement, and lower socioeconomic status (Lane and Fox, 2020). During adolescents, when a child is exposed to emotional and physical stress, it creates a negative environment, and increases delinquency. Due to these factors, minorities develop a lack of empathy towards authority and develop a lack of remorse for their criminal actions (Mendez et al., 2020).

Peer Groups and Gang Involvement

As youth grow into adolescents, peers become the number one influence in their life, and depending on whether those youth are negative or positive, it can be a major factor. When youth associate with negative peers, it can influence delinquent and

criminal behavior (Conway-Turner et al., 2020). Some adolescents make the decision to associate themselves with negative peers, while others are drawn to positive ones (Walters, 2020). Peers are the primary source of information because they influence adolescent development. Buchanan (2019) suggested that youth join gangs because they have delinquent friends (p. 2). When a youth join a gang, their criminal activity increases, causing them to become involved with the juvenile justice system. Additionally, these adolescents are less likely to obtain employment as adults and more likely to have financial problems. They look to the gang for support, financial stability, and as family. Furthermore, many of them who are in gangs come from broken families, have less family support, and a lack of parental supervision.

Studies continue to investigate whether joining a gang is based on delinquent friends. Thomas (2018) suggested that when there is delinquent behavior in a youth, it does not necessarily mean that they are associating with negative friends, but there are other factors that could influence delinquency such as society bonding, gender, and self-control. However, other researchers argue that associating with negative peers play a role in the choices that they make when committing delinquent acts (Thomas, 2018, p. 716). When looking at the word choice for example, youth who are already in a gang, but rank low, makes the choice to commit a criminal act to gain a reward for their deviant behavior and move up in rank. On the other hand, those youth who are already high ranking may not be influenced by social influence and rewards.

Juvenile Gang Members and Lack of Resources and Socioeconomic Status

Low socio-economic status has become an issue in the United States as to why youth join gangs. According to Osman and Wood (2021), “Empirical research shows that gang members have disruptive family lives, and they live in deprived communities where their psychological impact can be affected” (p. 2). When looking at psychological impact, studies suggest that living in deprived neighborhoods can affect the mental health state of a person and influence them to join a gang. For young men who are living in deprived areas, they join a gang to learn masculinity. Usually in poor areas, there are limited prosocial activities and they turn to gang members to gain power and respect (Higginson et al., 2018). Although this is their way of overcoming poverty, it increases arrest and a path to crime.

A families’ socioeconomic status is a comprehensive reflection of their overall social capital. Residing in poor neighborhoods can have an influence on life’s course, such as finding positive peers and role models, and reframing from deviant behavior. Research has noted that if poverty areas became gentrified, it could increase the values in homes and community development and reduce violent offending. With gentrification, a study of 500 cities suggested that it increased the wellbeing and health of poor neighborhoods (Tran et al., 2020).

African American young men between the ages of 13-16, living in poverty increases the chances of delinquency. Minority youth are leading in the juvenile justice system compared to other ethnic groups. Research suggests that minorities are overrepresented in official records and self-reporting by 21%-38% (Carson, 2018, p.

451). In addition to leading in the highest incarceration rate, minority youth reside in poorly resourced communities with blocked opportunities and limited resources (Carson, 2018). Due to gang involved minority youth living in disadvantaged communities, it increases the likelihood of street socialization and criminal offending.

School and Gang Life

School failure is significant when it comes to gang involved youth in the United States. Schools should focus on gang involvement because students who are gang involved have higher incarceration rates than their peers who are not gang involved. Higginson et al. (2018) states "Gang members that have low attachment, exposure to violence at school, and educational difficulties show significant association for gang involvement" (p. 9). Gang membership can begin in preschool if there is a lack of parenting, socio-economic factors, and high levels of family conflict. Schools have now become recruiting grounds for gang members.

Gangs and schools are a major factor for gender differences and race/ethnicity. African Americans are sent to alternative schools and expelled at higher rates than other ethnicities (Carson, 2018). Research has established that with a lack of education and low level of literacy, there are higher levels of juvenile justice involvement for African Americans. Minorities who disengaged in school expectations are called oppositional culture, but those who are engaged are acting White or are called nerds (Edward, 2021). To steer away from oppositional culture, teachers and counselors actively support and engage African American students, by providing resources that helps with building academic performance and achieving academic success.

Lack of Parental Involvement and Gang Affiliated Youth

As an adolescent, peers serve as the main source for socialization. However, family plays as a major factor as well. Throughout the stages of adolescent development, family and parental behavior has an influence on a youth's life, particularly making right and wrong choices. As adolescents become older, there are challenges that they face, to include negative peer association, drug use, and substance use (Mowen et al., 2018). With positive family support, it creates positive social outcomes. However, negative relationships can increase delinquency and a lack of coping skills. According to Mowen et al. (2018),

Developmental researchers have long recognized that family conflict is associated with several deleterious outcomes beyond delinquency and offending. These negative outcomes can be broadly categorized as issues of externalization (aggression and antisocial behavior) or internalization (depression and low self-esteem) (p. 277).

Parents are a support factor because they provide warmth and discipline when needed. These two factors contribute to the emotional wellbeing of an adolescent that has been linked to reducing delinquent involvement. Studies show that when an adolescent is impacted by a negative family environment it increases their association in wanting to join a gang (Higginson et al., 2018). However, the possibility of joining a gang when there is a positive family environment decreases those odds.

Much of the research on gangs and family are due to a lack of parenting and parental conflicts. When there are parental conflicts in the home, it often increases anxiety, depression, and negative outcomes on an adolescent's life. Additionally, it

creates a breakdown in social bonding and increases delinquency and criminal activity (Carson, 2018). It is important that adolescents feel safe and have the protection and security that they feel is needed within the family structure to be productive.

Evidence-Based Programs

To reduce recidivism in the juvenile justice system, evidence-based programs have become more prevalent in the United States today. According to Elliot et al. (2020), "Evidence-based programs are effective treatment and prevention models that focus on programs, practices, and policies" (p. 1305). Considering the increase of gang members, federal, state, and local governments have invested in interventions to try and combat this gang problem. Evidence-based programs came into effect in 2013 in Georgia, during the development of the juvenile justice reform, when changes were made to the juvenile code. Emphasis was placed on evidence-based programs as a decision-making tool to reduce reoffending (Russell, 2017). Studies suggests that this tool provides cost savings and reduces recidivism rates by 10% and will save over $425 million by 2030 (Elliott et al., 2020, p.1314).

Evidence-based programs were sought in the state of Georgia because many low-risk youth were taken out of their homes and placed in programs designed for high-risk offenders (Russell, 2017). Before House Bill 242/juvenile justice reform was created, many judges' hands were tied because there were not enough community programs for juvenile offenders. However, after the establishment of the juvenile justice reform by Governor Deal, it began to make a difference because judges had more program options.

Evidence-based programs has been an understudied topic for gang members and if these programs reduce recidivism rates. Researchers have completed extensive research on determining if evidence-based programs work. To do this, programs were deciphered by their quantity, quality, and the impact it had on juvenile offenders with deterring future criminal activity (Elliot et al., 2020). In a study that took place in Florida, two evidence-based programs were implemented to juvenile offenders to reduce recidivism rates. The results were substantial and the programs provided cost savings and reduced recidivism rates for these offenders. From 2010-2011 there was an 8% reduction in rearrest and a 24% reduction in felony rearrest (Elliot et al., 2020, p. 1314). Although there are studies that has shown that evidence-based programs are considered best practice, there is no sound methodology for determining what works for gang members.

Multisystemic Therapy

Multisystemic therapy is defined as a community-based treatment program designed to treat youth with behavioral issues (Vermeulen et al., 2017). During sessions, therapists meet with the family on a weekly or biweekly bases for 4 to 6 months to implement counseling and set goals for the family to achieve. In some states, this program showed no significant difference with lowering recidivism rates, but studies suggests that there was a significant positive outcome when using multisystemic therapy (Vermeulen, 2017). Although research suggests that multisystemic therapy reduces recidivism rates for juvenile offenders, there was not a significant difference with reducing the recidivism rates for gang involved youth. They often failed out early in the treatment process or was rearrested early on while receiving treatment (Boxer, 2017).

Boxer et al. (2017) states, “Youth who are not in a gang had an 85% successful closure rate, compared to youth who are in a gang case closed with a 62% successful rate” (p. 108). Despite this significant difference, multisystemic therapy is cost effective and an alternative to detention for juvenile offenders.

Gang Resistance Education and Training

Gang resistance education and training has shown a reduction in youth joining gangs. This training is taught by law enforcement officers and its main goals are to reduce recidivism rates and reduce gang memberships (Walters, 2019). This program has been shown to be effective with delivering the best treatment for juvenile gang members (Box et al., 2017). In one random study, 31 students were chosen from different schools to participate in the gang resistance education training curriculum program. The results were accelerating because the program reduced youth wanting to join a gang. The program was proven to be impactful for ethnically diverse groups by lowering the odds by 24% of youth wanting to join gangs over a 4-year study (Howell, 2019, pg. 634). Because the program was a success when studied, it was executed in many states.

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

Cognitive behavioral therapy, as defined by Denecke et al. (2022), is an intervention used to reduce recidivism rates, reduce distress, and increase adaptive behavior in patients with mental health and behavioral problems. Research suggests that this program may be effective in preventing youth from joining gangs because it changes their mindset and thought process (Hinsberger, 2017). When altering the thought process of a juvenile offender, it diverts them from violence and a life of crime, to focus more on

altering their behavior to think positively and make the right choices. Cognitive behavioral therapy has had its challenges because it has been questioned by researchers on how it facilitates change for gang involved youth. There is not a lot of evidence that shows that this evidence-based program work. However, there are strategies that it has.

Summary and Transition

Based on the research of several literary works regarding juvenile gangs in Georgia, I have considered several risk factors leading to youth joining gangs and using evidence-based programs to reduce recidivism. There is little research on whether evidence-based programs reduce recidivism for African American juvenile gang offenders, however, some of these programs have shown changes for at risk youth, and reduction in youth wanting to join a gang. Georgia's current Governor continues to place emphasis on get tough policies to combat this ongoing gang problem. However, some research shows that evidence-based programs can reduce violent offending, reoffending, and antisocial behaviors.

