

2022

Black Males Incarcerated and the Effect Upon Children Left Behind

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Walden University

College of Health Sciences and Public Policy

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Cathy M. Crutchfield

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Walden University
2022

Abstract

Black Males Incarcerated and the Effect Upon Children Left Behind

by

Cathy M. Crutchfield

MA, Walden University, 2017

BS, Illinois State University, 1977

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Public Policy and Administration

Walden University

November 2022

Abstract

Black men in the United States have been disproportionately removed from the lives of their families by means of incarceration for generations. Aggressive drug laws, racist policing strategies, and sentence disparities are contributing factors. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to examine how formerly incarcerated Black males perceived their incarceration affected the children they left behind while incarcerated. The research sample consisted of six former offenders. Each participant was at least eighteen years of age, Black, a parent at the time of incarceration, and a resident of Guilford County, NC, at the time of the offense. Each participant was free of all probationary or parole requirements. Social bonding theory was the theoretical lens used to view the problem under study. Data were collected via electronic, semi-structured interviews. Interviews were transcribed and manually coded to determine common themes surrounding participant perceptions of the effects of incarceration on their children. The results of this study indicated most of the children have evolved to be adults harboring emotional, behavioral, and psychological damage from feelings of abandonment. It is recommended that the father/child relationship be nurtured during incarceration and in reentry preparation for release after incarceration. Implementation of programs and judgements for intervention utilizing the social body theory as guidance, should lessen the negative effects of the father's incarceration on the child and reduce recidivism. This study can impact positive social change by informing policymakers, justice professionals, and reentry programmers on strategies to prioritize the father/child relationship during reentry training.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my children Naadia, Kiara, Chris, and Christopher III who are my heartbeat. This academic journey could not have been possible without you. My desire is to leave you with a legacy to never give up. No matter what life may throw at you, remain teachable and never give up. It does not matter how old you are, strive to be the best version of yourself and reach for the stars! Know that I love you and I could not have done this without you. Never give up and always keep God first!

A very special thank you to Clarence Williamson, PhD, and Miyoung Lee, PhD, for all the support and patience you have rendered to me while on this doctoral journey. For helping me to attain that which was only a dream, I can never thank you enough!

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Background

The systematic confinement of Black men has existed in the United States since the formulation of this country. Whether it began with slavery or the disproportionate incarceration of Black men in the war on drugs, both were legalized methods of Black men being extracted from the lives of their children and families. This is not to say that Black men never commit crimes that warrant imprisonment; however, whether these men have committed a crime or have been targeted unjustifiably, the disruption of Black families is still occurring in large disproportionate numbers.

In Chapter 1, I examine this disproportionate absence of Black men from the lives of their children and families due to incarceration. Legitimate incarceration alone cannot be credited as the sole cause of this phenomenon; sentencing policies, demographics, policing, and targeting also contribute. However, I focus on the absence of Black men through incarceration, and how formerly incarcerated Black men perceive the effect on their children. Guilford County in North Carolina was the location of the research study. The social bonding theory was the framework, which may assist to reduce and lessen the impact of incarceration and recidivism affecting both the offender and the children left behind.

Problem Statement

Blacks in the United States are disproportionately represented in the penal system. The trauma of parent-child separation due to incarceration can be devastating to the life of a child as well as the incarcerated parent, leaving them vulnerable to numerous adverse

experiences, yet very little research has addressed the topic (Miller, 2007; Turney, 2018, 2019). Even less research has examined the perspective of the male Black offender on how he perceives incarceration has affected his children (Welch et al., 2019). In this study, I not only examined how separation caused by incarceration affects the parent and child but specifically how Black fathers perceive or understand the impact their incarceration has had on the children they left behind.

Some studies have focused on how incarceration affects children. In this study, I examined the potential connection between the father's understanding of the damage to his children and his behavior that landed him in prison. This understanding may provide the motivation needed for the ex-offender to remain connected to his children while incarcerated and assist in adequately preparing himself for release (see Craigie et al., 2018). Exploring what motivates the participation in reentry programs is important because programs such as the Second Chance Act reentry program has been shown to lower recidivism. However, many reentry programs have participants who continue to experience high rates of recidivism within 30-months of their release (Mulhhausen, 2018).

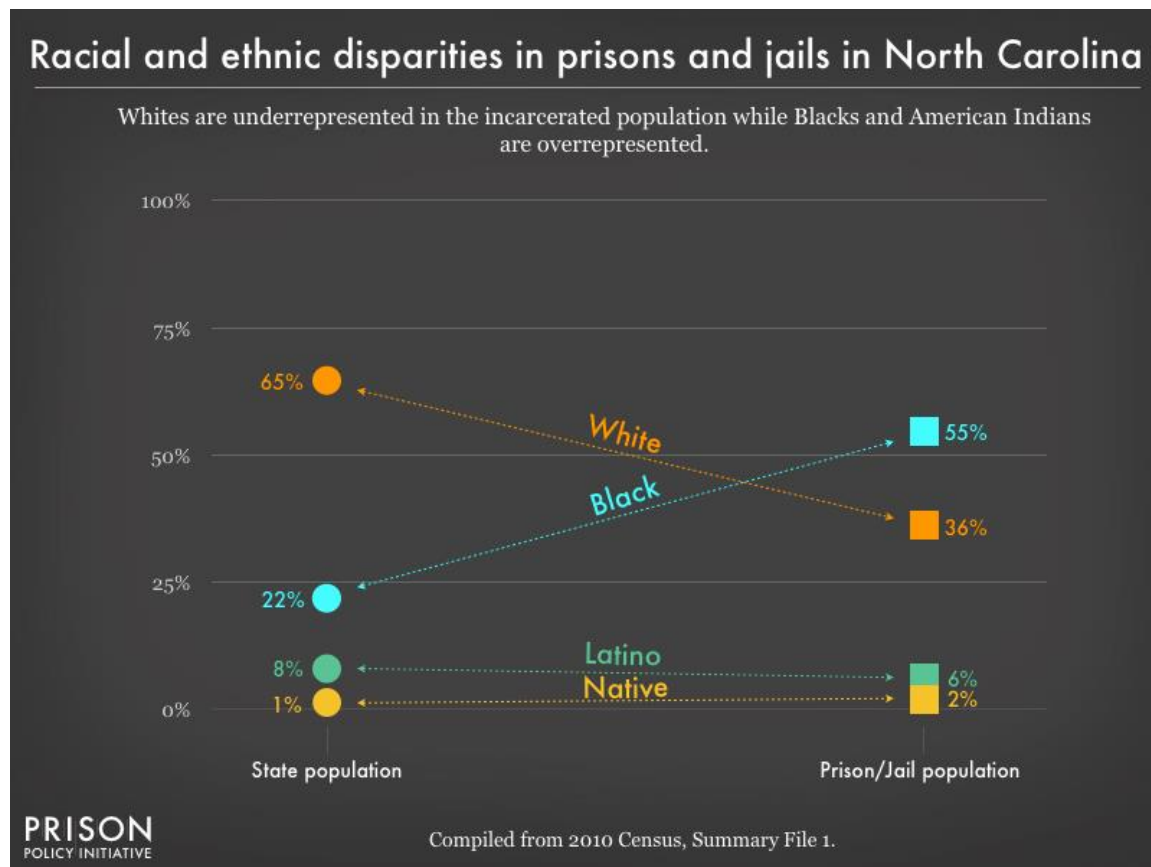
Additional research such as this is needed because Black youths are born into a nation with a history of deep racial divide stemming from slavery, Jim Crow laws, and mass incarceration. For a struggling Black family to lose the Black male of their household to incarceration, whether it is due to his poor judgement or systemic racism, is problematic for several reasons. As head of the household and a parent, the incarcerated Black male has left his child to deal with feelings of abandonment, being unloved, and

being uncared for (Stopford & Smith, 2014). In addition, frequently children left with one parent to provide are subjected to substandard housing, economic deprivation, low educational expectations, and premature exposure to street elements when the father has been removed (Stopford & Smith, 2014).

When dealing with the criminal justice system, many times Black men are not treated the same as those of other races. They are given longer sentences than that of their White counterparts committing the same crimes, which accounts for much of the racial disparity (Stopford & Smith, 2014). By examining the perception of ex-offenders, the offender may gain a better understanding of how his actions affected his children and possibly motivate the offender to get out of prison and stay out. When offenders have ongoing contact with their children during and after incarceration, they have a lessened sense of loss and detachment (Welch et al, 2019). For the child whose father has just been removed from the home, there is a better chance of not feeling abandoned and understanding what caused the separation (Welch et al, 2019). Policy makers, judges, school counselors, and reentry programs may understand how to create more effective and better implement laws, support the children, and adequately prepare an offender to reenter society.

In this study, I examined how six Black men, who were ex-offenders, perceived that their incarceration affected their children's lives. Studies such as this are needed because, in 2010, Blacks represented only 22% of the population, yet they represented 55% of the North Carolina prison system (www.prisonpolicy.org, 2010). As noted by the Prison Policy Initiative in Figure 1, Whites are underrepresented in the incarcerated

population (prisonpopulation.org, 2010). Also, frequently children left with one parent to provide are subjected to substandard housing, economic deprivation, low educational expectations, and exposure to street elements when the father has been removed (Stopford & Smith, 2014).

Figure 1*Prison Policy Initiative*

Note. From “Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Prison and Jails in North Carolina” by P. Wagner and J. Aiken, 2016,

[.https://www.prisonpolicy.org/graphs/disparities2010/NC_racial_disparities_2010.html](https://www.prisonpolicy.org/graphs/disparities2010/NC_racial_disparities_2010.html)

In the United States, 54% of all inmates are parents with minor children between the ages of zero and seventeen years of age; 1.1 million of them are fathers (The Pew Charitable Trusts, 2010). There are 2.7 million children with a parent in prison (The Pew Charitable Trusts, 2010). In the Black community, one in nine children, or 11% of children, have a parent incarcerated (The Pew Charitable Trusts, 2010). Children with fathers in prison are more likely to be expelled or suspended from school (Stopford & Smith, 2014). If Black males drop out of school, they are 37% more likely to be in prison between the ages of twenty and thirty (The Pew Charitable Trusts, 2010).

Black males have historically been overrepresented in United States prison systems compared to other races (Cai, 2011). Several system level variables have contributed to the inequities in the racial demographics of U.S. prison populations. These variables include the unequal application of aggressive drug laws, policing strategies, and sentencing decisions (Nellies, 2016). Independent variables such as poverty, education attainment, gainful employment, and criminal history impact population disparities in correctional institutions as well. Research examining parental support and numerous cumulative judicial obligations placed on incarcerated men has been scarce even though the damage to children, families, and communities of the incarcerated has been well documented (Bartlett, 2019). Brown and Patterson (2016) documented the effects of “collateral damage” to families of incarcerated males. The absence of a father is significant, and the impact on children and families of persons in prison is traumatic. Families who experience the incarceration of a father experience social-economic challenges as well as the disruption of the family environment (Bartlett, 2019).

Additionally, many children of parents in custody experience low educational attainment and have a higher probability of juvenile delinquency (Aylward, 2017). Young boys who have fathers in prison are known to have lower noncognitive skills as well, and many schools are likely to place them in special education classes (Haskins, 2014).

Although there is literature supporting that a fathers' incarceration significantly impacts families, the literature has not addressed how fathers perceive or understand the impact of their imprisonment on their families. Without examining the potential connection between the father's understanding of damage to his children and the actual damage incurred, the ex-offender may genuinely believe he is the only one who has suffered from his actions. By obtaining the offender's perception regarding his incarceration, the offender may acquire the motivation needed to maintain family connections while incarcerated and the desire to do better upon his release. Adequate preparation for release must be intentional and significant when preparing offenders to be successful upon their release (Craigie et al., 2018). Finding the motivation to participate in reentry programs is essential because many reentry program participants continue to experience high rates of recidivism after their release (Mulhlhausen, 2018).

There are numerous barriers hindering the successful maintenance of family relationships and the successful reentry into the community for the ex-offender. Physical and emotional detachment may occur because of the physical and emotional distance between those incarcerated from their children (Rabuy & Kopf, 2015). Sometimes caretakers may believe that it is in the best interest of the children not to visit their fathers in prison due to destructive ties that may have been existed before the parent's

incarceration. In actuality, the longer the separation, the more difficult it is on the child and the parent to function in their role (Rabuy & Kopf, 2015). The paternal connection with no maintenance may further exacerbate the negative impact of incarceration on children and challenging efforts to reconnect fathers with families upon his release from custody (Rabuy & Kopf, 2015).

The goals of reentry programs are to reconnect formerly incarcerated persons with employment, healthcare, housing, and with their families. This study may assist in extending literature regarding reentry strategies and provide new data for reentry professionals in confinement facilities designed to reconnect incarcerated fathers with their children. In addition, the perspective of ex-offenders in this study may provide policymakers with valuable information to design useable frameworks, implementation, and evaluation strategies that could mitigate the negative impact of incarceration on children with incarcerated fathers.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of formerly incarcerated fathers regarding the affect their incarceration has had on their children. My intent was to (a) examine how Black men perceive the incarceration has affected their children; (b) examine the effects of social bonding on recidivism; and (c) provide valuable information to reentry programs, court professionals, local government leaders, school counselors, and reentry funding sources in support of the ex-offender and his children. The improvement of current reentry programs includes information to reentry programs, court professionals, local government leaders, and reentry program funding sources for the

support of the ex-offender and his children. The improvement of reentry programs addressing the maintenance of father/child connections is vital while the father is still incarcerated. The goal is to mitigate the impact of incarceration on children during the father's incarceration and to minimize recidivism amongst offenders once they are released.

Research Question

How do formerly incarcerated Black males perceive their incarceration affected the children they left behind?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study was the social bond theory. Hirschi developed the social bond theory in 1969 as an effort to understand why certain people refrain from delinquent or criminal behavior and other do not (as cited in Anderson, 1999). The maintenance of familial connections is essential in a child's life as well as the incarcerated adult. This is especially true for children who experience maternal or paternal incarceration. Hirschi suggested in his social bonding theory that when there is social bonding with the familial, delinquency is less likely to occur (as cited in Kalu et al., 2020). In this study, I attempted to answer the following research question: How do formerly incarcerated Black males perceive their incarceration affected the children they left behind? I explored this topic through the lens of the social bonding theory to determine if there was a connection between the perception of incarcerated fathers, their children, and recidivism.

The social bond theory is a theory designed to render assumptions about human behavior that may help to understand deviant behavior. The social bond theory has four components: attachment, involvement, commitment, and belief. The attachment component of the social bond theory is often considered the most critical component of this theory (Burraston & Eddy, 2017). The attachment bond between fathers and their children is one that I referenced heavily in this study. Through the lens of the social bond theory, valuable data were collected, which may alter deviant behavior in the formerly incarcerated father and his children. In this study deviant behavior was the behavior causing fathers to be returned to prison or recidivism, also rendering aide to adverse effects of incarceration on their children.

When a parent is incarcerated, the effects of incarceration are not only felt by that parent but also by those in which there is an attachment shared. Children who experience the incarceration of a parent are negatively impacted physically, mentally, and emotionally (Craigie et al., 2018). Previous studies have viewed the connection of incarcerated parents and their children through programs that promote enhanced visitation. Exploring the components of the social bond theory, Mears and Stafford (2022) examined the impact of visitation of children with incarcerated parents. Focused on maintaining a child's attachment with an incarcerated parent, they found that there was a reduction in recidivism for formerly incarcerated males who maintained regular contact with their children via visitation while incarcerated. Folk et al. (2019) used the social bond theory to examine the impact of starting the reentry process, attempting to use all applicable components of the theory prior to release back into the community.

Folk et al. found that visitation was a critical part of the reentry process and helped incarcerated parents both maintain family connections and strengthen the ability of formerly incarcerated parents to transition back into the home.

Conceptual Framework

The social bond theory provided the conceptual framework of this study. This framework assisted me in examining how formerly incarcerated Black men perceive their incarceration has affected their children. The Black children they have left behind are disproportionately represented in schools and communities for suspensions and expulsions due to displaying externalized behavior (Kalu et al., 2020). The elements of the social bond theory were explored in this study as the framework to provide guidelines for assistance. When Hirschi developed the social bond theory in 1969, he attempted to investigate conformity and not deviance. Hirschi developed four elements of his approach, and he believed that the more elements present, the less likelihood of deviant behavior. The four elements of the social bonding theory are social attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief (Burraston & Eddy, 2017). I used the social bond theory to examine the perceptions formerly incarcerated fathers regarding their children. Social attachment is believed to be significantly important in that it connects the offender to those outside of the prison walls, thus motivating the offender to reconnect upon reentry. Researchers have found a weak attachment in the bonds between parent and child deviance is more likely to occur (Bouffard & Petkoyses, 2014). Paternalistic leadership plays a significant role in a parent or child relationship, and when it is absent, there is a void left for deviant behavior to occur.

Involvement is another element of the social bond theory that serves as a deterrent to deviant behavior. When an individual, whether they are adult or a child, is a member of a team, group, or organization, the time invested in those groups or organizations leaves less time to become involved in deviant behavior (Bouffard & Petkoysek, 2014). When individuals are associated with people involved in constructive things, they are less likely to become involved with illegal activity. Commitment or obligation can serve to assist in or be a deterrent as well. When there is a commitment to ones' job, school, or even when the responsibility of parenting is taken seriously, deviating from that obligation would take additional consideration before committing an act that would cause incarceration. Lastly, is the element of belief. An individual having some form and confidence in the laws and rules that govern society and hold meaning and purpose when followed will have guidelines, rather than a sense of lawlessness. The same lawlessness may land them in the criminal justice system.

The social bond theory operates on the premise of controlling human behavior by refocusing an individuals' attention on bonds that decrease the cost of deviance, using the elements of social bonds. When adults have developed social bonds with their children, the consequences of deviant behavior increase (Bouffard & Petkoysek, 2014). There is a gap in research that has addressed how Black men, specifically, perceive their incarceration has affected their children. When incarcerated Black men have developed a bond with their children, they must not only deal with the criminal justice system as a consequence of their deviant behavior but must also deal with the loss of an attachment bond to their child or children. When this bond is present, the probability of criminal

behavior is lowered (Kalu et al., 2020). What makes the plight of Black men different from that of other men is the disproportionate numbers in which they are incarcerated, which in turn affects a disproportionate number of Black children. This disproportionate separation of Black fathers from their children dates to slavery, which has impacted a culture for generations.

