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Restorative Justice and Recidivism in Formerly Incarcerated Women

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Walden University

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Walden University

College of Health Sciences and Public Policy

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Alfeia B. DeVaughn-Goodwin

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Walden University
2022

Abstract

Restorative Justice and Recidivism in Formerly Incarcerated Women

by

Alfeia B. DeVaughn-Goodwin

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Public Policy and Administration

Walden University

November 2022

Abstract

This study explored the experiences of nonviolent women offenders over the age of 50 of all ethnicities who were formerly incarcerated and their involvement with restorative justice and recidivism from a public policy perspective. Although there was prior research on reentry of ex-offenders, the problem was that few studies focused on the barriers and success factors of reentry services for older female ex-offenders 50 years or older. The purpose of the study was to explore restorative justice and recidivism in formerly incarcerated women who were nonviolent offenders in an East Coast state with a focus on the barriers and success factors of reentry services for female ex-offenders 50 years or older. The theoretical framework and concepts used to ground this study was the person-in-environment theory, also known as an ecological perspective. This general qualitative design included thematic analysis and coding of interviews of five female ex-offenders. The results of this study identified that education and training of prisoners while imprisoned helped them secure a job after release and that employment after imprisonment helped with successful reintegration into society. This study showed that incarceration impacted the behavior change of formerly imprisoned women. The positive social change implications of this study are that reentry programs during and after imprisonment, such as education, training, religion, and restorative justice can help bring positive behavior change in formerly incarcerated women over 50 years old.

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Dedication

To my father, Turner Brooke DeVaughn and those who have suffered through tangles of mass incarceration.

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I express sincerity and gratitude to my committee chair, Dr. Gregory Campbell, who remained patient and consistent with the mentoring and movement of this dissertation. I would also like to thank my advisor Dr. La Toya Johnson, who remained available to me during this process.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

The incarceration and recidivism of women who are over the age of 50 and are nonviolent offenders is an American problem; few studies have explored this topic specifically in an East Coast state. In 2018, 11.8% of women incarcerated in the United States were between the ages of 50 and 59 with a recidivism rate of 35.1% within the first 9 years of release from incarceration (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2018). The concept of recidivism has produced a variety of definitions and special applications. However, the meaning that is most widely used has defined recidivists as offenders who serve time in prisons, reenter society, and violate their parole or commit new crimes that return them to custody (Duwe & Clark, 2013). Restorative justice is an approach to achieving justice that involves, to the extent possible, those who have a stake in a specific offense or harm to collectively identify and address harms, needs, and obligations in order to heal and put things as right as possible (Zehr, 2015). The population of aging ex-offenders present many challenges, and a review of the literature revealed minimal research focusing specifically on older African American women and their reintegration process (Brent, 2019). Although researchers have investigated this issue, the topic has not been explored in this way (see Brent, 2019; Mitchell & Davis, 2019; Thompson & Cummings, 2010).

The question this study addressed was as follows: What are the experiences of women who are nonviolent ex-offenders over 50 years old as it relates to restorative justice and recidivism, with a focus on the barriers and success factors of reentry

services? The problem is that few studies have focused on the barriers and success factors of reentry services for female ex-offenders 50 years or older (see Brent, 2019; Mitchell & Davis, 2019; Thompson & Cummings, 2010). This study furthers the research of Brent (2019), who explored the barriers and success factors of reintegration for African American female ex-offenders over 50 years old from California. This study expands on Brent's research by taking a public policy lens of restorative justice and looking at female ex-offenders over 50 years old of all ethnicities from an East Coast state. The theoretical framework and concepts used to ground this study included the person-in-environment theory, also known as an ecological perspective, first applied by Germain. To address the research question in this qualitative study, the research design was a general qualitative study design. Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world (Creswell, 2014). The social implications of this study are more policy-oriented attention towards decreasing the incarceration and recidivism of aging women who are former nonviolent offenders.

Background

The phenomenon that prompted me to search the literature is that in 2018, there was a total number of 1,465,200 people imprisoned in the United States; 110,845 were incarcerated women (Bureau of Justice Statistics [BJS], 2018). In 2018, 11.8% of women incarcerated in the United States were between the ages of 50 and 59, with a recidivism rate of 35.1% within the first 9 years of release from incarceration (BJS 2018). A review of the literature revealed that most studies on reentry services for ex-offenders predominantly focused on male offenders or women who were younger and middle-aged

(see Brent, 2019; Mitchell & Davis, 2019; Thompson & Cummings, 2010). The population of aging ex-offenders present many challenges, and a review of the literature revealed minimal research focusing specifically on older African American women and their reintegration process (see Brent, 2019). The specific problem is that few studies have focused on the barriers and success factors of reentry services for older female ex-offenders 50 years or older. This study furthers the research of Brent (2019), who explored the barriers and success factors of reintegration for African American female ex-offenders over 50 years old from California. This study expands on Brent's research by taking a public policy lens of restorative justice and looking at women ex-offenders over 50 years old of all ethnicities from an East Coast state. Brent's findings emphasized but are not limited to the reality of successful reentry and maintaining stable employment, but this is not possible if there is a lack of education and job skills. The study participants expressed frustration with their inability to be gainfully employed once released from prison. The participants believed that there should be a transitional program that helped them once they were released (Brent, 2019). Ideally, such a program would work in tandem as follow-up with the reintegration process.

Problem Statement

This study focused on the gap in the literature regarding females of all ethnicities who were formerly incarcerated and their involvement with restorative justice and recidivism from a public policy perspective. A review of the literature revealed that most studies on reentry services for ex-offenders has focused on male offenders or women who were younger and middle-aged (see Brent, 2019; Mitchell & Davis, 2019; Thompson &

Cummings, 2010). The population of aging ex-offenders presents many challenges, and a review of the literature revealed minimal research focusing specifically on older African American women and their reintegration process (see Brent, 2019). This study further the research of Brent (2019), who explored the barriers and success factors of reintegration for African American female ex-offenders over 50 years old from California. The specific problem was that few studies have focused on the barriers and success factors of reentry services for older female ex-offenders 50 years or older.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore restorative justice and recidivism in formerly incarcerated women who are nonviolent offenders in an East Coast state, with a focus on the barriers and success factors of reentry services for female ex-offenders 50 years or older. This study built on the research of Brent (2019), whose research examined from a social policy perspective the reintegration process of previously incarcerated African American women in California who were over 50 years old. The key concept and or phenomenon investigated in this study was women who were formerly incarcerated nonviolent ex-offenders orchestrated through both restorative justice and recidivism. The process of reintegration may be easy for younger ex-offenders, but older ex-offenders may experience a more arduous journey back to society (Brent, 2019). The intent of this study was to build on the work of Brent by exploring the topic from a public policy perspective and exploring the experiences of females over 50 years old from various ethnicities.

Research Question

Research question: What are the experiences of women nonviolent ex-offenders over 50 years old as it relates to restorative justice and recidivism, with a focus on the barriers and success factors of reentry services?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework and concepts used to ground this study included the person-in-environment theory, also known as an ecological perspective, first applied by Germain. Germain (1973) first applied the ecological perspective to social work practice, wherein the emphasis was on the ecosystems (as cited in Brent, 2019). The conceptual framework for this study involved restorative justice and recidivism amongst women who were nonviolent ex-offenders over the age of 50. The presumed relationship between variables was public policy and the lack of research on women who have been incarcerated for nonviolent offenses.

The logical connection amongst key elements of the framework was women and the rate of incarceration for nonviolent offenses. However, research into this area showed a gap in literature when creating a literal mapping on understanding the topic. Indeed, a meta-analysis of reentry interventions for women revealed a lack of outcome measures other than recidivism (such as well-being, self-esteem, psychological symptoms, or substance use) and that no analysis could be performed on these other variables (Heidemann et al., 2016).

Focusing on ecology, the adaptive fit of individuals with their environments examined interpersonal and organizational environments to establish whether adequate

supports were available to support well-being (Germain, 1973). For Germain, an ecological perspective was essential to identifying a foundation for research in social work. This approach related to this study because it offers both a what and how regarding the variables listed. This approach was also conducive to this research because of its focus on a wholistic answer to decreasing recidivism amongst women who are nonviolent offenders. Ecology's concern is with the relationships between organisms and environments (Germain, 1973).

Nature of the Study

The nature of this study was a general qualitative study design. The qualitative method guided my research design because qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world (see Creswell, 2014) Qualitative research is based on the belief that knowledge is constructed by people in an on-going fashion as they engage in and make meaning of an activity, experience, or phenomenon (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Based upon recommendations of most qualitative studies, I selected a sample size of 5. A qualitative research design provides consistency with learning and understanding how restorative justice and recidivism are experienced in the lives of women who have been incarcerated for nonviolent offenses was the focus of this research. Qualitative research consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible (Creswell, 2014). Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Definitions

The following are definitions of the key terms used in this study.

Ex-offenders: As of 2008, there were approximately 2.3 million people (about twice the population of New Hampshire), .3 million people (about twice the population of New Hampshire), 2 (about twice the population of New Hampshire), .and 3 million people (about twice the population of New Hampshire) in prisons and jails, and a staggering 5.1 million people (about twice the population of Mississippi) under community correctional supervision, that is, on probation or parole (Kang-Brown et al., 2021).

Nonviolent offender: Nonviolent crimes are defined as property, drug, and public order offenses that do not involve a threat of harm or an actual attack upon a victim (BJS, 2004). These include summary, misdemeanor, and/or citation violations.

Recidivism: The concept of recidivism has produced a variety of definitions and special applications. However, the meaning that is most widely used has defined recidivists as offenders who serve time in prisons, reenter society, and violate their parole or commit new crimes that return them to custody (Duwe & Clark, 2013).

Reintegration: Reintegration occurs when the victim or offender can become active and productive parts of their communities (Cowburn et al., 2015).

Restorative justice: Restorative justice is an approach to achieving justice that involves, to the extent possible, those who have a stake in a specific offense or harm to collectively identify and address harms, needs, and obligations in order to heal and put things as right as possible (Zehr, 2015).

Assumptions

Amongst elements assumed true in this study but were nonvitrifiable were a percentage of formerly incarcerated women who did not return to recidivism and were able to reintegrate into society by their own means. As pathways into criminal justice involvement are gendered, so too are the pathways out of prison and back into the community (Heidemann et al., 2016). The assumptions were necessary in the concept of this study due to the tracking of a flexible population. Labels typically given to them—offenders, criminals, convicts, and felons—give the impression that they may never overcome their past (Heidemann et al., 2016). This aspect is meaningful due to an undetermined percentage of women who are nonviolent offenders and have created and/or rely on means that are not fully documented. This form of social exclusion has dire consequences for women’s self-esteem and ability to successfully reintegrate into the community (Heidemann et al., 2016). One reason this is meaningful is because of a risk in both recidivism and reintegration to the nonviolent offender that occurs as a direct result of communal and personal resources.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this qualitative study was how public policy affects formerly incarcerated, women nonviolent offenders who are over the age of 50. A specific and considerable issue of the research problem was the age of women who were nonviolent offenders and how age has been incorporated into recidivism. Since 1980, the number of women incarcerated in U.S. state and federal prisons has increased exponentially (Heidemann et al., 2016). As their proportion in the general prison population grows,

women's representation among paroled and probation populations has also been growing (Heidemann et al., 2016). The age of ex-offenders tends to directly influence an outcome, during the search of adequate employment and housing.

The delimitations of this study included data acquired from a target population of women who were nonviolent ex-offenders and over the age of 50. This study included interviews conducted with women who were formerly incarcerated nonviolent ex-offenders who had been involved in restorative justice and recidivism. Men were omitted from this study due to the amount of information and research readily available. While media and scholarly attention have overwhelmingly focused on the incarceration of men, women are the fastest-growing segment of the incarcerated population in the United States and now make up almost a third of incarcerated women in the world (Halliday et al., 2017). This also applies to the potential transferability of aging women who are violent ex-offenders and who have been involved in restorative justice and/or recidivism.

Limitations

Limitations associated with methodology and design for a qualitative study include both the observations and acquired documents of the researcher. Limitations are likely to occur within the usage of a general qualitative study with a qualitative design, due to a limited number within a target population of participants. As is the nature of qualitative studies, a small size is not generalizable, and because of the use of the qualitative design, the findings could be open to other interpretations or oversimplified (Brent, 2019). Whether personal accounts or official documents are involved, the source may provide unrepresentative samples (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Potential barriers

included challenges in recruiting women who are formerly incarcerated nonviolent ex-offenders and over the age of 50, due to the absence of restorative justice programs and decreased recidivism. The pathways to jail vary for older adults in prison, and one or more cumulative disadvantages or inequalities related to race, education, socioeconomic status, gender, disability, legal, or immigration status can influence their access to health and social services, economic resources, and justice (Maschi & Aday, 2014). A challenge and barrier of this study also included the sample size, due to a lack of restorative justice programs, and increase in recidivism. However, given the preponderance of blogging and vlogs in which writers give in-depth thoughts about their experience with a particular phenomenon, blogs and online discussion at social media sites were an easy source of data as documents (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Significance

This study is significant in that it contributes to the advancement of knowledge concerning restorative justice and recidivism in formerly incarcerated females over 50 years old who were nonviolent offenders, with a focus on the barriers and success factors of reentry services. Stigma and internalized shame present unique obstacles for women being released from prison, who are often seen as irrevocably “fallen” women who have violated the social contract and have transgressed fundamental moral principles of womanhood (Heidemann et al., 2016). This study fills a gap in addressing an under researched area in public policy concerning both restorative justice and recidivism as it relates to the reentry of women ex-offenders convicted of nonviolent crimes. Although “one-size fits all” correctional programs may represent efficient and cost-effective

approaches to reentry in terms of implementation, failure to attend to gender and age responsive factors may prove more economically and socially costly overall (Holtfreter & Wattanaporn, 2013). The result of this research can help to establish public policies to support women experiencing reentry services after incarceration that are beneficial and long term. Enhancing clearer and more accurate knowledge regarding post release resources for women who are nonviolent offenders over the age of 50 requires research concerning a prison-to-communal successful transition for women.

The results of this study also have potential implications on the practice of restorative justice and the prevention of recidivism for female ex-offenders 50 years or older due to the diversified population of incarcerated women, specifically those who are currently aging while incarcerated. A provision of information is needed for the creation of a cohesive framework regarding women who were previously incarcerated and returned to communal life. Potential implications also point to advancements in social change because of policy directly influenced by this study, having a lasting effect on restorative justice and a decrease in recidivism.

Summary

In this study, I explored restorative justice and recidivism in formerly incarcerated women who were nonviolent offenders with a focus on the barriers and success factors of reentry services for female ex-offenders 50 years or older. I aimed to discover the barriers and success factors of reintegration for women who were ex-offenders over 50 years old. The process of reintegration may be easy for younger ex-offenders, but older ex-offenders may experience a more arduous journey back to society (Brent, 2019). The gap

in research is that few studies have focused on the barriers and success factors of reentry services for older female ex-offenders 50 years or older.