I discussed several risk factors leading to juvenile recidivism. Studies used by researchers showed that African American youth who grew up in low socio-economic areas, associated with negative peers, and had school related problems often turned to gangs and committed a criminal offense. Parenting styles and or practices are also a risk factor if done inappropriately or inconsistently.

The benefits of this study have been the findings in the research may lead to a profound understanding and contribution of why youth join gangs in Georgia. Although the main goal is to reduce recidivism, law and policy makers have implemented get tough

policies and as a result, recidivism rates continue to rise for gang involved youth. Furthermore, based on this research, there are limited studies on evidence-based programs and its effect on gang involved youth.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

My purpose in this qualitative research was to better understand the perspectives of juvenile probation officers regarding the effectiveness of evidence-based programs in Georgia for gang-involved African American men between ages 12 and 21. In this chapter, I present the research design. I include the rationale, role of the researcher, methodology, sampling plan, and instrumentation. Finally, I present the ethical considerations.

Research Design and Rational

The central phenomenon of this research study was the perspectives of juvenile probation officers who work with gang-involved African American youth in the state of Georgia. In this study, I explored the phenomenon by analyzing the existing literature related to juvenile gangs throughout the country and in the state of Georgia. I gathered data by interviewing juvenile probation officers in the surrounding inner city Atlanta counties who supervise juvenile gang offenders on their caseloads. Due to the lack of literature involving probation officers and evidence-based programs, knowledge on this topic was needed to help address the gap between real-world studies, perceptions of evidence-based programs and how they are implemented, and the research in the literature (Ingel et al., 2021). Probation officers were interviewed, and qualitative data were collected regarding their perceptions and experiences. One research question guided this research study:

RQ: How do juvenile probation officers perceive the effectiveness of evidence-based programs in reducing recidivism rates for African American men between ages 12 and 21 who are gang involved in the state of Georgia?

There are three methodological approaches a researcher can select for a research study: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods. Olateru-Olagbegi (2020) stated, "A researcher must choose research that best address the research problem, answers the research questions, and fulfill the purpose of the study" (p. 43). A qualitative approach involves direct personal experience with the goal of understanding external or internal states" (Olateru-Olagbegi, 2020, p.44). Furthermore, qualitative researchers seek to understand perceptions and beliefs, asking open-ended questions through interviewing (Olateru-Olagbegi, 2020). After careful consideration of this research and the goals of this study, I determined a qualitative research method was most appropriate.

Qualitative research allows researchers to make interpretations from life experiences of others. Unlike quantitative research, which is used to test data and hypotheses, qualitative research is focused on theories and concepts derived from interviewees. According to Merriam and Grenier (2019), "Qualitative researchers are interested in how people understand and make meaning of the world" (p. 6). Qualitative research provides insight on research topics, and participants feel free to express their emotions about a phenomenon from their observations. My focus in this research was the perspectives of juvenile probation officers who supervise African American gang members and who have used evidence-based programs. Evidence-based programs was

the object of observation. This research project is a shared experience, and this made it relevant to interview probation officers.

Grounded theory was used in this study. This theory is the most influential paradigm in qualitative research (Patton, 2015). Grounded theory was first discovered by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and was later reconstructed by Strauss and Corbin (1998). As suggested by Charmaz and Thornberg (2020), *social constructivism* means that knowledge is learned through the interactions of others. The information participants provide is credible, original, and useful (Charmaz and Thornberg, 2020, p. 315).

For this research, I interviewed juvenile probation officers who shared their experiences and knowledge about evidence-based programs and juvenile gang members. Participants also shared whether they believe evidence-based programs reduce recidivism rates for gang-involved African American male juveniles. My plan was to interview 10 probation officers or until data saturation was met.

Role of the Researcher

When obtaining data, a researcher must establish a rapport with the participants, particularly an empathetic one that creates good connection and trustworthiness. Rubin and Rubin (2012) suggested that a trusting relationship stems from a conversational partnership through which a researcher respects the experience, knowledge, and insight of the participant. A researcher should be aware of their attitude toward the participant, including being aware of emotions and needs. Additionally, researchers must follow all ethical guidelines when conducting the study. In this study, all information gathered from

interviews was recorded on Zoom and transcripts were analyzed. Once the transcripts were analyzed, all Zoom recording were deleted.

As the researcher, I did not have any supervisory role with the participants. As a current probation officer, I reminded the participants that their information would not be disclosed, and their identities would remain confidential. Also, I educated the participants of their rights and that at any time they could decline to continue with the interview. Juvenile probation officers provided their firsthand experiences and knowledge about the phenomenon. Furthermore, my role as the researcher and as a juvenile probation officer reflected how I interpreted the data. I took measures to ensure I did not overly interpret.

Methodology

Participant Selection

The target population for this research study was juvenile probation officers who work with juvenile African American men who are gang involved. These probation officers resided in Georgia and had at least 3 years of experience working with gang-affiliated juvenile offenders. I used purposeful sampling to select and recruit participants. Purposeful sampling is appropriate for cases that study people, organizations, communities, cultures, events, and critical incidence (Luciani et al., 2019). The information obtained was rich in context and provided an understanding of the research problem. By using this sampling technique, probation officers who were knowledgeable about the research phenomenon provided in-depth interviews on their perceptions and experiences. To recruit participants, I used social media platforms LinkedIn and Facebook. Participation criteria were: (a) juvenile probation officers who have worked

with gang-affiliated youth for a minimum of 3 years; (b) who reside in an inner city in the state of Georgia and were willing to talk about their experiences as a probation officer working with gang-affiliated African American youth. If any of the probation officers did not meet these criteria, they were not able to participate.

Once the study received approval from Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB; approval # 12-19-22-0607061), probation officers were recruited. To recruit these individuals, I posted an invitation on Facebook and LinkedIn. I asked potential participants if they were willing to participate in the research study and talk about their knowledge and experiences related to juvenile African American gang-involved youth and evidence-based programs in Georgia. The aim and objective were to provide confidentiality, and I provided participants an informed consent form that they read and acknowledged by replying to my Walden email with "I consent." Furthermore, if any questions or concerns arose, participants could contact me or Walden University for further assistance.

The research plan was to conduct 10 interviews, but I met data saturation before the 10th participant. Guest et al. (2020) conducted a meta-analysis of qualitative research and noted that, across four data sets, 80% to 92% of all concepts were noted in the first 10 interviews (p. 2). Data saturation occurs during data analysis when the incoming data points produce little to no useful information about the study's objective (Guest et al., 2020).

Table 1

Interview Schedule

	Question
Experience and knowledge as a probation officer with evidence-based programs	1. How much time have you spent with juvenile African American gang members and evidence-based programs? 2. In your experience supervising juvenile gang members, what additional support (case management, counseling, mental health services, mentoring, etc.) is effective in supporting the evidence-based programs to get positive results? 3. From your personal experience with evidence-based programs, what do you believe could be enhanced to better service youth gang members (whether that be active involvement, engagement, and participation)? 4. In working with juvenile gang members and evidence-based programs, do you see a lot of parent/guardian participation? Why or why not?
Challenges with evidence-based programs and juvenile offenders	5. During your time referring juveniles to evidence-based programs, what have been some of the challenges that you have encountered (e.g., transportation, low socioeconomic status)?
Successful completion of evidence-based programs	6. With gang-involved youth on your caseload, past and current, how many would you say successfully completed an evidence-based program? Why is that?
Georgia's get-tough policy	7. How has the Georgia get-tough policy affected probation officers and evidence-based programs?
Attitude	8. Governor Nathan Deal was all about rehabilitation, and current Governor Brian Kemp has instilled get-tough policies on gangs. Do you believe that current evidence-based programs reduce recidivism rates for this population? Why or why not? 9. Tell me about your involvement in the process of making referrals to evidence-based programs? Do you find these programs to be effective for gang involved youth? 10. Is there anything else you would like to share that could be beneficial?

Instrumentation

In this study, I used three tools to collect data: an interview schedule, Zoom videoconferencing software, and a notebook. Before conducting the interviews, I explained to the participants that there would be no embarrassing answers and each question answered was important for the study. The interview schedule assisted with focusing on memory retention through a conversational approach with the interviewee (see Wheeler, 2021). I made the interviewees as comfortable as possible, building rapports and explaining that their identity would not be disclosed. I also provided the invitation explaining the process, how long the interview should take, and an informed consent statement. I provided all participants my Walden email address and contact phone number.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

In the study, I collected data through interviews with juvenile probation officers conducted online using Zoom. Each interview was tailored to answer the research question that focused on obtaining the probation officers' perceptions. It took 1 month to recruit and interview participants, transcribe interviews, and analyze the data for all participants. I recruited juvenile probation officers in the first 2 weeks and over the course of the following weeks, conducted interviews and transcribed the data for analysis.

Each interview took approximately 30–40 minutes. After the interviews were conducted, I expressed my appreciation to participants for their time and consideration completing the study. I explained the importance of their participation and how their

perspectives had significant value. Lastly, I explained that the results of the findings would be available 6 or 7 months after the dissertation is completed.

Data Analysis Plan

I used the grounded theory approach to analyze my data. Recordings were transcribed verbatim. My first step was familiarization, and I achieved that through transcription and thoroughly reviewing each interview and documents to obtain an understanding about the phenomenon (see Olateru-Olagbegi, 2020; Steele, 2021). After familiarizing myself with the transcriptions, I then uploaded the data into a computer-based qualitative analysis software called MAXQDA 2022. I used MAXQDA 2022 to assist with coding. This software allowed me to upload the interview transcripts to analyze the data and provided basic tools for coding participants' interviews.

After I analyzed the interview transcriptions using the software, coding began. Coding is labeling the concepts, themes, events, and examples in transcripts that speak to a research question (Rubin and Rubin, 2012). To code, I went through each interviewee's transcript line by line to identify words, phrases, events, and sentences that relate to the phenomenon I was studying. Next, I coded the themes. Themes are statements that summarize what is going on, explain what is happening, or suggest why something is done the way it is (Rubin and Rubin, 2012). To find the themes in each interview, I first reflected on what the interviewee said, then I examined the relationship that existed between the codes.

