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Perceptions of Juvenile Justice Personnel on Effects of Detention Assessments on Low-Risk Offenders

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Walden University

College of Health Sciences and Public Policy

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Desire' Hulse

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Walden University
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Abstract

Perceptions of Juvenile Justice Personnel on Effects of Detention Assessments on Low-

Risk Offenders

by

Desire' Hulse

MA, Kaplan University, 2013

BS, Kaplan University, 2010

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Public Policy and Administration

Walden University

November 2022

Abstract

Nationally, arrest rates have declined; however, Georgia faces disproportionately high crime rates, mainly among African American juveniles in Fulton County. Juvenile recidivism has been a long-standing issue. Researchers have demonstrated that risk factors impact recidivism amongst youth offenders at 17 and 18 years of age. Researchers have not yet been able to establish how risk factors impact recidivism risks of low-risk youth offenders. The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences and perceptions of Fulton County juvenile justice personnel on the detention assessment's effects on low-risk youth offenders and impact on recidivism risks of African American youth. Heidegger's philosophy and the advocacy coalition framework was used as approaches to analyze the collected data. Using the hermeneutic circle and Colaizzi's method, data from in-depth interviews were collected from 15 participants including police officers, attorneys, detectives, social services professionals, and intervention program professionals within the Fulton County Department of Juvenile Justice. Results of these analyses indicated that recommendations of positive social change include implementing, adjusting, and refining the DAI evaluation criteria or adding a mandated behavioral assessment for low-risk youth offenders diverted from placement in a detention facility. Juvenile justice systems may benefit from the results of this study by formatting diverse advocacy coalitions that can influence a more effective decision-making process to promote effective policy and positive social change.

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Dedication

This research is dedicated to my family who have helped push me through my PhD journey. My mother and father, Francesca and Roger Hulse who raised Jeanette, Jennifer, and myself to be strong women as two of us excel in law enforcement and the other one in the military. Daneeyha, Dayla, and Amir, my dear children, who understood when mommy was surrounded by papers, they were free to do whatever they wanted. Hasan, my husband, who listened to me read and reread each section of my research a million times to perfect clarity. Without them, my little successes would not have been so massive. I continuously push my younger sisters to go further in their education and try to show them that as women, African American women, in our field, we hold strength and professionalism in every step and decision we make. We will forever be role models to everyone around us, even if it is for a short period in time; so, it is important that we be each other's muscle. I am proud to say that each of my children represent a degree. Daneeyha pushed through a bachelor's degree in my tummy, Dayla sat with me on her first day of life working on our master's degree, and little Amir spent his first year of life reading books on research and theory before turning two and running away from me. I truly hope this research advances more literature on the juvenile justice system. To God be the glory, great things He hath done. Without Him, all this would not be possible.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

In 1998, the Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice facilities were reported as overcrowded, understaffed, lacked protection for children from harm, had minimal standards of classifications, and had inadequate mental health care (Department of Justice, 2015). In need of change, the Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice added the implementation of detention assessment instruments to the procedures of the juvenile justice system. Detention assessment instruments, state-mandated by the Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice, divert low-risk groups from being committed to the justice system to reduce overcrowding and overuse of resources that the Department can direct to better ramifications of public safety.

National arrest rates of juveniles have declined from 2009 to 2018, with African American juveniles having the highest rate despite the decline. The national arrest rates distinguish rates of arrest of youth 0-17 per 100,000 of youth between the ages of 10-17 in the resident population with the ethnicity of Hispanics being included amongst the following races. The results have been reported as 457.6 Asians, 1792.7 White, 2251.2 American Indian, 3365.3 Minority, and 4618.3 African American (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2019). National reports do not expressively provide recidivism rates because each state measures recidivism differently. In that, detention assessments are used to reduce arrest before referral, focus on criminal history, level of risk, and the need for placement in a secured detention facility for the juvenile offender. However, actions of diversion may lack considerations of internal and external risk factors at decision points that can impact recidivism risks. The risk of recidivism is not

respectfully targeted, affecting the accuracy of crime statistics used by the juvenile justice system, policymakers, and developers of crime detention assessments.