Chapter 2 examines selected literature on restorative justice, recidivism, and women who are nonviolent offenders. The literature review provides a more in-depth look (for the new learner) on what restorative justice and recidivism are. Chapter 2 also provides an illustration into why this research is needed, specifically considering the gap in literature on women over 50 years old who are nonviolent ex-offenders, and incarceration.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Since the 1980s, the criminal justice system (CJS) has witnessed an increasing number of crimes, especially within the female segment (Ross, 2017). As a result, there has been a significant increase in incarcerated female prisoners (Hunter et al., 2016). The main problem arises when female prisoners are released back into society and must address the various reintegration challenges (Lee et al., 2016). The purpose of this study was to explore restorative justice and recidivism in formerly incarcerated women who were nonviolent offenders in an East Coast state, with a focus on the barriers and success factors of reentry services for female ex-offenders 50 years or older. Northcutt Bohmert (2016) has shown that programs currently adopted by most institutions support male rather than female integration and reentry. The problem is that few studies have focused on the barriers and success factors of reentry services for older female ex-offenders 50 years or older. Most plans do not recognize the differences in gender needs between male and female prisoners (Lee et al., 2016). As a result, most female prisoners experience severe difficulties upon their release when they must confront challenges such as finding jobs and reuniting with their families, as compared to men (Washington, 2019).

The restorative justice approach aims to provide various practical strategies at the community level to facilitate offenders' reintegration back into society upon their release from prison (Kohn, 2018). This chapter highlights some of the existing literature and past studies that have discussed restorative justice and its application to community and prison environments to promote offenders' reintegration back into society. This chapter also

introduces studies that have addressed gender differences that have seen women remain underserved in the CJS.

Literature Search Strategy

Studies used in this literature review were located in the Walden University Library by searching databases on sociology, psychology, and the CJS. The search was also limited to resources written since the CJS's introduction of restorative justice practice. The search was carried out using different resources, including Research Gate, Google Scholar, U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics, and SAGE Publications. Investigation on the experiences of previously incarcerated older persons and nonviolent offenders involved the use of keywords, such as *reintegration*, *reentry*, *elderly reintegration*, *desistance*, *offender reentry*, *ex-offenders*, and *restorative justice*.

Structure of the Literature Review

This review's primary function is to inform on past studies carried out revolving around restorative justice among female offenders. Some of the critical issues discussed in the literature review focused on various topics such as (a) history of restorative justice, (b) theories of restorative justice, (c) recidivism, gender, and reentry, (d) profile of women in the CJS, (e) reality of reentry for female ex-offenders and strategies for successful reentry of female ex-offenders, and (f) restorative justice and reentry for women over 50 years.

Theoretical Foundation

The theoretical framework was based on the person-environment theory that focuses on the interaction between the environment and individual characteristics (see

Bradley, 2017). For instance, while an individual can influence their environment, their environment also affects the individual (Daly, 2016). Therefore, the adequacy of fitness between an individual and their environment can affect their motivation, behavior, and overall physical and mental health (Ross & Muro, 2020). Most of the theories discussed in this section address the impact of the degree of fitness between the offenders and the environment on their decision to desist from criminal behavior (see Ortiz, 2019). The main idea presented in most of the theories in this section is that environment and individuals usually define human behavior. Environmental factors may include demand for jobs, values within society, and job characteristics that require specific skills (Ross & Muro, 2020). The theory, in general, is a vital concept in philosophy in the social work field, stating that individual behavior can be understood based on their current and past environment.

Several studies have sought to tackle the complexities of the reentry phenomena. Scholars have found that reestablishing post prison life is quite challenging as offenders face numerous challenges like finding a place to stay, address substance abuse dependency, reunite with family members, obtain a job, and avoid criminal activity (Ross & Muro, 2020). In most cases, their criminal history makes it challenging to achieve all these tasks of reestablishing life after prison (Loong et al., 2019). Mancini et al. (2016), maintained that the path to reintegration and desistance is usually dependent on factors like a good marriage, the aging process, stable employment, and identity transformation.

Meijers et al. (2017) study have shown that marriage is a critical factor influencing an individual's transition into society upon release from prison, especially

among men. The life-course theory of offending best explains this narrative by emphasizing the factors that shape its persistence, onset, and decline (Nyamathi et al., 2016). Based on the control theory, marital relationships can promote desistance by providing an environment that supports social control (Fox, 2016). Developing these social bonds in adulthood best explains the path to desistance, independent of the individual differences in criminal propensity (Conti et al., 2020). Marital attachment can function as a form of informal social control, inhibiting offending (Fox, 2016). However, a good marriage effect on reintegration tends to be cumulative and gradual (Coupland & Olver, 2020).

Holtfreter and Wattanaporn (2013) showed that marriage discourages offending behavior as it disrupts delinquent peers' ties. Other scholars have demonstrated that a spouse can facilitate desistance by reducing an offender's engagement with potential criminal-minded friends (Hausam et al., 2020). Another qualitative study also revealed that developing conventional social bonds usually shapes the desistance process (Thompson & Cummings, 2010). For instance, a satisfying and adequate relationship with a woman or a man in a family context relates to desistance (Shapland, 2016). However, according to Gill and Wilson (2016), the main problem with incarceration is that few prisoners are married.

Labor market experiences also play a crucial role in predicting post prison outcomes (González, 2019). Following the social control theory, commitment to employment usually reduces an individual's potential to participate in crime (Bradley, 2017). Halliday et al. (2017) study also supported this idea, suggesting that an individual

with a high-paying legitimate job will more likely stop offending. Brent (2019) study maintained the argument suggesting that age interacts with employment in their effect on self-reported recidivism rates. For instance, offenders aged 27 and above are more likely to be involved in crime and arrest when provided with marginal works than when they are not provided with employment opportunities (Brent, 2019). Scholars have concluded that the availability of stable employment opportunities plays a significant role in ensuring an offender's success in the transition from prison to community life (Carter & Marcum, 2017). However, modern society's main challenge is that many ex-convicts find it challenging to find legitimate job opportunities (Bradley, 2017). For instance, an accumulation of weak connections, limited work history, and incarceration stigma makes it increasingly tricky for returning prisoners to find job opportunities (Brent, 2019).

Wood and Suzuki (2016) argued that desistance is more a function of age. Some researchers have argued that individuals self-select into prosocial institutions like marriage when they age out of offending behavior (Bouffard et al., 2017). According to this argument, some researchers believe that crime declines with age. Qualitative interviews with persistent male offenders found that aging influenced subjective contingencies, which impacted desistance (Brent, 2019). The meaning and calculus of crime change over the life course, prompting some offenders to turn away from crime (Butler & Maruna, 2016).

Other researchers have produced a different view, insisting that maturity can develop regardless of age. An individual's decision to commit to noncriminal life is central to an easy transition from prison life into society (Chin & Dandurand, 2012).

Proponents of this approach have indicated that a desisting individual goes through self-identity changes and self-concept (Garcia & Ritter, 2012). Research also revealed that reformed offenders are more likely to find satisfaction in generative behavior, discover purpose and meaning of life, and feel a sense of control over their future (Grossi, 2017). Therefore, a change in maturity and identity influences desistance among offenders (Grossi, 2017). Thus, resisters have identified a sense of direction, have recognized problems associated with crime, and have become informed that participating in crime is bad, making them desist from crime (Bouffard et al., 2017).

Generally, the perspectives presented here show that marriage, aging, employment opportunities, and identity transformation are critical factors playing a unique role in a successful transition from prison life into society. Most of these studies have been conducted on offenders while including only small samples of female offenders. Therefore, a better understanding of the reentry phenomena can be achieved by moving beyond the traditional focus on the male to women-centered approaches providing insight into post release experiences (Perán, 2017).

Theories Behind Restorative Justice

As previously highlighted, the reintegrative shaming theory was used when developing the restorative justice approach (Brent, 2019). Reintegrative shaming theory communicates shame to the wrongdoer by encouraging them to desist (Hodgson, 2020). The theory disapproves within the continuum of respect for the offender by treating them as good people who had done bad deeds (Heidemann et al., 2016). The theory dismisses the need for stigmatization as violence increases with a reduction in positive

communication (Link & Williams, 2017). RJ's primary focus is to repair relationships that were once available before an individual participated in a crime (Larsson et al., 2018). As such, an essential factor is for the offender to take responsibility and provide victims with an apology (Weimann-Saks & Peleg-Koriat, 2020). Providing a nurturing environment or support can also increase the mediation approach's effectiveness (Masson & Österman, 2017).

The forgiveness theory also provides insight into restoration's benefits because forgiveness comes with compassion and increases prosocial actions (Mciver, 2020). There are numerous benefits of forgiveness, with most dominant one being improving health and finding closure (Willison & O'Brien, 2017). RJ can have the outcome of forgiveness if the victim takes the path of forgiveness that will release the power the crime has on the victim (Link & Williams, 2017).

Another popular theory of RJ practice relates to cognitive dissonance. The theory discusses situations that relate to conflict between attitudes, behavior, and beliefs (Ojha et al., 2018). The cognitive dissonance results include mental discomfort that alters people's views and attitudes, resulting in restoration (Ortiz, 2019). Studies have shown that due to cognitive dissonance, offenders grow in empathy while acknowledging responsibility (Thomas et al., 2019). As a result, their perspective of time changes, resulting in a desire to modify one's behavior to reduce the cognitive dissonance that potentially results in desistance.

The defiance theory also supports RJ practice that treats all participants with respect while focusing on communication (Österman & Masson, 2016). The theory

explains when and why defiance occurs among offenders (Salem et al., 2013). The defiance conditions include when the offender perceives the sanction as unfair, refusal to acknowledge the shame in the offense, and poor relationship with the communities (Steyn & Booyens, 2017). RJ provides an environment where all the conditions highlighted above for defiance theory are not present, making it easy to reduce further crime (Visher & Bakken, 2014).

Clamp (2016) study highlighted that RJ practices continue to lead theory. Clamp suggested that RJ is simply a process of recovery. Scholars have proposed an approach providing the basis for building hypotheses and testing RJ for social sciences (Ward & Merlo, 2016). The scholars have claimed that RJ comprises three distinct but connected structures: stakeholder needs, social discipline window, and restorative practice typology (Ward & Merlo, 2016).

The social discipline window adopts four approaches to maintaining social discipline, displaying each method based on the discipline style from low to high control or from low nurture or support to high one (Zavradashvili, 2015). The structure proposes different approaches: permissive, punitive, restorative, and neglectful (Walker & Tarutani, 2017). The punitive approach is one employed in the traditional justice system (Zavradashvili, 2015). The technique involves high control and low support, emphasizing punishment or controlling the offender without supporting an individual to be responsible and reintegrated into society (Ward & Merlo, 2016). The permissive approach involves low control and high support.

An example of restorative justice is a rehabilitative or therapeutic approach to criminal justice, focusing on the offender, and does not require the offender to be responsible for their actions or repair harm caused, which reduces consequences for wrongful acts (Salem et al., 2013). The neglectful approach comprises low control and low support such that it dismisses harm caused and of all victim's need for nurture (Armour & Sliva, 2018). The restorative approach to social discipline comprises high control and high support and nurture where all parties come together and share their experiences with the harm caused (Steyn & Booyens, 2017). The approach allows all parties to develop a plan on repairing damage and preventing future occurrences while supporting the offender's reintegration into society (Österman & Masson, 2018).

The stakeholder needs comprise harm cause and the social responsibilities expected of the offender to meet the needs. The stakeholder needs constitute all direct stakeholders, particularly the offender, the victim, the community of care, and the indirect stakeholders like local agencies, community members, and government agencies (Österman & Masson, 2016). Expression of how each stakeholder feels and providing an environment in how harm is repaired enables the victim to take back the loss of power experienced and become a survivor (Rade et al., 2018). The offender will not have a damaged relationship and lost trust as being responsible for their actions will contribute to healing of the victims (Ortiz, 2019). As a result, the offenders can regain confidence and successfully reintegrate into society (Link & Williams, 2017). The community of care comprises groups less affected by the offense like a family member (Brent, 2019). The communities of care will take responsibility to ensure healing by ensuring all

procedures to prevent further reoffending are taken and to promote successful reintegration of the offender and the victim into the society (Gunnison & Helfgott, 2017). Indirect stakeholders take the responsibility to support and facilitate processes determined by direct stakeholders without intervention in decisions made (Hodgson, 2020).

Restorative Justice

Restorative justice has been identified as having many benefits. According to past studies, benefits include the ability to meet the victim's needs and the offender as its goal is to help the offender acknowledge the harm done and aid in the reduction of future harm and prison overcrowding (Larsson et al., 2018). RJ's benefits differ from the traditional approach to criminal justice as it does not focus on punishing the offender without focusing on the needs of all direct stakeholders (Grossi, 2017). The method also provides a distinct manner where all participants are treated equally without concentrating on presumes guilt but mending relationships and repairing harm to meet the victim and offender's needs (Heidemann et al., 2016).

Further analysis has identified gaps in RJ's use for only minor infractions and juvenile cases. Some RJ literature has focused on using RJ for more severe issues like homicide (Durnescu, 2019). While most of the benefits are identified for implementing RJ, barriers still exist with the current implementation and future programs. Some of the implementation barriers include problems of having inconsistent definition and growth of RJ in criminal institutions that implemented its practices with their own goals, which sometimes leave the victim feeling unsatisfied (Brent, 2019). Additionally, implementing RJ to only minor, and juvenile cases has limited the program's effect on various

vulnerable populations (Garcia & Ritter, 2012). Another problem that can be perceived as a current and future barrier is the program's approach to the disproportionate representation of minorities in prison particularly, gender, class, and race (Hodgson, 2020).

Analysis of Prior Research on Restorative Justice

A systematic review of literature has shown that most RJ meta-analyses were carried out on the youth population (Chin & Dandurand, 2012). The limitation can be a consequence of the more comprehensive RJ implementation among the youth leading to the increasing availability of its research. According to existing literature, victims and offenders have reported high satisfaction from benefits associated with reduced recidivism, low cost, and ensuring the offender is held accountable without inducing harm when applying the RJ approach (Carter & Marcum, 2017). Past research has also called for further extensive and systemic qualitative and quantitative research measuring the effectiveness of RJ on the victim and offender (Barak & Stebbins, 2021). Further research will help design the RJ programs, including high integrity implementation, leading to cost-saving (Hodgson, 2020). Furthermore, RJ's implementation in many violent crimes would have a larger effect given the correlation between high emotional and more meaningful discussion with reduced recidivism (Ortiz, 2019). Some studies have also found that inconsistent implementation has seen some victims feel the approach is insensitive, thus requiring more RJ training that helps victims address issues they face with RJ practice (Bradley, 2017).