Issues of Trustworthiness

To ensure the quality, trustworthiness, and credibility of my research, the first step was to ensure that the study measured or tested what was being studied. It is important to know that for information to be trustworthy it must be credible. When conducting qualitative interviewing, there will be strategies that work and not work. As a researcher, I had to find the best strategies and techniques that worked for me. The first strategy that I used was prolonged engagement**.** This strategy assisted with ensuring that participates were actively engaging in the conversation and I asked for examples and followed up with questions. Triangulation was used to test for consistency in my research. I had to ensure that the data was accurate, which involved reading and rereading the data to ensure that it was credible. Other strategies to build trustworthiness was being self-aware and reflexive about the research theory. From collecting the data to interpreting it, it was key to remember that the information should not be grounded in your own viewpoint, but all information should come from the data. Lastly, I kept an audit trail. Audit trials are dependable notes that reflect thoughts and the researched material (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Having an audit trail assisted me with the transparency of the research pattern.

Credibility

One major factor about qualitative interviewing is that it produces credible results or is believable from the perspective of the participants in the research. Interviews must be conducted on individuals who are knowledgeable about the study and have firsthand experience. To obtain credible results, I interviewed juvenile probation officers who had

experience and knowledge with gangs and evidence-based programs. Furthermore, transcripts were reviewed to ensure that there were no mistakes. Rubin and Rubin (2012) suggested that the participants should be able to provide their experience and remember the events or processes. The credibility of my research promoted triangulation.

Transferability

Transferability, created by Lincoln and Guba (1985) maintain patterns and descriptions from one context applicable to another. It is the degree to which the sample population is reflective of a sizable or significant population (Olateru-Olagbegi, 2020). The participants for this study were juvenile probation officers who had knowledge and experience with juvenile gangs, their culture, and evidence-based programs. Researchers argue that transferability is rich in detail and will describe the study's phenomenon. According to Patton (2015), "To produce transferability, it will allow credible findings to come from context, participants, data gathering, and data analysis" (p. 156). This research had enough detail that I was be able to paint a picture and guide scholars with the findings.

Confirmability

Christenbery (2017) describe confirmability as a degree of neutrality or the extent to which findings of a study are shaped by the respondents and not by the researcher's bias, motivations, or interests. To ensure confirmability for this research, an audit trial was established to assist with keeping and reporting information, and documents were checked and rechecked throughout the study. Confirmability brought a uniqueness to the research because researchers brought their own perspectives to the study. For this

research, I served as the expert, and the first and second chair offered suggestions and guidelines to ensure that the study aligned. Since the start of the dissertation process, I was in continuous contact with my committee chairperson about this study which enabled me to decide confirmability.

Dependability

Dependability is based on replicability and repeatability. Essentially, it entails having data saturation with achieving the same results in the study. Dependability depends on trustworthiness and ensuring that the findings are consistent (Christenbery, 2017). Peer debriefing has been known to create trust because it builds communication and relationships. My study allowed my first and second chair to make comments to ensure my research was dependable and reliable.

Ethical Procedures

After I obtained approval from Walden's Institutional Review Board, I posted the invitation on Facebook and LinkedIn and began receiving emails from participants who wanted to participate in my study. For those individuals, I provided the consent form and interview schedule and asked via email for a time and date that would work for them after work hours. After each participant responded with a date and time, and an email that they consented, I then set up a Zoom calendar to keep up with the schedule. I also sent each participant a private Zoom link they and I had access to. I stressed to each participant that the information provided was confidential and their identity or testimony was confidential. I asked each participate if they had any questions and I then proceeded with advising each of them that their interview was voluntary and at any time, they could

resend their consent. I further advised each participate of the risk with participating in the study. After the interviews were completed, I thanked each participant for taking the time out of their busy schedule in assisting with this study. I ensured that all documents were kept confidential, and they were stored on an encrypted password protected computer. Maintaining the safety and security of these confidential records were an agreement established between myself, the Walden's Institutional Review Board, and the participants before the interviewing began. After the completion of the study, I continued to keep all documents locked on a computer that only I had access to. The data will be stored on a password protected laptop for a minimum of 10 years, per Walden requirements, before the data are destroyed.

Summary

In Chapter 3, I outlined the study design and provided the rational for selecting a Grounded theory approach. I described my role as the researcher and the data collection process such as the guidelines for selecting participants for this study. Also outlined in this research was the data collection process. Semi structured interviews were conducted on juvenile probation officers with 3 or more years of experience, knowledgeable about African American juveniles who are gang involved, and have experience with evidence-based programs. I also explained the qualitative software that was used. Lastly, I provided evidence to ensure trustworthiness when collecting and storing data. In Chapter 4 I provide the findings of the research study.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

In this qualitative study, I aimed to increase knowledge and understanding of Georgia's juvenile probation officers' perceptions of evidence-based programs and their belief of whether these programs reduce recidivism rates for juvenile African American gang- involved youth. The juvenile probation officers interviewed for this study reside and are employed in inner city Atlanta counties. One research question guided this study:

RQ: How do juvenile probation officers perceive the effectiveness of evidence-based programs in reducing recidivism rates for African American men between ages 12 and 21 who are gang involved in the state of Georgia?

In this chapter, I present the results of the research. This chapter will include the setting, demographics, data analysis, coding, code dictionary, evidence of data analysis, interpretation of results, and a summary.

Grounded theory approach developed by Strauss and Corbin (1990) was used to collect the data. Patton (2015) defined grounded theory as when a theory emerges from a researcher's observations and interviews out in the real world rather than in the laboratory or the academy (p. 18). Open coding was the first step to assess the data, followed by axial coding. This form of coding is an extension of open coding used to categorize the open codes. Lastly, I used selective coding to develop themes. Theming of the data informs a reader what the data mean or what the data are about (Saldana, 2015).

Setting

I conducted semi-structured interviews to gain the perspectives of juvenile probation officers and whether they believe evidence-based programs reduce recidivism rates for juvenile African American gang members. There were 10 participants total, although data saturation was met before the 10th interview. All participants were interviewed using Zoom video conferencing, and I took notes in a notebook to aid interpretation. The interview invitation was placed on LinkedIn and Facebook to gain participants. After each participant responded that they were interested in participating in the study, I provided them the informed consent form and interview questions. In the same email, I asked that they provide a date and time for their interview. All the interviews occurred after work hours when participants were free from work obligations and were able to give their undivided attention to answering the questions thoroughly.

Although the participants were live on Zoom, they were advised to leave their cameras off for confidentiality purposes. Zoom provides the opportunity to interview participants and record them. This application also protected participants' privacy because each interviewee was provided a separate private link that only I could access. Each participant was advised in the consent form that they needed to access this platform from a safe location where their privacy would be protected without interferences or disruptions. According to Bullock et al. (2022), "Zoom video conferencing eliminates travel, and it maximizes the teaching and learning output" (p. 2). The average duration of each interview was 30 to 40 minutes. Initially, P10 did not want to interview via Zoom and preferred to write responses to the questions out on the interview schedule. After

thoroughly answering the questions, P10 emailed them to me at my university email address. However, I had follow-up questions that P10 answered using Zoom. No outside organizations or agencies affected this study, and approval was received from the Institutional Review Board.

Demographics

Participants were 10 juvenile probation officers in Georgia who all reside and are employed in inner city Atlanta counties. These officers had at least 3 years of experience as juvenile probation officers who have worked with the juvenile African American male gang population. There were seven female participants and three male participants in this study. Participants' years of experience ranged from 4 years to 24 years. Table 2 provides the years of experience of each officer participating in this study.

Table 2

Participants' Years of Experience

Participants	Years of experience
P1	9 or 10
P2	4
P3	8
P4	24
P5	15
P6	20
P7	10
P8	12
P9	13
P10	4

Data Analysis

All interviews were recorded using the Zoom application. Recordings were transcribed verbatim by me. Interviews were transcribed verbatim in Microsoft Word. To protect the privacy of participants, after the transcriptions were completed, I deleted the Zoom interview recordings. Also, all names were removed from the transcripts to protect participants' confidentiality. All participants were given a number: Participant 1 (P1), Participant 2 (P2), etc. The transcripts were imported into MAXQDA 2022 qualitative software. The data were analyzed using grounded theory. This theory, which is the most used in qualitative research, does not begin with a hypothesis. The hypothesis/theory is not revealed but is grounded in the data, as discovered by Strauss and Corbin (1990, as cited in Al-Eisawi, 2022).

Coding

Coding is defined as a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and evocative attribute for a position of language based on visual data (Saldana, 2015). Three coding techniques were used to analyze the data: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. In the first step of the analysis, transcripts were uploaded into the document section of MAXQDA 2022 software. All the information was coded using the grounded theory method.

Open Coding

Open coding was the first step in analyzing the data using grounded theory. Open coding breaks down the qualitative data into discrete parts and compares similarities and differences (Saldana, 2015). The interviews were read to thoroughly create a code, the

essential information from each interview was highlighted, and a code was created. The codes were labeled on the perceptions of juvenile probation officers regarding their beliefs of the influence and effectiveness of evidence-based programs. This process was reviewed three times, and 11 new codes were created based on the data.

Axial Coding

Axial coding is extending the analytical work from the initial coding to focused coding. This process further explains how the categories relate (Saldana, 2015). This part of the data analysis was conducted by finding similarities in the codes. When juvenile probation officers expressed similar meanings, it was placed under the same code assigned to groundedness. This process was reviewed three times to ensure that all codes were exhausted and that each response was placed under the correct code. After reviewing the codes a third time, there were 11 new codes that emerged from the data. There was a total of 27 codes and 250 segments of text. Table 3 outlines the codes used to analyze the data using the grounded theory method. The codes are labeled from most grounded to the least grounded in the research.