According to the national figures, Georgia faces disproportionately high crime rates, mainly among African American juveniles in Fulton County. The main problem is that detention assessments focus on diverting low-risk groups from being involved in the Department of Juvenile Justice. However, detention assessments lack considerations of internal and external risk factors, in which treatment is not included at decision points of diversion which may impact recidivism risks. The Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice displayed in its most current recidivism report 2011 that in a 1-year follow-up after release, recidivism rates had increased each year after 2003 to 2009.

In 2003, the 1-year delinquent recidivism rate was 27.6%, with 14,742 minors released. In 2009, results of recidivism were 33.5%, with 12,302 minors released. These findings displayed a decrease of the juveniles released in 2009 than 2003; however, recidivism rates continued to increase in the years leading up to 2009 (Buckner, 2011). Within the 12,302 releases in 2009, the African American population totaled 7,258 from 7,666 in 2003, and Whites non-Hispanics totaled 4,183 from 6,383 releases. The African American population only displayed a 5% decrease, while the White population dropped 34% (Buckner, 2011).

In reducing arrest rates, juvenile justice professionals used many different assessments before and after treatment or arrest to evaluate the potential risk of recommitting crime based on known risk factors. Predictive-oriented assessments, such as detention assessments, consider different factors than reduction-oriented assessments as

risk and needs tools. Still, they both use risk levels as determinants of their purpose. Such steps allow personnel to adhere to the best form of treatment to place offenders to rehabilitate.

The structures of such tools adhere to the demands of disproportionate minority contact concerns, as coalitions within the juvenile justice system focus on essential principles of objectivity, uniformity, and risk-based assessments (Thomas, 2013). Disproportionate minority contact sub-committees in Fulton County assembled independent studies throughout the counties in Georgia to identify successful use of detention assessment tools and interpersonal factors that include mitigating or aggravating circumstances that impact recidivism risks. The focus was on identifying juveniles who should be detained, reducing resources used, and ensuring the right juveniles are detained (Thomas, 2013).

Vincent et al. (2016) posited that groups labeled low risk do not imply there is “no risk” because circumstances may increase the chances of involvement in delinquent behavior. Therefore, in this study, I inquired into how the detention assessment instrument used by Fulton County relates to juvenile recidivism of low-risk groups from the viewpoint of juvenile justice professionals. More understanding of low-risk juvenile offenders is needed. This chapter discussed background information, the problem statement, purpose of the study, theoretical framework, nature of study, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, and significance of this study.

Background

Various current and historical studies have explored the importance of utilizing detention assessments (Georgia State University Law, 2014; Sanchez & Lee, 2015; Skeem et al., 2017). Other studies have researched social factors connected with assessment instruments and found that they are helpful concepts for prediction and reduction-oriented tools to help maintain effective deterrent programs and predict recidivism among juveniles placed back into the community (Baglivio & Wolff, 2017; Clarke, 2017; Gonzales et al., 2018). However, the studies have not explored how detention assessments, used to evaluate an arrested youth to determine the need for detention or not, relate to recidivism in the sub-group of low-risk youth offenders from the standpoint of coalitions within the juvenile justice system.

Researchers have conducted studies that addressed risk factors for recidivism and the use of prediction and reduction-oriented tools (Skeem et al., 2017). On the other hand, the studies have not addressed how assessments measure youths between diversion and secure detention and impact recidivism risks of low-risk youth offenders. The studies have not addressed the limitations of assessments when diverting low-risk groups from treatment or placement. Detention assessment instruments are developed to correspond to the emerging numbers of juveniles placed in secure detention facilities, committed, petitioned to the Department of Juvenile Justice, or transferred to adult court. When instruments primarily target groups already in the system and function based on lowering incarceration population rates, the likelihood of the low-risk groups reoffending is neglected.