Children who have strong social bonds with their parents are more apt to have healthier relationships in life. Their development of self-esteem is usually high, and the ability to trust others is of stronger due to social bonds (Bouffard & Petkoyses, 2014). Their relationships with friends and mates are known to be stronger as well. They are less likely to develop antisocial behavior that would lead to deviant behavior (Bouffard & Petkoyses, 2014).

Nature of the Study

This research was qualitative in nature. Qualitative research methods are useful in providing a better understanding of human behavior, which aligned with my primary research question of how formerly incarcerated Black males perceive their incarceration has affected the children they left behind. Qualitative research is most effective in answering the questions of why and how in research (Novo-Corti & Barreiro-Gen, 2015). I have briefly touched upon the problem of why this phenomenon exists by examining why there is a disproportionate number of Black men incarcerated and not raising their children. However, my primary focus was to examine how Black male ex-offenders perceive their incarceration has affected the children they left behind when incarcerated.

The research also examined the ability of these Black men to return to society and provide economically, as well as their behavior when they are not able to provide, vote, or establish a relationship with their children. The assistance of six volunteer participants was sought from nonprofit reentry programs in North Carolina by posting fliers that volunteers responded to, and the technique of snowballing. Data was collected and analyzed from the in-depth interviews conducted. The interviews were all conducted in separate environments that were both private and safe for me and the participants. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, modifications were needed for conducting the interviews.

Definitions

Absent fathers: A male parent who is not present in the life of their child.

Children of the incarcerated: A child with a parent/parents in prison or jail.

Ex-offender: A person who has broken the law, been incarcerated, served the time in jail/prison, and released.

Felony: A crime of great seriousness, punishable by death or imprisonment of more than 1 year.

Incarcerated fathers: Male parents who are offenders and in prison or jail.

Mass incarceration: A form of punishment that involves the imprisonment of offenders in large numbers within the United States.

Offender: A person who has broken the law

Racial disparity: When there is different and unequal treatment due to one race; treating another race differently because of the belief that they are inferior.

Recidivism: The act of an offender to reoffend, get rearrested, and get reincarcerated or returned to confinement, within the criminal justice system. A violation of conditions of release from incarceration, resulting in the return to prison for the offender.

Reentry: To reenter the community after incarceration.

Rehabilitation: The act of restoring an offender back to normal life after imprisonment with the assistance of therapy and treatment.

Assumptions

The first assumption was that all participants in this study were parents while they were incarcerated in the state of North Carolina. This assumption was made because it was explicitly outlined in the body of each flier that all participants who responded were parents at the time of their incarceration in North Carolina.

The second assumption was that children with incarcerated fathers still want their fathers to be involved in their lives, even if they are embarrassed about what the father did. Most children wish to have both parents in their lives unless they have witnessed or experienced something horrific involving that parent. Many children go through a time in their lives when trying to figure out who they are (Brown, 2020).

My last assumption was that the majority of Black children believe that they will be poor, end up in jail, or die due to the racial disparity in the United States. Many Black children have repeatedly witnessed or viewed in the media young Black people dying at young ages from violence in their communities or at the hands of the police.

Additionally, there was a reasonable assumption that research participants were truthful in their interview responses. The reality of the impact of incarceration on families and Black fathers was communicated objectively.

Further research is needed because Black youths are born into a nation with a history of deep racial divide, which stems from slavery, Jim Crow laws, and mass incarceration. For a struggling Black family to lose the Black male of their household to incarceration, whether it is due to his poor judgement or systemic racism, is problematic for several reasons. As head of the household and a parent, the father leaves his child to deal with feelings of abandonment, being unloved, and uncared for when incarcerated (Stopford & Smith, 2014). Frequently, children left with one parent to provide are subjected to substandard housing, economic deprivation, low educational expectations, and early exposure to street elements when the father has been removed (Stopford & Smith, 2014).

When dealing with the criminal justice system, Black men are often not treated the same as those of other races. They are given longer sentences than that of their White counterparts committing the same crimes, which accounts for much of the racial disparity (Stopford & Smith, 2014). By examining the perception of ex-offenders, the offenders have the capability to gain a better understanding of how their actions have affected their children and be motivated to get out of prison and stay out. When offenders have ongoing contact with their children after incarceration, they have a lessened sense of loss and detachment. For the child whose father has just been removed from the home, there is a better chance of not feeling abandoned and understanding what caused the separation.

Policymakers, judges, school counselors, and reentry programs may understand how to create and implement better laws, support the children, and adequately prepare an offender to reenter society.

Scope and Delimitations

The focus of this study was on determining how Black, male, ex-offenders perceive their incarceration has affected the children they left behind while in confinement. My intent was to touch upon the generational dilemma of Black men being systematically separated from their children. For ethical reasons, I could not use children nor offenders still serving time. The interviews obtaining the perceptions of ex-offenders were conducted for research purposes only. There are significant possible implications; offenders may draw the motivation needed to reduce or eliminate their engagement in deviant behavior, which could place them back in prison. School counselors, policymakers, and judicial officials may also be able to implement new approaches to students who are products of this phenomenon.

Historically, racial discrimination and confinement in the United States dates back as far as 1619, beginning with slavery (Stopford & Smith, 2014). Black men have disproportionately been separated from their children and families due to incarceration in large numbers. This study focused on the viewpoint of Black, male, ex-offenders. Changing the fathers' understanding and behavior regarding illegal activities he has committed can also influence the lives of his children. To show this relationship between the two, I assumed that when there is a change in the behavior of the independent variable, the father, it will cause a change in the dependent variable, the child (see

Johnson, 2015). The perceptions of these men were examined in an effort obtain information to reduce the high recidivism rates and shed insight onto the plight of their children and bring about social change.

Physical walls of prisons serve to confine men and women of all races. However, the focus of this study was primarily on Black men due to racial disparity and the number of Black men in jails/prisons or under community supervision. The cultural and generational impact of such large numbers of Black men imprisoned and absent from their children's lives has created life-changing difficulties within the black community for children.

In this study, I obtained and examined how six ex-offenders viewed their incarceration affected their children. The actual children were not interviewed due to ethics and instructional review board (IRB) restraints. The social bond theory framework not only focuses on strengthening the bond between father and child but also serves as a tool for intervention to reduce the likelihood of previous offenders reoffending. When the father clearly understands the impact his actions have had on his children, the recidivism rate maybe lowered significantly. If school counselors and juvenile court officials can understand the impact the fathers' actions and incarceration has had on their children, they can possibly intercede with the proper interventions to prevent damage to another generation. In the instances of Black ex-offenders who feel that they did nothing wrong and were simply victims of discrimination, racially motivated confinement, the social bond theory serves no positive purpose regarding recidivism. The repetition of racially motivated incarceration of Black men has been noted in this study. Still, the problem

statement primarily addressed the perception of how Black men perceive their children were affected by their incarceration.

Limitations

A qualitative approach using the phenomenological method of research was used in this study. The phenomenological method of research was best suited for this study because it enabled me to explore the participants' different experiences from the participant's perspective. However, challenges were present in finding participants willing to participate due to this study's sensitive nature. Participants were asked to recall a potentially very painful time in their lives. There are also ethical barriers immediately present when dealing with the offenders. There could be no implications that the offenders' freedom is contingent on his participation in the study. In this study, I felt it was best to avoid those falling within any protected status for interviews. I had previously worked in Guilford County as a probation and parole officer, I needed to make sure it was clear that I no longer worked in that capacity while conducting this study. I did this by thoroughly screening each participant the day before their interview. Therefore, I purposely avoided the use of individuals still under when possible. Adults who were formerly incarcerated and had been released from any type of supervision were used instead of those still under supervision.

There are barriers that exist due to a lack of resources or funding. There was no payment for the assistance requested from participants. This could have been problematic because some people do not want to participate in research unless they are being paid. Consequently, when limitations, challenges, and barriers are presented in research, the

researcher must rely heavily upon their creativity and the resources available to them to accomplish their goals. The qualitative research method does not come without limitations, challenges, and barriers, as with the other methods.

Time was a limitation as well in that this study was not conducted over several years. The information collected was based primarily on the reflections of the participants and secondary research results. Additionally, the small research sample of six participants make it difficult to extend the findings to all demographics, contexts, and geographic locations of formerly incarcerated Black fathers.

Significance

This research provides valuable insight and perspective to decision makers, judges, policy makers, lawmakers prison counselors, school counselors, and other service providers of Black youths who are at high risk or have already entered the juvenile criminal justice system and those dealing with current or former inmates. Positive social change can only be brought about by providing lawmakers and those who enforce laws with insight about the people they are dealing with. When laws are administered unequally, the impact on the lives of Black children, communities of color, and the offenders is devastating. Service providers need to understand the significance of early intervention with offenders before sentenced to prison and before they are released from prison.

Measures for reducing the rate of recidivism can be significant. This research can assist in determining when and where intervention should occur in the lives of high-risk Black children who have parents incarcerated, impacting positive social change. Other

studies such as that conducted by Allard (2018) are important, but they did not focus on the unique perspective of the Black man and how he perceives his incarceration has impacted the lives of the Black children and the families they left behind.

This examination, from the point of view of these Black offenders, can also serve as motivation to the men to want to establish, continue, or improve their relationships with their children. Examining their perspectives may be the motivation needed to spark the desire to acquire job skills while still in prison so that upon their release they can legally provide for their children, families, and themselves when they get out. Blacks are disproportionately represented in the penal system and their plight is one that has survived since slavery. It is critical for service providers as well as policymakers to understand the experience of this phenomenon from the perspective of the Black offenders. Understanding how and why the massive removal of Black males from their children and families due to incarceration is significant. Incarceration has affected their lives, economically, psychologically, and behaviorally through generations. Once this understanding has taken place, decisionmakers can apply the appropriate programs and services while they are still incarcerated that will bring about positive change in the lives of these offenders, their children, and society.

When Black offenders who want to change have been identified, programs that assist in nurturing their relationships with their children and families can begin to take place while offenders are still incarcerated or under supervised (Wu et al., 2012). When a child has a father or parent in the penal system, supportive actions and programs need to be made available to the child as well. Implementing services that provide mentoring,

support, and counseling to these youths can assist in preventing these children from repeating this cycle of incarceration and the culture of recidivism (Wu et al., 2012).

Summary

In Chapter 1, I addressed how Black men perceive their incarceration has affected their families and children who were left behind. I examined this phenomenon and then used the social bond theory to propose that the four elements of the social bond theory, attachment, commitment, belief, and involvement, lessen the inclination of offenders to partake in antisocial or deviant behavior. Examining the social bond theory as it related to this to phenomenon enabled me to predict how the independent variable (the offender) is related to the other dependent variables such as crime and their children. Through supervision and intervention, strategic methods may be applied to produce effective change (Kivunja, 2018).

In this study, I explored the elements of the social bond theory as they applied to six ex-offenders in Guilford County, North Carolina. This study was an opportunity to explore how the participants perceived that their disproportionate representation in prison affected their children psychologically, economically, and socially. Chapter 2 addresses the history, the children, and the formerly incarcerated offender through prior studies and literature available.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Black men in the United States are disproportionately represented in the penal system. The trauma of parent-child separation due to incarceration can be devastating to the life of a child and the incarcerated parent, yet very little research has addressed the topic (Miller, 2007). There has been even less research conducted from the perspective of the Black offender, as to his point of view on how incarceration has affected his children (Welch et al., 2019).

In this study, I examined how separation caused by incarceration affects the parent and child and how Black fathers perceive or understand the impact their incarceration has had on the children they left behind. I examined the potential relationship between the incarcerated father's understanding of the damage to his children and family and his behavior. This point of view may help to establish the motivation needed for Black male offenders to stay out prison. Offenders may need to remain connected to their children while incarcerated and the system to assist in adequately preparing the offender for release without the likelihood of recidivism (Craigie et al., 2018). Motivation to participate in reentry programs is significant for programs such as the Second Chance Act reentry program to exist. This program was established in 2008 to assist formerly incarcerated offenders in reentering society. However, in this program, the participants continue to experience high recidivism rates within 30-months of their release (Mulhlhausen, 2018).

Research such as this is needed because Black youth in the United States are born into a nation with a history of deep racial divide. This racial divide stems from slavery, Jim Crow laws, the Black Codes, and mass incarceration. For a struggling Black family to lose the Black male of their household to imprisonment, whether it is due to his poor judgment or systemic racism, is problematic. The intent of this study was to, (a) examine the history of how this generational disproportionate separation of Black fathers from their children came about, (b) explore this separation from the incarcerated Black mans' perspective, and (c) examine the effects on the children of Black fathers incarcerated. Valuable information can be gained for reentry programs, court professionals, local government leaders, and reentry program funding sources to benefit society, ex-offenders, and their children. The improvement of reentry programs addressing the maintenance of father/child connections is vital while the father is still incarcerated. The goal is to minimize recidivism amongst offenders once they are released and mitigate the impact of incarceration on children during the imprisonment of their fathers.

Literature Search and Strategy

My primary source of literature for this study came from Walden Library databases. The city government websites, census.gov., databases were also used along with the Department of Justice databases. Google Scholar was accessed through the Walden University databases as well.

Some of the key words and phrases used to access material for this study were as follows: *mass incarceration, recidivism, criminal justice, phenomenology, social theory, incarcerated parents, War on Drugs, slavery, Black Codes, racism, Black fathers,*

qualitative research, children of the incarcerated, increased father involvement, psychological effects of incarceration, psychological effects of imprisonment, post incarceration syndrome, incarceration, penology, traumatic grief, detention-related psychological problems, prisoner psychology, interpersonal trauma, prison mental health, recidivism, complex posttraumatic stress disorder, the trauma of incarceration, post incarceration, post incarceration syndrome, privatization, selfhood, selfhood after traumatic confinement, traumatic memories, solitary confinement, and children of the incarcerated. Google Scholar was used in accessing incarceration data. The Thoreau database and Pro-Quest database were used to access criminal justice articles on Black people incarcerated and incarcerated parents. Crime statistics in counties located in North Carolina were collected from www.census.gov/quickfacts/guilfordcountynorthcarolina.

I found little to no previous research conducted on my topic using a phenomenological approach. However, I was able to access a few earlier studies with similar issues, methods, or practices, which provided me with some guidance on how to frame the research.

Theoretical Foundation

The theoretical foundation for this study was the social bond theory. The social bond theory was developed by Hirschi in 1969, providing assumptions as to why some people refrain from breaking the law and indulging in criminal behavior while others deviate from social norms and involve themselves in illegal activity (as cited in Anderson, 2015). The maintenance of familial connections is essential, and Hirschi outlined four components for the social bond theory that he claimed strengthens the motivation for

some not to commit deviant or criminal acts (as cited in Biscontini, 2019). The first bond component, often deemed the most important, is attachment. This includes attachments to siblings, peers, and family. The second bond is group activities, like being a part of a team, group, or organization. The third bond involves having obligations or commitments, such as having a job or being in school (Biscontini, 2019). The fourth and final component is belief; the belief in moral fairness applies to the rules of society. Hirschi believed that when two to four elements of the social bond theory are present in an individual's life, it is improbable that individual, or in this case, Black ex-offenders, commit crimes.

Kalu et al., (2020) conducted a study using the social bond theory with intervention and prevention in mind for girls. Secondary data was used for this study. Data was examined for the girls used in his study, displaying externalized deviant behavior, which most often led to their involvement in the juvenile justice system (Kalu et al., 2020). This study provided information and guidance to social workers, educators, policymakers, researchers, as well as stakeholders. Kalu et al., (2020) examined the relationship between parental and school bonding and externalized behavior of the girls. Due to racial disparity within the juvenile justice system, the differences between races were also accessed. For Black and Hispanic girls, the parental attachment was a factor. For Black and White girls, belonging was a factor. For Black girls, the absence all four elements of the social bonding theory were indicators for deviant external behavior, which can eventually lead them to involvement in the justice system.

The social bond theory appropriately aligned with my study, using the same four elements of Hirschi's social bond theory of 1969: (a) attachment, (b) involvement, (c) commitment, and (d) beliefs (see Kalu et al., 2020). I intentionally sought the perception of Black, male, ex-offenders and how they perceive their incarceration affected their children's lives. In this study, I examined Black males who externalized deviant behavior, which is a strong indicator of recidivism (see Kalu et al., 2020). Accordingly, I present questions for discussion that explored and aligned with the social bond theory, provoking thoughts that can lessen the probability of external behavior and recidivism.

Children who experience the incarceration of a parent are often negatively impacted physically, mentally, and emotionally (Craige et al., 2018). Previous researchers have viewed the connection of incarcerated parents and their children through programs such as enhanced visitation. Using the perspective of social bonds theory, Mears and Stafford, (2022) examined the impact of visitation with incarcerated parents, focusing on maintaining a child's connection with an incarcerated parent and found reductions in recidivism for formerly incarcerated males who maintained regular contact with their children via visitation while incarcerated. Similarly, Folk et al., (2019) used social bond theory to examine the impact of starting the reentry process prior to release back into the community. Folk et al. found that visitation was a critical part of the reentry process and helped incarcerated parents both maintain family connections and strengthen the ability of formerly incarcerated parents to transition back into the home.

My research question addressed how formerly incarcerated Black males perceive that their incarceration has affected the children they left behind. The social bond theory

provided valuable insight in several areas, such as reentry programs. In contrast, the four components of social bonding can be the focus to prepare men to reenter society. A phenomenological approach allowed interviews to be conducted using adults who had fathers absent from the home and their lives due to incarceration. There is a tremendous need for the United States to pass laws and policies that are consistently among all races.