Table 3

Codes Used to Analyze Data, Grounded Theory Method

Codes	Participants contributing data (N = 10)	Groundedness
Parental involvement	10	43
Lack of resources increases recidivism	6	21
Probation officer's positive thoughts of evidence-based programs with proper resources	7	18
Low socioeconomic status	8	17
Probation officer's negative thoughts about evidence-based programs	7	14
Mindset can cause inability to be receptive to services	7	14
Resources needed to decrease recidivism	5	14
Years of experience	10	12
Georgia get-tough policy impact juvenile offenders	7	11
More punitive measures and not rehabilitation	8	10
Negative case management provides negative support	2	8
Holding juvenile offenders accountable	5	8
Juveniles join gangs for a sense of belonging	4	7
Demographics impacts the success evidence-based programs	2	7
Ways to communicate with juvenile gang offenders	3	7
Education support enhances growth and success	5	6
The need to keep offenders from committing offenses	3	5
Probation officer's negative thoughts of community placement	4	5
Offenders unsuccessfully removed from evidence-based programs	4	4
Programs tolerance for gang-involved youth	4	4
Effective case management	2	3
Barriers to identifying the problem	2	3
Communication to address barriers	1	2
Diversity can improve communication	1	2
Poverty is the norm for juvenile gangs	1	2
Positive parental support	2	2
Assessment and classification	1	2

Selective Coding

Selective or theming of the data extends a phrase or sentence that identifies what the data are about (Saldana, 2015). Similar codes were grouped into themes in the third step of the analysis. Initially, there were three themes, but five themes were created after I discovered more codes that emerged from the iterative process. The codes within each theme were also reviewed to ensure the correct code was categorized with the correct theme. The definitions for each code are provided, grounded in the participants' narrations.

Code Dictionary

Assessment and classification: Youth who are high-level offenders should not be measured with low-level offenders. More tools and assessments are needed to measure high- versus low-level offenders.

Barriers to identifying problems: When working with gang-involved youth, no one takes the time to get to the root of the problem. When these youth act out and are removed from evidence-based programs, no one evaluates the problem or the situation. Realistically, there must be a real solution as to why the problem exists.

Communication to address any barriers: Communication between the probation officers, evidence-based program providers, and parent must be established in case barriers occur.

Demographics impact the success of evidence-based programs: With evidence-based programs, they are more successful in rural areas rather than inner cities. When

looking at evidence-based programs and focus groups, these programs are more successful in rural areas than in the inner city.

Diversity can improve communication: Diversity impacts recidivism and juvenile gang-involved youth. When providers share similarities and experiences with youth, the message has a better connection and deliverance. The youth receive information better from people they are familiar with. These youth should be linked to the right provider that better works with that offender.

Education support enhances growth and success: Education support assists youth with obtaining their high school diploma, GED, trade, and gang prevention. These gang-involved youth should have more education services and extracurricular activities. In addition, there should be more educational services for youth who cannot attend traditional schools. Education services increase success for juvenile gang offenders.

Effective case management: To be a compelling case manager, probation officers must follow up with evidence-based programs and additional services that are needed. They must also receive buy-in from the parent and effectively communicate. It is essential to have a case manager who is humble and humble to treatment.

Georgia get-tough policy: currently, the Georgia Get Tough Policy is preparing youth for prison. This policy has focused more on punitive measures and not rehabilitation. This policy has affected the referral process because the programs do not tolerate behavior issues. The get-tough policy does not implement change and only keep juveniles locked up. Because of this policy, probation officers hold youth more

accountable instead of meeting them where they are. This policy is not designed to help the youth, only to keep them locked up.

Holding juvenile offenders accountable: Rehabilitative services should be provided for youth. However, they should still be held accountable if they do not attend. Accountability comes from the probation officer, parent, and program, which creates a balance for youth to succeed.

Juveniles join a gang for a sense of belonging: It is important not to judge juveniles for joining a gang. Many programs do not want them, and it makes these gang members justify why they want to join a gang. When youth join gangs, they have someone who wants them, and they feel accepted. Many youths join gangs because they cannot fit in at school, and they turn to the gang to provide them with what they need. There is a lack of supervision in the home, and they long for a sense of belonging.

Lack of resources increases recidivism: Juvenile gang offenders lack the resources necessary to thrive and be successful. Many programs once available have been taken away. Resources should be available and assessable but affordable. Many resources and services that could better this population have been cut. Juvenile probation officers have a hard time finding resources in their areas, and parents do not have the resources. With gang-involved youth, transportation has been a significant barrier because their access is limited. Furthermore, there is a lack of programming and funding, two of the biggest hurdles. The government is not giving enough grants/money to run these programs.

Low socioeconomic status: Poverty is crucial when working with gang-involved youth. With many programs, parents cannot afford them. Many juveniles come from low socioeconomic backgrounds, and they commit offenses to eat or get what they need. Often, they are African American, impoverished, and come from low socioeconomic backgrounds, which leads to their criminal behavior and inability to meet their daily necessities. Additionally, transportation could be a barrier because of their economic status.

Mindset can cause an inability to be receptive to services: Youths and parents are not open to evidence-based programs because of their ego, immaturity, embarrassed, and withhold information. The juvenile and the parent must change their mindset. Often, gang involved juveniles are born into their lifestyle because their parents are in a gang too. The challenge is getting buy-in, and they must believe there is a better way. Juvenile gang offenders think that is their way of life, and they are not afraid to go to prison. Furthermore, they do not see the importance of the programs, and changing their mindset could implement change if they took all the information in and used it to their advantage. Many youths do not have a role model to change their mindset.

More punitive measures and not rehabilitation: probation officers have steered away from rehabilitation and implemented more punitive measures. Juvenile gang members do not come from good homes, and there has been an inclination toward discipline over nurturing. Locking up juvenile gang members only causes more problems because needed services are being taken away, and they are only becoming more

institutionalized. There is no more rehabilitation; as soon as they mess up, they are removed.

Negative case management provides negative support: Probation officers must make changes because their actions are not working. Often, there needs to be more buy-in from the probation officer. They only identify what they see instead of looking at the family dynamics. Often, probation officers make referrals to make them rather than reaching the juveniles' needs, and they only care about numbers, not the youth. Probation officers have high caseloads and only assess youth for 30 minutes at a time, and there is less time spent with these offenders.

Offenders unsuccessfully removed from evidence-based programs: Offenders are unsuccessfully discharged from programs because of their behavior. Many youths do not attend, which causes dismissal. Often, families are not working with the programs due to inconsistent participation.

Parental involvement: Parents are not involved with gang-involved youth, and there should be a mandate to get parents involved. Parents are not involved because of financial challenges, stability problems, and having employment that prevents them from being involved. Parents cannot afford to lose their jobs. Instead of participating in services for their child, they believe they do not have to be a parent at that time. Parental involvement must occur for programs to work, and parents should be held accountable. Often, gang involved youth come from single-parent households with multiple children. Their parents work nontraditional hours or jobs that interfere with their participation in evidence-based programs. Parents do not support them or take them to services. Parents

need to be fully active in the process to avoid a disconnect. Without parental involvement, youth become parentified and must take on adult responsibilities. When parents are asked to participate, they become offended and advise that they are not on probation. Parents feel the programs interfere with their daily lives. A lack of parental involvement leads to criminogenic behavior.

Probation officers' positive thoughts of evidence-based programs: Evidence-based programs can reduce recidivism rates with proper funding and resources. The programs succeed when there is accountability for the youth and the parent. Evidence-based programs help these gang-involved youth see a different way of life, teach them productive ways to use their time, assist with traumas, provide coping mechanisms, and provide an outlet to keep them from their gang-involved peers. The juvenile code has shown effectiveness with evidence-based programs because it has been shown to reduce recidivism rates since 2014. Juveniles with no evidence-based programing are more likely to reoffend than those involved in an evidence-based program.

Probation officers' negative thoughts about evidence-based programs: Evidence-based programs are not based on individuality. Some of these evidence-based programs are not set up to help individuals but to collect data. There are inconsistencies in many of these programs; they do not target these gang-involved youth and their behaviors. Many programs pick which youth they want to work with. Often, they do not want to service gang offenders because the programs are resistant to dealing with this population. Evidence-based programs are a good initiative but are not well put together. When these youth are referred to programs, it forces probation officers to identify youth who were

never looked at before negatively. Evidence-based providers demonstrate a lack of empathy and positive relationship building. Many providers do not want to change, and they do not want to meet these youth where they are. These programs are not geared toward families who need them and are not geared toward juvenile gang members. When placed in these programs, they are not given a chance, and by the time they experience a setback, they are being removed.

Probation officers' negative thoughts of community placement: In working with juvenile gang youth, when they are moved from the home to attend a program they are placed back into the same environment, and the problems that occurred before happens over again like a repeated cycle and they make the same negative life choices.

Positive parental support: Gang-involved youth who have the support of their parent have been successful. Parental support plays a huge part in gang members' success. Parental support is critical to fulfilling their sense of belonging and acceptance.

Poverty is the norm for juvenile gang members: Poverty does not affect juvenile gang members because it is the norm. Additionally, poverty does not interfere with evidence-based programs because juvenile gang members are born and raised in low socioeconomic areas.

Programs do not have tolerance for gang involved youth: gang involved youth are excluded from programs because they are in a gang or services are discontinued when they make minor mistakes. Often, programs do not have the patience to deal with the caliber of youth in metro Atlanta, however, if they did it would help with reducing recidivism rates.