Most studies on RJ prison applications have paid attention to specific practices like community reintegration programs, Victim Offender Mediation, and Restorative Justice Conferencing (Bouffard et al., 2017; Ortiz, 2019). Victim Offender Mediation can be due to an increased number of programs focusing on dialogues between victims, and offenders in the United States (Ortiz, 2019). The number of people involved in mediation is usually small, comprising the offender, the mediator, and the offender (Gill & Wilson, 2016). Restorative justice conferencing involves both parties involved in the offense, the mediator, and the support system for each participant involved in the process (González, 2019). The restorative Justice circle also includes community harmed in addition to the persons involved in the previous intervention.

The RJ circle's goal is to shift slightly to incorporating communities' needs in the restoration process (Brent, 2019). Victim-offender mediation relies on the victims to share their experiences (Hodgson, 2020). As such, victim awareness programs prepare the parole before being released into society and connect them to successful reintegration resources (Thompson & Cummings, 2010). The community reintegration programs focus on volunteers who help offenders exiting prisons to access successful reintegration resources.

Studies have shown that the goal of victim-offender mediation is to mend the broken relationship rather than determining guilt (Halliday et al., 2017). The ultimate goal involves repairing, healing, and restoring the victim and offender relationship (Gill & Wilson, 2016). The prison programs utilize surrogate victims who have been found to provide perspective in the broader population rather than actual victims (Thompson &

Cummings, 2010). Surrogate victims refer to volunteer crime victims who come and share their stories and the impact of crime on their lives (Ortiz, 2019). The process of victim participation in the mediation program is voluntary. However, some studies have indicated that surrogate victim mediation fails to highlight the victims' involvement in the process (Halliday et al., 2017). For instance, most participants' primary goal in mediation is to help understand things from the victim's perspective to promote healing.

With the growing use of Restorative Justice practices, there is an emergence of Restorative Justice practices involving the community. The programs include community-based reintegration through conferencing circles, local agencies, and community partnerships with individuals under parole (Hausam et al., 2020). These programs' primary goal is to ensure the offenders' successful reintegration into society by meeting their needs, and holding them accountable for desistance (Brent, 2019). An example is the Community Justice Network of Vermont (AJNVT), working with incarcerated and paroled individuals. The program works with various agencies to deliver Restorative Justice to communities by operating through circles to help repair harm (Thompson & Cummings, 2010). For instance, the program pairs individuals on parole with community members who share characteristics to help find resources like housing, employment, and education (González, 2019).

A social works group in Colorado uses community members to offer the offenders' linkage to re-entering their community to different agencies (Brent, 2019). The program provides various services such as crime prevention, services to connect people with a social safety net, services to people who have experienced victimization, reentry

support, treatment services, and neighborhood economic development (Keenan et al., 2017). The program also uses funds from the Colorado Department of Corrections to cater to intermediary agencies' services. Most of the services link offenders to recourses in their community while holding the program accountable for financial responsibility.

Meta-Synthesis Approach

The meta-synthesis approach was a main focus of the literature review, which was used to interpret multiple studies' findings. Different studies were combined and assessed based on common themes and elements of specific shared experience regarding restorative justice and its application to female offenders aged 50 years and above or serving time for non-violent crimes.

Recidivism

Much has been documented about male than female offenders' return to free world experiences. Trends in prisons have witnessed an increased number of female offenders being imprisoned than male offenders, which indicates that many women will also be returning home after serving their time (Daly, 2016). Another reality is that most inmates existing in prisons confront similar challenges upon release (Coupland & Olver, 2020). However, a woman's reentry experiences qualitatively differ from men's experience (Hausam et al., 2020). For instance, men usually find a home and family awaiting them after prison instead of women offenders who find it challenging to secure a job after release (Link & Williams, 2017). However, when a woman finishes serving her time in prison, she is often expected to re-establish a family and home roles and regain her children's custody while at the same time find a job that will cater to their needs

(Gunnison & Helfgott, 2017). The significant difference in gender reintegration into society proves that women experience more difficulties (Daly, 2016). For instance, a woman leaving prison will lack a home, employment, financial support, social legitimated skills, and knowledge on securing a job (Ward & Merlo, 2016). As such most women tend to lack a sense of hope for their future outside prisons.

Most women leaving prison life face insurmountable barriers, explaining the increased number of female re-offenders (Gill & Wilson, 2016). Recent studies have shown that 58% of incarcerated women are rearrested, 30% returned to prison, and 38% rearrested in their life after release (Thompson & Cummings, 2010). Feminist scholars argue that victimization has shaped female recidivism and criminality (Daly, 2016). Most of these scholars underscore the disproportionate number of female offenders who have experienced sexual and physical abuse, concluding a special relationship exists between subsequent offending and childhood or adulthood victimization (Visher & Bakken, 2014).

Other feminist scholars have contended that the trends towards poverty feminization and the increased number of poor women have driven women to participate in economic-based crimes (Holtfreter & Wattanaporn, 2013). Some studies have also demonstrated that individuals from a poor background participate in crime after being released from prison (González, 2019). The studies indicate that supporting women financially reduces their risk of participating in crime after prison release compared to scenarios where poor women are not supported (Fox, 2016). Furthermore, structural dislocation and economic marginalization significantly impact women of color based on

their status in society (Gill & Wilson, 2016). As such, a woman's economic hopelessness with lack of employment opportunities is a consequence of the interplay of classism, racism, and sexism that explain the increased rate of rearrests and difficulties to integrate into society (Nyamathi et al., 2016). Therefore, the worsening economic situation of the marginalized women explains the increased rate of women's offending.

Critics of sexism and feminist view argue that substance abuse best explains women's re-offending pattern (Gill & Wilson, 2016). For instance, drug use has been commonly correlated to recidivism. On the other hand, some feminist scholars have maintained that women's drug use aims at helping them cope with the pain of abuse (Meijers et al., 2017). The scholars also argue that petty drug sales among women serve as a means of economic survival to support them (Ortiz, 2019). However, other researchers have provided a different view arguing that drug craving without money tempts women addicts to turn to find a solution (González, 2019).

Other researchers have investigated factors shaping successful post-release outcomes. Studies show that marital attachment and job stability best explain offenders' successful reintegration into society (Mancini et al., 2016). However, this view does not apply to female offenders. Evidence suggests that children and family, besides from an intimate relationship, strongly influences women's ability to reintegrate into society (Loong et al., 2019). For instance, children serve as an essential catalyst for change such that they are a motivating factor for desistance (Loong et al., 2019). Similar studies have supported this idea indicating that women are more likely to exhibit behavioral desistance when they have children (Mancini et al., 2016). Most proponents of this view suggest that

supportive interpersonal relationships play a vital role in women's successful integration into society (Gill & Wilson, 2016). Therefore, parental and family relationships help to understand a woman's reentry process.

Most studies that have been carried on mostly male offenders have suggested that transformation is a significant factor facilitating reform among women (González, 2019; Ross & Muro, 2020). Following the theory of cognitive transformation, the four stages of transformation or desistance include exposure to hooks for change, openness to change, lifestyle transformation, and fashioning an appealing and conventional replacement self-based on ways personal views deviant behavior (Ross & Muro, 2020). Furthermore, lasting change consists of the replacement of an individual's old self. Coinciding with these findings are studies that showed that desistance might stem from an opportunity to claim a socially approved self-identity (Keenan et al., 2017). Thus, studies have underscored the significance of offenders negotiating their social identity as a means of desisting (Ortiz, 2019).

The research on women's transition from prison to society has shed light on the challenges that ex-convicts confront when reintegrating into society and factors contributing to reentry's failure or success (González, 2019). Despite this trend, a comparative analysis of former and current women offenders provides opportunities for enhancing people's understanding of desistance, recidivism, and prisoner reentry relationships (Kohn, 2018)).

History and Overview of Restorative Justice and Parole

Recidivism has continued to be a problem in the United States of America as more than 70% of paroles return to prison. An approach to a successful reduction in the number of paroles that re-offend is needed (Ross, 2017). Restorative Justice (RJ) was introduced since the CJS was criticized for its failure to address increasing crime rates despite its punishment approach (González, 2019).

During the mid-1970s, crime began to increase after a period of rehabilitative sentencing with decreased incarceration rates (Kerrison et al., 2016). Most findings by the Victims' Rights Movement (VRM) did not promote recidivism reduction, as most studies did not focus on the underlying problem of increased crime and the inefficiency of the punishment approach employed by the CJS (Lee et al., 2016; González, 2019). The increased criticism of the traditional method as many groups began to question and discredit mandatory sentencing efficiency and reduced crime starting in the late 1980s (González, 2019).

Tough on crime continued to gain momentum during Nixon's administration as a political gain platform in the 1970s (González, 2019). An increase in crime during the early 1980s saw politicians adopt the idea to encourage the introduction of policies that were tough on crime to deter criminals from participating in crime (Hunter et al., 2016). The politicians blamed lenient policies arguing that they encouraged criminals to commit further crimes. Nixon's administration used fear to get votes by implementing three strikes and mandatory minimum policies. The new policies saw an increase in the punitive laws during Regan's administration, such as the war on drugs (Washington,

2019). As a result, the sentencing rate for drug-related offenses increased by 17% compared to the overall sentencing increase of 18%, disproportionately targeted people of color (Ross, 2017). The Clinton administration also passed the Violent Crime Control and Enforcement Act in 1994, focusing the country's resources towards activities that increased pressure on offenders such as strict policies, prisons and police while extending measures to immigration initiatives (González, 2019).

Current studies and investigations into the new laws adopted by the government showed that most policies did not significantly reduce crime rate in the country. Additionally, the policies currently adopted by the CJS have not addressed the problem of increased homicide in the community (Hodgson, 2020). Failure to address the underlying problem left the USA with laws that were not rehabilitative but increased incarceration populations (González, 2019). Unfortunately, these policies targeted minority groups and did not reduce recidivism.

The USA's prison population grew by 500% between 1980 and 2016, causing a total increase of 50 billion dollars (about \$150 per person in the US) in yearly prison spending (Washington, 2019). As the country increased its war on drugs, the harsh penalties increased the number of prisoners serving time for drug offenses between 1980 and 2016 (Gill & Wilson, 2016). An increase in incarceration also resulted in gender and racial disparities affecting low-income and minority populations like African Americans (Brent, 2019). As the government continued to spend more money on incarceration, little attention was given to improve offenders' rehabilitation and treatment (Hunter et al., 2016). Research has also indicated a continuous increase in incarceration and cost, yet

there is no correlation between reduced crime rate and long-term sentencing (Ortiz, 2019).

Measurement of recidivism has been practiced since implementing the Sentencing Reform Act in 1984 (Kohn, 2018). According to the USA sentencing commission, recidivism refers to an individual's relapse into criminal behavior when they have already undergone past crime intervention (Washington, 2019). The understanding of the recidivism rate is essential as they inform on future policies and prevention mechanisms. In the United States, recidivism trends include gender, age of incarceration, time served, crime type, and federal prison differences (Fox, 2016).

Restorative justice was introduced in the CJS to resolve its correctional problems and promote an environment where both the victim and the offender are considered through the intervention (Ortiz, 2019). By repairing the offender's harm, RJ sought to reintegrate the offender into society. RJ has since been applied in a community setting as alternative imprisonment though recent calls from advocates saw it extended into prisons (González, 2019). Research has shown that RJ can benefit both victims and offenders when used in the CJS (Nyamathi et al., 2016).

Most research on RJ is qualitative based on tracing opinions and outcomes regarding its effectiveness. Few systematic reviews have focused on previous research outcomes as a baseline for comparing RJ effectiveness. Furthermore, little meta-analysis is available, conducted outside the USA, evaluating RJ's implementation in prisons.

Profile of Women in Criminal Justice System

In recent decades, the number of women in the CJS has dramatically increased (Brent, 2019). While the number of incarcerated women has been lower than men since 1980, there has been a significant increase in the number of imprisoned women than men in the USA (Brent, 2019). For instance, in 2000, there were approximately 162000 women incarcerated in prisons and jails across the United States (Brent, 2019). The only difference from men is that most female offenders are under community supervision. Studies in 2000 have also indicated that approximately 844000 female offenders were on probation, accounting for about 22% of all probationers (Brent, 2019). The figure represented an increase from 18% reported in 1990.

Women in the United States are arrested and incarcerated, particularly for drug and property offenses (Mancini et al., 2016). A recent study conducted bureau of justice statistics confirmed that most prison women are serving time in prison for drug offenses (González, 2019). For instance, the study showed that 38% of women were in jail for drug offenses than 17% for males (Keanan et al., 2017). Between 1995 and 1996, female drug arrests increased by approximately 95% compared to men's 55% (Keanan et al., 2017). In 1979, approximately 1 out of 10 women in US prisons served sentences for drug conviction (Keanan et al., 2017). The figure has since grown to approximately 1 out of 3 women in prison, according to 1999 statistics.

As the female incarceration rate continues to increase in the United States, there has not been a corresponding rise in violent crimes among female offenders (Meijers et al., 2017). For instance, the number of women imprisoned for violent crimes continues to

decrease as the proportion of women incarcerated for drug offenses continues to increase (Fox, 2016). A 1998 analysis showed that the women in state prisons accounted for approximately 14% of all violent offenders (Ortiz, 2019). Most of the violent crime's women offenders committed were against spouses, partners, or ex-spouses (Gill & Wilson, 2016). Most women also reported having been sexually or physically resulting in their imprisonment for assault.

The rise in incarcerated women is a consequence of the US government's strategies to address crime for the last 20 years (Gill & Wilson, 2016). These strategies include government policies that prescribe a severe response to social issues in society, public fear of crime, and state and federal mandatory sentencing laws (Conti et al., 2020). Other forces include the government's war on drugs and a shift in the academic and legal realm to viewing law-breaking behavior as an individual pathology, which discounts the social and structural cause of crime (Daly, 2016).

Many women in the US CJS come from poor backgrounds and lack education or skills to secure employment. Furthermore, this population disproportionately comprises women of color (González, 2019). Most female offenders are from poor backgrounds or have been brought up by single parents (Holtfreter & Wattanaporn, 2013). Furthermore, men are least likely to commit a crime to purchase money than women (Brent, 2019). While it is widely assumed that female addicts engage in prostitution to support their drug habits, these groups of individuals also find engaging in property crime an effortless way to address their drug problem (Hausam et al., 2020).

Differences also exist between female and male drug offenders. Most of these differences relate to their incarceration, reentry, and treatment (Ortiz, 2019). Recent studies have shown that drug-dependent women and men differed from a study on male and female prisoners concerning their employment histories, criminal involvement, substance abuse problems, sexual and physical abuse histories, and psychological functioning (Thompson & Cummings, 2010). The studies also found that cocaine was the most prevalent drug problem reported among females than men.

The Reality of Reentry for Female Ex-Offenders

Most women offenders have interacted with the CJS once they were released from prison. Past cross-state estimates of recidivism have shown that 57% of incarcerated women are arrested, while more than 37% and 30% reconvict and return to prison (Brent, 2019). Enough evidence from past studies shows that there is a positive correlation between women offenders and recidivism. Following a comprehensive review of past studies, it was clear that pre-imprisonment and demographic characteristics and pre-imprisonment determined parole outcomes among offenders (Bradley, 2017). Past studies have shown that young female offenders were incarcerated for property-related offenses (Halliday et al., 2017). Most young offenders with a history of drug abuse or a length criminal history were more likely to experience recidivism (Brent, 2019).