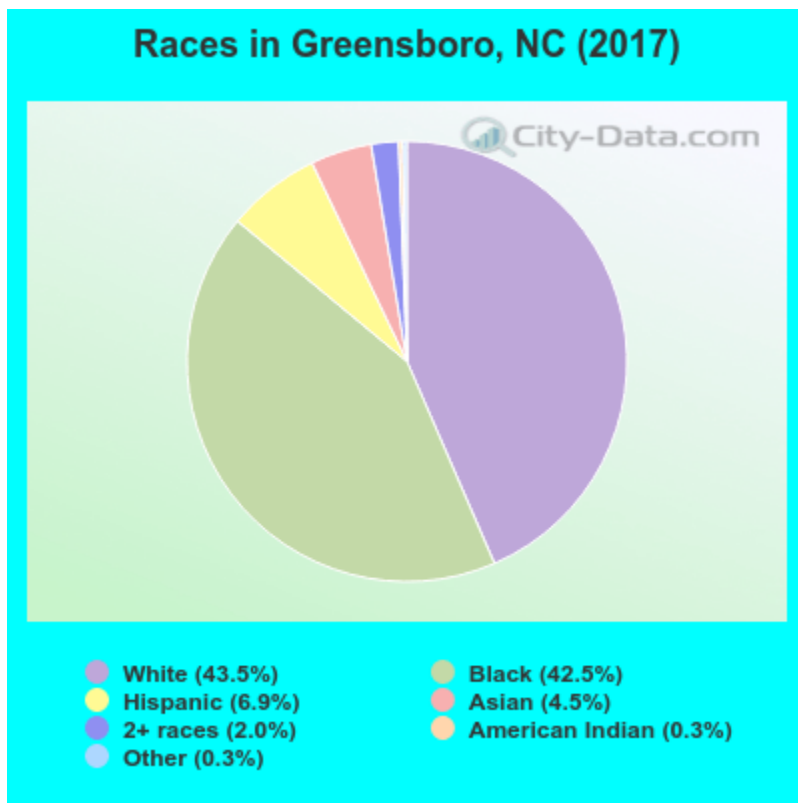
Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework is the researcher's umbrella for concepts as they relate to the topic. The conceptual framework of this research includes a discussion of how this phenomenon came into existence and how formerly incarcerated Black men perceive their incarceration has affected the children they left behind. The geographic area of focus was Guilford County, North Carolina.

The strategically planned collection and analysis of data as they relate to Black men in prison and Black children being raised without their fathers were essential to understanding this problem's magnitude. One in every four Black children born in 1990 has one parent in prison; for Whites, it is one in 25 children (Allard, 2018). To remove such a large segment of men from any race or culture of people (Black men) has inevitably had a profound effect on families and communities. Law and policy makers, service providers, court judges, social workers, counselors, teachers, and those in charge of reentry programs must be educated on the behavioral, emotional, and psychological effects of incarceration on the children left behind and the offender. This awareness can allow for the appropriate support, services, and understanding to be applied.

Service providers are assisting offenders in reconnecting with their families and implementing programs that equip them with the tools to be productive parents and citizens in and outside of the Black community. There is an urgent need for this country to implement laws and policies to be applied consistently among all races of people to prevent recidivism and minimize the collateral damage with children. This process needs to begin before the actual release of offenders.

This research took place in Guilford County, North Carolina. Guilford County, North Carolina, is the third largest county in North Carolina. This county has a total population of 533,670, of which the black population is 174,443 (City-Data.com). Greensboro, North Carolina, which is Guilford County, is the city where the participants in this study resided. The population of Greensboro consists of 63.1% Whites, 46.2% Blacks, 10.1% Hispanics, 6.4% Native Indians, 2.3% Asians, .5% American Indian, and .2% others (City-Data.com). These were 2017 statistics. Thus, the disproportionate removal of Black men from the Black population in this illustration is significant. Figure 2 shows the races of Greensboro, North Carolina.

Figure 2*Races in Greensboro, NC**Note.*

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of formerly incarcerated Black fathers regarding the effect their incarceration has had on their children. The intent of this exhaustive literature review was to examine (a) the history of how this phenomenon began, (b) the incarcerated Black men from their perspective, and (c) the effects on children whose fathers were incarcerated. Valuable information can be gained for reentry programs, court professionals, local government leaders, and reentry program funding sources that can benefit society as well as ex-offenders and their children. The improvement of reentry programs addressing the maintenance of father/child connections

is vital while the father is still incarcerated. The goal is to minimize recidivism amongst ex-offenders once they are released and mitigate the impact of incarceration on children during the imprisonment of the fathers.

The United States has the highest rate of incarceration of any country in the world (Washington, 2018). Studies have revealed that the effects of parental incarceration are internal and external for children. Confinement places children at high risk in several categories, such as social economics, parental guidance, psychological, and delinquency (Nesmith & Richland, 2008). Raising a child alone unexpectedly creates challenges within itself. However, when a child has a close relationship with a parent and that parent is suddenly removed, it can often lead to inadequate care of that child as well as traumatic stress (Nesmith & Richland, 2008). The child can be moved around within the foster care system or neglected intentionally or unintentionally by the single parent left to provide.

Incarceration has an essential purpose within the criminal justice system. However, when incarceration is implemented with glaring disproportionate numbers for Black men, lawmakers must revisit the policies in place. However, many times the collateral damage of incarceration is children, which means much more research is needed to initiate social change.

History

Historically, Black men have been systematically removed from their families (Weissman, 2017) and as common practice were sold as property and separated from their families through the institution of slavery. Jim Crow Laws, the Black Codes, and the War on Drugs were later implemented to maintain their subordinate status through

segregation and subjugation (Weissman, 2017). The dominance of segregation was strengthened and supported by the passing of laws and ordinances throughout this country. The legislative and judicial branches of government supported and enforced laws favoring the unequal treatment of Blacks. The 13th Amendment abolished slavery in 1865; however, a year later, southern legislators passed laws known as the Black Codes as a means of keeping Blacks in legal servitude (Weissman, 2017). The Black Codes were a series of laws passed by White southerners after the Civil War, allowing Blacks to be jailed, incarcerated, and inducted into chain gangs. Texas, Alabama, Mississippi, Florida, South Carolina, Georgia, Louisiana, and Arkansas leased out Black convicts for profit. Numerous White men were sworn in as police officers because it became a very profitable to hunt and catch Blacks (peonage). Black women and children arrested were leased to plantations to care for the cotton, tobacco, and sugar cane crops. The Black men arrested were leased to coal mines and railroads companies (Ericksen, 2019). Black people have been subjected to the laws involving racism and slavery; however, the role of Black men as fathers and head of households is significant and has received little attention from scholarly researchers (McAdoo & McAdoo, 1997). Black men and women were subjected to the Black Codes for minor and often unjustified offenses, such as marrying out of their race or looking at a White woman, preaching to a Black congregation, vagrancy, and slew of made-up offenses. If the parent of a Black child was arrested for vagrancy offenses, the child could be taken and leased out, and the plantation owner was judicially authorized to inflict punishment as needed. Boys could be held until

age 21, and girls could be held until age 18. Peonage did not end until World War II began.

The Civil War had largely been fought in the South and there was a tremendous amount of structural damage, creating the need of rebuilding and repair. Without slave labor, the task of rebuilding would have been economically devastating. Thus, the Black Codes were created. Black men were separated from their children and families often held in legal servitude for prolonged periods. White southerners feared their former slaves and feared what the loss of free labor in the South would mean economically during reconstruction (Weissman, 2017). Economics was a huge factor for promoting incarceration and condoning any labor laws administered that may have been of benefit to Black men (Weissman, 2017).

Records of how the separation of Black men from their children and families evolved into a norm. Weissman (2017) accumulated historical data regarding the laws as well as the climate that governed the lives of Blacks after the civil war. Weissman strategically recorded findings showing that even though the 13th Amendment freed Blacks, some laws and ordinances were passed that continued to legally separate blacks from their families and regarded them as biologically inferior. With laws and ordinances in place to support the imprisonment of Black men for free labor, the numbers also grew for Black children being raised without fathers.

The vision of a Black man having the ability to have a family and raise his children after the civil war quickly faded. Erickson (2019) conducted a qualitative study examining racial gaps related to incarceration and how the gaps evolved. Erickson

addressed how the incarceration rate of Black men increased immensely after the Civil War, and by 1880, Black men were three times more likely to be incarcerated than White men. According to Erickson (2019), many Black men fled the South looking for better job opportunities, leaving a southern rural existence, and entering urban life. Between 1920 and 1940, there was a massive migration of Blacks to the north seeking a better life for themselves and their families (Erickson, 2019). By the 1940s, 2.11 % of those Black men had been placed in prisons or jails (Erickson, 2019). The South needed the free labor of Black men to reconstruct the damage from the Civil War and to maintain agriculture. Still, the North needed free or cheap labor provided by Blacks to support their industrial and commercial growth (Erickson, 2019). The gap between Blacks and Whites incarcerated expanded immensely during this period, even when there was very little difference between their education and income levels that existed. One of Erickson's (2019) initiatives was the desire to study the *Great Black Migration* to northern cities between 1900 and 1970. According to Erickson (2019), approximately 6 million Blacks left the South and moved to the North. However, Erickson's (2019) research did not elaborate on how impoverished Blacks had been left in the South after the civil war. Lynching was common and Black families with nowhere to go began to rent land to sharecrop. Nor did Erickson (2019) elaborate on how the Black families that traveled to the North were systematically criminalized and imprisoned. Many Black men had to leave their families for prolonged periods to work in the industrialized North, leaving women to raise the children and seek domestic work. The South had been riddled with overt hatred, prejudice, and slavery. When blacks arrived in the North, the racial climate

was not what they hoped for (Erickson, 2019). The dream of the Black father having the ability to support his children and family remained a dream.

Incarcerated Black Men

The origination of racial discrimination and the separation of Black men from their families in the United States, dates to when and how this country was first founded. Large numbers of Blacks were specifically brought to the United States for the purpose of becoming slaves. Annie Stopford (2014) interviewed Michelle Alexander, a civil rights attorney and legal scholar, about her book, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, published in 2010. Alexander was questioned about several highlighted points in her book. She compared Jim Crow laws and slavery to the incarceration of Black men today. Blacks were initially regarded as property and considered only 3/5ths of a human being when brought to America as slaves (Stopford & Smith, 2014). Alexander regarded mass incarceration as another form of legalized discrimination and confinement. Sending such large numbers of Black men to prison and labeling them as felons was like branding them to an underclass, enabling society to legally discriminate against them (Stopford & Smith, 2014). Alexander stated both White and Black men commit crimes. However, Whites received shorter sentences and have the ability to recover, but Blacks are branded for life. Drug sweeps were done frequently on targeted black communities. For those imprisoned, there was no access to educational grants or jobs, no voting rights, Black men that had been in prison, were and are, treated as disposable (Stopford & Smith, 2014).

When Black fathers are incarcerated, their children are usually left with struggling mothers. If by chance the mother is also arrested, the child is then placed in foster care or with a struggling relative, positioning that child to repeat the cycle. As head of the household and father figure, the father, has left his child to deal with feelings of abandonment, being unloved, and uncared for (Stopford & Smith, 2014). Children are often subjected to sub-standard housing, economic deprivation, low educational expectations, and early exposure to the hardcore elements of the streets, when the father has suddenly been removed from their home (Stopford & Smith, 2014).

The strength of this article was that Alexander had worked as a federal prosecutor for years and was a part of and witnessed this cycle repeats itself for Blacks for generations. Until one day realizing what was being done to generations of Blacks within communities. This is what prompted her to write the book (Stopford & Smith, 2014). The weakness found in this interview is that many Blacks and Whites practice discriminatory practices in their daily life. These biases are sometimes conscious and sometimes unconscious, nonetheless they are present and most dangerous when exerted by those which are in power. An attitude of denial that bias and discriminatory practices exist are defended when individuals or a race note that “if blacks would just pull themselves up by the bootstraps, like Obama, Bill Crosby and Oprah they would be ok” (Stopford & Smith, 2014). There is so much literature that does not even acknowledged the biases and discrimination, faced every day by Black children and adults exists. Bias in the form of teachers with low expectations, alienation in schools, targeting by police, and a society

that regards Blacks as lazy criminals. None or very little research has examined how Black men perceive what has been happening to them or their children.

Many times, Black men are given longer sentences than their White counterparts committing the same crimes, which accounts for much of the racial disparity (Stopford & Smith, 2014). By examining the perception of ex-offenders, the offenders may gain a better understanding of how their actions affected their children and are motivated to get out of prison and stay out. When offenders have had ongoing contact with their children, the children have a lessened sense of loss and detachment during and after incarceration.

The first component of the social bond theory, “attachment,” will be present to reduce the chance of recidivism possibly. The children have a better chance of not feeling abandoned and understanding what caused the separation. Policy makers, judges, school counselors, and reentry programs may understand how to create better and implement laws and policies to support the children and adequately prepare an offender to reenter society.

The focus of my study takes place in Guilford County, North Carolina. In this study, I examine how six Black male ex-offenders perceive their incarceration has affected their children's lives. More studies are needed, for example in 2010, Blacks represented only 22% of the population, yet they represented 55% of the North Carolina prison system (The Pew Charitable Trusts, 2010).

In the United States, 54% of all inmates were parents with minor children between 0-17 years of age, 1.1 million of them are fathers (The Pew Charitable Trusts, 2010). There are 2.7 million children with a parent in prison (The Pew Charitable Trusts,

2010). In the Black community, 1 in 9 children, or 11% of children, have a parent incarcerated (The Pew Charitable Trusts, 2010). Children with fathers in prison are more likely to be expelled or suspended from school (Stopford & Smith, 2014) and if the Black male child drops out of school, they are 37% more likely to be in prison between the ages 20 and 34 (The Pew Charitable Trusts, 2010).

There is longevity in Black males being overrepresented in the United States prison systems in comparison to other races (Cai et al., 2011). Several system level variables contribute to inequities in the racial demographics of U.S. prison populations. These variables include the unequal application of aggressive drug laws, policing strategies, and sentencing decisions (Nellies, 2016). Independent variables such as poverty, education attainment, gainful employment, and criminal history impact population disparities in correctional institutions. Research examining parental support and accumulative judicial obligations placed on incarcerated men has been scarce. However, monetary burdens on ex-offenders can often be overwhelming, and the damage to the offender and his family can be counter-productive (Bartlett, 2019). Families that experience the incarceration of a Black father experience social-economic challenges and the disruption of the family environment as well (Bartlett, 2019). Brown et al., (2016) documented “collateral damage” to families, partners, and children of incarcerated males thoroughly. The United States houses more of its citizens in its’ prisons than any other country in the world. The incarcerations are astronomical, involving people of color, in a country that proclaims itself to be the largest advocate of freedom world is profound.

Families of color are torn apart by a racially biased system that justifies these events with the laws and policies they created.

One of Americas' most shameful travesties was the case of George Stinney Jr., a 14-year-old Black child. Stinney was the first minor child executed in the United States. George was from Alcolu, South Carolina and was accused of raping and murdering 2 young white girls (Smith, T., 2021, Brinson, R., 2018). He was put on trial and executed by electrocution on June 16, 1944. George was convicted in 10 minutes by an all-white male jury and his court appointed white attorney did no cross examination and called no witnesses (Smith, T., 2021, Brinson, R., 2018). In 2004, citizens and the Northeastern School of Law called for the case to be re-examined. In 2014, seventy years later, in a Judicial Review the judge found that Stinney had not received a fair trial, the conviction was vacated, and his name was cleared (Smith, T., 2021, Brinson, R., 2018). This case was a clear example of Jim Crow Law in the South.

Many studies have examined how the incarceration of Black men has impacted society, communities, and families. Welch, et al., (2019) conducted a phenomenological qualitative study with seven Black males who were former offenders to get their perspective on their experiences in parenting after being incarcerated. In this study, there was no discussion of recruitment or how recruitment was done. The results of this research indicated that, a) parenting skills acquired were from the experience of each man, b) the relationships were formulated and maintained with the children while in prison, and c) each man s' personal experiences made them want to do and be better in

life (Welch et al., 2019). However, the article did not address the fathers who had no desire to do better as a father or did not place it as essential responsibility.

Some studies focus on what the participants did wrong and why they should not repeat the behavior that got them in trouble; however, Welch et al., (2019) chose to give their attention to the strength-based approach. This approach concentrates on the strengths of an individual, family, or group. The power of each entity serves as an asset to aid in the recovery of all parties. By utilizing the strength-based approach in this study, the outcome was positive. This approach increased parental involvement in the lives of their children and lessened the factors of risk for their children thus providing an incentive for the ex-offender not to offend (Welch et al, 2019). By the researchers not giving any attention to the problems that caused the incarceration, the study did not address how the offenders could avoid the same results of prison. This study was essential and effective in exploring and providing an avenue of understanding that factors the motivation of ex-offenders to want to do better in life as parents and lower recidivism rates. The study can possibly help assist children of the formerly incarcerated in not becoming high-risk factors for entering the criminal justice system, by listening to the stories of their parents or others who understand this struggle because they have lived through it.

In 2017, the NAACP reported 34% of those in prison were Black men (Carson, 2018). Carson (2018) noted that despite reports stating that the rate of Black men being incarcerated was declining, 29% of those being imprisoned were still young Black males. Black males between 18-19-year-old were 11.8 times more likely to go to jail than their

White counterparts (Carson, 2018). Regardless of the appearance that the rate in which black men were sentenced to prison was declining, there was still significant disparity in the numbers of young Blacks than Whites going to prison. Even though there may have been a decline in the numbers of Black men in prison, there was no mention in this report of those that were still involved in the criminal justice system in the community, through probation and parole or in some other manner, still receiving community supervision and how it was received by their children and families.

In contrast, Alexander's (2010) research, reported that disproportionately mass incarceration of Black men excelled during the years of the "War on Drugs." Felson and Krajewski (2020) did a study that focused on the years 1973 to 2004, the years of mass incarceration. Their position was that the disproportionality of Blacks in the prison system took place before the "War on Drugs" and simply continued at the same rate through the "War on Drugs" but was not escalated. The "War on Drugs" only increased the number of Black men in prison at an already established rate. According to Felson and Krajewski (2020), in the first part of mass incarceration, the population of Hispanics increased more than other cultures. The rate in prison population still increased for blacks and white inmates stayed the same as before the War on Drugs. However, the pace for blacks being incarcerated did increase somewhat during the later years of mass incarceration. Felson and Krajewski (2020) stated the increase for blacks in prison was offset in 1996-2004, which was a time the prison population in general began to decrease.

Felson and Krajewski (2020) concluded that the racial composition of prisons did not change during mass incarceration in the 1990s and the odds that those arrested during

this time were marginal or first-time offenders was slim. They felt that the majority of those arrested were repeat offenders (Felson & Krajewski, 2020). The weakness of this research is that this study used data that came from the point of view of offenders while they were inmates. There were no government statistics presented to substantiate these claims. Questionnaires were distributed to these inmates 6 different times over a 31 year span. The inmates themselves completed the questionnaires. As the reader, I do not know what policies were in place at the time of the arrests. We do not know if the increase in the prison population was caused by law enforcement arresting more minorities and first offenders or if offenders caused the increase in incarceration with a rich history of being arrested and the 3-strike rule applied. During the time the offenders were arrested, laws and policies were unknown, and with the offenders themselves supplying the data, their criminal background may have been conveniently minimized. There was no mention of what led to the increase in the inmate population during the times of arrests.