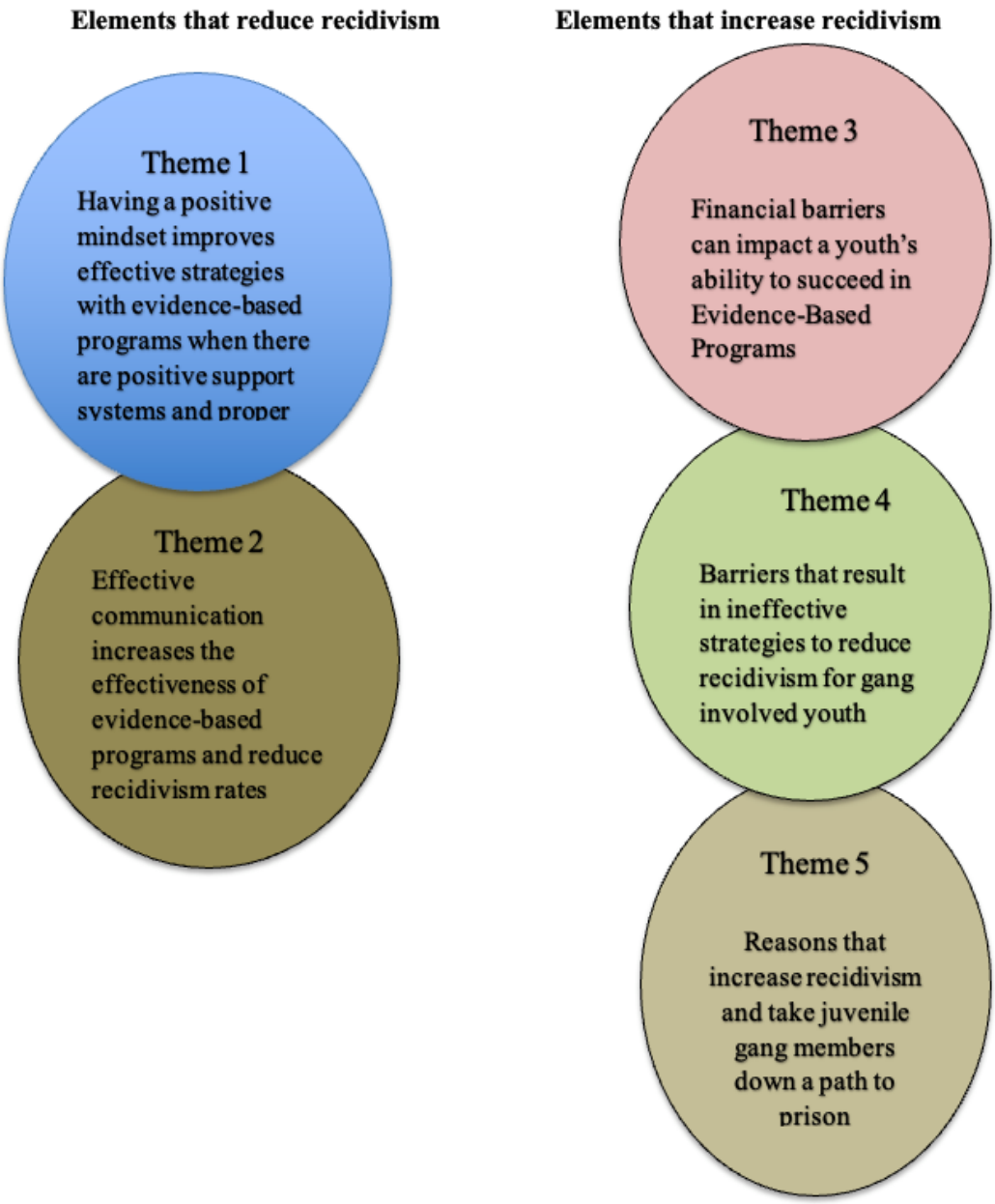
Resources needed to decrease recidivism: Resources dedicated for juvenile gang members to be effective. It is essential to look at things that were cut out to see what worked, such as proper funding, mental health services, family support, and mentoring services to assist youth with better life choices. Additionally, there should be positive peer selection groups.

The need to keep offenders from committing crimes: When meeting juvenile offender needs, it is essential to keep them from gang-involved peers or committing additional offenses. Any professional (counselor, therapist, etc.) meeting these youths needs to have a license. Meeting these youths needs not only targets the youth but the family as well. It is necessary to target their needs first and eliminate any distractions that may come about, i.e., completing referrals that fit the needs of each offender. Target their needs specifically.

Ways to communicate with juvenile gang members: To communicate with juvenile gang members, a person must be honest and genuine, relate to them, and be personable. They should get to know the juvenile and meet them on their level. To be the right mentor or counselor, they must provide engagement, and active participation, build a rapport and establish a relationship. Providers must continuously seek the youth even when they make mistakes, so they know the program has their best interest at heart.

Figure 1

Themes



As outlined in Chapter 3, the data analysis plan included credibility, transferability, confirmability, and dependability. As I completed the interviews, the

importance of each became more evident. The following section will describe how juvenile probation officers' trustworthiness was found in each component during data collection.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility

As outlined in Chapter 3, interviews must be conducted with individuals who are knowledgeable about the study through firsthand experience (Rubin and Rubin, 2012). As mentioned, I selected probation officers with three years or more of experience in the field. Participants had tremendous experience, with the most being 24 years. Each juvenile probation officer was very knowledgeable about gang-involved youth and brought their perspectives on the questions provided. There were similar opinions on each question, and everyone was in agreeance with the most grounded segments: *parental involvement, lack of resources increases recidivism, probation officer positive thoughts of evidence-based programs, low socioeconomic status, and probation officers' negative thoughts of evidence-based programs.*

Transferability

Transferability is the degree which the sample population reflects a sizable or significant population (Olateru-Olagbegi, 2020). Before the data collection process began, it was evident that most of the gang population was in inner city Atlanta counties. Therefore, the invitation specified that the selected participants should be juvenile probation officers who reside and are employed in inner city Atlanta. The thought process before the interviews was this group have more knowledge and experience about juvenile

gangs in inner city Atlanta since they deal with this demographic continuously. Also, they were aware of the socio-economic status of this population. The participants brought knowledge and experience to their interviews. Additionally, many were aware of this demographic's low socio-economic status with limited resources. The sample consisted of 10 participants, although data saturation occurred before the 10th interview.

Confirmability

As outlined by Christenbery (2017), confirmability is the findings described and shaped by the respondents and not by the researcher's bias, motivations, or interests. After gathering the participants, providing the interview schedule and consent form, and setting up a date and a time, the interviews were conducted through Zoom. All interviews were recorded. When the interviews were conducted, I introduced myself, readvised each participant of their rights, and explained that all information would be confidential. As the participants provided their perspectives, I listed and took notes to aid interpretation. The interviews were interrupted when more clarification was needed on specific questions. Although I have 10 years of experience in juvenile probation, there were no leading questions or biases. All participants answered the questions thoroughly and from their perspectives.

Dependability

Dependability is the replicability and repeatability of the findings are consistent (Christenbery, 2017). From all aspects of the interviews, similarities appeared when talking about parental involvement, resources, residing in low socioeconomic status, changing their mindset, punitive measures, probation officers' positive and negative

thoughts about evidence-based programs, and Georgia's get-tough policy. Much of the information became repetitive quickly because their perspectives were similar. New insights came with a few answers. However, this study showed evidence of similarities with the juvenile probation officers. Most of the responses were consistent among the ten participants.

Results

The research question used to guide this study was: How do juvenile probation officers perceive the effectiveness of evidence-based programs in reducing recidivism rates for African American men ages 12-21 who are gang involved in the state of Georgia? Five themes emerged while analyzing the data. Those five themes are: (a) having a positive mindset improves effective strategies with evidence-based programs when there are positive support systems and proper resources for gang-involved youth; (b) effective communication increases evidence-based programs' effectiveness and reduces recidivism rates; (c) financial barriers can impact a youth's ability to succeed in evidence-based programs; (d) barriers that result in ineffective strategies to reduce recidivism rates for gang-involved youth; (e) reasons that increase recidivism and take juvenile gang members down a path to prison.

Theme 1

Theme 1 was identified as having a positive mindset improves effective strategies with evidence-based programs when there are positive support systems and proper resources for gang-involved youth. There was a total of seven codes grounded in Theme 1. The codes were: years of experience, positive parental support, education support

enhances growth and success, diversity can improve communication, the need to keep offenders from committing crimes, communication to address barriers, resources needed to decrease recidivism, and probation officers' positive thoughts of evidence-based programs with proper resources. The two most grounded codes for this theme were probation officers' positive thoughts of evidence-based programs with the proper resources and years of experience. There were seven out of ten participants and 18 grounded segments for probation officers' positive thoughts of evidence-based programs with proper resources, and 10 participants and 11 grounded segments for years of experience based on the participant's responses. Both codes enhanced evidence-based programs when there were positive support systems for gang-involved youth. Evidence-based programs are interventions put in place for juvenile offenders. However, having the proper resources could affect the implementation of these programs. The participants advised that evidence-based programs are effective, and they do reduce recidivism rates with proper funding. P7 stated, "In my experience, evidence-based programs reduce recidivism when they have the proper funding and support to service the gang-involved population. When a juvenile does not receive evidence-based programming, they are more likely to re-offend than those who do."

When probation officers have positive thoughts about evidence-based programs, it changes how they implement them. According to Ingel et al., (2022), "Juvenile probation officers' perceptions about the validity of evidence-based programs affects their use of evidence-based programs (p. 976). These programs assist with traumas and provide coping and, if properly funded, could reduce recidivism rates for this population of

offenders. P7 further stated, “I find the programs to be effective. Evidence-based programs have shown that if properly funded and supported by all stakeholders, it will likely reduce recidivism rates and provide the youth with an outlet to keep them away from their gang-involved peers.”

The 7 participants in the study agreed that when probation officers have a positive mindset about evidence-based programs with the proper resources, they are effective, increasing success. The code years of experience focused on how much knowledge and expertise each probation officer had in the field. P1 stated, “I have 9 or 10 years in this field,” and P7 stated, “I have 10 years of experience.” Exploring the years of experience of each juvenile probation officer provided an understanding how this plays a vital role in the effectiveness of evidence-based programs in reducing recidivism. P1 perceived that based on the years of experience, it determined how engaged probation officers were with putting services in place for these youth. P1 stated, “Seasonal probation officers are more devoted to helping find the evidence-based programs.” P1 believed that the more years of experience the juvenile probation officers had, the more willing they were to help youth find evidence-based programs to be successful.

Based on the most grounded codes in Theme 1, years of experience and probation officers’ positive thoughts of evidence-based programs with proper resources, participants perceived that more years of experience dictated how willing they were to put evidence-based programs in place for gang-involved youth. Furthermore, with probation officers’ thoughts of evidence-based programs with proper resources, evidence-based programs are considered interventions/strategies for juvenile offenders; however,

without proper resources, it could affect the implementation of services. Per the participants, evidence-based programs reduce recidivism rates with proper funding; however, when probation officers have a positive mindset about evidence-based programs, it changes how these programs are implemented and the validity of their use.