Studies carried out by the bureau of statistics in 1994 revealed similar outcomes when focusing on 15 state female release cohort recidivism data (Bouffard et al., 2017). Rearrests incidence and timing showed that the number of prior arrests, age at release, and race were the most important recidivism predictors after post-release (Carter &

Marcum, 2017). Furthermore, the studies noted that the effect of substance abuse, post-release context, and institutional programming missed from the report on female patterns of recidivism (Chin & Dandurand, 2012). The prior studies have raised the omission of incarceration and contextual measures in the review of recidivism literature. As a result, most scholars insisted that recidivism research would benefit from a broader longitudinal framework incorporating a whole-life perspective of offending and desistance (Garcia & Ritter, 2012).

Women and Incarceration Experience

A growing body of evidence suggests that incarceration has a significant impact on post-release outcomes and that women offenders' cultural and racial ethnicities shape prison and reentry experience (Gill & Wilson, 2016). A large body of research focusing on recidivism on both men and women suggests that time served, prison programming, and institutional behavior have a modest effect on recidivism (Halliday et al., 2017). Recent studies on women incarceration have focused on institutional classification, shortage of female institutions, and strategies used in correctional institutions (Carter & Marcum, 2017).

Studies have suggested that correctional institutions are still employing the traditional management system developed for male offenders while stereotyping female criminality (González, 2019). On the issue of treatment, research also shows that services offered in men's institutions are not offered in women's correctional institutions (Grossi, 2017). The female institutions have also failed to provide training which has also been limited to stereotyping feminine occupations (Brent, 2019).

The high rise of new penology has contributed to developing actuarial tools for an institutional approach to decision making (Heidemann et al., 2016). Despite this development, most risk scales are not gender-sensitive or have not been tested for female samples resulting in over-classification of female offenders (Hodgson, 2020). For instance, there are instances when a significant group of economically disadvantaged women is over-classified while following gendered approaches to offending (Gill & Wilson, 2016). Therefore, it is essential to acknowledge this disparity, given that faulty classification can lead to the adoption of custodial control, which can undermine a specific gender (Hodgson, 2020). Furthermore, literature evidence shows that including gender-sensitive risk scales can improve post-release behavior prediction (Larsson et al., 2018)

Release and Reintegration

Research has shown that it is essential to facilitate prisoners' contact with the outside world to reduce the harmful effect of imprisonment while assisting with prisoners' social reintegration (Link & Williams, 2017). Perceived family acceptance is a factor linked to future optimism, successful employment, and drug abstinence (Gill & Wilson, 2016). For instance, prisoners whose families or friends have visited were found to be less likely to re-offend compared to those who did not receive visits (Zavradashvili, 2015).

The CJS's current problem is restriction of prison visits in fear of security and administrative issues, making restorative justice a more significant challenge for prison staff (Bradley, 2017). Therefore, agencies and the government should make prison visits

a priority and use it as an opportunity to implement restorative justice (Gill & Wilson, 2016). Furthermore, this approach to rehabilitation is more efficient and cost-effective as it does not require many resources (Grossi, 2017). For instance, it is only a matter of scheduling staff time and prisoner movement while establishing security a priority and putting in place information management protocol to keep track of the visits (Bradley, 2017).

Compared to male prisoners, female prisoners are usually most prone to having children, increasing the need for parental care (Masson & Österman, 2017). As such, their separation from families and children resulting from imprisonment will have a significantly detrimental effect on female prisoners (Mciver, 2020). Thus, prisons need to include facilities where prisoners can receive visits from family members and spend meaningful time together (Gill & Wilson, 2016). Following women's disproportionate domestic violence experience, women should also be consulted about visits they want. They should be allowed to refuse any visit they do not wish to have (Ojha et al., 2018).

Special considerations should also be made for women with a history of victimization and those with children. For instance, female prisoners should have access to mental health evaluation, protective custody, and rape crisis counselors (Gill & Wilson, 2016). Most institutions do not provide such interventions leaving female prisoners to deal with their emotional and mental trauma upon release (Brent, 2019). Additionally, imprisonment creates particular challenges for mothers as they cannot maintain their bond with their children (Grossi, 2017). Upon release, women are usually expected to reassume their role as mothers while facing other challenges like employment

and accommodation (Österman & Masson, 2016). Children's separation from their mothers can also significantly impact women when serving time in prison (Brent, 2019). Therefore, correctional institutions should promote family visits to improve restorative justice outcomes of female prisoners upon their release

Reentry Views of Women Over 50 Years

Empirical studies focusing on older women's experiences and views above 50 years have focused on the significance of employment, romantic partnership, motherhood, trauma, and substance abuse in women's offending patterns (Osterman & Masson, 2018). For lasting desistance and reentry efforts, most studies have cited the importance of securing employment (Visher & Bakken, 2014; Steyn & Booyens, 2017). However, less attention has been given to the influence of offender's age on employment outcomes (Steyn & Booyens, 2017). Studies that measured employment effects on older women's self-reported offending and recidivism fail to offer insight into the female offender's age's moderating role on reentry (Ward & Merlo, 2016). Some studies have cited that employment status reduced recidivism among women though little has been documented on the interplay between offending cessation and having a job in and of itself (Grossi, 2017).

Studies on older women offenders' experience and views have also revealed the impact of motherhood and the influence of age on reentry and motherhood (Heidemann et al., 2016). For instance, more than 30% of female prisoners were mothers before getting arrested (Hodgson, 2020). Thus, it is not the structural role of motherhood that inhibits recidivism, at least not for crimes committed earlier (Brent, 2019). Furthermore,

with maturity and age comes a readiness to adopt a pro-social identity and reclaim the motherhood role, contributing to the desire to change (Larsson et al., 2018). Some studies have also cited that older woman who acknowledged their motherhood reported high levels of the decision to desist from criminal behavior (Link & Williams, 2017).

Other studies focusing on recidivism among older women have devoted their efforts towards the significance of marriage and romantic partnership (Masson & Österman, 2017; Osterman & Masson, 2018). However, data suggest that the absence of gender-responsive treatment and programming subjected women of all ages to many kinds of struggle (Ortiz, 2019). For instance, women of all ages find it challenging to develop a healthy partnership that can support their decision to desist from crime (Osterman & Masson, 2018).

One critical problem with the CJS is that most individuals under supervision suffer from substance abuse disorders, especially women (Osterman & Masson, 2016). Desisting from drug abuse requires these women to address elements in their lives, prompting them to use drugs (Salem et al., 2013). However, on studies of drug abuse and recidivism among older women, little information has been documented on how age moderates' women's substance abuse desistance (Salem et al., 2013).

Some studies have also highlighted that age catalyzes desistance efforts among young and less criminally enmeshed offenders (Steyn & Booyens, 2017). Similarly, some scholars have underscored how adulthood maturity and desire to desist prompts desistance (Garcia & Ritter, 2012). Furthermore, the nature of most findings has raised the need for research on a range of women from age, race to offending patterns (Chin &

Dandurand, 2012). The current study contributes to this understanding by examining the impact of age, particularly women above 50 years, on long-term desistance and recidivism.

The reentry context has become a central approach to understanding recidivism. For instance, the role of concentrated disadvantage levels in neighborhoods has been a focus of recent studies which predicted poverty's association with reduced number and quality of institutions, reduced treatment services, and decline in labor market opportunities (Halliday et al., 2017). Other studies on male and female parolees and probationers suggested a strong and positive relationship between recidivism and disadvantage (González, 2019; Brent, 2019).

Most women, mainly from minority communities, return to an impoverished neighborhood when released from prisons (Brent, 2019). Other studies have also documented these views insisting that lack of service access is common among the disenfranchised communities like African Americans (Carter & Marcum, 2017; Bradley, 2017). The result is that women of color returning from prisons will often report feeling marginalized within the economically distressed neighborhood, making it more difficult to reintegrate into society (Bradley, 2017).

In other cases, studies have highlighted emerging evidence to support the view that neighborhood context can affect women's experience indirectly during reentry as it diminishes opportunities for developing pro-social relationships for effective reintegration (Bouffard et al., 2017). An example is a high level of disadvantage and joblessness, which usually affect women as it reduces the marriageable men's pool (Gill

& Wilson, 2016). For instance, women that return to disadvantaged neighborhoods with high number of incarcerated men find it challenging to develop a romantic relationship compared to men (Thompson & Cummings, 2010). Thus, a decision to opt-out of marriage reduces the chances of marriage, employment, and other pro-social activities identified to have a critical positive influence on successful reentry (Hausam et al., 2020).

Another major issue affecting women relates to finding suitable housing, which has been identified as an essential element for successful reentry (González, 2019). A stable home environment offers social and emotional support and structure conducive to positive reentry transition among women offenders (Keenan et al., 2017). However, recent studies on reentry outcomes have shown that while more than half of the released women lived with family and most had received social or financial support, approximately a quarter of them did not receive family support (Holtfreter & Wattanaporn, 2013).

Rehabilitation Needs of Female Offenders

Research carried out following a gender-neutral approach suggests that female and male offenders have common criminogenic needs (Gill & Wilson, 2016). However, these researchers have also acknowledged that women may have specific treatment and rehabilitation needs than men (Daly, 2016). Based on these studies, accuracy in identifying and targeting the criminogenic needs results in effective treatment (Halliday et al., 2017). Studies from gender-responsive approaches suggest different criminal offending pathways have increased women's risk factors compared to men (Daly, 2016). For instance, women have a high prevalence of mental health problems, extensive

relationships, victimization experience, difficulties with substance abuse, and physical health issues (Coupland & Olver, 2020). Furthermore, women also differ in rate and degree of education, financial disadvantage, and employment (Fox, 2016).

Research has also shown that there are two specific risk factors or criminogenic needs for women offenders (Meijers et al., 2017). One group comprises gender-specific, and the other constitutes factors common to men and women offenders (Nyamathi et al., 2016). However, the nature of the relationship to rehabilitation outcomes differs for women.

Research focusing on the gender differences in offenders has invited institutions to review the effectiveness of the current practices focusing on women inside and outside prison (Mancini et al., 2016). The agencies can only focus on structures that will improve women's success by re-entering the community by understanding the critical differences between female and male offenders' needs (Loong et al., 2019).

A clear understanding of the female offenders' needs will be critical when developing operating principles to manage their needs (Ross & Muro, 2020). The correctional system has been designed for male offenders by incorporating assumptions related to male behavior. Therefore, a successful reentry strategy for restorative justice must take into account the key differences between men and women offenders as it applies and integrates evidence-based and gender-based strategies (Kohn, 2018). Adopting these practices will ensure that the restorative justice strategy acknowledges that gender makes a difference in the correctional practice (Washington, 2019).

A clear focus on gender differences will enable the CJS to develop strategies that support the correction and rehabilitation of female offenders (Gill & Wilson, 2016). Thus, it is critical for disciplinary practices like restorative justice to acknowledge that women come into the CJS through a distinctly female pathway (Ross, 2017). As such, they will require unique custody and supervision considerations when implementing strategies for reentry into the community after prison life.

Reducing Recidivism in Women Offenders

Facilitating offender reintegration into society is a complex task, making it difficult to assess specific interventions' impact (Gill & Wilson, 2016). However, lower recidivism rates still serve as the main predictor of a successful social reintegration program like restorative justice (Hunter et al., 2016). The reintegration program's primary goal entails encouraging offenders to desist from crime and stop offending (Chin & Dandurand, 2012). Desistance involves the process by which offenders terminate their offending activities while maintaining a crime-free life (Lee et al., 2016).

Numerous factors have been associated with an offender's decision to desist from committing a crime. An example of these factors is acquiring new skills, starting a family, or full-time employment (Kerrison et al., 2016). These factors have also been gender-specific, making it critical to assess the particular factors that apply to men or women (Kohn, 2018). The changes in family or employment circumstances have also been argued to be the key factors that account for desistance (Gill & Wilson, 2016). Furthermore, it has also become problematic to establish the link between absences of criminal behavior.

Based on desistance theory, programs prefer a long-term change of an offender towards a non-criminal life rather than short-term control from the criminal life (Ortiz, 2019). The programs recognize that progress is unlikely to be direct or continuous (Halliday et al., 2017). Therefore, these programs focus on offering support that will make an offender view themselves from a different perspective positively and hope for a better future (Grossi, 2017). The approach assumes that offenders' successful social integration is founded on the proper combination of motivation and human and social capital like employment and supportive family.

Restorative Justice and Reentry for Women

Gender-Responsive Strategies for Successful Reentry of Women Offenders

Restorative justice must consider numerous factors when introducing approaches to female offenders' reentry into society (González, 2019). The biggest challenge in CJS has been to establish approaches that will improve successful reintegration of women into the society upon their release (Washington, 2019). As such, correctional agencies, community supervision agencies, and other partners must consider a variety of policies and practices when working with women offenders through the restorative justice approach to transition and reentry (Daly, 2016).

When preparing incarcerated women for release from prison, numerous considerations must be addressed to help them transition into the community (González, 2019). The first step involves modifying the case management team's membership to introduce members who will supervise the women once they join the community, such as parole supervision, employment, and family reintegration services (Kohn, 2018).

Furthermore, community-based programs should be utilized to ensure continued support to women upon their release (Ross & Muro, 2020). A suitable approach can be to invite representatives to meet with women before their release from prison.

Agencies involved should also consider using community-based residential facilities to help women adjust to community life after release (González, 2019). If there will be a need for a plan for housing in post-release, agencies involved should also consider women's safety and accommodation for their children (Nyamathi et al., 2016). Additionally, the transition plan will require that agencies provide adequate assistance to women in employment opportunities to cater to various personal and family needs (Fox, 2016). The agencies should also address women's survival needs upon their releases like transportation, clothing, and identification, guarantee their effective transition to life outside prison (Gill & Wilson, 2016). Finally, the agencies should also assist in family reunification by introducing approaches that will ensure that women and their families prepare for the next phase of life when released from prison (Meijers et al., 2017).

Once released into the community, there are other specific considerations that agencies should also address to ensure successful reintegration. One key factor will be to ensure that the survival needs are met for the immediate future (Chin & Dandurand, 2012). The agencies should also link women with substance abuse issues for immediate treatment upon their release (Conti et al., 2020). An example involves making prior appointments before release to guarantee continuous care (González, 2019).

Another special consideration involves being clear with women regarding the community expectations and consequences (Gill & Wilson, 2016). The agencies should

also offer legal assistance and transport services for women expected to meet their release obligations (Halliday et al., 2017). Women should also be assisted in applying their knowledge and skills through successful employment under supervision (Chin & Dandurand, 2012). Agencies should also continue to support women in their personal, vocational, and social life upon release from prison.