In 2016 Blacks represented 41.3% of the state and federal prison population (Williams et al., 2019). Of those incarcerated, 95% of them will be released at some point. This makes the policies governing reentry into society a significant concern of the disproportionate Black male population of former offenders.

Once a Black man has been labeled a convicted felon, he will face collateral consequences such as disenfranchisement, public service ineligibility, child custody restriction, housing ineligibility, student loan ineligibility, and felon registration (Williams et al, 2019). Returning to society with these heavy discriminatory practices, no family support, and no secondary education, leaves these men at extremely high risk for

recidivism. The men with children participating in this study voiced that they viewed their children as a second chance to make right their mistakes. The children were a motivation for them to want to stay out of jail and be a part of their children's lives. Williams et al., (2019) conducted this study using ethnography and semi-structured interviews to extract data from black, male offenders regarding reentry. The method used to collect data was a mixed- qualitative methodological approach; both methods were dominant. The two methods used were ethnography and interviews to form a triangulation.

While attending a meeting with a non-profit reentry program, Williams et al., (2019), contacted a gentleman called the gatekeeper, the man who ran the program and he too was a former offender. By gaining his trust, it made it easier to gain the confidence of others in this hard-to-reach population, which is usually very suspicious of opening-up, to outsiders. Snowball sampling was used to obtain interviews and document observations (Williams et al., 2019). A small team of researchers made five trips to the community nonprofit to collect data. Data was observed and recorded. Notes were taken by hand, as well as the use of an actual recorder. Observations were made, and coding was used to record data. The strengths of this study was the use of triangulation. This was done to ensure the validity of the data. To collect data with less bias influencing, the data had more than one researcher collecting it. The researchers never specified how private the interviews were or if there was the possibility of the participants emulating each other.

Incarcerated fathers face numerous crucial issues during and after incarceration that influence their role as fathers. There are serious issues regarding children and family

to be dealt with when a man has been remanded to prison. Chui (2016) conducted a qualitative study using purposeful sampling from a non-governmental organization in Hong Kong. Chui (2016) explored the rarely visited gap in research regarding the caregivers of children who have incarcerated fathers. This target group was selected because 80% of the prison population in that country were men. Fifty- four women participated, all caring for children ages six to eighteen years old. There were no face-to-face interviews conducted. Questionnaires were sent out to potential participants that were caring for the children of males who were incarcerated. Questionnaires were sent to men and women. However, those received from men caretakers were thrown out to remain consistent in the study.

Chui (2016) addressed how incarceration affects the father's relationship with the child and focuses on the caregiver and the child's high level of stress. The father must also worry about who will take care of their children while he is away. Caregivers experienced depression, anxiety, and a high level of mental health problems (Chui, 2016). The children were found to internalize and externalize a lot of their feeling. Children externalized much of their feelings, but it manifests with negative behavior and acting out (Chui, 2016). The social, economic status of the participants was not a factor in choosing the participants of this study.

Chui (2016) examined a related gap in research regarding those who provide care for the children whose fathers were incarcerated. Incarcerated fathers face struggles with their identity and their role as fathers, which had changed since locked up. They are no longer role models, providers, or disciplinarians. According to Chui (2016), children

with incarcerated fathers were often known to suffer academically, behaviorally, and psychologically. Men returning home from prison suffer the shame of having even gone to jail; they are severely limited in their ability to be the breadwinner, they are often unable to have participated in the daily lives of their children and frequently are not allowed to attend the child's school activities, due to their background (Chui, 2016).

Being in prison, men learn and practice the skills of an inmate to survive. Those skills directly contrast with the skills utilized in fatherhood or are deemed as parental behaviors such as protection, support, guidance, and honesty (Chui, 2016). This is regarded as an identity interruption. Formerly incarcerated fathers must somehow find a way to make this adjustment upon their return home.

Miller et al., (2018) conducted a qualitative study done with 17 Black male ex-offenders. This research examined the struggles of Black men returning from prison. These were men trying to find themselves and then trying to find out how they can be fathers to the children they left while incarcerated. The racial disparity involving incarceration has had a significant and long-lasting impact on communities of color.

The disproportionality of incarceration for Black and Latino men has been researched from many different angles. Are Black and Latino men committing more crimes than whites, or are the criminal justice systems on local, state, and federal levels targeting these men and stacking policies to their demise? Research has concluded that in 2011, Black males represented 36% of the state and federal prison population. Hispanic males represented 21% of the state and federal prison population (Miller et al., 2018).

James Baldwin, a novelist, playwright, poet, and activist, depicted racism in America during the civil rights era, as a time in history combatting racial injustice. During this time one out of nine Black children had a parent in prison (Miller et al., 2018). Mass incarceration was depicted as racial mass imprisonment, hyper-incarceration, and the New Jim Crow (Miller et al., 2018). These were all terms used to describe what was deemed as the inevitable fate of poor Black men. Mr. Baldwin viewed this as a time in this country that attempted to force Blacks to quietly accept the position of second-class citizens as punitive punishment for being Black (Miller et al., 2018). Racial disparity within the criminal justice system has disproportionately enacted overt racial bias on minorities, which overwhelmingly includes Black men (Miller, et al, 2018). The data used in this research covered research done during and since the civil rights era. One in 18 Black women, 1 in 9 Black men and 1 in 3 minorities incarcerated, will never graduate from high school (Miller et al., 2018). Without a high school education, it is more difficult for Blacks to thrive economically. Black fathers in prison have child support payments they have to pay upon their return to the community, as well as supervision fees, when they have been paroled from prison (Miller et al., 2018). These payments, along with simple living expenses, can paint a bleak picture and present a classic recipe for recidivism, especially when unemployment is an issue. The ex-offender, Black and a father will not be able to help their child with homework, support them financially, and in many cases, provide a place of residence, these issues become known as barriers (Miller et al., 2018). The numbers are staggering for Blacks and Latinos that are supervised within communities.

There is a history of Black male overrepresentation in the United States prison systems compared to other races (Cai et al., 2011). Several system-level variables contribute to the inequities in the racial demographics of U.S. prison populations. These variables include the unequal application of aggressive drug laws, policing strategies, and sentencing decisions (Nellies, 2016). Independent variables such as poverty, education attainment, gainful employment, and criminal history impact population disparities in correctional institutions. Research examining parental support and numerous accumulative judicial obligations placed on incarcerated men has been scarce. However, these monetary burdens on ex-offenders can often be overwhelming, and the damage to the offender and his family can be counter-productive to any positive skills taught in prison (Bartlett, 2019). Families that experience the incarceration of a black father experience social-economic challenges and the disruption of their family environment (Bartlett, 2019). Brown and Patterson (2016) document “collateral damage” to families, partners, and children of incarcerated males. To say that the United States houses more of its citizens than any other country in the world is a very profound statement. The incarceration of so many people of color from a country that proclaims itself to be the largest in the free world is profound. The statistics are staggering, and if there appears to be a shortage of Black men, it is not imaginary, many of them are in prison. Black men were brought to the United States as slaves, and 400 years later, they still live in fear for their sons and daughters to be removed from their families unjustly.

Many studies have examined how the incarceration of Black men has impacted society, communities, and families. Welch et al., (2019) conducted a phenomenological

qualitative study with seven Black males who are former offenders to get their perspective on their experiences in parenting after being incarcerated. In this study, there was no discussion of recruitment or how recruitment was done. The results of this research indicated that a) parenting skills acquired were from the experience of each man, b) the relationships were formulated and maintained with the children while in prison, and c) each man's personal experiences made them want to do and be better in life (Welch et al., 2019). However, the article did not address the fathers who had no desire to do better as a father or did not place fatherhood as essential.

Some methods or approaches focus on what the participants did wrong and how they should not repeat the behavior that got them in trouble; however, Welch et al., (2019) chose to give their attention to the strength-based approach. This approach concentrates on the strengths of an individual, family, or group. The power of each entity serves as an asset to aid in the recovery of all parties. By utilizing the strength-based approach in this study, the outcome was positive. This approach increased parental involvement in their children's lives and lessened the factors of risk for their children and provided an incentive for the ex-offender not to offend. By the authors not giving any attention to the problems that caused the incarceration, the study did not address how the offenders could avoid prison results outside of involvement with their families. This study was essential and effective in understanding the things that motivate ex-offenders to want to do better in life and as parents and lower recidivism rates. This type of study was also helpful in assisting children of the formerly incarcerated not becoming high-risk

factors for entering the criminal justice system by listening to the stories of their parents or someone who understand their struggle because they have lived through it.

The criminal justice system consists of several means of supervising offenders besides incarceration. The most common form of supervisory involvement in the criminal justice system for adults and juveniles is probation and parole (Phelps, 2019). Probation was initially meant to be an alternative to institutionalization and imprisonment. It has now widened and expanded into a formal method of supervision for convicted offenders. Probation promotes class disparity and has had a devastating effect upon minority communities, according to Phelps (2019).

Community supervision was once thought of as a welcomed alternative to prison. However, what was once considered a gift, now brings questions to many—servicing 1 to 4.3 million offenders between 1980-2007 (Phelps, 2018). The numbers then dropped in 2015 to 3.8 million adult offenders on probation, which in 2018 accounted for 6.7 million adults involved with community supervision of some kind with the criminal justice system, according to Phelps (2018). This article explores who gets put on probation, what they experience, when and why probation is revoked.

The positive point of being on probation or parole is that the incarcerated father is not behind bars and can physically see their children and watch them grow up. The weaker side of this equation is that he may not be able to support that child or himself economically in the community. In prison, an inmate gets three meals daily. In the community, if an inmate does not have a strong support group or a decent job, he can

easily find himself homeless, hungry, or back doing the things that got him in trouble in the beginning, simply to sustain an acceptable standard of living.

Policy changes and recommendations by legislators can reduce the harm of mass incarceration and mass community supervision. The emphasis on who and how many are on probation is often based on the overcrowding of jails, policy changes, and administrative instruction (Phelps, 2018). The climate of how many and who goes to jail and who is on supervised probation can change with the political culture. Provisions of supervised probation can at times be quite restrictive (Phelps, 2018). Often, the terms of supervision involve hefty fines, curfews, home searches, house arrest, drug screens, and a wide array of conditions that if violated can quickly send an offender to prison (Phelps, 2018). The decision of who is on unsupervised probation and supervised probation lies with the judge and the officer in charge of the supervision.

Phelps (2018) addressed the subject of mass probation from the existing literature available on this subject. Her analysis of how mass community-based supervision evolved from mass incarceration was primarily from previously published data and research. What strengthens the study of Phelps (2018) was that she was allowed access to the archives of the Michigan Department of Corrections records which proved to be of great assistance to her and added to the validity of her research.

Remanding offenders to prison in large numbers opened the door for profiting from the incarceration of Black and Latinos, with prison expansion. Many of the prisons were built and ran by private companies Phelps (2018). When the government contracts with companies to create prisons, they must have people to put in them. The need for

bodies was met with the assistance of US laws and policies that justified the imprisonment of those, primarily those of color (Phelps, 2018).

To gain perspective of Blacks in the criminal justice system, McQuade (2018) reviewed several books and felt that some of the books written could serve as a catalyst for lawyers and policymakers to gain insight into social problems and the racial disparity that exists within the criminal justice system. One of the books reviewed was that of Michelle Alexander. Michelle Alexander is an attorney, professor, civil rights activist, and well-known author of *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Color Blindness and 2020 Edition* (McQuade, 2018). Though McQuade did not agree with all the viewpoints of Ms. Alexander, he concedes that her book opened the eyes of many lawyers and policymakers on the get-tough policies for nonviolent drug offenses. Many of these policies deprived people and sometimes whole communities of their right to vote and serve on their peers' juries when in court. Books such as this can lead and assist decision-makers and legal scholars in developing programs and priorities that can shape public policy in America with a new perspective.

Many years have passed since Black men have been legally and physically bound and were removed from their children and families because of slavery. However, Black women are, again, left to provide as single parents for the children when Black men are removed and incarcerated under the laws today. The problem arising from this scenario is that Black women, who are the ones left to be primary caretakers of the children, are now the fastest-growing segment of the prison population (McQuade, 2018).

Gray et al., (2017) position was that the prison population explosion can be explained primarily by poverty, poor schools, and broken homes. Policies and laws have placed men and women of color in a permanent underclass by being the most significant number of convicted felons. US prisons are disproportionately populated with Blacks and Latinos (Gray et al., 2017). Incarceration affects an ex-offender's ability to vote, serve on juries, and obtain higher-paying jobs. At the same time, Gray et al. (2017) attribute the predominately Black prison population to poverty, poor schools, and broken homes. This may be true; however, there are certainly other elements that largely attribute to the absence of Black men in families and communities. History has a clear outline of Black men and simply men of color being subjected to the systemic racism that contributed heavily to the prison population explosion (Gray et al., 2017).

Removing such a large segment of one race of people will inevitably impact families and communities. It is imperative that service providers such as the juvenile court judges, social workers, counselors, teachers, and administrators, are educated on the background and environment of the children they have contact with. In 2007 the Bureau of Justice Statistics reported that of the 1.5 million offenders in prison, 53% of those incarcerated had children that are minors (as cited in Allard, 2018). This is problematic due to the racial disparity in the prisons, and Black children bear the brunt of the problem. In 2016, Black children were nine times more likely to have a parent in prison than Whites and 25% more likely to have had, at one point in their life, a parent in prison. In 2007, 809,800 incarcerated parents had two or three minor children (Warren, 2019).

Several system-level variables impact the disproportionate representation of black men in the are just a few variables.

Children are exposed to incarceration at an early age, and the number of Black children exposed is staggering. Turney (2019) reported that it is estimated, by the age of 17 years old, 24% of Black children will have been subjected to one of their parent's having been removed from the home and incarcerated. Low levels of education have been associated with high incarceration rates. Sixty-two percent of Black youths have parents without high school diplomas as opposed to 15% of Whites (Turney, 2019). The levels of education and the environment in which a child is exposed do seemingly have some bearing on the level of risk a child may be regarded.

More black men were involved with the correctional system today than there were in 1850, the days of slavery (Freehold, 2012). He expands his position by stating that the prison population explosion can be explained primarily by poverty, poor schools, and children from broken homes. Freehold (2012) argued that race nor gender has any bearing on how children respond to their father's imprisonment. With the number of Black men in prison expanding, Black women are often left as the primary caretakers of the children. Freehold (2012) stated Black women are now the fastest-growing gender of the prison population.

Since women are becoming the fastest growing population in prison, there now needs to be an increasing concern about who will raise the children. Policies have created a permanent underclass for convicted felons who are disproportionately Blacks and Latinos. To generate this underclass, minorities are the subject of frequent stops and

receiving harsher sentences in court (Brown & Patterson, 2016). This systemic variable will have to be addressed, at some point, for the disproportionate population in jails to change. The research for this study examined the effects of familial incarceration on the psychological stress levels of black men. Much of the data used in this study was obtained from secondary data collected from the *Data Survey of American Life*, using 1168 questionnaires sent to black men regarding the effects of incarceration. The research indicates that black men had a 20% cumulative risk of being incarcerated, whereas White men had a 3% risk (Brown and Patterson, 2016). Noting that 18% of black men with high school diplomas had an increased risk of being incarcerated before they turn 30 years of age. It was also estimated that 50.5% of black children whose fathers did not finish high school, would have a father in prison by age 14 (Brown et al., 2016). Data indicated one in four black children have experienced fathers in prison and 1 in 25 white children experience the same (Brown et al., 2016).

Black partners and children with familial incarceration are more susceptible to poverty, illness, and depression (Brown et al., 2016). The disproportionate absence of a Black man is significant, and the impact on children and families of persons in prison can be traumatic. High incarceration rates can cause the family cultural alignment to become out of sync, not only because of economic disadvantages but also because of role identification. Though the data which was received was strictly from questionnaires, and there was no way to follow up on questions asked, there was still a lot of valuable knowledge gained from Browns' study.

The Effect on Children and Families

Children left behind when parents go to prison encounter an array of obstacles. Many of these children experience low education attainment, and juvenile delinquency is high (Aylward, 2017). Young boys who have fathers in prison are known to have lower non-cognitive skills, which leads to the likelihood of schools commonly placing them in special education classes (Haskins, 2014). There is extensive fallout when a father is incarcerated.

Chi (2011) did a review on the book, *Change is gonna come: Transforming literacy education for African American students*, where he attempts to answer some of the hard questions: Why are there are more Black men in prison than in college? Why are Black children disproportionately in special education classes? Why Black children prefer to be cool than smart? All of which leads back to a connection to no Black male role model in the household. The weakness of this article is that it is a book review in a scholarly journal, and there is no opportunity to interact with the children or ask the teachers questions. However, from the literature, Chi (2011) gained valuable insight from evidence already collected from actual teachers that could add new perspectives, approaches, and theories to working with Black children within the school system.

Although there is literature supporting the fact that a fathers' incarceration significantly impacts families, the literature does not examine how fathers perceive or understand the impact of their incarceration on their families. Without examining the potential connection between the father's understanding of damage to his children and the actual damage incurred, the ex-offender may genuinely believe he is the only one who

has suffered because of his incarceration. By obtaining the offender's perception regarding his imprisonment, the offender may acquire the motivation needed to maintain family connections while incarcerated and the desire to do better upon his release. Adequate preparation for release should be intentional and significant in preparing the offender to succeed upon his release (Craigie et al., 2018). Finding the motivation to participate in reentry programs actively is essential. Many reentry program participants continue to experience high rates of recidivism (Craigie et al, 2018).

There are many barriers to the successful maintenance of family relationships and successful reentry into the community. A physical and emotional detachment is brought about due to the abrupt physical and emotional distance created when separating those incarcerated from their children (Rabuy & Kopf, 2015). Sometimes caretakers may believe that it is in the best interest of children not to visit their fathers in prison, due to the emotional ties that may have been damaged, before the parent's incarceration. In actuality, the longer the separation between father and child, the more difficult it is on the child and the parent (Rabuy & Kopf, 2015). Maintaining that disconnection may further exacerbate the negative impact of incarceration has on children and fathers. This presents an even more significant challenge to efforts to reconnect fathers with families upon the fathers' release from custody (Rabuy & Kopf, 2015).