Theme 2

Theme 2 was identified as: effective communication increases the effectiveness of evidence-based programs and reduces recidivism rates. There were three codes in Theme 2: Effective case management, ways to communicate with juvenile gang members, and holding juvenile offenders accountable. The code that was most grounded in this theme was holding juveniles accountable. There were 5 out of 10 participants and eight grounded segments. This code specified that rehabilitation services should be provided; however, juvenile offenders should be held accountable for not participating in services. P6 stated, “Honestly, lately, the things that these kids been doing, you have to have balance, meaning programs and holding them accountable.” Troutman (2018) suggested that adolescents cannot foresee the consequences of their actions (p. 204). Often, these gang members make quick decisions and not rational choices. The participants suggested that evidence-based programs should be provided, but when there is no compliance, the youth should be held accountable, and there should be consistency across the board. Accountability does not always mean detention or lock up. The participants advised that accountability should come from the parent, probation officer, and the evidence-based program when they are not complying. P1 stated, “Accountability should come from the probation officer in order for them to be successful.” As probation officers, holding these

juveniles accountable to some degree when they are not compliant with evidence-based programs is an avenue to success and stimulates helping them to take accountability for their actions and make changes to improve their behavior.

The code ways to communicate with a juvenile gang member is significant for this research, although this code was not one of the most grounded codes in the study. When juvenile offenders feel that the individual working with them is genuine, they tend to be more compliant. P7 stated, “In my experience, most youth who see that the program is there for them through any barriers are more likely to comply and complete the program than when they see that the program is only there to collect a check.” Additionally, P1 stated, “in working with juvenile gang members, you have to be real, and you have to be personable.”

Communication is an essential factor when communicating with juvenile offenders. They work with you when they see that you are working with them and helping them succeed. Meeting these individuals where they are and not where they should be is essential for probation officers or service providers. Communicating with juvenile offenders requires being able to relate to them. P4 stated, “To be the right mentor and counselor, they must provide engagement, active participation, involvement, build a rapport, and establish a relationship. Also exposing them to a different lifestyle.” Communicating with a juvenile gang member is essential to building a relationship with them. Establishing a rapport and gaining trust is essential to youth being successful. The participants shared similar characteristics with, stating that being relatable, being involved, and seeing that people are working with them builds communication and trust.

In summary, holding juveniles accountable comes from the parent, probation officer, and the program. Holding juvenile offenders accountable to some degree should be distinct from detention or lockup. Some accountability measures increase success by making them consider their actions to reduce recidivism. Communication increases the effectiveness of evidence-based programs because there is an equal balance. Often, these youth make quick decisions and do not think about the consequences of their actions. As the participants suggested, evidence-based programs should be provided, but these youth should be held accountable with the assurance of communication and consistency.

Theme 3

Theme 3 was identified as: financial barriers can impact a youth's ability to succeed in evidence-based programs. There was a total of 3 codes in Theme 3. The codes were: low socioeconomic status, lack of resources increases recidivism, and assessment and classification. The code that was most grounded in this theme was lack of resources increases recidivism. There were 8 out of 10 participants and 21 grounded segments for this code. This code analyzes juvenile gang offenders residing in low economic environments and lacking the resources necessary to succeed. Because they do not have proper resources, it increases recidivism rates. P1 stated, "I feel like probation officers have a hard time finding resources, and they often have to google resources." The probation officers shared similarities by advising that transportation was one of the lack of resources and that these juveniles could not get to the programs. Additionally, with a lack of resources, they have free time, and resources such as extracurricular activities and services that once existed have been removed, increasing recidivism rates. P2 stated,

"Due to the lack of resources, the crime rates have increased significantly, especially amongst documented gang members." In addition to P2, P8 stated,

> More resources would be more helpful because there are not enough, and many of these youth spend so much time waiting for a vacancy for the available programs. Some must wait months to get into an evidence-based program or assistance. The government is not giving enough grants/money to fund programs. While these juveniles wait for a program, they get into trouble. Also, more people should be hired to assist this demographic.

The second most grounded code in Theme 3 was low socioeconomic status. There were 8 participants and 17 grounded segments. This code is vital to this study because many of these youth live in poverty-stricken areas in metro Atlanta counties and face low socioeconomic barriers. P7 stated, "The majority of gang-involved youth come from a low socioeconomic background, leading to their criminal behavior to meet their daily necessities. Also, transportation to the programs is a barrier due to their economic status.

Many families that these juvenile gang members come from are impoverished and do not have daily necessities such as food, clothes, or transportation to school. Many of them must obtain their necessities their way, including committing crimes. Because of economic barriers, they are not interested in evidence-based programs. Poverty can be challenging, and financial barriers can play a significant part, causing a lack of participation in evidence-based programs and increased recidivism rates.

In summary, the most grounded code for Theme 3 was lack of resources increases recidivism. However, the low socioeconomic status code was also discussed because it is

vital to this research. Gang involved juveniles reside in low economic environments and lack the resources to succeed. Resources that once existed have been removed, and recidivism rates have increased. Based on the participants' responses, the codes advised that resources should be assessable and affordable. Additionally, transportation is a critical factor as a resource, and enrolled juveniles do not make it to their scheduled appointments. Furthermore, juvenile gang members of low socioeconomic backgrounds play a crucial factor in the effectiveness of evidence-based programs. Many youths do not have the necessities they need, and poverty has been a challenge due to the lack of participation. If these juveniles do not have the necessities they need, they are less likely to participate in evidence-based programs. Furthermore, recidivism continues to increase because of the lack of resources and low socioeconomics.

Theme 4

Theme 4 was identified as: ineffective strategies that increase recidivism rates for gang- involved youth. There was a total of seven codes in Theme 4. The codes are probation officers' negative thoughts about evidence-based programs; offenders unsuccessfully removed from an evidence-based program, poverty is the norm for juvenile gang members, demographics impact the success for evidence-based programs, tolerance for gang-involved youth, probation officers' negative thoughts of community placement, and barriers with identifying the problem. The code most grounded in Theme 4 was probation officers' negative thoughts about evidence-based programs. There were 7 out of 10 participants and 15 grounded segments for this code. Although probation

officers' place these youth in evidence-based programs, there are negative thoughts that were grounded in the data. P5 stated,

> There is a lack of empathy and positive relationship building. Many providers are stringent and do not want to change. Many providers will not meet the youth where they are. The services are not geared toward families who need them. These programs are not tailored towards this demographic.

Furthermore, P1 stated, "Some programs' mindsets are not to help these individuals, but to collect numbers. Also, there is inconstancy." These 7 participants had a negative view of evidence-based programs. The officers commented similarly about evidence-based programs and how they are not targeted toward gang-involved youth. The program's effectiveness is not seen because everything is so stringent. Furthermore, when the youth do participate in services, those with similar offenses get to know one another and commit offenses together. Often, when probation officers make referrals to programs, they are forced to identify barely recognized juvenile offenders. For example, when completing a referral, there are questions giving probation officers' a different perspective about these juveniles, including their crimes, gang history/involvement, and drug history. Lastly, the participants believed the programs need to be better put together, which questions the effectiveness of evidence-based programs.

The most grounded code for Theme 4 was probation officers' negative thoughts about evidence-based programs. Although probation officers place youth in evidence-based programs, the groundedness supports that there are negative thoughts about these programs. Providers are unwilling to change and need to meet these juveniles on their

level. The probation officers believed that they do not target the gang-involved youth demographic and that evidence-based programs must be better put together.

Theme 5

Theme 5 was identified as: factors that increase recidivism and take juvenile gang members down a path to prison. There was a total of six codes in Theme 5. The codes were: parental involvement, mindset can cause inability to be receptive to services, Georgia get-tough policy impacts the juvenile justice system, negative case management provides negative support, more punitive measures and not rehabilitation, and juveniles join gangs for a sense of belonging. There were 10 out of 10 participants and 43 grounded segments of text for parental involvement. Parental involvement affects the evidence-based process. Probation officers perceive that parents are not involved in the process, which is evident by the groundedness of the data. Often, they do not participate because they are single parents, have other children they must care for, and work full-time jobs. Often, these programs do not fit the parent's lifestyle. P10 stated,

Many parents say they are not on probation, and they don't want to deal with evidence-based programs that probation officers put them in. Parents work, so they think that evidence-based programs are an interference with what they already have going on. Parents also have other children that they must take care of, so adding additional services these parents feel hinder them.

P8 further stated, "There is no support from the parent, and they are not interested." Often, parents feel that evidence-based programs put a strain on their life because of other obligations that they must deal with on a regular basis. There is no

follow up from parents, and they do not assist these youth in changing their behavior. Often, parents are in a gang, too, and there is no reinforcement or accountability. The lack of parental involvement increases recidivism rates. P7 stated, “In my experience, gang-involved youth come from broken homes and have no parental support, which leads to their criminogenic behavior. Sometimes evidence-based programs and probation officers become a crutch for the parents to redirect gang behavior.”

The participants advised that the most significant component is family involvement. Parents feel that they should not have to partake in these programs with their children because they are not on probation. The probation officers perceived that judges should issue mandatory court orders of participation for parents who do not participate. The problem starts from home, and if the parents do not participate, the programs will be less effective. P6 stated,

I do not see many parents participating. When they are asked to participate in programs, they feel they are being targeted rather than participating and encouraging the child. It’s important to look at changes instead of participation. Instead of looking at why do I have to participate they could look at techniques. We need to find a way to encourage parents because we do not have a lot of parents by in/enrollment.

In summary, the most grounded code for Theme 5 was parental involvement. For juvenile gang members on probation, parental involvement is lacking. Often, parents are single, have full-time jobs and other children, and want to avoid participating. Parents believe that it interferes with what they have going on already. There is hardly any parental involvement, based on the responses from the participants. Without parental

involvement, it increases recidivism rates. Often, parents put things off on the probation officer because of their unwillingness to participate. The participants believed there should be some redirection from the court to make parental involvement mandatory.