Factors that Influence the Effectiveness of Restorative Justice among Female Offenders

Studies have shown that there are inconsistencies in restorative justice especially with regard to gender (Gill & Wilson, 2016). Past studies demonstrate disagreement regarding practitioner's role and responsibility in restorative justice relating to gender specificity in working approaches (Keenan et al., 2017). Past studies have also demonstrated that the factors include ensuring non-discrimination based on offense type, considering how emotions of shame and guilt are managed, attention to complex needs, and awareness of balanced attendance (Keenan et al., 2017).

Ensuring Nondiscrimination Based on an Offense

Female and male offenders differ in their offending patterns as female crime statistics have been demonstrated by non-violent or acquisitive violence (Bradley, 2017). Past studies have also established that the gendered offense patterns can influence RJ's access among women (González, 2019). For instance, studies have indicated that inconsistencies exist regarding the way restorative justice prioritizes offenses (Carter & Marcum, 2017). In most cases, priority is usually given to offenses with an identifiable personal victim (Gill & Wilson, 2016). Given that female-dominated offense categories

constitute fewer personal victims, opportunities exist for them to be involved in restorative justice practices.

Therefore, female offenders' various priorities reflect the past studies that showed that restorative justice has not been efficient for victimless crimes (Gill & Wilson, 2016). However, it is essential to acknowledge that most existing literature comes from male-focused samples as little consideration has been given to how gender affects the various cases (Garcia & Ritter, 2012). Qualitative evidence from women offenders' experience of restorative justice like minor offenses has shown positive results (Bradley, 2017). As such, women view restorative justice practices as playing a significant role in challenging their narrative of minor offenses as victimless crimes.

Studies have also focused on how female youth offenders perceive the impact of their behavior in the broader community (Salem et al., 2013). Past studies found that few young offenders engaged in minor offenses had re-offended, mirroring previous successes with a similar scheme (Gill & Wilson, 2016). Therefore, if restorative justice is delivered in a multiagency setting, the approach will potentially be a practical approach to reducing recidivism in prolific female offenses (Mciver, 2020). Gill and Wilson (2016) also emphasized the need to give equal priority to minor crimes and taking active control to develop positive engagement.

Summary and Conclusion

The chapter discussed various issues about female prisoners across the globe and the need for multiple interventions. The main issue raised in most sections of this chapter has been the differences in male and female prisoners' needs. Most strategies that have

been adopted for prison management and support transition back into society have been in favor of male prisoners. In most instances, traditional approaches are still adopted in all CJS stages, making it difficult for female prisoners to benefit from restorative justice. As such, there is a need for further research into restorative justice and recidivism among female prisoners. The literature review has introduced a research gap that raises the need for current research into the problems that female prisoners experience when reintegrating into society upon their prison release. As such, further studies should be carried out to assess the effectiveness of restorative justice when applied to female prisoners. Furthermore, studies need to address the gender issues about imprisonment, rehabilitation, transition, and reentry back into society. The next chapter will describe the research methods used to study the issue of restorative justice and recidivism among female prisoners.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of the study was to explore restorative justice and recidivism in formerly incarcerated women who were nonviolent offenders in an East Coast state, focusing on the barriers and success factors of reentry services for female ex-offenders 50 years or older. This study built on the research of Brent (2019), who examined the reintegration process of previously incarcerated African American women above 50 years of age in California from a social policy perspective. This study built on Brent's work by exploring the topic from a public policy perspective and exploring female ex-offenders' experiences from various ethnicities.

This chapter highlights the techniques and practical steps followed in the study process. It contains discussions of the following significant sections: research design, type of qualitative methodology, the role of the researcher, setting, and sample, data collection procedures, data analysis, trustworthiness, protection of participant's rights, exploratory study, and presentation of results.

Research Design and Rationale

According to Blanche et al. (2006), a research design is a plan that guides the "arrangement of conditions for data collection and analysis to combine relevance of research purpose to the economy purpose" (p. 34). Generally, the design provides an extensive outline and form the study takes. In addition, a research design is defined as an aspect that antedates and presents a logical basis for data collection, processing, and

analytical decisions (Akhtar, 2016). Akhtar (2016) further described it as a plot that specifies data collection and analysis procedures in a study.

This study used a general qualitative design to explore restorative justice and recidivism in formerly incarcerated women who were nonviolent offenders in an East Coast state and environment, focusing on the barriers and success factors of reentry services for females' ex-offenders 50 years or older. General qualitative study designs have been in play since the early 1930s, and 60s among studies for British criminologists (Strokes & Bergin, 2006). The approach has been used to answer questions or explain a "phenomenon of interest, a social process or a culture by collecting and analyzing narrative data from the perspective of the participant" (Astroth & Chung, 2018, p. 381). Additionally, qualitative approaches provide holistic and in-depth insights into a phenomenon by collecting narrative material with a flexible qualitative design tradition (Moser & Korstjens, 2017). Moser and Korstjens (2017) further highlighted that qualitative research is premised on a constructivism paradigm that acknowledges the existence of multiple interpretations of reality and explores how individuals construct their reality in a natural context.

The choice of general qualitative design was used because the I desired to focus on the participants' experiences. The design originated from philosophy and psychology and allows the researcher to describe the participant's physical, mental, and social experiences through in-depth interviews (Muthee, 2020). A mission of the research is to gain an appreciation and understanding of how nonviolent female ex-offenders interpret their experiences and an interpretation of the meaning they attribute to their experiences.

Qualitative research sits on various philosophical stances. However, popular qualitative design approaches among criminological settings include phenomenological, grounded, case studies and ethnography (Schlosser, 2008). Cañón and Buitrago-Gómez (2018) highlighted that “the systemic formulation of the research question allows the researcher to focus the study, guide the method decisions, and to put forward possible solutions” (p. 193). As stated in Chapter 1, the study’s RQ was as follows:

RQ: What are the experiences of women nonviolent ex-offenders over 50 years old as it relates to restorative justice and recidivism, with a focus on the barriers and success factors of reentry services?

Creswell (2014) described a central question as a broad question that explores a central phenomenon in a study and includes how open-ended verbs focus on the specified participants’ experiences. Moreover, the central concept is usually the main idea being explored in a qualitative study between the central question and the purpose statement. The concept is stated at the midpoint between too narrow and too broad.

The central phenomenon explored in this qualitative study were the experiences of nonviolent women ex-offenders above 50 years of age after restorative justice and recidivism, barriers, and success factors of reentry services. In this research, I assessed women’s experiences post incarceration and the types of reentry services they engaged in upon their release. Brent (2019) affirmed that the reintegration process is quite complex, and previously incarcerated women might face too much hostility from society during the reentry process. Further, she cited several barriers facing ex-offenders, including but not limited to employment, social and personal barriers such as lack of housing, as well as

difficulties in family and friend reunions. Also, older ex-offenders face a more complicated process during reintegration than their younger ex-offenders' counterparts (Brent, 2019).

This study employed a general qualitative study design to explore nonviolent female ex-offenders' experiences above 50 years of age and the functional application of learning their experiences. A generic qualitative design was the best approach strategy and has been adopted for some studies involving criminal offences over the years. Caelli et al. (2003) elaborated that generic qualitative research studies are those that epitomize the characteristics of qualitative research but rather than focusing on culture as does ethnography, or the building of theory as does grounded theory. Generally, this strategy of inquiry focuses on understanding an experience or an event or process (Cooper & Endacott, 2007) by exhibiting some characteristics of qualitative studies and conducting a study through a combination of specific methodologies or adoption of no methodology at all (Caelli et al., 2003).

Justification for the Research Method

This study's RQ has a multifaceted feature, and the qualitative design selection could be easily misconstrued. It could be narrative research because the female ex-offenders narrated stories of their life experiences, grounded theory as I aimed to describe the social process over time, or phenomenological methodology because I aimed to identify the phenomenon through participants' perceptions in a situation (see Liu, 2016). However, the generic qualitative study design tradition can answer straightforward questions without framing the inquiry within an explicit theoretical or philosophical

tradition. The researcher makes assumptions instead of philosophical assumptions (Caelli et al., 2003). The generic tradition has a descriptive nature and the ability to seek and understand the process, phenomenon, worldviews, or participants' perspective in the study (Liu, 2016).

The rationale for the adapted research tradition is how its interpretive nature satisfactorily fits the research focus. This generic method is flexible and can easily fit in complex situations (Liu, 2016). In addition, the purposes of this qualitative method are envisioned with the mode of research. I summarized the nonviolent women ex-offenders' perceptions into important thematic areas and tried and to build up links between the research aim and these themes as well as develop a conceptual model about the experiences of women nonviolent ex-offenders over 50 years old, with a focus on the barriers and success factors of reentry services. Further, the generic qualitative design approach leverages how people interpret their experiences, construct their worlds, and ultimately determine what meaning they derive from their experiences (Kahlke, 2014).

Role of the Researcher

My role as researcher was to collect qualitative data based on the experiences of nonviolent women ex-offenders above 50 years of age. This role as an incisive observer was to observe how these women conducted themselves and generally their behavior after restorative justice and recidivism. Also, to fill this information in the researcher's journal. In addition, I was an active participant in these women's day-to-day activities to interpret their diverse perspectives and experiences at a personal level. Further, I formulated interview guides, a questionnaire form, and a focus group discussion guide to

aid in the data collection process through observations, in-depth interviews, and moderation of focus group discussion sessions among the study sample.

I sampled and recruited study participants. The researcher's role also included introducing oneself to the study participants, stating the purpose of the research study, administering informed consent forms, and ensuring privacy and confidentiality of the information given as this study sample entailed a stigmatized population. I conducted observations and semi structured in-depth interviews orally through face-to-face or telephone interviews and moderated focus group discussions to elicit the participants' experiences during the data collection. During an observation, the researcher plays either of the listed four roles during the data collection process: complete observer, observer as participant or observer-participant, participant as observer or participant-observer, and finally, a complete participant (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). It is also the researcher's responsibility to maintain and ensure that the data collection tools and materials are adequate and in proper shape during the entire study period. Further, I managed the collected data in an acceptable form and interpreted all the participants' perceptions of their experiences as listed in the questionnaire forms and the focus group discussion responses after transcription.

I maintained a subjective supervisory/instructor relationship with participants during the face-to-face or telephone in-depth interviews and the entire study period. Moreover, I had contact with the participants during the observation process as a complete participant and during other interactions and could offer counselling if the participants depicted behavioral disorder due to their incarceration experiences.

When considering researcher bias, Galdas (2017) described bias as the potential to influence the results of a specific study. Preference bias in scientific studies occurs when the study results echo the researcher's preference over other possible study results (Wilholt, 2009). Further, potential researcher bias in this study was likely to occur during the formulation of a RQ, data collection, selection of study location, recruitment of study participants, private funding (see Wilholt, 2009), and possibly during data coding.

The qualitative research paradigm is often premised on reflections of the researcher opinions and influences and is usually conducted by a small group of people to avoid biases from an individual investigator (Galdas, 2017). Moreover, researcher bias is most prominent in qualitative studies as the researcher assumes both data collector and data analyst roles (Birt et al., 2016). In this study, potential researcher bias was policed and minimized by the research participants' active involvement in checking and confirming the results. I sought permissions to conduct this study and observed confidentiality of data and the protection of study participants due to their sensitive age and incarceration states.

Methodology

Setting and Sample

The East Coast, with coastal access to the Atlantic Ocean, houses 15 states. Pennsylvania is by far the longest, at about 2,170 square kilometers, and with a high population of all the East Coast states, second only to Florida. Pennsylvania is also my home state and my place of birth. This factor coupled with a professional familiarity with East Coast public policy was a driving force in my selection of the East Coast for this

study. The East Coast states were purposively sampled as they were ranked in the top 30 out of 50 U.S. states in terms of increased crime and imprisonment rates. Data collection only took place in one state (Pennsylvania) among the 15 states located on the East Coast.

Participant Selection Logic/ Population for Study

The study's target population consisted of nonviolent female ex-offenders older than 50 years old who had been released for a period exceeding 2 years but have spent 2 to 3 years in incarceration, although more than a dozen factors were related to recidivism in the univariate analysis. The multivariate analysis in the same data showed that recidivism can be reliably predicted with only four factors: age, no custody of children, substance use frequency, and number of substance problems (Scott et al., 2016). According to Scott et al. (2016), further analysis showed that both univariate and multivariate, most of the variables primarily predicted early recidivism (1 to 12 months post release) and contributed much less to the prediction of later recidivism (13 to 36 months post release). This period facilitated ease of recall of participants' experiences of pre-and post-incarceration. Participants resided on the East Coast and were not in custody at the study time. The study participants were free of supervision, not on parole or probation, but seeking employment opportunities and reintegration services using local provider networks.

Sampling Methods

A purposive sampling procedure, a non-probabilistic sampling technique, was employed to select participants. I further selected the nonviolent female ex-offenders above 50 years old through a critical case sampling approach until theoretical saturation

was attained with a sample of nonviolent women ex-offenders. I identified and selected the most appropriate study participants to provide data on my specific interest in exploring the experiences of nonviolent women ex-offenders over 50 years old as it related to restorative justice and recidivism with a focus on the barriers and success factors of reentry services after release from correctional centers. My primary strategy was through social media, specifically Facebook, for female ex-offenders. A secondary strategy was to recruit participants through the Innocence Project, an organization that assists those who have been unfairly incarcerated.

Critical case sampling is a purposive sampling technique focused on a small number of participants and is employed when there are limited resources (Patton, 2007). In situations where study participants are scarce or not available, snowballing, another nonprobabilistic sample method, could be employed to select study participants. Already recruited participants can suggest other possible participants of similar experiences for recruitment into the study.

Sample Size

According to Moser and Kortsjens (2018), the sample size is different for each study and is usually determined by data saturation or a point where new data will yield redundant information. Further, qualitative studies are associated with difficulty in sample size determination at the beginning of the study. However, sampling of study participants is conducted until theoretical saturation is reached. The sample size was small, and determination depended on further questions raised during the data collection process and the sampling sites.

Based upon recommendations of most qualitative studies, I have chosen a sample size of 5 or until saturation. The generic qualitative design adopted in this study lacked a detailed methodology, and thus the research approach lay with the researcher by piecing data collection clues after a keen analysis of other qualitative research traditions (see Caelli et al., 2003).

Participant Eligibility

Selection of the participants included the following criteria: To be eligible, participants had to (a) be at least 50 years of age, (b) be released from prison between January 2018 and December 2020, (c) be under no supervision such as parole or probation, and reside in an East Coast State, (specifically Pennsylvania) where the study is conducted, (d) have been incarcerated for at least 2 to 3 years, and (e) have been convicted of a felony, and (f) be non-violent female. Brent (2019) acknowledges how there has been a research gap in the reintegration and the readjusting difficulties among older ex-offenders compared to their younger ex-offenders' counterparts. The exact crimes committed by these non-violent female ex-offenders did not harm their participation in the study. Criteria for identifying participants were adopted from Brent (2019)'s study, whose criteria came from various sources such as nonprofits and organizations whose purpose and mission are to work with individuals who are reintegrating. These research sources utilized social media, specifically Facebook, to contact participants regarding their participation in the study. A social media message informed potential participants about the study, the requirements for participating in the study and asked if they will become involved.