Reentry programs attempt to reconnect formerly incarcerated persons with employment, healthcare, housing, and reunite with families. This study may assist in extending literature regarding reentry strategies and provide new data for reentry, professionals in confinement facilities designed to reconnect incarcerated fathers with

their children. Additionally, the perspective of ex-offenders may provide policy and lawmakers with valuable information to create useable programs to implement and evaluate frameworks, which could mitigate the negative impact of incarceration on children with incarcerated fathers.

The purpose of this study is to explore and examine the perceptions of formerly incarcerated fathers regarding the effect their incarceration has had on their children. The intent of this Chapter 2 will be to: a) Examine the history of how this phenomenon began, b) examine the incarcerated black men from their perspective, and c) examine the effects on children. Valuable information can be gained for reentry programs, court professionals, local government leaders, and reentry program funding sources that will benefit society as well as ex-offenders and their children. The improvement of reentry programs addressing the maintenance of father/child connections is vital while the father is still incarcerated. The goal is to minimize recidivism amongst offenders once they are released and mitigate the impact of incarceration on children during the imprisonment of the fathers.

Studies have revealed that the effects of parental incarceration are internal and external for children. Confinement places children at high risk in several categories such as social economics, parental guidance, psychological, and delinquency which are just a few (Nesmith & Richland, 2008). Raising a child alone unexpectedly creates challenges within itself. However, when a child has a close relationship with a parent and that parent is suddenly removed, it can often lead to inadequate care of that child, as well as

traumatic stress (Nesmith & Richland, 2008). The child can be moved around within the foster care system or neglected by the single parent left to provide.

Incarceration does have its purpose within the criminal justice system. However, when incarceration is implemented with glaring disproportionate numbers for Black men, lawmakers must revisit the policies in place. Unfortunately, the collateral damage is often children, which means much more research is needed to initiate social change.

The literature reviewed for this study has addressed: a) how racial disparity in incarceration first began, b) the perception of black males incarcerated, and c) the effect of Black male incarceration on their children. The effect incarceration has had on children will be examined from the perspective of previous offenders. When there is racial disparity in the prisons, the children and families left behind to experience wealth decreases by 64.3 percent (Sykes & Maroto, 2016). The results of this study will hopefully expose possibilities of how to reduce recidivism, minimize collateral damage, and stimulate the implementation of new, equally administered laws and policies. The laws and public policies implemented by the United States government since approximately 1619 (slavery, black codes, Jim Crow, and mass incarceration) until now will be examined as a possible cause of how the disproportionate imprisonment of Black men began.

In the United States, the number of school-aged children who have parents that are incarcerated has been on a steady rise. It is estimated that 50.5% of Black children in the United States, with fathers who have only high school diplomas, will experience parental incarceration before they turn 14 years of age (Brown et al., 2016). Black men

are represented disproportionately in the numbers of incarcerated parents. One in four black children will experience parental incarceration during their childhood instead of one in twenty-five white children (Brown et al., 2016). The average age of children with fathers incarcerated is eight years old. One in 5 children under the age of five, had a parent in prison. In 2007, Lopez & Bhat (2007, p. 141) indicated the number of black children with a parent in prison was as high as 9xs more than white.

It is suggested that the War on Drugs significantly stimulated mass incarceration, and the War on Drugs was not a war on drugs but a war on people of color (Jensen et al., 2004). Between 1990 and 1999, the total number of inmates in state and federal prisons increased 75%. State prisoners increased by 71% and federal prisoners by 127% (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2000b). States with the most significant increases in prison populations during this time were Texas (173%), Idaho (147%), West Virginia (126%), and Hawaii (124%) (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2000b). Incarceration is concentrated among young, uneducated males, African Americans. In 1999, over 44% of the number of inmates in state and federal prisons and local jails were black, and 11% of black males in their 20s and early 30s were either in prison or jail in 1999 (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2000a). In the mid-1990s, one out of every three young Black males were under some form of state supervision (Western & Beckett, 1999). Social injustice and racism have historically been inflicted and supported by the federal government with laws. The United States has used nonviolent drug offense violations to render lengthy sentences on blacks which have mainly contributed to many blacks in jail.

Research such as this is of great importance to examine how this phenomenon can be subsided. Once students with incarcerated parents have been identified without being labeled, school counselors can attempt to provide the support students may need. Providing support to these students is not a routine matter of counseling. Many school counselors have resonated that they need additional training to provide appropriate support to the students (Brown, 2020). Without enough understanding of the theories and research conducted, counselors will fail to provide adequate support for these students.

To increase the knowledge, school counselors must rely on theories, research, and perspectives, which include that of offenders, such as in this research. The perspective of the offenders themselves can assist in obtaining strategies for approaching the students. The offender can offer insight as to how their actions affected their children. But confronting the collateral damage of their incarceration, the offender must want to do better even be a part of such a program as this. Upon their release, programs involving strengthening the relationship with the offender and their children can very well be the incentive needed to lessen the chance of recidivism.

Offering a hypothesis as to how to approach this phenomenon and giving insight into how to approach the children, ex-offenders, may provide an avenue and insight into the reoccurring problems. Information can be obtained as to how an offender perceives their incarceration has affected their child. Support personnel needs to understand, and no two students will handle their parent's incarceration the same. Several facts need to be considered. When the separation occurred, the child's age, was there a relationship

between the mother and father, how many children in the family have been impacted, and several other personal situations students may face.

This phenomenological study is being conducted to provide a clear and concise picture of how the disproportionate representation of black men in prisons originated. This research will then give an examination of literature and interviews with black fathers formerly incarcerated. This literature and interviews will provide the perspectives of these men on how their incarceration has impacted the lives of their families. The research will focus on their perception of the collateral damage to children and motivation to maintain family connections while incarcerated and adequately prepare for release by participation in reentry programs (Craigie et al., 2018). Motivation to participate in reentry programs is essential because many Second Chance Act reentry program participants continue to experience high recidivism rates after a 30-month follow-up period (Mulhlhausen, 2018).

The Children Left Behind

When a parent is placed in incarceration, whether it is in the North or South, they do not suffer alone. There is a lasting effect that is felt by all those associated with that offender. Children are often regarded as ‘collateral damage’ when the father is incarcerated. Too few studies have focused on the father’s awareness or perception of the damage encounter by those children. Communities of color know this all too well about the damage and hardships encountered when the father has been incarcerated, according to Desai and Abeita (2017), researching the juvenile justice system and how it impacts the education and economics of young black males.

At age 12, Malcolm, a young black male whose father was imprisoned, found himself and his family in a downhill spiral. A single domestic incident occurred between he and his mother, resulting in Malcom becoming involved with a juvenile justice system. A system that was fast-tracking Malcom into the prison system. Many black youths have gone through traumatic events at an early age and as a result began to act out as teens due to that trauma (Desai & Abeita, 2017). Educators and researchers who work with children with incarcerated parents need to be cognizant of labels, stereotypes, and biases placed on them and not let that define them or affect their experience with that child. Many youth become involved in the juvenile justice system for relatively minor offenses. These youths become hardened as a means of survival and have no problem transitioning to prison. As an adult and an advocate for young black kids with a parent in prison, Malcolm's message is not to give up on children with incarcerated parents (CWIP). School staff, administrators, and court personnel are vital to early intervention. Malcolm was one of the lucky ones that somehow found his way home from juvenile detention. Desai and Abeita (2017) expose the problem of removing a child from the system once they have been labeled and taken out of the home. Malcolm was fortunate to have a mother that fought with him, to get him out of the juvenile justice system. However, many times the problem for single parents is lack of support, which may be due to logistics, lack of education, or simply the time involved in the process, especially if there are other young children in the home when the father is incarcerated.

The adverse impact of incarceration on families and communities is well documented. Children can begin feeling the effects of having an absent parent due to

incarceration at a very young age. There are numerous vulnerabilities and disadvantages experienced by children with parents in prison. It is difficult for single parents to participate in children's education and attend to their health and behavioral needs while being the sole provider economically (Turney, 2018). Little research has been conducted that considers that Black children specifically are disproportionately exposed to events such as neglect and abuse when one of the parents is incarcerated (Turney, 2018).

The strength-based approach obtained the best results from studies conducted by Turney (2018). This approach focuses on the idea of changing the high-risk behavior of children that have incarcerated fathers. Utilizing the strength-based approach, the attention is placed on the children's inherent strengths instead of focusing on their weaknesses. Turney (2018) investigates how to increase parental involvement and decrease risk factors for their children. Once a father has been incarcerated, there is a limit to the amount of participation in his child's life that he can have. Most of the parenting skills that confined black men have acquired come from lived experiences they have had, their contact with their children while in prison, and their encounters that made them want to become better parents and better people (Turney, 2018). By initiating the contact between children and their incarcerated fathers helps the child deal with the absence of that parent, it can decrease risk factors for that child, and it can also catalyze the father to want to stay out of prison and reduce recidivism.

Frequently, before a father being incarcerated, stress factors existed for the children already in the home. These factors could be things such as drugs, fights, or economic problems. Swisher & Roettger (2018) concluded that removing the father from

home due to incarceration simply exacerbated a bad situation and increased depression and delinquency in minors. One consistent thing is, whether the situation was good or bad, children almost always preferred both parents in the home. Children of all races were a part of Swisher & Roettger's (2018) study. However, due to Black men being disproportionately represented in prison, Black children are more significantly impacted. The number of children affected may differ, and data indicated that the association between the father's incarceration and depression and delinquency does not vary by race, ethnicity, or gender. There was no difference in how children responded to the incarceration or absence of their father. The depression and delinquency of minors are only magnified in the black communities simply because the numbers are more significant. Collected data from the study conducted by Swisher & Roettger (2018) also revealed a need for more research to be done. Additional research focuses on and identifies the services incarcerated fathers feel they need to become effective and successful parents (Swisher & Roettger, 2018). These studies may help develop therapeutic groups, potential peer-led groups, and creating community-based support groups for the fathers and their at-risk children.

Reentry programs designed to help incarcerated individuals put their lives back together are invaluable to many inmates. Swisher & Roettger (2018) and Breckenridge (2018) conducted studies that better understand things that motivate offenders. Their findings can assist policymakers, educators, and clinicians in meeting the needs of those previously incarcerated. These researchers hope to reduce recidivism, decrease the collateral damage to the children, and strengthen Black families and the communities. If

two parents are present in a child's life, there may be a greater chance of creating an environment of dual supervision for their children. If one parent is working, the other may not be at any given time.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight prisoners who were repeat offenders. All were serving short sentences of less than 12 months and had been in prison at least four different times. The participants were between ages 24-37 years. During this phenomenological qualitative study, participants were advised that they attributed much of their recidivism to lack of support from the system, both in prison and upon their release (Lievesley et al., 2018). Most voiced feelings of worthlessness for not being able to provide for their families. Hopelessness, depression in that many found themselves homeless because their mates had moved on and sometimes even had additional children. They had no connection or support in the community. This would prompt them to purposefully commit a crime to go back to prison where they had meals and shelter. The weakness of this study is that it was done in the United Kingdom rather than the United States. The policies and laws will differ. Given the sentences are less than a year, the participants may very well not be sent to prison for a sentence less than 12 months but to jail, if space permitted. This would make it easier to maintain a connection to the community and their children and families. The study's strength is that with only eight men to interview, men in prison time and accessibility would not be an issue if an area of the interview needed to be revisited or elaborated on the participant was easy to access. Also, regardless of what country the offenders were in, the attitude would be the same.

Without a connection with the community or the four elements of social bonding, recidivism can be predicted.

When Black men are removed from their families, a trickle-down effect occurs, impacting all those associated with them. Bonds of matrimony and parental responsibilities are tremendously strained due to financial burdens, loss of co-parenting, and just the changes in the family dynamics (Breckenridge, 2019). The absence of the incarcerated parent being there is an extra burden on the mother who has just become a single parent. Often the children grow up economically challenged, living below the poverty level, and without male role models in the home. The Ridge Project is a Christian-based organization, uniquely formulated after the husband, Ron, was sentenced to 15 years in prison (Breckenridge, 2019). During this time, Ron began to mentor individuals in prison while his wife mentored children and families outside. Upon Ron's release, they formed The Ridge Project to continue their work.

The Ridge Project consists of community and institutional-based mentoring programs that have proved to be quite valuable. Accumulating data and following how the programs are implemented and their success rate is a helpful asset to the criminal justice system. This project provides insight into understanding what motivates offenders during and after incarceration to be better people (Breckenridge, 2019). Data can be used to assist policymakers, educators, clinicians in meeting the needs of those previously incarcerated. Reducing recidivism and decreasing the collateral damage to children, as well as strengthening families and the community is the goal of this project.

Finding an area of interest for offenders could be the key that will keep them from reoffending. The gap identified in this research is the need for more research to determine what services fathers feel are needed to become effective and successful parents. Research and studies may help develop therapeutic groups, potential peer-led groups and develop community-based support groups for the fathers and their children. Miller et al. (2018) agree that there is a gap in research regarding the attention given to addressing the needs of fathers in prison and children. Fathers who need and want to become better parents could very well be the key to curbing recidivism and curbing aggressive behavior of children with parents in prison.

Brown (2020) is concerned with the simplified view of school counselors regarding children who have parents who are incarcerated. It is estimated that 5 million children will experience this phenomenon, and most of them are disproportionately black and Latino. It is imperative that school counselors, who deal with these students daily, know the extenuating circumstances surrounding their academic, behavioral, and social performance.

Brown (2020) conducted her qualitative study in the southeastern part of the United States, with school counselors observing students with incarcerated parents in one school. Many students who have parents who are incarcerated internalized feelings by withdrawing, shutting down, and lacking in extracurricular activities. The external behaviors exhibited were lashing out, seeking unconventional attention, showing defiance, refusing to follow directions, and conflicting with other students and those in authority (Brown, 2020). In this study, there was only one student that did show

resilience. This student wrote an essay regarding his circumstances, having a parent in prison. This essay resulted in him obtaining a scholarship to college. But not many of the students were that open with private details of their life.

The act of being part of a study about an event a child is not proud of is not something that children will readily volunteer for. Therefore, to conduct research such as this, Brown (2020) had to establish limited trustworthiness on the part of the students. This was accomplished by showing interest and effort to reach out and address the needs of those youth who had an incarcerated parent. However, there were school counselors that participated that came with preconceived biases. Perhaps rather than utilizing only counselors that volunteered for the study, all counselors should have been required to attend as part of the job. This could alleviate those students that fall through the cracks. Brown (2020) notes the mentorship programs were not as helpful as they could have been. Each student was placed with a mentor. Many parents and students felt that the mentors could not relate to their feelings, circumstances, and loss, and it was a waste of time.

Regardless of what offense the incarcerated parent had committed, the children wanted their parents in their life. Feelings of overwhelming anxiety and isolation were manifested due to the parent's absence at school activities and in their lives. There is a void to be reckoned with for studies on how school counselors can meet the needs of students with incarcerated parents by providing more professional training and development and diversity. This study was conducted on one school; however, there are

so many more schools and school districts across this country with more diversity and a need for intervention for students with high-risk factors.

The label of “high risk” is commonly associated with children of the incarcerated. One must ask oneself, do these children not have the right to seek help. While Brown (2020) found in her study that mentors from some of the school programs often left students and parents feeling as though they were unable to relate and out of touch with their circumstances. At times there were issues of trustworthiness. Other studies found mentoring to be quite helpful.

The way a mentoring program is implemented can make a difference in its impact on a child’s life. Contrary to Brown (2020), Stump et al. (2018) found that mentors were an asset upon examining children with incarcerated parents. They found 53% of incarcerated adults were parents (Stump et al., 2018), and when funding is available, the recruiting of mentors could be detailed and beneficial. When recruits are appropriately trained and strategically matched with children, their results were quite successful. As a result, the children (COIP) experienced reduced symptoms of depression and improved social, academic, and behavioral adjustment.

Obtaining adequate funding to support program goals can make a difference as to its effectiveness. When the proper resources are available and put into quality mentoring programs, the results can be positive. Taking the time to interview potential mentors and match mentees with the correct person can be a lifesaving moment for a child. There is such a large percentage of parents' prison population, and a significant portion of those inmates being black, leaving many black children at risk in communities.

Children of Black Males Incarcerated

When dealing with children with incarcerated parents, it is essential to understand the importance of a parent-child bond. Understanding that that bond is severely damaged for numerous children when the father is removed and incarcerated. Turney (2019) estimated that by the age of 17 years old, 24% of Black children will have already been exposed to at least one parent being incarcerated. With one parent incarcerated, it is left up to the other parent to wear several different hats to care for the children and the family. Unfortunately, if the parent's education level is low, that parent will only be able to assist minimally with schoolwork. Sixty-two percent of black youths have parents without high school diplomas, in contrast to 15% of white parents (Turney, 2019). Having a lower-level education usually equates to low wages, which brings a whole new set of problems like decent housing, schools, neighborhoods, and supervision.

The extent of damage to a child depends on what the child's relationship was with the absent parent before incarceration. The level of disruption caused by a parent and child bond being broken will depend on several things, such as a) How old was the child when the father left? b) Was the father living with the child at the time of his incarceration? and c) What was the relationship before incarceration (Turney, 2019)? The closer the father and child were, the more complex the disruption will be, and the older the child is upon the separation, will also bring more difficulty.

Despite the reports that the rate at which Black men are being incarcerated is declining, 29% of those incarcerated are still Black males (Welch, 2019). Black males

between the ages of 18 to 19 are 11.8 times more apt to go to prison than their white counterparts. Of the referenced Black men, 40% of these men are parents (Welch, 2019).

The gap identified by Welch (2019) was the need for more research to determine what services Black fathers felt were needed, to assist them in becoming effective and successful parents. These studies may help develop therapeutic groups, potential peer groups and community-based support groups for Black fathers and their at-risk children. Previous research shows how incarceration harms the relationship between Black men and their children, but it does not say how to put it back together. This type of study can provide an understanding of things that motivates offenders after incarceration. It can help policymakers, educators, and clinicians meet the needs of those previously incarcerated to reduce recidivism, decrease the collateral damage to the children, and strengthen the black families and the community.

School districts in charge of our children must somehow find a way to deal with children that are collateral damage to the penal system. The zero-tolerance disciplinary policy in schools is administered by many school districts around the US, including North Carolina. These policies render predetermined punishments for school infractions, regardless of circumstance. They are exclusionary punishments that may include automatic suspensions, expulsions with some continued educational services, expulsions without any continued educational services, mandated referrals to law enforcement, automatic exclusion from extracurricular or co-curricular activities, and referrals to and placement in alternative educational settings may be included (Sellars, 2018). With these policies, 56% of students who are overwhelmingly expelled are either Hispanic or Black.