Five major themes emerged during data analysis to address the research question. The current research showed mixed perceptions that evidence-based programs could be effective with proper resources and effective communication. Effective communication enhances these youth's engagement, creating success and reducing recidivism rates. Additionally, probation officers with years of experience and a positive mindset about evidence-based programs are more likely to implement evidence-based programs to the clients on their caseloads. However, some of the probation officers perceived that evidence-based programs did not work because they were inconsistent, and the service providers did not meet the needs of the offenders. Despite the mixed perceptions of probation officers' and evidence-based programs, it can be concluded from the research that current and future probation officers need quality training on evidence-based programs and their material (Ingel et al., 2021). Although these youth are gang involved, when probation officers, parents, and service providers show them that they care, are honest, and are personable, it alters their mindset to make more rational decisions and reduce criminal gang involvement.

Based on the perceptions of the probation officers, when these youth do not participate in services, they must be held accountable. Accountability can come from the probation officer, programs, and parents to provide a consequence for their actions to make rational decisions. Even though juveniles should be held accountable, there are

mitigating circumstances and barriers that must be taken into consideration. The current study suggests that metro Atlanta is impoverished, and these youth and families have limited resources. The probation officers perceived that they needed more resources to succeed. Additionally, because of this barrier, probation officers' need more resources to assist them. Gang involved youth reside in low socioeconomic environments and do not have the daily necessities needed to carry out day-to-day functions such as food, clothes, and transportation. These factors can potentially increase recidivism and decrease the effectiveness of evidence-based programs.

Lastly, parental involvement, the most grounded code in the study, plays a significant factor in evidence-based programs. Without parental support, these youth could end up on a path to prison. The probation officers perceived that gang involved youth live in single-parent homes, and parents have full-time jobs and other children and do not want to participate in evidence-based programs with their gang-involved child. Further conclusions made are that parents believed that the program interferes with their jobs and what they have going on. Often, parents are in a gang too and do not assist with program participation or the youth changing their behavior. Uninvolved parents hinder the effectiveness of evidence-based programs due to a lack of participation. Furthermore, regarding accountability measures, the participants want to see changes from the court to enforce parental involvement. Currently, it lacks, and without parental involvement, recidivism rates have increased.

Chapter 5: Discussions, Recommendations, Conclusions

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to provide a detailed analysis of juvenile probation officers' perceptions and whether they believe that evidence-based programs reduce recidivism rates for gang-involved youth. The study findings provide valuable and credible information that may be used to address the effectiveness of evidence-based programs and recidivism rates among gang-involved youth. In Chapter 1, I highlighted the gap in the literature for this study and outlined the nature of the study, background, problem statement, purpose, research question, theoretical/conceptual framework, definitions, assumptions, scope and delimitation, limitations, and significance of the study. In Chapter 2, I presented the theoretical/conceptual framework for the study, social disorganization theory and the general strain theory, and included a literature search strategy, theoretical foundation, literary progression, Georgia legislation history, juvenile court history/House Bill 242, domains of gang membership, and evidence-based programs. In Chapter 3, I presented the grounded theory used in this study as the conceptual framework for collecting the data and the research design and rationale, the role of the researcher, methodology, instrumentation, and the data analysis plan. In Chapter 4, I included a description of the participants, coding, theming, the setting, demographics, data analysis plan, code dictionary, and the results. The current chapter includes the interpretation of the findings, the study's limitations, recommendations, implications, suggestions for future scholars, and the conclusion.

Interpretation of the Findings

The main question that guided this study was the following:

RQ: How do juvenile probation officers perceive the effectiveness of evidence-based programs in reducing recidivism rates for African American men between ages 12 and 21 who are gang involved in the state of Georgia?

This research question was created to evaluate the effectiveness of evidence-based programming related to juvenile gang members. Howell (2019) suggested that continuous research on gangs has resulted in what works, in what communities, and under what circumstances. This research question emerged to see if juvenile probation officers believe these programs are effective for gang-involved youth and if they reduce recidivism rates for this demographic. Research has indicated that only 38% of gang-involved youth are service completers, compared to 78% of uninvolved youth (Howell, 2019, p. 638). However, some researchers have expected significant impacts from evidence-based programs.

Five themes emerged from analysis of the data in response to the research question: (a) having a positive mindset improves effective strategies with the evidence-based program when there are positive support systems and proper resources for gang-involved youth; (b) effective communication increases the effectiveness of evidence-based programs and reduces recidivism rates; (c) financial barriers can impact a youth's ability to succeed in evidence-based programs; (d) barriers result in ineffective strategies to reduce recidivism for gang-involved youth; and (e) reasons that increase recidivism

and take juvenile gang members down a path to prison. Now I will discuss the findings in the context of grounded theory.

Of the five themes that emerged from the data, eight codes were the most grounded in the study. Additionally, one code, ways to communicate with gang-involved youth, was added because I believe it affects the success of evidence-based programming. The codes participants cited as needing to be addressed include lack of parental involvement, lack of resources, low socioeconomic status, and probation officers' negative thoughts about evidence-based programs. However, the codes participants cited as strategies were probation officers' positive thoughts of evidence-based programs, years of experience, holding juveniles accountable, and ways to communicate with juvenile gang members. The code most grounded in this study was parental involvement.

Participants indicated that they perceive parents believe that evidence-based programs interfere with their lifestyles because they work full-time jobs and have other children. According to participants, many parents believe that because they are not on probation—their child is—they should not have to participate. The findings of this study demonstrate that lack of parental involvement is a major risk factor grounded in the effectiveness of evidence-based programs to reduce recidivism rates for gang-involved youth.

These findings support the literature suggesting that research on gangs and family indicate a lack of parenting and parental conflicts. These issues break down social bonding and increase delinquency and criminal activity (Carson, 2018). Additionally, studies have shown that a hostile family environment increases a juvenile's association

with wanting to join a gang (Higginson et al., 2018). For juveniles, family plays a significant factor. Parental behavior influences a juvenile's life, particularly in making decisions. Having positive support from parents creates positive mental and social outcomes, but lack of parental involvement increases delinquency and a lack of coping skills (Mowen et al., 2018). In one U.S. study, more than half of parents expressed interest in an evidence-based program, but only 10% participated (Hill et al., 2021, p. 891). Further studies have shown low levels of engagement from parents with lower incomes, and among minority groups, parents with low self-efficacy provide low social support.

Jaggers et al. (2017) found consistency with the current findings by indicating that low socioeconomic and impoverished areas are significantly influenced and this demographic lacks resources. Jaggers et al. found that African American youth between ages 13 and 16 residing in neighborhoods with low socioeconomic status were positively correlated with delinquent behavior and exhibited higher levels of gang involvement (Jaggers et al., 2017, p. 32). Participants in the current study described low socioeconomic status as a risk factor that influences the effectiveness of evidence-based programming because many of these areas lack programming and funding, and access is limited. Juveniles and their families need the means to obtain needed resources. Participants described transportation as an economic barrier and a lack of a vital resource, and these youth lack the financial ability to gain necessities such as food and clothing. Connolly et al.'s (2017) findings were similar to the current findings: a lack of monetary

abilities puts a strain on acquiring goods, decreases the ability to gain services, and increases criminal activity.

Furthermore, the findings align with previous research that low socioeconomic status has become the number-one issue in the United States regarding why youth join gangs. Higginson et al. (2018) suggested that living in deprived neighborhoods can affect a person's mental health and increase antisocial behavior, which could influence their decision to join a gang. With limited prosocial activities, these communities are poorly resourced, which results in blocked opportunities and limited resources.

Much of the research has revealed that gang involved youth grow up in low socioeconomic settings mostly in urban areas where they have more access to criminal gangs, guns, and a lack of supervision. The current findings indicate that metro Atlanta counties are considered urban or inner-city areas with mostly low socioeconomic or impoverished populations, and many resources are not available or accessible. Connolly (2017) found that more than 68% of male juveniles living in urban areas were more likely to become involved in delinquency than 38% of youth residing in rural areas (p. 235).

Ingel et al.'s (2021) findings were consistent with the current findings regarding probation officers' negative thoughts about evidence-based programs. Although the juvenile justice system has adopted evidence-based programs to increase success for the juvenile offender population, studies show that juvenile probation officers are not yielding toward placing these youth in those programs. Research shows that juvenile probation officers negatively perceive evidence-based programs (Ingel et al., 2021). The participants in the current study described a lack of empathy and unwillingness to change

across these programs; the programs are not geared toward the gang population. Ingel et al. (2021) indicated that practitioners need to consider which of their practices are salient for the context and population they serve. There is less recognition that these programs are successful when there are poor outcomes. Another factor to consider is a juvenile probation officer's training, education, and experience. The participants described that when probation officers have years of experience, they are more likely to place youth in evidence-based programs. Ingel et al. (2021) noted that juvenile probation officers might fail to incorporate evidence-based programming due to inadequate training and lack of understanding.

Participants cited strategies that increased the effectiveness of evidence-based programming: probation officers' positive thoughts of evidence-based programs, years of experience, holding juveniles accountable, and ways to communicate with juvenile offenders. The most grounded code was the probation officers' positive thoughts about evidence-based programs. The participants perceived that evidence-based programming does work in reducing recidivism rates. Findings suggest that evidence-based programs treat youth with problems of delinquency, drugs, and alcohol problems. evidence-based programs are used as a tool for success by reducing recidivism rates and improving youth functioning and development (Ingel et al., 2021). These findings are consistent with the participants' accounts, suggesting that evidence-based programs reduce recidivism rates. These programs assist with counseling by addressing traumas and providing coping mechanisms to steer youth from gang involvement. Also, it teaches a different way of life that juvenile gang members are not used to seeing.

Current findings suggested that juvenile probation officers' who have been in the field and are knowledgeable, with years of experience, were more likely to place youth in an evidence-based program. These findings were consistent with Ingel et al., (2021) in suggesting that attention to how officers understand evidence-based programs are understudied (Ingel et al., 2021). Most of the participants in the study ranged from 4 to 24 years of experience working with juvenile gangs. Additionally, the research found that when juvenile probation officers find these programs meaningful and having value, they are more willing to adopt and use them (Ingel et al., 2021).