The participants who met the research criteria were contacted through the Facebook group page, or by phone or email address provided in the circulated Facebook messages. Participants who meant the research criteria were contacted based on their individual preferences, in person, by phone. If the participant requested to be interviewed in person, or if a person chose to be interviewed by phone, all interviews were audio recorded at the time of the interview.

Relationship Between Saturation and Sample Size

According to Braun and Clarke (2019), saturation is often construed as redundancy of information after exhausting all-new thematic areas from data. The saturation point influences the sample size often during the data collection process. The purposive sampling strategy adopted a theoretical saturation mode, where new data did not influence the RQ. Theoretical saturation, which evolved from grounded theory design, is defined as a point in which all concepts and relationships between categories are fully explained. Ideally, the researcher stops data collection upon the saturation reach or when he has attained adequacy in the understanding to construct a theory (Braun & Clarke, 2019). In cases of availability of rich information or in-depth data showing various study phenomena, a data saturation point is assumed to be reached after rigorous analysis of the findings and the quality of collected participant descriptions. Further, the research team comes up with the sample size as shown by Moser and Kortsjens (2018) in a series of practical guidance to qualitative research. Part 3: sampling, data collection and analysis. I reached saturation when similar themes and information became redundant, and the absence of new thematic areas of exploration.

Instrumentation

The primary data collection instrument in this study was an interview guide that was validated in Brent's (2019) study. Although Brent's research explored the barriers and success factors of reintegration for African American female ex-offenders over 50 years old from California, this study will expand on Brent's research by taking a public policy lens of restorative justice and looking at female ex-offenders over 50 years old of all ethnicities from an East Coast State. Brent indicated that content validity of the interview questionnaire was supported and established by developing questions derived from the literature review, re-interviewing the same participants, and member checking of interviews for confirmation of both specific and emergent findings (Brent, 2019). Additionally, member checking was also incorporated in Brent's study for determining whether the information acquired was reflective and accurate of the worldview of the participants.

This instrument aligns with the study topic and concepts of understanding the perceptions of female ex-offenders over 50 years old of all ethnicities from an East Coast State. Although Brent's (2019) questionnaire focused on reintegration with a mention of restorative justice, I have incorporated only one minor modification of the questionnaire to reflect restorative justice. I reached out to Dr. Eva C. Brent for approval to modify her questionnaire (see Appendix A). For further content validation, I submitted the questionnaire to Walden University experts for review and made changes as recommended.

Upon IRB approval, the interviews will be observed, transcribed, and coded, for relevant themes and categories (Brod et al., 2009). Interviews provide knowledge from the research participants about the information that pertains to their experiences (Patton, 2007). Opdenakker (2006) informed us that the most common form of interviews are face-to-face; however, technology has enhanced research. Due to Covid-19, interviews may be administered face-to-face, by telephone or via Zoom conference calls. The use of technology allowed the researcher and the interviewee flexibility to meet safely and ease.

In-Depth Interviews

In-depth interviews were the primary source of information for this study. These are one-on-one interviews conducted either face-to-face or through telephone, and audio recorded. This method provided the non-violent female ex-offenders with an opportunity to share their encounters, experiences, prospects, and coping mechanisms pre- and post-incarceration while freely allowing the researcher to ask questions based on their responses. I reached out to the participants and provided a date and time for interviews participants who meant the research criteria indicate whether they wish to conduct a face-to-face or telephone interview.

According to Strokes and Bergin (2006), in-depth interviews are often defined as unstructured personal interviews, allowing one participant to express their perceptions of a research topic through extensive probing from the researcher. I developed an interview guide on the subject topic and carry out all the in-depth interview sessions among the participants by reading out standard questions and allowing them to express their feelings about that particular subject exhaustively while observing the amount of time taken

between different study interview sessions. I also asked the same question in the same order to ensure objectivity, with additional follow-up and or clarifying questions based on the responses received.

Sufficiency of Data Collection Instruments

The data collection instruments mentioned above will be sufficient for this purpose as they have been proved and tested to provide sufficient information during qualitative studies. Further, most generic qualitative studies adopt interviews, focus group discussions and observations as sufficient instruments to collect data (Liu, 2016).

How Participants Exit the Study

Participants exited the study out of a free will. When a study participant can drop out of a study, conditions will be when they feel the research study harms them, and when the research study process is completed. The exiting participants were given a short debrief to thank them for their participation in the study and informed of the possibility of other researchers may visit their communities with different studies and request their participation just like this one. Participants were also issued brochures with information on qualified counsellors' location, and where to get food aid, shelter or even startup jobs as they continue to re-enter the community.

After the study, participants will be followed up for two years to assess their reintegration process after the study, and what the study has impacted them, and their respective communities in the short and long-term. However, in situations where participants are required to return for follow-up interviews due to insufficiency of the initial transcript provided or to check for validity, the participants will be contacted by

telephone or email, the process explained to them by the researcher, and they will then be called upon to appear for a re-interview process. Finally, this participant recruitment process can be used during a follow-up process to acquire more data when the first cohort included very few participants in the study.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is the process of drawing inferences, including the development of a theory. “It entails examining, categorizing, tabulating and testing” (Twining et al., 2017, p. A6). Generic qualitative research has varied analysis methods since this qualitative method lacks a specific qualitative tradition as shown by Moser and Kortsjens, (2018) in a series practical guidance to qualitative research. Part 3: sampling, data collection and analysis. The qualitative approach produced a vast body of textual material such as transcripts of field notes, study’s audio-taped interviews and focus group discussions.

I read the transcripts and conducted line-by-line open coding with reflection memos. Verbatim transcription of the audio-taped material will be done using Microsoft Word. Assigned preliminary and initial codes will be ordered into different categories to develop a model from raw data and put across key thematic areas to establish patterns before content analysis.

This study adopted a five-step thematic development strategy with the following steps: initial reading of text data, subdividing into specific text segments linked to the research aim, creating categories by labelling the significant segments, and reducing overlapping the categories, and creating a model integrating the most significant concepts.

According to Liu (2016), the qualitative data analysis approach is thematic, and content based. The NVivo is a software used by researchers to organize data into nodes (Liu, 2016). In this study, the researcher generated themes to identify the participants' experiences from the time of post-incarceration to this study, from the available interview transcripts, transcribed audiotapes and focus group discussions using the five steps above strategy. Usually, the software clusters unstructured text to structured themes to draw recommendations and make a conclusive report. The coded text will be assigned free nodes in a disordered manner in NVivo. The analyzed data will further interpret in line with the RQs and objectives. Discrepancies were sorted by ecological zoning, where a regional and geographical article with discrepancies were classified as per the characteristics that preclude a specific area.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is the bedrock of high qualitative research (Birt et al., 2016). It is defined as the extent to which the findings are a true reflection of the lived experiences of the phenomenon under study (Curtin & Fossey, 2007). To establish trustworthiness in this study, the employment of member checking from participants and peer debriefing techniques were applied. According to Birt et al. (2016), member checking is a technique or tool used to establish credibility in qualitative research.

Member checking covers a range of activities, considering the improvement and accuracy of a qualitative study. It was done by first returning the interview transcript to participants by person-to-person contact, email, or preferred method selected by the participant, after the study is completed. Member checking also includes conducting an

interview using the interview transcript data or interpreted data as a guide. And finally, returning analyzed synthesized data as done in synthesized member checking for in-depth interviews.

Credibility was checked as a member checking technique to ensure the accuracy of results of the study. Member checking is often used to check for trustworthiness, assess rigor, verify, or validate qualitative results (Birt et al., 2016). Further, ensuring the transcripts are accurate and the interview and the focus group discussions are a true reflection of the entire experience.

Accuracy was assessed and established by asking the participants to check the verbatim transcriptions of their interview and reconstruct their narratives in places they felt were no longer part of their experience post-incarceration.

External validity was assessed using the thick description. Thick description is a qualitative study strategy to provide dense and detailed rich descriptions about the participants, setting and themes of a study (Creswell & Miller, 2010). Participant sentiments are epitomized in thick descriptions (Brent, 2019).

Dependability is the opposite of reliability and was checked using the triangulation strategy, which entails eliminating overlapping areas by sorting and putting data into specific themes. According to Creswell and Miller (2010), triangulation is "...a validity procedure where researchers search for convergence among multiple and different sources of information to form themes or categories in a study" (p. 126).

The confirmability of the study was checked using the reflexivity technique. This technique allows the researcher to acknowledge and declare their assumptions, personal

beliefs, biases, and values. It is done earlier in the research process to enable readers to understand where they stand and suspend or bracket researcher biases as the study proceeds (Creswell & Miller, 2010).

Ethical Procedures

According to Munhall (1989), a social enquiry is often linked to ethical reflection. She further defines ethical consideration as a means to imply an awareness of your ethical means and aims. Some of these considerations include describing and authentically reporting the participants' experiences and maintaining systematic and objective procedures before and during the entire study period. In addition, criminological studies are sensitive and necessitate adherence to ethical considerations. Davies and Francis (2018) assert that the criminological researchers' ethical responsibilities are tied to the participants (with least power) and are viewed to present accurate information concerning their lived realities.

The two most sensitive ethical areas in this study are the participants' ages, and the previous incarceration state. As a researcher there was a need to seek permission to conduct the study through introductory letters to the relevant authorities. The researcher also needs to observe utmost care when recruiting study participants from a vulnerable group such as the incarcerated female ex-offenders due to the high rate of the stigma involved. Privacy and confidentiality were ensured by issuing free, and informed consent to the participants, and constant explanations and assurance that the information given is for academic purposes only. As a researcher there is a need to seek permission from IRB

to conduct the study (see Appendix E). I have also completed the required CITI (Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative Certification).

In addition, I also informed participants that the process is voluntary, and they can exit or drop out of the study should they feel burdened by the questions or process. Further, privacy and confidentiality will be respected during data collection, data transcription, data management and reporting without disclosing the participants' identities. Each participant was allowed an opportunity to review their transcripts during member checking, and data storage, including audiotapes, is stored in a secure data cloud five years post-study. There is no conflict of interest in this study, and no monetary incentives will be given to the selected study participants during the entire data collection and study period. However, information gathered on where to acquire food aid, shelter, and professional counselling services was provided in written form.

Walden University's Institutional Review Board has issued an ethics clearance for this study. Other authorities at the East Coast will grant permission to conduct the study in the area after scrutinizing the submitted research proposal. Data will be accessed by the researcher, the Institutional Review Board (11-11-21-0284555), and the Dissertation committee members.

Summary

This study adopts a qualitative research design and a generic qualitative approach. Purposeful sampling will select the research study site, study participants, i.e., non-violent women ex-offenders, and the focus group discussion groups. Primary data was collected using semi-structured in-depth face-to-face, and phone interviews, observations,

and focus group discussions, whereas secondary data will be collected from existing legal documents. Data processing and analysis were done using NVivo software. Some of the information provided includes the researcher's role, sampling criteria, ethical considerations, and permissions, and trustworthiness and credibility issues. The findings of this study are included in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore restorative justice and recidivism in formerly incarcerated women who were nonviolent offenders in an East Coast state, with a focus on the barriers and success factors of reentry services for female ex-offenders 50 years or older.

RQ: What are the experiences of women nonviolent ex-offenders over 50 years old as it relates to restorative justice and recidivism, with a focus on the barriers and success factors of reentry services?

In this chapter, I present the results from interviews performed among formerly incarcerated women nonviolent offenders over 50 years based on their experiences during and after imprisonment. The findings also build on the research of Brent (2019), who examined the reintegration process of previously incarcerated African American women over 50 years old in California from a social policy perspective. The chapter is organized into seven main subsections: the research setting, participants' demographics, description of the data collection process, data analysis process, results representation based on themes, and a summary of the results based on the Research Question.

Setting

The setting for the study remained unchanged as all involved participants resided in Pennsylvania, one of the 14 states located on the East Coast. The state was purposively sampled as it is among the East Coast states, ranked in the top 30 out of 50 U.S. states in terms of increased crime and imprisonment rates. The personal or organizational

conditions that may have influenced participants and their experience at the time of this study included modifications in personal budget, which also affected an ability to pick up prescribed medication. All participants conducted telephonic interviews due to COVID-19 concerns.

Demographics

All five participants used in the study were female ex-offenders aged 50 years or older. They all resided in Pennsylvania and were not on parole or probation. All five participants were released from prison between January 2019 and December 2021. According to data provided during the interviews, two of the five participants were not born in Pennsylvania; however, they were born in the continental United States. The youngest participant's age was 50 and the oldest was 72. All scheduling of the interviews was conducive to the participants availability.

Data Collection

I performed five separate in-depth interviews with five participants for the data collection process. The interviews were conducted in December 2021 and January 2022. The average duration for the interviews ranged from 45 minutes to 90 minutes, with an average of 60 minutes. The interviews were conducted via telephone and were transcripts for validation. The study was consistent with the plan presented in Chapter three, which included a sample size of five participants. During data collection, there were challenges in recruitment, including locating participants who were conducive to the study's eligibility criteria listed in Chapter three. Some of the challenges were locating

participants free of supervised release such as probation or parole. After interviewing a total of five participants, saturation was reached.

Data Analysis

I used NVIVO software for the analysis of the five interview scripts. The process involved reading the scripts manually to get to know the data, uploading scripts to the software, and coding similar interview responses into codes. This software effectively develops codes and discovers the key themes from the transcripts that are used to address the RQs. After coding, similar codes were reassembled and put into context for theme development.

Regarding reliability and validity of the analysis, I employed a method that involved approaching each interview transcript with a fresh perspective, free of biases during the manual reading of the transcripts. In addition, I successfully eliminated bias while identifying codes and themes using the NVIVO software as it has a high level of accuracy. The codebook generated from the coding process is shown in Appendix F. References in the codebook highlight the number of code occurrences in the responses made by the participants. Files refer to the number of participants whose responses discussed the codes. The Dendrogram in Appendix G represents the similarities of the themes regarding the coding.

The identified themes were based on the following RQ:

RQ: What are the experiences of women nonviolent ex-offenders over 50 years old as it relates to restorative justice and recidivism, with a focus on the barriers and success factors of reentry services?

Data Representation/Conceptual Model

Axial coding, a qualitative research technique, was used during the analysis. Axial coding involves relating data to reveal categories, subcategories, codes, and linked concepts in developing the main themes. The theme development activity was based on the above RQ. The analysis identified six themes.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility was established in the study by employing member checking and peer debriefing techniques. Each participant received their interview transcript after the study was completed. This sharing helped validate the qualitative results. A verbatim transcription strategy was used to ensure the accuracy of the responses. Dependability was checked via the triangulation strategy as patterns were used to identify the themes. In addition, the axial coding technique during data analysis helped ensure reliability by linking concepts to develop themes. The reflexivity technique was performed to help eliminate researcher biases during the research. This technique helped ensure the confirmability of the study. The implementation of the above strategies helped me establish the trustworthiness of the study.