Sellars (2018) stated, Hispanic and Black students make up 70% of students involved in school-related arrests or referrals to law enforcement. Schools have got to do a better job at not labeling children according to class or social-economic standards. Many times, a child's circumstances or culture can dictate how they respond to adverse situations. By lumping children into a group and labeling them, schools may harm their only chance of changing their environmental fate. Policies such as these that do not consider that individual child's circumstances can ostracize a child's chance of changing their circumstances or predicted outcome. Living in an area that the child must defend himself to survive is not taken into consideration. For a child trying to do the right thing, policies such as these could be devastating!

The spoken burden and, most of the time unspoken, that youth carry is quite heavy. Swisher and Roettger (2018) concluded from their study that depression and delinquency increased when children have a parent who is incarcerated. Results indicated that associations between a father's incarceration, depression and delinquency do not vary by race and ethnicity, or gender. Regardless of cultural or racial differences, the pain of a parent being incarcerated still hurts. This study did not address any differences in the number of children with incarcerated parents who also went to prison as their parents, and children who did not.

What is the best way to reach the children with a father who is incarcerated so that the cycle does not repeat itself? Jones (2017), a 35-year-old lady who grew up in the projects in Louisiana and had a father that had been incarcerated all her life. Jones (2017) speaks of her childhood and the shame and embarrassment she felt when people asked

her where her father was. She speaks of her impoverished neighborhood and the crime, death, and violence that she grew up thinking was a normal way of life. Ms. Jones spoke of the remembering her grandparents that were committed to taking several modes of transportation, to take her to see her father and how that all ended at age 15, upon the death of her grandparents. Ms. Jones (2017) spoke to the economic impact of having a parent incarcerated and how it negatively affected her as a child. This article also touched upon the importance of contact between the child and the absent parent. This contact can serve as beneficial to the behavior of the child and the offender.

Children with an incarcerated parent often need something or someone to help them to navigate their cognitive behavior. Jones (2018) stated that after her grandparents passed, she became angry and began acting out in school. She then used track and field as a form of therapy to release her anger. Redirecting negative energy into something positive worked for her. She said that school counselors may not always be the answer to reaching children with anger and several different emotions that come with growing up and having her father incarcerated. Jones felt that help would be received better coming from someone who has lived through the same experiences. Jones stated that local officials need to listen to the children in these situations even though each child's story differs. She believed in the saying it takes a village to raise a child, but you must understand the village first. Jones (2018) felt that those that have lived this life and somehow escaped the perils of 'the hood' are more equipped to help as opposed to a stranger to the experience. The example of *Volunteers of America* is mentioned as an example of a mentee program that matches the mentors' background with that mentee.

Ms. Jones herself now volunteers as a mentor. The essay is very clear in depicting her experience growing up in the 'hood' without her father, due to incarceration. Even though her situation was the norm where she lived, it was still different. Through her experiences, good and bad, as an adult, she is now presenting herself to others who made it out and wants to help others. Ms. Jones is now a college graduate working on her master's degree and mentoring two young women to develop their life and leadership skills.

This article written about Ms. Jones, was a success story about someone that made it out of her negative circumstances and had the passion and ethics to reach back and help others. In the best-case scenario, this works. When a person has experienced something tragic, they are usually the best ones to help others in that same situation. However, some are just so happy their life took a turn for the better, they do not want to look back at that painful era in their lives. In instances such as that, anyone, trying to help is better than no one. As stated before, when a man goes to prison, he is not the only one affected. It is painful, and it is unforgettable. When those who do not have that lived experience are available to assist, properly training those in professional positions and positions of authority can help when they want to help.

According to Kids Count Data Center (2018), 66% of black children live in single-parent households. There also are many instances when both parents are incarcerated, and the grandparents must assume the role of caretaker so that the children do not become wards of the state. Often in families of color, legal documentation is not obtained when custody is switched due to a lack of understanding of how the system

works (Carswell & Rose, 2007). It is often not clear that temporary custody is not permanent custody. However, placing a child that is already considered high risk in the custody of older individuals could be better than foster care, but still problematic as well.

More black men were involved with the correctional system today than there were in 1850, the days of slavery (Freehold, 2012). He expands his position by stating that the prison population explosion can be explained primarily by poverty, poor schools, and children from broken homes. Freehold does not believe neither race nor gender has any bearing on how children respond to their father's imprisonment. With the number of black men in prison expanding, black women are often left as the primary caretakers of the children. Freehold (2012) states that black women have become the fastest-growing segment of the prison population.

Since women are becoming the fastest growing population in prison, there now needs to be an increasing concern about who will raise the children. At the same time, Freehold (2012) attributes the explosion of the prison population primarily caused by poverty, poor schools, and children from broken homes. Policies have created a permanent underclass for convicted felons who are disproportionately blacks and Latinos. To generate this, underclass minorities are the subject of frequent stops and receiving harsher sentences in court. This systemic variable will have to have to be addressed at some point for the disproportionate population in jails to change.

The criminal justice system consists of several means of supervising offenders besides incarceration. The most common form of supervisory involvement in the criminal justice system for adults and juveniles is probation (Phelps, 2019). Probation

was initially meant to be an alternative to institutionalization and imprisonment. It has now widened and expanded into a formal method of supervision for convicted offenders. Probation promotes class disparity and has had a devastating effect upon minority communities, according to Phelps (2019).

Summary

This study was conducted in Guilford County, located in North Carolina. The study uses a qualitative method of research to examine how previously incarcerated Black males perceive their incarceration has affected their children's lives. In this study, the social bond theory will be the theoretical framework used, initially developed by Travis Hirschi. The four components of this theory will be explored: a) attachment, b) involvement, c) commitment and d) belief.

The social bond theory will serve to assist me in examining how, through their attachments with their children and families, Black male offenders and others may be able to understand how incarceration has affected those they are closest to. Through attachments, the offender should be better able to understand the hardships his absence has caused emotionally, mentally, and economically to his children. The ex-offenders' involvement in the community was also be examined. Was he an active member of a group, team, or organization when he got into trouble with the law? How did or could membership to an organization, group or team make a difference in decision making prior to. Did the ex-offender have obligations such as employment or a commitment like being enrolled in school, at the time of arrest? Lastly, I will examine if the participants have a

basic belief in the rules or laws of society. Was there a basic belief in the laws to govern society and consequences, if you do not abide by them?

The literature reviewed for this study addresses a) the history of racial disparity and incarceration, b) Black males incarcerated, and c) the effect of Black male incarceration on their children. The effect incarceration has had on children will be examined from the perspective of previous offenders. When there is racial disparity in the prisons, the children and families left behind to experience wealth decreases by 64.3 percent (Sykes & Maroto, 2016). The results of this study will hopefully expose possibilities of how to reduce recidivism, minimize collateral damage, and stimulate the implementation of new, equally administered laws and policies. The laws and public policies implemented by the United States government since approximately 1619 (slavery, black codes, Jim Crow, and mass incarceration) until now have now been explored as a possible cause of how the disproportionate imprisonment of black men began.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Data Collection Process and Analysis

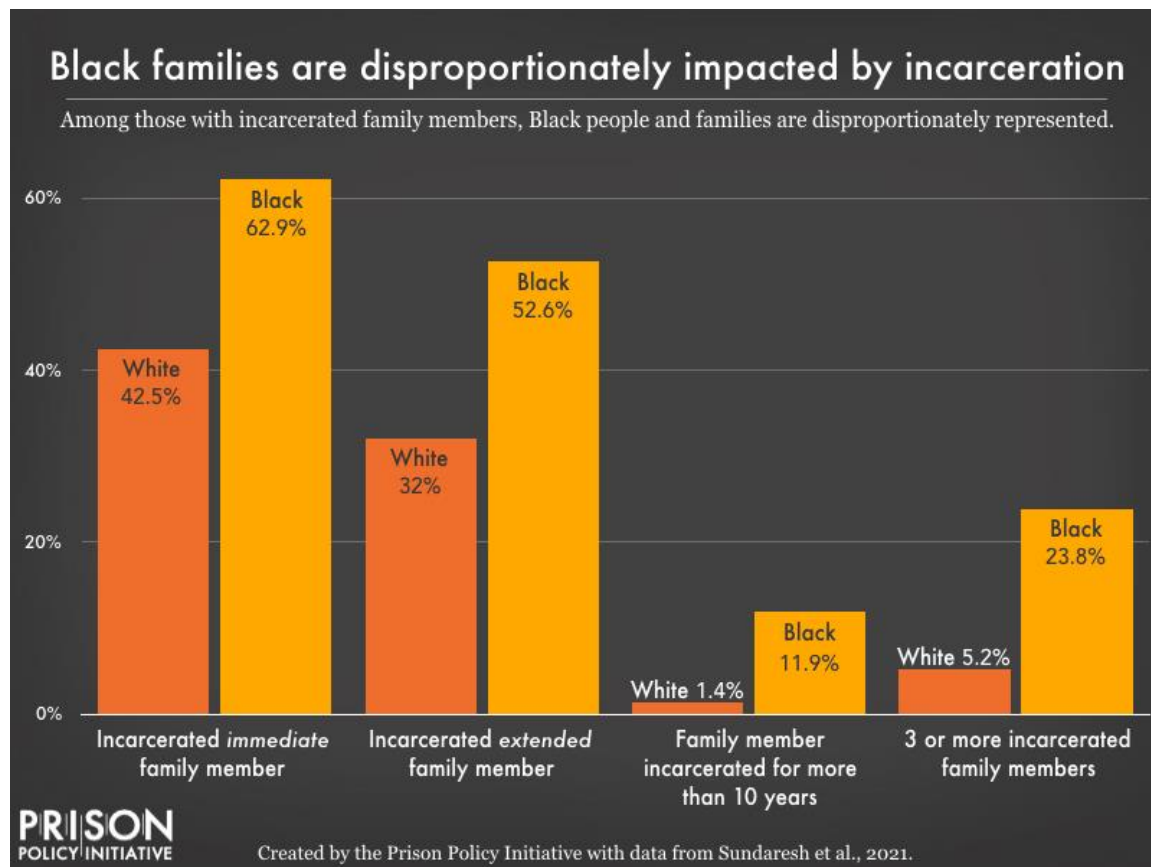
This phenomenological study was conducted to examine the experiences and perceptions of formerly incarcerated fathers regarding the impact their incarceration has had on their families, communities, and children. This type of study is valuable because the incarcerated father often returns to the same communities where they lived when they were first incarcerated (see Buston, 2018). In this study, I examined the role of reentry programming in maintaining a connection between fathers and their children. The study may be used to inform reentry court professionals, local government leaders, and reentry program funding sources regarding the improvement of reentry programs to address the maintenance of father/child connections while the father is incarcerated. The goal is to mitigate the impact of incarceration on children during the father's incarceration and assist the previously incarcerated father in transitioning to reconnect with his community, family, and children productively.

Research Design and Rationale

The research question was as follows: How do formerly incarcerated Black males perceive their incarceration has affected the children they left behind? This was a qualitative study that used a phenomenological method of research. Phenomenology was the method chosen for this study to obtain the perspective of six Black male, former offenders. Face-to-face interviews were going to be conducted to examine how the men chosen felt their incarceration affected their families, specifically their children; however, due to Covid-19 restrictions, interviews were conducted via telephone. The prerequisite

to participation was that participants had to be residents of Guilford County, North Carolina.

The phenomenological method was chosen because it was essential to examine the lived experiences of these Black men from their perspective. Prison should not only be a place to house inmates, but a place where inmates who want to do better can obtain the tools they need to lessen their chances of returning to prison after reentering society. In-depth, semi structured interviews were conducted with six Black male former offenders to gain insight into their perception of the phenomena. Using phenomenology gave the former offenders the chance to provide personal insight into how they perceived their incarceration had affected their families and any collateral damage on their children. By being imprisoned, these men have been unable or hindered to fulfill their role as head of their households, providers, and father to their children. Figure 3 illustrates how in 2021 Black people nationally were still losing family members to the criminal justice system at a much higher rate than Whites, regardless of income, age, or gender.

Figure 3*Black Families and Disproportional Incarceration*

Note. Created by the Prison Policy Initiative with data from Sundaresh et al., 2021.

(Graph: Emily Widra, 2021)

<https://www.prisonpolicy.org/graphs/familyincarcerationbyrace.html>

Ethnography was considered as a possible method of obtaining the information needed to answer my research question of how formerly incarcerated Black males perceive their incarceration has affected the children they left behind. Ethnography is a method that collects research information regarding social life and culture using multiple

detailed observations of the participants (Hammersley, 2016). This research method is used primarily in the natural social setting of the participants and not one of the researcher's choosing. The data collected are obtained by observing the participant functioning in their natural environment (Hammersley, 2016). Researchers have used this method most often in study groups, communities, and institutions in society. This method of study can be used in qualitative and quantitative studies.

The phenomenological method was chosen for this study for several reasons. The participant's perspective of their lived experience can tell reentry professionals what tools they perceive to be most needed by offenders to be successful upon their release when reentering society. When using the ethnographic method, there were a few obstacles to be considered, such as difficulty gaining access to government organizations that house offenders and Covid-19. Researchers need to be specifically trained on observation techniques (Hammersley, 2016). The data collection must include understanding verbal and nonverbal descriptions and human interactions among participants (Hammersley, 2016). When ethnography is used in Criminal Justice, policymakers frequently question the validity (Chan, 2013) and referred to it as anecdotal or unreliable. The data collected must include a uniform understanding of human interactions among the participants (Hammersley, 2016). If the validity were to be questioned and deemed unacceptable by policymakers, this would defeat the purpose of my research (see Chan, 2013).

Role of the Researcher

As a researcher, my goal was to interview six Black men who had previously been incarcerated and were separated from their community, families, and their children.

These men had to have been living in Guilford County, North Carolina. As such, I served as the primary data collection and data analysis tool for this study. It was my intent to conduct this qualitative study in a manner that would allow me to obtain an understanding of the participants' perspective of how their incarceration impacted their families and children. Gaining an accurate interpretation of the participant's data is essential and often challenging (Karagiozis, 2018). As a researcher, I had to become an even more effective listener and remain objective. To do this, I needed to be aware of my personal biases, whether they be age, gender, religion, disabilities, or social-economic status (see Karagiozis, 2018). Phenomenology research allowed me, as a researcher, to use the reflections of these former offenders as a tool. This tool enabled the audience, the former offender, and me to better understand the offender's lived experiences (see Lien et al., 2014).

As with the role of any researcher, being regarded as trustworthy is of the utmost importance. Establishing rapport and trust with participants and listening closely to the material presented was essential in collecting material and attempting to analyze it from the participant's perspective and not my own. Having previously been a probation and parole officer, I was accustomed to listening to offenders tell their story, and they often had an ulterior motive, such as not going to jail. When conducting interviews for this study, I had to make sure that my thinking was adjusted to the role of a researcher. By using reflexivity and simply taking an honest look at myself, I controlled my biases. I understood that this was a participant in my study, with no other motive except to assist me in presenting an unbiased picture. My intentions were to understand the picture of

how a formerly incarcerated Black man perceives his incarceration has affected his children and what can be done during and after incarceration to lessen the chances of recidivism and harm to the children..

Methodology

A phenomenological study method was used to examine the perceptions of Black males who had been formally incarcerated in Guilford County, North Carolina. This study method was chosen to obtain the perception of formerly incarcerated Black men on how they perceive their incarceration has affected their children. The perception of these men was essential regarding this adverse event in their lives. Whether the incarceration was due to their poor judgment or systemic racial disparity, the collateral damage to the children existed. The separation of Black men from their children through incarceration has been occurring for generations (See Stopford & Smith, 2014). A broken system with unjust laws is part of it. There have been numerous Black men recently acquitted from prison after serving several years for crimes they did not commit. There are also offenses that Black men themselves controlled and used with poor judgment (See Stopford & Smith, 2014). To stop incarceration initiated by the actions of offenders, it is necessary to examine how these men perceive their incarceration has affected the lives of the children they left behind. Implementing programs that begin while they are still in prison and escalates as the date of the offender's release approaches then continues after their release can work. This research was an attempt to obtain the honest perspective of the offender. Through this study, I aimed to determine Black offenders' awareness of how their incarceration has affected their children. Examining the thoughts of these men has

hopefully motivated and given them some tools to be successful men and parents in society upon their release. Through this study, motivation was sought to prevent these men from returning to prison and prevent them from having children that will repeat their path.

A phenomenological examination of black males incarcerated is significant primarily because of the disproportionate number of black men incarcerated, resonating that their lives matter too, as well as the lives of their children. The history of Black men being incarcerated and removed from the lives of their children is long. Topcu and Hirst (2020) stated that phenomenology is based on the perception of lived experiences of oneself, others, or groups. The lived experiences of Black men incarcerated are worthy of a phenomenological examination seen through their eyes, to find the motivation to change the lives and fate of their children from being raised without a father. For many of the incarcerated black men today, the desire to be better tomorrow may just come from understanding how their incarceration has affected their children.

In criminology, phenomenology is most often used in the context of subjective perception of the lived experience of deviant behavior. Understanding behavior may or may not be deemed deviant by the participant (Polizzi, 2011). For example, dealing drugs may be considered deviant and illegal by society and the legal system; however, as the dealer reflects upon his life, as a Black man who may or may not use the drugs, it may be a lucrative means to support his family when he may not have had any education. Reflection is a vital art of phenomenological research, along with it comes rationality and objectivity to be considered a valid study.

The skill of reflection holds a great deal of importance to enable myself to understand the meaning of the lived experience of the interviewee. While understanding the participant's lived experience is vital, it is of equal importance that as the researcher, I remained objective in my findings (see Lien et al., 2014). Finding the truth and revealing the essence of those being interviewed was significant in this phenomenological research. However, it was imperative that I did not lose sight of the fact that there were two perspectives: the subjective meaning and the objective meaning. As the researcher, it was my job to find the unbiased subjective meaning of the data collected. The reflection of my own experiences as the researcher can uncover the essence of the phenomenon when objectivity consciously is practiced (see Lien et al., 2014)

Participant Selection Logic

The selection of primary participants in this study came from fliers that were placed in reentry program facilities and shelters for men to solicit the assistance of former offenders. There were not enough participants initially, so I used snowball sampling as a means of recruitment for my final participant. Often, upon the release of offenders from prison, offenders either have no family, cannot return to their families, or have families who have moved and do not want the offender to know where they are. These previous offenders or participants were all over 18 years of age, Black males, living in Guilford County, North Carolina, and were fathers.