The findings further indicated that when juveniles are held accountable, it creates success. Casey et al. (2016) suggested that there should be calls for greater accountability for youth by way of performance measurements and monitoring. The current findings suggest that juvenile offenders should have a balance, placing them in programs and holding them accountable when they do not participate. There is often no consistency, and there should be accountability for the parent, program, and probation officers when these youth do not abide by rules and regulations. Similar results were reported by Casey et al. (2016), who advised that accountability strives to ensure that policies and procedures are met, and evidence programs are practiced. It is important to take into consideration that outcomes from all practices should be measured. In addition to accountability, there must also be an establishment of communication with juvenile offenders. Research suggests that children build relationships and trust early on with primary caregivers, and as they get older social trust increases. However, low levels of trust have been identified with juvenile offenders (Aebi et al., 2022). Not only do they

demonstrate low levels of trust toward their probation officers, but there need to be more trusting relationships with their parents and service providers. The current study aligns with the research based on the participant's responses suggesting that although these youth have committed a crime, it is important to build rapport and trust to establish a relationship.

The results of the current study demonstrated that lack of parental involvement, lack of resources, low socioeconomic status, and probation officers' negative thoughts about evidence-based programs are ineffective strategies that can lead youth down a path to prison. Parental involvement, the most grounded code in the research, is supposed to be an anticipated support strategy for changing a youth's behavior. However, when there is a lack of parental involvement, there is less participation from the youth and parents, and the benefits nor effectiveness can be seen with evidence-based programming. With youth living in low socio-economic status or poverty, there are limited resources to reduce recidivism. Additionally, these youth are likely to commit offenses and join gangs. Most gang members residing in metro Atlanta live in poverty-stricken areas. When these youth are placed in evidence-based programs, they do not have adequate transportation to get to these programs, and many are dismissed. Furthermore, many of these youth must depend on getting their daily necessities (food and clothing) and are not interested in attending evidence-based programming. With these youth residing in low socio-economic areas, limited resources are provided (i.e., extracurricular activities and services).

Probation officers' play a vital role in the implementation of evidence-based programming. However, many of them have a negative perception because they believe that the programs are less effective and are unwilling to change their mindset and establish relationships with juvenile offenders. Furthermore, many service providers are stringent and do not want to change their mindset. Often, evidence-based providers do not meet these youth where they are, and the programs only target a specific area.

The results of the current study further demonstrated that there are positive strategies that increase the success of juvenile gang members. These strategies are probation officers' positive thoughts of evidence-based programs, holding juveniles accountable, and ways to communicate. Probation officers' positive thoughts of evidence-based programs are the most grounded in this study for positive strategies. Probation officers are critical to the juvenile justice system and implementing evidence-based programs. Participants cited that evidence-based programs have been known to reduce recidivism rates. They assist the youth with counseling and trauma and provide coping mechanisms to steer youth from gang activity. When probation officers' have a positive mindset about evidence-based programs, it increases the effectiveness of these programs because probation officers are placing more youth in services and following up with the providers. Additionally, when there is more knowledge and training on evidence-based programs, it increases program success as well.

According to the participants, holding juveniles accountable for their actions increases success and decreases recidivism. Participants suggest that although programs should be implemented, there should be an equal balance of holding juveniles

responsible when they do not participate. When holding youth accountable, there should also be an establishment of communication. Communication is the key to success: building rapport, relationships, and establishing trust.

Limitations of the Study

The study's limitations are weaknesses that are beyond this researcher's control. The study had several limitations that affected the outcome of the study. Qualitative research involves collecting and analyzing data to gain an interpretation of the analysis. The participant's *years of experience* range broadly from 4 to 24 years. Depending on the number of years in the field, there could have been different responses, altering the results and findings of the study. Therefore, the findings are uncertain. However, obtaining information from previous research and studies aided in assisting with this under-researched population.

A second limitation of this study was the participant's bias toward evidence-based program service providers. Based on their responses, some of the probation officers had negative perceptions of the service providers themselves. Many of the participants stated that the providers are set in their ways, they do not work with the gang population, are unwilling to meet these youth where they are, and so forth. This mentality has altered many of their mindsets, and they have challenged the effectiveness of evidence-based programs. Next, there may have been a weakness in the validity of the results. For instance, Corbin and Strauss Grounded theory approach provide strategies for data analysis (Chamaz & Thornberg, 2021). The participants could have withheld information

for fear that they could lose their job based on their responses. Therefore, they could have been more forthcoming with in-depth answers, which could have altered the study results.

As a probation officer, I have realized that there are few evidence-based programs in Metro Atlanta counties. Additionally, the available programs do not target the gang population. The available evidence-based programs can work, but they need to be evaluated to see how they can better target juvenile gang members and their families. Furthermore, I believe providers should attend training to assist juvenile gang members. Regarding juvenile probation officers, I believe that the available resources are scarce, and policymakers should provide more funds to implement more programs and assist juvenile offenders and their families in impoverished areas. Furthermore, if juvenile probation officers attended more training on evidence-based programs, they would be more aware of what programs offer and would not be hesitant to place the youth in an evidence-based program.

Recommendations

Based on the previous research and results from the study, it is essential for future research to explore the anatomy of evidence-based program daily to understand what it does and whom it serves (Ingel et al., 2021). It is also essential to explore the qualifications of evidence-based providers who work with specific youth demographics, including high-risk or gang-involved juveniles. Equipping juvenile probation officers with training about evidence-based programs is vital because how juvenile probation officers understand evidence-based programs and their effectiveness is understudied (Ingel et al., 2021). For example, because juvenile probation officers may encounter

different experiences and biases toward service providers, future research should address where those beliefs originated. Adequate training may be reconstructed to ensure that more juvenile gang members are placed in evidence-based programs moving forward. Therefore, it would be beneficial if juvenile probation officers could improve their understanding of evidence-based programs to aid in better decision-making.

Future research should assess low socio-economic status more with gang-involved youth and what society is doing to improve gang involved youth and families. What resources are beneficial? Of the resources that have been taken away, which were beneficial in the past? These avenues should be looked at because there is currently a lack of resources for juvenile probation officers to do their job effectively for gang youth to succeed, and to enhance evidence-based programs. Additionally, more studies need to be conducted on what evidence-based programs are effective for gang-involved youth.

Parental involvement has been the focal point of this research. Future research should be assessing parental involvement and how it hinders youth from being successful when parents are less involved in their child's life. Although many suggestions can be made about what effective parental involvement is and what parents should do to be more involved with their children, it is important to consider parents who will not participate no matter what. In situations like this, there is no definite solution. However, past research has tried to address parental involvement issues. According to Ripley-Mcneal & Cramer (2021), "Parenting not only prevents criminal behavior in youth but also cultivates a host of other desirable psychosocial outcomes later in life" (p. 103). One recommendation is to develop strategies to get the parents more involved with their

children and get them more involved in the process. Another recommendation is to educate parents on how their parenting styles can affect their children positively or negatively. Youth join gangs because of the lack of structure in the home with lack of parental involvement. Additionally, Kethineni et al. (2021) further recommended parent engagement programs that consist of workshops for problem-solving and building interpersonal communication skills with their child. As stated, teaching the parents about their parenting style, and connecting families to community resources could be beneficial for future purposes.

Implications

The current study generated evidence contributing to the effectiveness of evidence-based programs as perceived by juvenile probation officers. As outlined in Ingel et al., (2021), there could be additional training for probation officers to learn more about evidence-based programs and their material. Additionally, as it relates to parental involvement, the most grounded code in the study, has contributed to the effectiveness of evidence-based programs. Gang involved youth need structure from their parents, and parents are unwilling to participate in evidence-based programs with their children. More programs or resources could be implemented in the community to assist parents with being more active and involved in their child's life, whether through parenting classes, parental engagement courses, or learning parenting styles. Gang involved youth residing in low socioeconomic environments and having limited resources, additional programming and resources should be explored. Law and policymakers can look at

adding more funds to fund more programs. Furthermore, implementing more programming and assistance to help impoverished families could reduce recidivism rates.

The findings of this study have contributed to the literature. Limited research has been conducted on juvenile probation officer perceptions of evidence-based programs and their effectiveness in Georgia. The study responds to Ingel et al., (2021) and Kethineni et al. (2021) recommendations to explore strategies to improve juvenile probation officers' perceptions of evidence-based programs and implement strategies to gain more parental participation. The findings of this study are unique because it sheds light on how juvenile probation officers feel about the evidence-based program. The findings could be brought to the attention of the juvenile justice system and court officials to reduce recidivism rates for the juvenile gang population in metro Atlanta counties. The Grounded theory was used to study the individual, and the larger societal process, which in this case were gangs and evidence-based programs in Georgia.

Law and policymakers can use this study to understand aspects that reduce or increase recidivism for gang-involved youth as they seek to develop strategies for future purposes. According to Tomkins et al., (2021), "In the public service domain, the rise of the evidence-based movement may be a response to several intersecting societal developments, including a decline in deference to government and a demand for greater accountability and openness in policy making and service delivery" (para 2). Strategies can be explored to improve how, what, and why evidence-based programs work for gang-involved youth. Additionally, how can evidence-based programs affect people under what circumstances? When looking at ethical strategies in evaluating evidence-based

programs, it lessens trial and error and possibly deliver a positive outcome to reduce recidivism rates.

Conclusion

This qualitative study aimed to gain the perceptions of juvenile probation officers and if they believed that evidence-based programs reduced recidivism rates for African American gang-involved youth in the state of Georgia. Findings from the study demonstrated that some juvenile probation officers believed that the programs were effective, and some did not. Mostly, all the probation officers agreed that parental involvement tremendously affects youth joining gangs and that these programs are ineffective due to the lack of parent participation. The findings indicated that many of these gang involved youth are living in low socioeconomic environments with limited resources. Additionally, it is all about communication with these youth. There could be positive outcomes if individuals show that they care (i.e., probation officers, parents, and evidence-based program providers). Future research should go in-depth and explore these areas more. Overall, establishing more training for probation officers and providers and introducing more programs, communication techniques, and resources for juvenile offenders could provide an effective strategy that may reduce recidivism rates for gang-involved youth in Georgia.

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