Results

The analysis identified six themes: support impacts reintegration process, restorative justice impacts behavior change, relationship impacts recidivism and reintegration, employment status implications on recidivism and reintegration, community behavior impacts reintegration and recidivism, and incarceration impacts behavior change. The findings of these themes are elaborated below.

Theme 1: Support Impacts Reintegration Process

The analysis highlighted that the kind of support received during imprisonment and after release affects the reintegration process of formerly imprisoned women aged above 50 years. In general, participants who received support from family, friends, and probation officers experienced an integration process that was somehow smooth compared to their counterparts who did not receive sufficient support. Most of the participants received support mainly from family and friends. I have assigned each of the participants pseudonyms and will use these to refer to each participant. For instance, Samantha stated that she received support from her "family, friends and [her] belief system." Mary supported this statement by saying the support mechanism was based on family and prayer. When asked to explain, Mary said, "I have a circle of family members, who ride with me and have gone to prison with me, and their support is more than it has ever been." This statement highlights how significant support is in the recovery and reentry of prisoners.

On the other hand, Bell indicated friends to be the only support. The participant stated, "Friends, close friends." Bell further explained that friends were supportive: "Relationships with my friends, people that I can depend on." Benny agreed that family and friends were supportive by stating, "My family members, relatives, and friends have been of great help." The participant further shared, "My family has been there for me by inspiring me to indulge in activities that will help me abstain from negativity. Friends and relatives helped me in securing work."

In addition to support from family and friends, Benny added that education programs were supportive by stating, "Education and improving on my carpentry skills helped me secure a job after prison. There was motivation due to the education I received while at prison." She further stated that she was not involved in the restorative justice program. However, family and friends were still supportive enough: "I wasn't involved in a restorative justice program. However, family and friends provided the support I needed."

Toure agreed that friends and family helped provide the much-needed support and explained, "My family and friends always visited me while in prison and encouraged me to be positive in the way I viewed things. Thereafter, they also helped me secure a job to help me sustain myself after imprisonment." She further stated that her efforts in securing employment after imprisonment was greatly helped by friends and family: "Finding a job after imprisonment was a challenge. But having supportive family and friends helped me secure one after two months of leaving the prison." The participants also shared that support was mainly based on a good relationship with family and friends. Toure said, "The supports programs including that from family helped me secure a job as well as maintain good relationships with other people."

Theme 2: Restorative Justice Impacts Behavior Change

The analysis highlighted that the support in terms of restorative justice impacts behavior change of formerly incarcerated women aged above 50 years. Even though the participants were not involved in restorative justice programs, they had several views about the program. For instance, Samantha stated, "I would like to become involved."

Mary was angered by the lack of restorative justice programs by saying, "It's different the support. That would start while incarcerated, you can't just put someone in a box, no counseling no nothing, either you come out whole or messed up." She highlighted the prison programs that attributed to her behavior change: "No, just family and friends. They got this parenting class, but it wasn't useful. People don't get better in jail, it's a money market."

Regarding satisfaction with the restorative justice program, most participants were dissatisfied with the program. The respondents suggested that more follow-up was required based on restorative justice programs. Belle stated she would instead be enrolled in a restorative justice program: "I would like to become involved with one that focuses on women and helping women." She further explained that she only heard of men's programs by stating, "I've heard of programs that focus on men who are non-violent offenders, like men who went to jail for smoking weed or a blunt." The participant was dissatisfied with the information she received while incarcerated: "They talked to me, but they thought it was funny, they were laughing, and they were uneducated and seemed untrained at dealing with nonviolent offenders."

Benny suggested that restorative justice can be improved by focusing on peace initiatives. She stated,

Restorative justice is ideal for a better society where there is decreased level of hatred. I believe more can be done to ensure restorative justice is effective in bringing peace into society. The responses involved need to be effective while communicating to the offender and the victim.

The participant further stated that restorative justice might help bring positive behavior change to prisoners: "The restorative justice program I am aware of helps resolve the conflict between the offender and the victim. This helps with the recovery of prisoners to become better people in society." She further suggested that restorative justice initiatives may help better society by stating, "The idea is ideal in today's society as the level of immorality is on the rise. Such a program helps bring peace to the society where different conflicts are resolved." However Samantha had several critical views about restorative justice, stating, "The program lacks enough support especially from our community. Members of society ought to view prisoners as people rather than criminals since they have potential to be better people."

Regarding information about restorative justice and recidivism while in prison, most participants believed that education programs helped bring life-long changes. For instance, Toure stated, "The education programs helped change one's perspective, to be better people by being involved in positive activities. The program emphasized avoiding crime after imprisonment as well as securing jobs."

Theme 3: Relationship Impacts Recidivism and Reintegration

The analysis highlighted that the type of relationship with family, friends, and probation officers impacted recidivism and reintegration of formerly incarcerated women aged above 50 years. A good relationship was attributed to positive change, while a bad relationship had negative implications for recidivism and reintegration. For instance, Samantha noted that a positive relationship turned her life around. She said, "A very good

relationship, she understands my health challenges and how that affects my life." The participant further explained that she changed to relate with people positively:

I try to help others, so they won't make the same mistakes that I have made in my past. I use my voice to talk to anyone. The older ones or the younger ones, who are out there going crazy, anyone who will listen.

Mary indicated that a good relationship with family members was helpful by stating, "I have a circle of family members, who ride with me and have gone to prison with me, and their support is more than it has ever been." However, she asserted that her poor relationship with probation officers led to problems. Mary included, in reference to relationships with probation officers who are helpful and consistent, a good one, because parole, I violated parole, and then I went back to prison, some girls are going to prison on purpose, they put me with people who didn't do the same type of crimes as you. Lots of problems.... Relationships with my friends, people that I can depend on.

Regarding Belle's idea of relationships based on restorative justice, she stated that inequality was an issue. The respondent explained that the quality on both ends, race, gender, and restoring a balance in the justice system when it comes to black people being treated equally in the justice system. Before I was arrested, I was a cop and I used to lock up black kids for weed, and I locked up a black kid who was going away, to the military, and he only had 300 dollars' worth of weed and I thought it was a good pinch, but he wasn't a threat, and I should have let it go. The white kids in the Northeast we used to let go all the time, and the sergeants would go to the district attorney and request to withdraw the charges. That was on my conscious for a long time, and the little boy was

selling his grandma's pills, and the sergeant still let it go, and that really bothered me for a long time. Most of the guys that I worked with are dead, heart attack, stress, and cancer, it's like a ghost. So, I wish that had happened differently and saved his life and not ruined it.

Participant "Benny" stated that communication is critical for effective relationships by saying, "I believe more can be done to ensure Restorative Justice is effective in bringing peace into society. The responses involved need to be effective while communicating to the offender and the victim." The participant, however, stated that she had a good relationship with the probation officers, "The probation officers were kind to me. I viewed them with a high level of respect. This helped enhance my coordination with them." On the other hand, respondent "Toure" indicated that the type of relationship she had with the probation officers was poor by stating, "They were stricter rather than supportive. This led to reduced communication as I felt they focused on punishment more rather than recovery." She noted that the poor relationship resulted in improper communication.

Theme 4: Employment Status Implications on Recidivism and Reintegration

The analysis highlighted that the reentry in terms of securing employment had implications on Recidivism and Reintegration of formerly imprisoned women aged above 50 years. The behavior changes of most formerly incarcerated women made them aim to secure jobs once they were out of prison. Regarding the reintegration process, participant "Samantha" was willing to get an education and secure employment. She stated, "School, employment, and getting back on my feet." The participant believed the success of

Restorative Justice is based on the ability to avoid recidivism in terms of criminal activities. She also argued that some of the prison programs helped her gain skills on how to secure jobs. She stated, "I used one program that helped me fill out job applications, make a resume, and speak to people."

Participant "Benny" indicated that education and gaining skills in prison helped secure employment. She stated, "Education and Improving my carpentry skills helped me secure a job after prison. There was motivation due to the education I received while at prison." The participant added that motivation to indulge in positive activities was attributed to education and employment by stating, "The education programs helped change one's perspective, to be better people by being involved in positive activities. The program emphasized avoiding crime after imprisonment as well as securing jobs."

Participant "Mary" believed getting a job after imprisonment would help with the reintegration process. The participant said, "Restoring family values, getting a job. It starts with me." Participant "Belle" stated that she practiced inequality before imprisonment while working as a cop. After imprisonment, the former officer wished to work with a focus on equality, especially towards black people. She stated,

Before I was arrested, I was a cop and I used to lock up black kids for weed....

The white kids in the Northeast we used to let go all the time, and the sergeants would go to the district attorney and request to withdraw the charges. That was on my conscious for a long time, and the little boy was selling his grandma's pills, and the sergeant still let it go, and that really bothered me for a long time. Most of

the guys that I worked with are dead, heart attack, stress, and cancer, it's like a ghost. So, I wish that had happened differently and saved his life and not ruined it.

This reflection implies that the former officer wishes to work as a cop who practices equality, meaning the former officer wishes to avoid recidivism via employment.

Participant "Benny's" support from family and friends helped her secure a job within a short time after release. She stated, "It took me a month. Helped mainly came from family and friends who assisted with the job search." The participant added that employment helped her be busy, helping her avoid recidivism. She stated, "I have changed the way I relate with people. After imprisonment, I relate with more kindness. In addition, I try to be busy by indulging in work to keep away idleness." The participant also stated that family and friends helped her secure employment to avoid indulging in criminal activities. She said, "My family has been there for me by inspiring me to indulge in activities that will help me abstain from negativity. Friends and relatives helped me in securing work."

Participant "Toure" added that her turning point involved securing employment to help her avoid criminal activities. She stated, "The education programs helped change one's perspective, to be better people by being involved in positive activities. The program emphasized avoiding crime after imprisonment as well as securing jobs." She also commended her turning point involved indulging in industrious activities by stating, "That is what I actually did after my release. I am kind to other people, and I love doing industrious activities." The participant also added that indulging in legal work would help

with the reintegration process, unlike indulging in work with criminal activities such as the sale of drugs. She stated,

Yeah, but it's hard, working for a temporary agency, way out there. And then I started selling drugs and that didn't go well, so I stopped. Then I found another job that worked for me, registering voters, knocking on doors, because I had to keep a roof over my head. Some things will make you change; my life is better.

Partisan "Belle" added that self-employment was an ideal route to employment, especially for individuals who may not be absorbed back to their jobs due to age. She stated,

I'm self-employed, I was worried about getting a government job, I have contracts, and I was concerned about that, because I'm retired. I'm curious about how many women are like me. Everything is so high. What can a woman do? How can I ask someone for five thousand dollars? There are not many people.

Theme 5: Community Behavior Impacts Reintegration and Recidivism

The analysis highlighted that the type of relationship between the community and formerly incarcerated women impacts the reintegration and recidivism of these women above 50 years. The experience of how the community views and treats them affects the formerly incarcerated women; when they are treated without much respect to the point, they feel rejected, these women tend to indulge in criminal activities. On the other hand, the results showed that formerly incarcerated women treated well by society were less likely to be involved in criminal activities during reentry. The results highlighted mainly family and friends from a community perspective helped formerly imprisoned women to

reintegrate into society. They provided the much-needed support for the positive transition of formerly imprisoned women's reentry process.

Participant "Samantha" supported this notion by stating that community support through religion, family, and friends was beneficial. She said, "Family, friends' and my belief system.... My religion is Islam." This statement implies that apart from family and friends, religion also plays a significant role in the positive transition of formerly imprisoned women. Participant "Mary" added that family and prayers helped. She commented, "Family, and prayer.... I have a circle of family members, who ride with me and have gone to prison with me, and their support is more than it has ever been."

As for participant "Belle", only friends were helpful from a community perspective. She stated, "Friends, close friends.... Relationships with my friends, people that I can depend on." However, she was against the idea of imprisonment as she stated,

Although I wasn't treated badly, I don't want to go back, and injustice is not something that a person can numb, being in the cell is traumatizing, just to pee, it's embarrassing, and makes me feel insecure about my life.

Respondent "Benny" commented that friends and family were helpful regarding positive transition and avoiding crimes. She stated,

My family members, relatives, and friends have been of great help.... My family has been there for me by inspiring me to indulge in activities that will help me abstain from negativity. Friends and relatives helped me in securing work.

Participant "Toure" also mentioned that family and friends' support helped with the positive transition. She stated, "My family and friends always visited me while in prison

and encouraged me to be positive in the way I viewed things. Thereafter, they also helped me secure a job to help me sustain myself after imprisonment."

Theme 6: Incarceration Impacts Behavior Change

The results highlighted that the imprisonment and support in terms of education programs, Restorative Justice, and favorable treatment by the community based on friends, families, and probation officers had implications on behavior change of formerly imprisoned women aged over 50 years. Most participants agreed that imprisonment led to a change in behavior. The results highlighted that the behavior of formerly incarcerated women before detention was different from behavior after imprisonment.

For instance, participant "Samantha" supported this notion by stating she was a changed woman after imprisonment. She said, "I wish I could turn it all around, and be straight like I am now, because I haven't looked back since. Because if nothing changes, then nothing changes, and I am a changed woman today, a better woman today."

Participant "Mary" stated that family and jail time led to her behavior change. She stated,

While I was incarcerated my mother was sick, and I shaved all my hair off, and I read the book of Job, and said "God if you save my Momma, I'll change my life" a lot of things had to change for me. Not just for me but for my mother, my children, my friends. I have a beautiful home, I don't claim the streets at all, I don't play in the streets. My mother said, "change starts with you."

Participant "Benny" was also in agreement that imprisonment adversely led to positive change. She stated, "I have changed the way I relate with people. After imprisonment, I relate with more kindness. In addition, I try to be busy by indulging in

work to keep away idleness.” The participant also added that support from family and friends while in prison and during reentry helped with the transition of her behavior. She stated,

Before imprisonment, I used to view things with a lot of negativities. This led to my high level of rudeness and hatred for work activities as well as people I interacted with. My turning point was the training and support programs I received while in prison. The support from family and friends also came in handy.

Participant “Toure” also supported this theme by stating that incarceration improved her relations with God via religion, leading to positive behavior change. She said,

While I was incarcerated, religion came in handy, and it helped me become closer to God. I came to realize the little things I took for granted are the ones that mattered most. I promised God once I get back my freedom, I would use it to better the people around me as well as myself. That is what I actually did after my release. I am kind to other people, and I love doing industrious activities.

Summary

The chapter presented the results based on the experiences of formerly incarcerated women non-violent offenders over 50 years based on reentry services' barriers and success factors. The analysis was performed via NVIVO software based on the five interview scripts. The study identified six themes: Support impacts reintegration process, restorative justice impacts behavior change, relationship impacts recidivism and reintegration, employment status implications on recidivism and reintegration,

community behavior impacts reintegration and recidivism, and incarceration impacts behavior change.