Six participants were chosen because it has become most common in qualitative studies to select smaller groups of participants rather than larger groups (see Onwuegbuzie & Denham., 2014). As the researcher conducting quantitative research

using the phenomenological method, it was simpler to focus on a smaller group of individuals to do in-depth interviews.

Instrumentation

The instruments I used were notes, a telephone recording device, computer transcription, and telephone interviews. In Guilford County, North Carolina, I was made aware of several relatively new reentry organizations. These organizations were formed to assist ex-offenders in becoming productive citizens upon their release from prison and resist recidivism. These programs are a part of Guilford County's efforts to assist the reentry of formerly incarcerated men in the area. Support and resources are provided to assist ex-offenders in dealing with some of the problems they incur upon their release, such as unemployment, drugs, and reuniting with their families.

I contacted the directors of these two of these programs and requested permission to place fliers in their facilities to attract participants. When I did not receive enough volunteers, I also used snowball sampling to obtain the full six participants. I accepted one of the volunteers based on the referrals from others who had already qualified from the referral and of the director of the program. Each of the six participants was interviewed for approximately 45 minutes to an hour. The complete interview process for all participants took approximately 2 weeks. It was also my intent that if a private space was available at the facility, I would request that space for my interviews. This was for my protection as well as the protection of the participant. However, because interviews had to be conducted by phone due to Covid-19, I merely requested that each participant find a quiet private space for themselves to participant in the interview. Consent forms

were read in their entirety to the participant, and their response was recorded and transcribed before any interactions for research purposes took place.

As the researcher, it was essential to protect my participants from all potential harm, so their anonymity was critical (see Richie et al., 2013). The subject of family relationships is very sensitive and establishing a rapport of trust was essential as well (Kyvik, 2013). Protecting the participants had more meaning than just being ethically correct, the validity of information that I received may depend upon it. All participants are known as Participant A, Participant B, and so forth to protect their identity.

The practice of emotional intelligence by myself allowed me to build rapport with the participants (see Kyvik, 2013). This practice includes self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, open listening, and communication (Collins & Cooper, 2014). I considered the impact the study could have on participants and made decisions to minimize any potential harm (Richie et al., 2013). Protection of participants can be challenging; however, it is very important to the study's validity. Data collected in the interviews were digitally recorded, documented, and protected.

Pilot Studies

My pilot study consisted of my formulating a list of interview questions for the participants that I felt would best assist me in answering the research question of, "How do formerly incarcerated Black men perceive their incarceration has affected their children?" Copies of the interview question were given to three probation and parole officers that were former coworkers, for their review and insight. All feedback was

positive with comment of not to be afraid to expand on ideas to get to research question answered.

Data Analysis Plan

This research was a qualitative study which involved an in-depth examination of human experiences and human behavior (Onwuegbuzie & Denham, 2014) from the perspective of six former offenders in Guilford County, North Carolina. The six participants have resided here and will have lived and experienced the phenomena of being incarcerated and remove from their families and children, while in Guilford County, North Carolina. By gaining insight into this phenomenon, professionals will be enabled to possibly stop future generations of Black children from being collateral damage from the incarceration of their fathers. The interpretation of this data included understanding verbal descriptions and human interactions among the participants (Hammersley, 2016). Part of the data analysis has been the coding of data manually. This has proven to be challenging but accurate. Information from the interview has been transcribed to become an intimate part of the data collection. Participants were later read their transcripts to ensure accuracy and agreement.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of this research has been established by using four different criteria: (a) Credibility, (b) Transferability, (c) Dependability, and (d) Confirmability. The trustworthiness involved in-depth descriptions of the participant's perspectives of their lived experiences.

Credibility

Credibility has been established in this study by accurately paraphrasing data from participants about their lived experiences. Information obtained in interviews for this research that lacked clarity was paraphrased. All ambiguous data collected or data that lacked clarity has been summarized and made understandable. Credibility was the method in which I have established my work to be accurate and believable with other researchers. By using triangulation, my audience can gain a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. Using triangulation as a strategy, multiple resources or methods can be used to check the validity of my study and ensure that any biases that I have, may not have become a factor in my analysis of the data (Carter et al., 2014). As the researcher, I have demonstrated how to encounter a participant, utilize the qualitative method of research to interview, listen to the participants, and analyze the outcome.

Transferability

While conducting the interviews with participants for this study, I have encouraged rich, thick, in-depth, descriptive explanations of how participants perceived their family and children have dealt with their incarceration (Kornbluh, 2015).

Transferability is the determining of whether the findings from another study can be transferred to my research. Whether previous research on my topic or a related topic is relevant and can be of potential use in this research.

Dependability

Dependability was established by encouraging participants to provide clear, detailed accounts of how they perceive their families and children have been affected and

dealt with their incarceration. In this qualitative study, my strategy was to obtain the former offenders' perception of what if anything, they could have done differently before their arrest to have prevented the situation causing incarceration. We explored what could have been done before their release from prison that would have made them better prepared for their return to society and their children. We then examined what is being done now that motivates them to stay out of prison. The main question being, how the participant perceives his actions that resulted in him being incarcerated has affected his children.

The data I collect must be consistent (Cope, n.d.) so that if another researcher replicated the same study, the outcome would be the same or similar.

Confirmability

Being aware of my own biases assisted me in remaining unbiased. Confirmability in research deals with researchers remaining neutral in their analysis of the data received. As the researcher in this study, I have made sure that it is not my viewpoint projected in my analysis, but the objective analysis of the data received. The data I collected reflects the collected data and not my perspective (Kornbluh, 2015). It is imperative in qualitative research that the researcher reports the data collected from an objective point of view.

Ethical Procedures

Due to the complexity and many facets of research, it is always received well within the criminal justice system. The outcome or results of my research will hopefully add new insight that is of substantial benefit to society. However, there are ethical standards that researchers must be held to, for the protection of research participants and

sensitive material contained in the research (Brown, 2018). All material must be peer-reviewed by an ethics committee when completed at higher education institutions (Brown, 2018).

At Walden University, the IRB is the entity that must grant permission prior to the publication of any research. An IRB application must be completed by all students and faculty members who conduct research projects of any scope involving collecting or analyzing data (Walden University).

Several ethical provisions must be followed closely for all research conducted in institutions of higher learning. These provisions include but are not limited to signing an informed consent form by participants before the study begins. By signing the consent form, without coercion and with full disclosure, the participant agrees to participate in this study with a clear understanding that they will be allowed to withdraw without penalty at any time. The participants will be authorizing specific permission for the use of digital recording and note-taking. Once the notes have been transcribed, the participants will have the opportunity to review the transcription for accuracy. As the researcher, it is my responsibility to assure the participants of no harm. There will be no way to identify any of the participants. Each participant will be remembered as Participant A, Participant B, and so on. The data collected from them will be locked on my computer with a private password. The computer itself will be stored in a safe in my office for a period of up to 5 years before being destroyed. Guilford County. There will always be an avoidance of undue intrusion, no deception, presumption, and preservation of amenity. Due to the

sensitive nature of this research, participants will be offered free resources such as the 800 number for mental health assistance in

Ethics in research helps to protect my integrity and covers the actual examination. When the views of other peers' conflict with the outcome, the results become more believable by validating the study's reliability and validity (Brown, 2018). Other researchers feel that the researcher should develop trustworthiness between the researcher and the participant because of the interdependence between the two (Gray et al., 2017). Trust is what solidifies the data received. When I am transparent and forthright with participants, it allows participants to be more open to divulge their participation (Brown & Patterson, 2018). The institutional review board (IRB) for Walden University can be contacted at 612-312-1210.

Summary

Examining the perception of incarcerated Black men regarding how they perceive their incarceration has affected their children's lives is a subject that has not received a lot of attention. As the author of this phenomenological study, it must be said that this is a subject well worth time and effort. This research is validated, if for no other reason than for offenders, it resonates that their lives and the lives of their children do matter. The criminal justice system has failed to recognize Black men as human beings and not property. The systematic variables that exist and historically has kept the practice of separating Black men from their children in disproportionate numbers must be examined and somehow changed.

There will always be those in society who are not going to follow laws and will not do the right thing. However, when Black men are repeatedly incarcerated at such a disproportionate rate, there is a problem that needs to be resolved. Too many Black children are in our midst that do not know what it is to have access to two parents. Communities are missing Black role models and young Black men are growing up guessing how to be fathers. Boys grow up into men, and maybe through studies such as this, some of those who are incarcerated might understand their worth or the worth of their children and make it a priority not to return to prison and become a positive point in their lives their children.

In Chapter 4, I will discuss my research findings and attempt to explain the data collected.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

This research was conducted to explore the perceptions of formerly incarcerated Black fathers regarding how they perceive their incarceration has affected their children. The intent of this study was to focus primarily on Black fathers who have been incarcerated and, (a) examine how they feel their incarceration impacted the lives of their children, (b) examine the effects of social bonding on recidivism, and (c) provide valuable information to reentry programs, courts, professionals, local government leaders, and reentry program funding sources. The information acquired can be used by any entity or individual committed to promoting the establishment and maintenance of offender/child relationships. Social bonding between the offender/child can be vital to recidivism rates and the well-being of the children of offenders. The goal of research such as this is to mitigate the impact of incarceration on children during the incarceration of their fathers and to minimize recidivism among offenders once they are released.

Pilot Study

The pilot study conducted consisted of contacting three of my previous colleagues and advising them as to the nature of my research. I then asked them to review my interview questions and provide me with feedback that may prove to be helpful. Two of the colleagues stated they felt the questions were fine. The insight that I received from the third colleague was that I should not be hesitant to expand upon my questions once the participant began to open-up about the subject matter. By asking the participants to expand upon their answers or piggybacking on a previous question, there was more

probability of obtaining the information needed to answer my research question. The information and comments received were noted and applied.

Settings

The recruitment of participants can sometimes prove to be a very daunting task, and other times things can immediately fall into place. Regarding this study, the posted recruitment for participants did not immediately fall into place. Permission was granted to post fliers from two nonprofit organizations that provide services to ex-offenders either by inclusive chance or by design. Fliers for recruitment were strategically placed in key areas around each agency. The recruitment for participants for data collection took place during the winter and during a time when Covid-19 transmission was high, and people were purposefully avoiding human contact. Additionally, one of the agencies had flooding in its facility, and all potential participants were relocated to off-site locations. After a couple of weeks, two individuals called to volunteer; however, in the short time it took to set up the interviews, their parole had been revoked, and they were no longer available. Several more weeks of unanswered calls and emails to the agencies passed. Finally, the second nonprofit director returned my call to say he had several volunteers for my study, which included himself, and all were ready to be interviewed. Snowballing was used to recruit the last participant, who headed his own nonprofit organization.

Demographics

Participants involved in this study were carefully selected and had to meet several criteria to participate in this study. Six participants were sought to be involved in the study. Each of the participants was screened carefully, followed by long discussions prior

to their interviews. Participants had to be a Black, male, and a resident of Guilford County, North Carolina, at the time of their offense and conviction. Though the ages of each of the participants varied, they had to be over 18 years of age and a parent at the time of their offense and conviction.

Data Collection

Data collection in the study involved the recruitment of six male participants who were previous offenders and were residents in Guilford County, North Carolina. These ex-offenders were willing to read and sign consent forms outlining their commitment and their rights throughout this interview process. Each agreed to complete an in-depth interview regarding sensitive and confidential information pertaining to their families, children, and incarceration. Participants were recruited by placing fliers in two nonprofit agencies that provide services to the public to include ex-offenders. Snowballing was a technique used as well when recruitment became difficult. Several of those who initially responded to the fliers were on parole and were revoked before the interviews could take place. The number of participants and one-on-one method used to interview were both deemed appropriate to obtain a thorough examination of the ex-offenders' perception of how their incarceration affected their children.

Interviews were originally planned to take place face-to-face, where I would be able to observe the body language of the participants. However, interviews were conducted via telephone due to Covid-19 restrictions and for safety purposes. Participants were contacted by phone and were given a time and date for the interviews to take place. Each person was asked to find a private and quiet area where they could speak freely.

Preplanned, in-depth, data collecting interviews were prepared. Interviews took place the day after the screening of each volunteer. The consent forms were slowly recorded and read to each participant right before each interview. Their verbal consent was recorded in the same manner. The duration of each of the interviews conducted was 30 to 60 minutes. REV, an app downloaded and used on a phone, was used to record all interviews. Microsoft Word, on my laptop, was used to transcribe the interviews as they took place. The recordings were used to correct any flaws or deletions in the transcription to ensure accuracy. Within a 2-week period, each participant was again contacted to review the transcription to ensure accuracy and approval.

Data Analysis

Full consent forms were read to each participant right before the interview and ended with their recorded consent. Once the interviews were conducted and the transcripts approved, the data were analyzed manually. All factors that could possibly lead to the identification of any participant were removed. Transcripts from the interviews were reviewed for coding. Commonalities included the age of the offender at the first offense, the age of the child/children at that time, if they were they living together at that time, and the ex-offender's relationship with the child/children now. Characteristics of the ex-offender were recorded, and the negative or positive affect of the offender's incarceration on their children were reviewed.

After each of the six interviews were completed, I compared the transcription from my computer to my notes then to my recordings. Many times, the actual transcription taken from my computer would have a blank space or sentences that ran

together because the audible sound from phone to the computer was not clear. After this was done, I began to color code each transcript according to the three themes. The three themes that emerged from the coding and categorizing of data were (a) abandonment, (b) time loss, and (c) child's response.

Abandonment

Most of the participants attested the perception of abandonment from their children. Participant 1 (P1) stated that he told wife to go on with her life with their three children after his conviction because he did not think he would ever be released from prison. Upon his release, the children are estranged, and contact with them was minimal and usually only around the holidays. There did not seem to be a close attachment. P2 initially stated he had no problems with his children now, but then admitted that when his siblings would bring his children to see him, when it was time to go, his daughter could not understand why he could not come too. She was the youngest and would always cry and cling to him before they left. His son was just angry. According to P3, his two children were 1 and 2 years of age when he was first convicted. The children were brought to see him in prison five times, but because he was a convicted habitual felon, he was moved around several times, which made visitation difficult. His children barely remember the visits and feel abandoned. P3 was convicted five times for criminal acts. P4 had no father figure or role model in his life. His child was 2 years old when he was first convicted, and he shared, "I was a 3-time habitual felon that served 9 1/2 years I'm still trying to get to know my son and figure out how to be a father figure in his life." P5 reported that his daughter felt like she was abandoned, and she now has four daughters

with four different fathers. He stated that his daughter has a habit of looking for love in all the wrong places and has real trust issues; she is angry and feels that all men will leave you. Contrary to the other participants, P6 stressed the fact that he grew-up with his father and mother in the home, yet still he chose a life of crime in the streets. P6 reported his daughter had strong abandonment issues and does not forgive him for not being there. Because of her abandonment issues, she has refused to have children of her own. P6 received counseling while in prison, regarding his life in crime, but his daughter has had none. P6 spent 23 1/2 years in prison. The feelings of abandonment verbalized by the participants equates to their perception of desertion, neglect and betrayal felt by their children.

Time Loss

The time spent away from children is significant. Many of the children of the participants in this study were under the age of five when their fathers were incarcerated and they were adults when the fathers returned. P1 was convicted twice, sentenced to 5 years but served 2 1/2 years. He had three children at the time; one was adopted. P1's family moved to New York, and he remarried and now has a second set of three grown children. P2 served 5 years and was convicted twice to serve 2 years and then 7 years. P3 was sentenced five times and served 26 years, the most time of all the participants. He had two children he lived with when first convicted. The children were very young when he was sent away. This resonated the belief element of the social bond theory and the intrinsic belief in laws, values, and norms of society to be good and right. P4 had one conviction, 36 months, and shared that he would not be where he is (alive), had he not

been sent to prison. P5 had one daughter, and she felt that P5 should have been there for her. P5 said that he has never lived with his daughter, nor was she ever brought to see him. He served 9 ½ years in prison. P6 spent a large amount of time in prison as well. He spent a total of 23 years in prison and had no commitment to anything or anyone prior to prison. He stated that he has now changed and does a prison ministry for incarcerated fathers. P6 had one daughter. A parent that is absent from a child's life and returns to after they have achieved adulthood can create numerous challenges.

Child's Response

Upon a parents release from incarceration they will find that many changes have occurred in the lives of the children they left behind. P1 reported that the first set of three children he had before prison are distant and live out of state. He was married and living with his family when he was first convicted. He speaks with these children approximately once or twice a year, and his son is now an attorney. P1 had a second set of three children after incarceration. P1 has a son from the second set of children that tries to emulate him in his youth by selling drugs and trying to beat the judicial system. P2 stated initially that he and his children have a good relationship. He stated that his son had real problems while growing up, at home and at school, acting out, talking back to his mother, and hanging with the "wrong crowd." Children often internalize their feelings that later manifest by their acting out (Chui, 2016). P2 tried to write letters to his son but found it was hard to try to talk to him and tell him the right things to do while still in prison himself. P2 shared that his son moved to New York after graduation: "I thought he was going to die there, but he actually got his life together, got a good job and flies me there

twice a year to spend time with him.” P3 shared that he had two children. His daughter is sad all the time, and his son, while in school, also had problems acting out at school and at home. P4 revealed that his son is “ok”, but he continually tries to steer him away from trouble when they talk. P4 said that his two daughters are just unhappy all the time. P5 discussed how his daughter is bitter and at times tries to reach out, but then she gets angry all over again about him not being there. He stated that he explained to her that he cannot change the past, only the future, and he shared, “My daughter gets involved with a lot of different men that are bad for her. She has trust issues.” In P5’s words,

My daughter did not want to have anything to do with me when I came home (2000), so all I could do is focus on me. I asked for a chance to form a relationship with her. It’s been hard and slow, but we are still trying.

P6 divulged that his daughter feels she was abandoned. This ex-offender stated that he had his daughter a week before he was locked up. He explained,

She won’t have children of her own. She feels like she was abandoned, even though I had to go, she still has abandonment issues, so it’s very difficult for us sometimes. Sometimes it is difficult for us to communicate because of how she feels and it’s just difficult for her to get it.

P6 stated that his daughter has never had any sort of counseling, but he did when he was in prison. The daughter of P6 was raised by her grandmother. This is another problem that men incarcerated must deal with: Who will raise their children while they are away (Chui, 2016). P6 stated that at first, he felt the grandmother had turned his daughter away from him, but now knows she was trying to protect his child. Coping with the absence of

a parent takes on many forms in the life of a child, unfortunately the outcome may not always be positive.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

When engaging in research, specifically qualitative research, trustworthiness is essential. It is the means that assists the researcher in understanding data in the real world. Trustworthiness is the relationship between two or more entities believing that the data being communicated are reliable. A large part of obtaining trustworthiness is the researcher always maintaining a degree of objectivity to interject their own biases into the interpretation of the data. Trustworthiness in this study was established by using these four elements: (a) credibility, (b) transferability, (c) dependability, and (d) conformability.

Credibility

Credibility was established in this study by using the technique of prolonged engagement. Upon my first encounter, as well as just prior to the interview with the participants, I spoke with the participants in length about the study. The participant and I spoke on why I was doing the study and why I felt the study was important. We also discussed what kind of information I would attempt to extract from him and why. By having this prolonged contact with the participants, it gave me the opportunity to become familiar with them as well and establish a comfort level for both parties involved.

Triangulation was also used to establish credibility by discussing other similar qualitative studies that have been conducted (see Carter et al., 2014). Using triangulation gathering six different perspectives from the six individuals involved in the study as

participants validated the data. Gaining multiple perspectives on this given phenomenon, along with in-depth semi structured interviews conducted, is a powerful tool when trying to understand human behavior and constitutes triangulation (Carter et al., 2014). My notes from our conversation prior to the interview initial conversation were used, and then the transcripts and recordings from the actual interviews were utilized.

Transferability

Transferability is the ability to establish that the finding from this study can be transferred and applied to other situations and hold its validity (see Kornbluh, 2015). Transferability was established in this study when I discussed how Black fathers were removed from the lives of their children by use of the Black Codes established in the South after slavery and fathers were removed from the lives of their children through incarceration to gain free labor. This was done legally for infractions such as looking at a White woman or not having a permanent address (Raza, 2011). After the Civil War, the South needed to be rebuilt, so Black men were arrested for almost anything and put on chain gangs (Raza, 2011). Examining the effects of fathers being removed from the lives of their children due to incarceration is the same basic feeling of abandonment for the children exists. Today, for example, many Black men are serving time on marijuana charges, and marijuana is now legal in many states (Stopford & Smith, 2014).

Dependability

Dependability was established in this study by encouraging the participant to be open, honest, and transparent. Dependability was best exhibited through triangulation: listening to the recordings on my phone, rereading the transcriptions taken by my

computer, and comparing my notes to both. Dependability was also established through member checking. Once the interviews had been transcribed, they were read back to the participants to check for accuracy. Once the participant agreed to the accuracy of the transcript, the data were then deemed accurate.

Confirmability

Throughout this research I have been totally transparent and cognizant of any possibility of personal biases that I may have. Information reported has been accurate, objective and totally the participants perspective. For clarity and accuracy, the transcribed interviews were read back to the participants. The analysis of the data has been the participants perspectives untainted with the researchers' viewpoint.

Results

After reviewing all the data collected in this study it was found that the longer the time spent in prison by ex-offenders, the more difficult it was for their children to establish and maintain a relationship with the fathers. P3, P5 and P6 spent 26, 9 1/2 and 23 years in prison and have children that are dealing with strong feelings of anger and abandonment. Though P1 and P2 were married prior to their incarcerated, there was commitment but no attachment. P3, P4, P5 and P6 had no *commitment* to anyone or anything at that time of their incarceration, including their children.

Of the men interviewed, P2, P3, P4 and P6 had children under 5 years of age at the time they of their conviction. P4 who was 19 when convicted and was the youngest of the participants when he was convicted, he is now 41. P4 voiced, " the problem with a lot of African American men is that they never knew how to be a father because they never

had a father figure in their life, including me.. You know, a role model or someone to show you how it is supposed to look. I was 19 years old when I went to prison.” This statement shows that there is a large and generational problem within the Black community of wanting Black men to be something that they never or rarely seen. Miller, Miller Dijoric and Patton (2018), did a study on men returning home from prison, noting lack of role models in the home, to be a major problem among Black men returning home from prison. Due to the racial disparity in prison, this becomes a very problematic for communities of color when their me return home from prison (Miller, Miller Dijoric and Patton, 2018).

The children of P3, P5 and P6, all suffer from feelings of anger, abandonment, and lack of trust. Which has manifested itself in multiple ways, P5s’ daughter has refused to have children because of this. P6 has a daughter that has 4 children with four different fathers and seems repeatedly, to get involved with men that treat her badly. P6 felt this was because his daughter had never seen a healthy marriage between a man and woman.

P2 and P4 spoke of having children acting out in school and at home, hanging with the wrong crowd and talking back to their mothers, however there was a helpless feeling because there was not much that could be done from prison. P1 was the only one who actual verbalized that his son was trying to mirror his illegal activity.

When a parent is confined it places a child at high risk. Children are put at high risk in several categories such as: social economics, parental guidance psychologically, and delinquency (Nesmith & Richland, 2008). Having both parents in the home is an asset in most cases and could serve as a deterrent for preventing a child from entering the

realm of the criminal justice system. However, in the case of P6, in the interview he admittedly states that he came from a home whereas both his parents were in the home, and they adamantly attempted to keep him out of trouble and out of the criminal justice system, yet he was determined to somehow hang out with the wrong crowds and get involved in illegal activities.

Providing intervention programs to offenders is not a new concept being introduced to the criminal justice system. In 2007 the federal government allocated monies towards this and again in 2017 to reduce recidivism. The programs were called Second Chance Act (SCA) Grant Program. Over half of the existing prisons participated. It was reported that only 12% of the parents in the prisons signed up for the classes therefore, the impact on recidivism was minimal (Burraston & Eddy, 2017). These programs in theory were good however, there were no opportunities to practice what was taught in the classes and then there is the primary question of, how has this affected the children left behind?

Summary

The criteria for selecting participants for this study was that six black males were to be selected. Each participant had to be over 18 years of age, an ex-offender, a parent at the time of their conviction, and convicted in Guilford County, North Carolina. In-depth semi structured interviews were conducted with each participant.

The establishment of data and participants that are trustworthy is vital. The importance of the researcher remaining neutral and not interjecting their own biases is essential as well, in order to have a reliable study. All of these elements were established.

The contents of trustworthiness are having data that has content that is credible, transferable, dependable, and confirmable. This is a form of checks and balances to legitimize accuracy in reporting the perspective of the participants and not that of the researchers’.

The six participants were interviewed, and their interviews revealed their truth regarding their lives and their children. Though not all of the participants took advantage of having access to counselling or intervention, it was available to them. In contrast, none of children received counseling, at least not to the ex-offender’s knowledge.

The results from data collected from the six participants have been presented in chapter 4. Chapter 5 will now address the limitation, recommendation, and implications of this research. Lastly, there will be a discussion of the essence of this study to conclude this dissertation.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

In this study, I explored the perception of formerly incarcerated Black fathers regarding how they view their incarceration has affected their children. The data in this study was obtained by (a) conducting semi structured, in-depth interviews from Black, formerly incarcerated men; (b) exploring the elements of social bonding on recidivism, and (c) collecting preexisting data provided by previous studies that assists juvenile school counselors, court professionals, reentry programs, policymakers, government leaders, and funding sources for reentry and programs geared to helping the children. The implementation of reentry programs addressing the maintenance of the father/child connections is vital before, during, and after the release of offenders from prison. The goal is to mitigate the impact of incarceration on the children and to minimize recidivism among offenders upon their release.

The United States has the highest rate of incarcerated citizens in the world, and most of those incarcerated are parents and Black. Many of these incarcerated parents lived with their children prior to incarceration. Black men are the largest race and gender incarcerated in the United States, leaving an enormous void in the Black community and in the lives of the children they leave behind.

Actual findings from the interviews with the six participants were that father all expressed remorse because of the way in which they had conducted their lives when they were younger. The offenders' ages ranged from 19 to 37 years old during the time in which they were committing offenses, and all but one participant had ever received any

paternal guidance at the time they received their first conviction. Their ages now range from 41 to 71 years of age. At the time that the offenses were committed, most of the elements of the social bond theory, attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief were nonexistent in their lives or not taken seriously, even in cases when they were married and living with their children. According to the assumptions of Hirschi, founder of the social bond theory, if a person possesses at least two of the elements in their life, it could be the difference between them refraining from criminal activity and those who involve themselves in criminal activity (as cited in Anderson, 1999).

All of the children were affected in some way by the deeds of their father, which landed their father in prison. Some of the children have internalized the pain in much deeper ways than others, and as adults, they are still tormented. None of the children had received any type of counseling, according to the ex-offenders. In a study conducted by Kalu et al. (2020), social deviance is more prevalent in Black teenaged girls when there is an absence of any of the four elements of the social bond theory. They examined the relationship between parental and school bonding and externalized behavior in females.

In this final chapter, I analyze and interpret the results of my findings, describe the limitations, make recommendations, then describe the implications of this research.

Interpretations of the Findings

According to Kivunja (2018), once it is understood how one variable is related to another, a strategic method for change can be established. In this study, the independent variable was being an ex-offender, and the dependent variables were the ex-offenders' children and recidivism. I also noted that people change when they want to change, and

no amount of therapy or counseling can change that. There were comments made by participants in reference to committing crimes, such as P1 who shared, “I was just doing what I wanted to do.” or P4 who said, “I was young and saw no harm in what I was doing.” This study has helped to make some of the participants have a better understanding of the harm they caused to their children by having to talk about and analyze the pain, anger, and hurt of their children, and then realize their actions caused it. Chui (2016) explained that children with incarcerated fathers often suffer academically, behaviorally, and psychologically. The ex-offenders now have a better understanding that they are not the only ones that suffer because of their unlawful actions.

Kalu et al. (2020) found that when any of the four elements of the social bond theory was missing in the lives of teenage Black females, the likelihood of external behavior was present. This study confirmed those findings in that P5 and P6 had daughters who lacked more than one of the social bond elements and exhibited external behavior with problematic behavior, aggression, and rule breaking.

Limitations of the Study

Most studies conducted with human beings are done so with some type of limitations. The first limitation was that the study was conducted during the time that Covid-19 was prevalent. I was unable to conduct my interviews face-to-face, observe body language, and make eye contact with the participants as I was interviewing.

The ability to speak with the children who were affected by their father’s incarceration would have been the best-case scenario; however, it was not feasible for ethical reasons to interview minors. Another possible limitation of this study is that not

all parents have the ability to bond with their children. For that matter, all parents may not have the desire want nor should even be parents. I did not have the opportunity to speak with any ex-offender who was in this category; however, not all offenders have the desire or ability to be a positive factor in the lives of their children. In those instances, it would be counterproductive to attempt to nurture a relationship that could cause more harm than good to both parties.

Some of the limitations placed on this study regarding trustworthiness include that the six men selected for this study was an ample sample size to answer the research question of how their incarceration affected the lives of their children. The credibility of each of the participants was never questioned; all appeared to be honest and transparent. Each of the participants was actively involved in this study of their own accord, with no compensation, willingly volunteering to discuss a very sensitive and private part of their lives, so dependability was not an issue. There was some hesitancy detected with each of the ex-offenders at first until it was reiterated that all the data collected would be confidential, and there would no way for readers to identify who was being interviewed or their children. This was reiterated with a consent form, which outlined all of provisions in place to protect those being interviewed for this study.

Recommendation

As a result of this study, there are strong indications that many offenders who long for a paternal bond of some kind with their children will extend themselves more diligently than before when there is assistance available. However, when Black men are removed from the lives of their children by means of incarceration, the damage to the

children tends to manifest itself in external behavior, such as anger, rebellion, promiscuity, and mistrust. Craigie et al (2018) found that children are affected mentally, physical, and emotionally when a father is removed from their lives due to incarceration. The weakened bond between Black men and their children is more significant than in other races due to the sheer number of Black men in prison and how it has dramatically affected a single race of people. The Bureau of Statistics (2020) noted that incarceration for Black Americans in state prisons was 5 times higher than that of Whites; this has had a profound effect on Black communities. Twelve of the 50 states in the United States have prison populations where over half are Black (Nicholas, 2021). Wisconsin, has more Blacks in its prison system than any of the other 50 states (Nicholas, 2021). One out of every group of 36 Black people are in prison in Wisconsin (Nicholas, 2021).

When an offender is released from prison, the lives of their children are still heavily impacted. The offender often encounters problems obtaining employment, housing, and earnings and obtaining voting rights. To be remanded to prison is life altering for both the offender and their children. Many of the children are left with feelings of anger, abandonment, and mistrust. All these emotions are echoed by the children of P3, P4, and P5. Coupled with the legacy created by the conviction of their fathers, the unequal distribution of sentencing is a lot for a child and the offender. One of the participants spoke of how his daughter was so angry and that her refusal to have children originated from her feelings of abandonment due to his imprisonment. While in prison, P6 stated how he had taken advantage of the opportunity to speak with his counselors, minister, and mentors regarding his relationship with his daughter and life,

but when asked if his daughter had received any type of counseling or support, he said “no.” Help needs to be automatically made available to the children and families of those who are incarcerated. A school mentor or counselor could also prove to be of benefit, if done discreetly, so that the child does not feel singled out or labelled.

To support these innocent children who have also become victims of their parents’ crime, policies and procedures have to change, and the numbers of Blacks and lengths of their sentences as opposed to White counterparts, are too great (Stopford & Smith, 2014). The United States still leads the world in incarcerating their own people. Day-to-day biased practices and policies promoting disparity enacted by law enforcement and in the courtroom are affecting Black youth, and this must change so that history does not repeat itself.

Implications

Positive social change can only truly begin to occur when the criminal justice system acknowledges that it is broken and has been broken for over a century. The separation of Black men from their children and families has created a caste system that many Black children are born into and find it very difficult to get out of once they have been labeled. This does not mean that if a man commits a crime, that they should not be punished. However, the punishment should be administered equally among the races. The current system sets too many Black men up to fail by not giving them the tools to succeed, and ultimately, it is the next generation and their children that pay the price.

Initially, there were two Black men who had responded to my fliers for this study, posted publicly in two nonprofit agencies. Upon speaking with one man, he stated he had

a story to tell, and he had no idea how horribly profound his incarceration had affected his son. However, within a few days of their call, before I could interview either man, their parole had been revoked, and they were back in prison.

To be released from prison with nowhere to go, no job, no parenting skills, no income, and nowhere to live is a recipe for failure. Two of those interviewed (P3 and P6) spoke of being released from prison after 20 plus years and having no knowledge of how to use a cell phone, credit or debit card, or even a remote control for the television. Both explained that they were terrified to meet with their children, who were now grown.

There are classes offered in some prisons geared towards the offenders' reentry into society. There are counselors available there for offenders to talk to, but not for the children. A support system in place for both the children and offenders, utilizing the social bond theory, could very well prove to be useful. There are four elements to the social bond theory: attachment, commitment, belief, and involvement. The social bond theory is a theoretical foundation that can be used as a tool to combat recidivism and to assist children in coping with father/child relationship issues stemming from incarceration that could lead to the children indulging in criminal behavior themselves (Anderson, 2015). The use of the social bond theory is not meant to imply that all men or children will respond to the four elements of this theory the same way. The child or the parent will need to have another means to reverse negative bonding if the predicted change in the social bonding theory does not occur, such as the removal or change from their current environment (Mears & Stafford, 2012).

Conclusion

This study took place in Guilford County, located in the state of North Carolina. According to the 2020 U.S. Census Bureau, the population of this county is 542,410, of which 35.4% of the population is Black. Guilford County is the third largest county in the state of North Carolina. This phenomenological study was conducted to examine the experiences and perceptions of formerly incarcerated fathers regarding the impact their incarceration has had on their families, communities, and primarily their children. This study is valuable because it can assist in determining the effectiveness of the current system and help to identify problematic areas where modifications or change is needed. The incarcerated father often returns to the same communities where he lived when he was first incarcerated (Buston, 2018). Thus, this study may be used to inform reentry court professionals, local government leaders, and reentry program funding sources regarding the improvement of reentry programs to address the maintenance of father/child connections while the father is incarcerated. The goal is to be to mitigate the impact of incarceration on children during the father's incarceration and assist the incarcerated father in transitioning to reconnect with his community, family, and children effectively.

When Black males enter the criminal justice system in the United States, there are many additional barriers put into place and add to a system that has never been kind to them. The sentences placed upon the lives of these Black men are not only served by the offender but also impact of the generations that follow. The rate of incarceration for Blacks in the United States is 5 times higher than that of Whites. That means it is 5 times

more probable that a Black child will have a parent in prison than their White classmates. With that child comes all the hurt, distrust, and rebellion from their experiences. There must be a system put into place to meet the needs of these Black children.

Systematic racial disparity must cease and be regulated through policies, procedures, and laws. Criminal justice reforms must be intentional and must be implemented to accommodate the needs of our children. These are the same children who are invisible until their external behavior becomes deviant, and they become the offender themselves. History then repeats itself.

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Appendix: Research and Interview Questions

Research Question

How do formerly incarcerated Black males perceive their incarceration affected the children they left behind.

Interview Questions

1. How old were you when you first went to prison?
2. How old are you now?
3. What was the crime you were charged with?
4. What do you think started you committing crimes?
5. How many children did you have when you were first incarcerated?
6. What were their ages?
7. How much time did you receive?
8. How many times have you been sentenced to prison?
9. How many of your children did you live with at the time you were sentenced?
10. Describe your relationship with your children now?
11. What programs did you participate in, if any, while still in prison to prepare you for you to return home?
12. What goals did you set for yourself while in prison to complete upon your release?
13. Are you working currently?
14. Describe your experience with your children upon your release?
15. Describe your experience with your family since your release from incarceration?

16. What services do you feel would have been helpful prior to your release, to assist in making your release deemed successful?
17. How do you think incarceration affected you?
18. Describe how you feel your incarceration has affected your family?
19. How do you think incarceration affected your children?
20. What do you think can be done now to strengthen your relationship with your children?
21. Is there anything more that you would like to add as to how your incarceration has affected your children?
22. I want to take this time to thank you for your participation in this study and this concludes our interview