Regarding the support theme, participants who received support from family, friends, and probation officers experienced a successful re-integration process. In the restorative theme, most participants were dissatisfied with the program. The third theme on relationships identified that healthy relations lead to a positive change in the behavior of the imprisoned women. The employment theme identified that securing employment after imprisonment helped female prisoners avoid recidivism. Most participants secured jobs through assistance provided by family and friends. The final theme based on incarceration showed that imprisonment and support in terms of education programs, Restorative Justice, and favorable treatment by the community based on friends, families, and probation officers had implications on behavior change of formerly imprisoned women aged above 50 years. Most participants agreed that imprisonment led to a change in their behavior. These findings are further discussed in detail in the next chapter.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of the study was to explore restorative justice and recidivism in formerly incarcerated women who were nonviolent offenders in an East Coast state, with a focus on the barriers and success factors of reentry services for female ex-offenders aged 50 years or above. The study involved five female ex-offenders aged 50 years or older who were not on parole or probation and resided in Pennsylvania, sharing their experiences based on the barriers and success factors they faced during their reentry. The analysis identified six themes: support impacts reintegration process, restorative justice impacts behavior change, relationship impacts recidivism and reintegration, employment status implications on recidivism and reintegration, community behavior impacts reintegration and recidivism, and incarceration impacts behavior change. The findings identified that the reentry and reintegration process of formerly incarcerated women (nonviolent offenders) over 50 years was impacted by the type of support provided by family, friends, and community; restorative justice and training/education programs; type of relationships with family, friends, and society at large; employment; and incarceration. These findings may help develop Brent's (2019) study that examined the reintegration process of previously incarcerated African American women over 50 years old in California from a social policy perspective.

Interpretation of the Findings

According to Northcutt Bohmert (2016), the reintegration and reentry of male and female prisoners back into society are supported by most institutions under programs

currently in place. However, there is insufficient information regarding the barriers and success factors of reentry services for female ex-offenders 50 years or older. As a result, most female prisoners experience severe difficulties after their release from prison. The results showed that the support of formerly incarcerated women over 50 years old mainly came from family and friends rather than institutions identified in the literature as the primary support for male and female prisoners. These results highlight that those institutions need to consider female prisoners aged 50 years and above in their plans. This consideration can be supported by the fact that most study participants had not attended restorative justice programs. The restorative justice programs intend to provide various practical strategies at the community level to facilitate prisoners' reintegration and reentry into society (Kohn, 2018).

Daly (2016) argued that the environment could affect an individual the same way a person can influence their environment. The findings identified that the community's perspective towards formerly prisoned female offenders impacts their reentry and recidivism. The literature supporting these results included Ross and Muro (2020), who argued that an individual's relationship with the environment (society) could affect their motivation, behavior, and overall physical and mental health. This study found that when the community is aggressive towards a formerly imprisoned individual, the individual becomes angry and is more likely to perform recidivism to counter the rude or aggressive action experienced. Fox (2016) argued that providing financial support to women released from prison reduces their risk of participating in crime after prison release compared to scenarios where poor women are not supported.

Ross and Muro (2020) argued that environmental factors might involve job demands, community values, and job characteristics requiring specific skills. The literature identified some of the barriers prisoners face during reentry as identifying a place to stay, securing employment, and avoiding crime (Ross & Muro 2020). In this study, I identified that finding a job for formerly imprisoned women aged over 50 years was their primary challenge. This problem was mainly experienced by prisoners who received no training while in prison to support gaining industrial skills. A community that focuses on a former prisoner's criminal history rather than the positive change finds it hard to employ prisoners. Age also played a factor as all the participants were aged 50 years and above. Mancini et al. (2016) argued that the path to reentry, reintegration, and desistance is usually based on good marriage, aging, stable employment, and identity transformation.

Women offenders find it more challenging to secure a job after release than men (Link & Williams, 2017). Gunnison and Helfgott (2017) supported this by stating that formerly imprisoned women are often expected to reestablish family and home roles more than securing employment. Family roles may limit the job searching process. This difference in gender reintegration into a society based on employment proves that women experience significant difficulties. According to González (2019), formerly imprisoned women's challenge in securing employment involves a lack of education or skills. In this study, I identified that education and training of prisoners while detained assisted in the securing of employment after release. The study showed that women were dissatisfied

with restorative programs as they mainly helped the male gender. Moreover, the results identified a lack of sufficient programs to help women during and after imprisonment.

Therefore, most imprisoned women lacked a sense of hope for their future outside prison. Ward and Merlo (2016) argued that women released from prison would lack homes, employment, financial support, social legitimated skills, and knowledge on securing jobs. Mancini et al. (2016) explained that employment in a stable position showed offenders' successful reintegration into society. In addition, an intimate relationship strongly influences women's ability to reintegrate into society (Loong et al., 2019). Hence, based on the findings of this study, the reentry of formerly imprisoned women is influenced by friends and family.

Regarding control theory, the support from family and friends helps create social bonds that are critical for desistance (Conti et al., 2020). According to Bradley (2017), the social control theory states that an individual commitment to employment reduces the chance of that individual indulging in crime. This statement is supported by Halliday et al. (2017), who found that an individual with a high-paying legitimate job will more likely stop offending. In this study, I identified that the employment status of formerly imprisoned women after release impacted recidivism.

Brent (2019) argued that offenders aged 27 and above are more likely to be involved in crime if they are not provided with job opportunities. This has also been supported by scholars who have agreed that the success of offenders during reintegration and reentry is influenced by the availability of stable employment opportunities. My study identified that most formerly imprisoned individuals were helped to secure

employment after imprisonment by family and friends. Brent supported this and stated that stigma based on incarceration, weak connections and relationships, and poor work history were the reasons behind the challenges faced by prisoners in securing employment after their release from prison.

Age and Maturity

Wood and Suzuki (2016) found that crime decreases with age. This study was based on female participants aged 50 years and above. The results showed less recidivism among these women, supporting the literature. However, other researchers disagreed as they asserted that maturity could develop regardless of age; the decrease in committing a crime is mainly based on an individual's decision to commit to noncriminal life after release (Grossi, 2017; Bouffard et al., 2017). This statement is supported by the two themes involving behavior change. In this study, I showed that incarceration influenced the behavior change of formerly imprisoned women. The programs during and after imprisonment, such as education, training, religion, and restorative justice, help bring positive behavior change to formerly incarcerated women aged over 50 years.

In this study, I identified that women were willing to relate better and indulge in positive activities while trying as much to avoid crime. These findings are supported by Grossi (2017), who argued that reformed offenders are more likely to find satisfaction in productive behavior, identify purpose and meaning in life, and feel a sense of control over their future. Therefore, offenders' behavior change is impacted by maturity and identity. The incarceration process assisted prisoners in discovering a sense of direction, while incarcerated, recognizing problems associated with crime, and becoming informed

that participating in crime is not good. This knowledge helps them with reintegration and reentry into society. The various notions discussed above show that aging, employment opportunities, and identity transformation have implications on the reintegration and reentry of prisoners.

In this study, I identified that prisoners' relationships with family, friends, and community have implications for recidivism and reintegration of formerly incarcerated women aged over 50 years. The study results highlighted that a good relationship was attributed to positive change while a bad relationship had negative implications for recidivism and reintegration. This is supported by Link and Williams (2017), who argued that violence increases with a reduction in positive communication. Positive communication is key for any relationship, and the restorative justice programs help repair relationships that were once available before an individual participated in a crime. Masson and Österman (2017) supported this by stating that nurturing environments or support can improve the effectiveness of relationships.

In addition, the offender needs to take responsibility and provide victims with an apology; this may help with the reintegration process. Mciver (2020) argued that restoration's benefits are based on forgiveness theory, where the act of forgiveness comes with compassion and increases prosocial actions. Forgiveness helps repair relationships. In this study, I identified that formerly imprisoned women who had stable relationships with family and friends had positive attitudes, behavior, and beliefs after release, helping them with the reintegration process. The formerly imprisoned women were willing to treat other people with respect. Osterman and Masson (2016) supported this via defiance

theory that suggests all participants should be treated with respect while focusing on communication.

According to Gill and Wilson (2016), the increasing number of female reoffenders is because most women leaving prison face insurmountable barriers. Scholars based on feminism have argued that victimization has shaped female recidivism and criminality. Based on this study's results, I found that the act of victimization leads to negative behavior change. The results also showed that relationships have an impact on recidivism. This was supported by Visher and Bakken (2014), who argued that a special relationship exists between subsequent offending and childhood or adulthood victimization.

Gill and Wilson (2016) argued that incarceration has a significant impact on post release outcomes and that the cultural and racial ethnicities of women offender's shape prison and reentry experience. In this study, incarceration led to positive behavior change in formerly imprisoned women. Past studies have shown that women suggested that time served, prison programming, and institutional behavior have a modest effect on recidivism, similar to this study's findings. In addition, institutions and strategies used in correctional institutions are very significant to help change behavior of imprisoned women. The study findings identified there was a lack of proper programs, such as education, training, and restorative justice to support the incarcerated women

Limitations of the Study

One of the limitations of this study is the small number of participants used to gather data. Therefore, the findings may be open to other interpretations. Another

limitation was that restorative justice programs focused more on men than women. This led to the absence of restorative justice programs made available within and outside of prisons.

Recommendations

Very few studies have been conducted on older women and their reintegration process. Regarding the limitation of the low number of participants used in the study, further studies on formerly incarcerated women should focus on using a bigger population to help provide more accurate findings. Other studies should also focus on identifying strategies for establishing restorative justice programs for women. The study identified a gap based on gender where men tend to be favored. In addition, further studies based on the desistance of formerly imprisoned women concerning age and maturity should be conducted. Further studies should identify effective programs to help with the reentry and reintegration of female prisoners.

Implications

Link and Williams (2017) argued that it is essential to facilitate prisoners' contact with the community to reduce the harmful effect of imprisonment while assisting with prisoners' social reintegration. In addition, family acceptance is a factor linked to future optimism, successful employment, and drug abstinence. In this study, I identified that prisoners visited were less likely to commit crimes after release. This statement was supported by Zavrashvili (2015), who argued that prisoners whose families or friends have visited were less likely to reoffend than those who did not receive visits. Therefore, it is essential to make prison visits a priority and use it as an opportunity to implement

restorative justice (Gill & Wilson, 2016). These visits, if allowed, can have a significantly detrimental effect on female prisoners (Mciver, 2020). Prison needs to have facilities that support visits by family members and friends. In addition, female prisoners should have access to mental health evaluation, protective custody, and counselors. This access will help female prisoners deal with emotional and mental trauma upon release (Brent, 2019). Daly (2016) identified that women might have specific treatment and rehabilitation needs than men.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed the findings and the literature. The main themes addressed involved support impacts reintegration process, restorative justice impacts behavior change, relationship impacts recidivism and reintegration, employment status implications on recidivism and reintegration, community behavior impacts reintegration and recidivism, and incarceration impacts behavior change. I identified that most female prisoners experience several challenges after their release from prison. Family and friends provided support to female prisoners. This helps with their reentry and reintegration.

Employed female prisoners after release are less likely to commit a crime. Thus, the relationship between female prisoners and the outside world needs to be friendly to help with successful reentry and reintegration. In addition, the environment influences prisoners' behavior just like individuals can influence their surroundings. Female prisoners need to be supported financially to help reduce the risk of participating in crime after prison release. The environmental factors involve job demand, community values, and job characteristics that require a specific set of skills.

In this study, I identified that education and training of prisoners while imprisoned helped them secure a job after release. Employment after imprisonment helps with successful reintegration into society. The success of offenders during reintegration and reentry is influenced by the availability of jobs. This study showed that incarceration impacted the behavior change of formerly imprisoned women. The programs during and after imprisonment, such as education, training, religion, and restorative justice, can help bring positive behavior change in formerly incarcerated women aged over 50 years.

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Appendix A Interview Flyer



Post Incarcerated Women Eligibility Requirements:



Formerly incarcerated women non-violent offenders over 50.

Must not be on parole or probation

Must have been released from prison between January 2019 and December 2021

Looking for individuals to participate in interviews regarding Restorative Justice and Recidivism in the community once released from prison.

Earn \$10 by participating in a confidential interview discussing your experiences and involvement in RJ and recidivism during reentry.

Please contact Alfeia DeV Vaughn-Goodwin

Appendix B Protocol for Interviews/ Interview Questions

**RESTORATIVE JUSTICE AND RECIDIVISM
STUDY
LOOKING FOR PARTICIPANTS**

Interview Details: Previously Incarcerated women over 50

Age

Interviewer:

Participant Name:

Date and Time of Interview:

Location of Interview:

Pre-interview Verification:

1. Verify informed consent letter is signed, dated, and collected.
2. Give participant a copy of the executed informed consent letter.
3. Remind participant she can request a copy of the results of the study if she wishes to have a copy.

Demographic Interview Questions

1. What city were you born?
2. Where do you currently live?
3. Are you currently involved in a RJ program ?
If so, when, and how did you become involved?
4. Does the RJ program you're involved with focus on recidivism?
5. Can you describe ?
6. Do you have other support mechanisms?
7. Please explain?

8. What is your idea of RJ and Why?

Interview Questions

1. How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the RJ you have experienced?
2. Can you discuss what type of relationship you had with your parole or probation officer?
3. In your words, describe the information you received while incarcerated in regard to RJ and recidivism.
4. Describe how you used RJ or reentry assistance programs.
5. What would you most want to change about the RJ information and programs made available to you?
6. How do you personally define RJ success?

Reintegration Questions

1. What was the first major decision you made upon released from incarceration?
2. Describe your experience in finding employment and, if you are employed now, how long did it take you to find employment once you were released?
3. Can you describe what entering a RJ program was like?
4. Tell me about your community before and after your incarceration. Is the community the same or has it changed in your opinion?

Reintegration Reflection Questions

1. Tell me how your age has had any impact on your reentry.
2. Looking back, in what ways do you think you have changed since your release?
3. When you reflect on your life, what would you say were the most important things you experienced and what was an important turning point?

Appendix C NIH or CITI

Appendix D Attempts to Contact Questionnaire Creator

The interview instrument for the study was sourced from information available online through <http://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/dissertations/6528> and while no permission was required for access, I have made an attempt to make contact with Dr. Eva C. Brent, “Reintegration Process of Previously Incarcerated African American Women Older than 50 Years” the creator of the questionnaire.

First Attempt: Email dated April 29, 2021 @ 1:06pm with a subject line, Requesting an author’s contact information. Emailed stated; I am requesting to use Dr. Brent’s questionnaire as a guide.

Appendix E: Codebook

Name	Description
Behaviour change	Change of behaviour after imprisonment
Community change	The change in how the community acts and behave
Information Gained	Information gained during imprisonment.
Location	Place of birth and residence
Reflection	Reflection of formerly incarcerated women non-violent offenders
Reintegration	Reintegration of formerly incarcerated women back to the community
Relationship	Type of relationship between probation officers and formerly incarcerated women.
Restorative Justice	Restorative Justice activities
Support change suggestion	Suggestion for how support of incarcerated women need to be addressed to help the women recover
Support Mechanisms	Support Mechanisms for formerly incarcerated women

Appendix F: Dendrogram