Another aspect missing from these studies is the Fulton County juvenile justice personnel's perceptions, who work, day in and day out, with young offenders. Such staff includes the Fulton County intake officers, attorneys, judges, detectives, social services, and intervention program professionals within Fulton County. This study closes the gap of the social issue of understanding how George's detention assessment instrument used by Fulton County focuses on low-risk youth offenders and the impact on recidivism risks, by exploring insight from juvenile justice personnel. Past research had included professionals' input on mental health, prevention, the use of risks assessments, and how risk factors impact recidivism amongst youth offenders at 17 and 18 years of age (e.g., Baglivio & Wolff, 2017; Clarke, 2017, Hammond & Loannou, 2015; Skeem et al., 2017). How juvenile justice personnel perceives the detention assessment's effects on low-risk youth offenders and impact on recidivism risks for African American youth have not been studied, despite the state mandate of their use.

Five concepts are discussed within this current study's purpose. These five essential concepts are detention assessment instruments, risk levels, recidivism, coalition and disproportionate minority contact, and Fulton County and disproportionate minority contact. They are all valuable in understanding the scope and outlining the purpose of this study. The first concept, the detention assessment instrument, was created to lessen the inconsistencies with detained youth. Secondary aspects considered in the review of multiple investigations of various detention centers across Georgia concluded that taxpayers' funding was heavily spent.

At the same time, it was evident that there was not enough return for investors (GSUL, 2014). Other findings from the investigations of several Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice facilities in 1998 uncovered multiple issues within the detention centers. Low-risk groups filled large portions of the detained youth, and risk and needs assessments were ineffective due to improper decision-making tools. Also, in the past, limited community-based program services provided no other sources for low-risk youth offenders other than confinement and there was a small collection of data on juvenile offenders (GSUL, 2014).

Recommendations that followed the investigations of these facilities in 1998 pertained to the use of decision-making instruments. The measurement of recidivism is a complicated aspect (Sanchez & Lee, 2017); however, using detention assessments can allow for a more informed measurement system. Regarding measurement, the second concept, risk levels, is used to reduce inappropriate detention by categorizing youth between who can be released and who requires detention resources. The groups of risks consist of low, medium, and high-risk levels. Other focuses of utilizing this measurement form are to direct resources in public safety efforts and ensure more high-risk youth are detained over low-risk youth.

Detention assessment instruments are prediction-oriented tools; the tool is structured to evaluate each juvenile's risk of recidivism. In this sense, crime results from external and internal risk factors that influence reoffending, such as poverty, criminal gang activity, family structure, and school involvement (Gonzales et al., 2018). In contrast to being a helpful tool at the beginning contact stages of the juvenile justice

system process, Monahan and Skeem (2016) concluded that they are ineffective at the point of sentencing because they fail to decipher risk assessments from risk reduction. Such vagueness is an issue in understanding racial and economic disparities within confinement and comprehending individual reasoning in group data. It is essential to know the areas where detention assessment instruments are helpful for a specific decision or contact point of the juvenile justice system. This knowledge can help distinguish better risk levels for placement, intervention, or other diversion alternatives that positively impact recidivism risks.

The third concept to explore is recidivism; it is an ongoing issue in the juvenile justice system. It is beneficial that decision-making tools focus on reoffending possibilities (Skeem et al., 2017; Smith, 2018). Risk of recidivism must be the interest of the topic for all tools and programs of treatment to target specific needs (Hay et al., 2016; ter Beek et al., 2018).

A uniform definition of recidivism across a state can help achieve such a goal. Having one meaning of recidivism allows for an invariant measurement, treatment, and procedural operations. Recidivism is defined as behaviors reverting to crime after release from treatment or custody (Sanchez & Lee, 2017). Georgia faces the issues of African American juveniles continuing to have the highest recidivism rate in Fulton County. Clarke (2017) interprets that risk factors are associated with adverse behavioral outcomes; in correlation, juveniles can be rehabilitated when placed in a diversion program matching their risk level (Wylie & Rufino, 2018).

The fourth key concept addressed is coalitions and disproportionate minority contact together, as these concepts help understand the use of detention assessment tools. The juvenile justice system has partnered together, forming alliances to make the detention assessment instrument race-neutral and bias-free. The correspondence of individuals and organizations coming together was to gather and analyze the State's collected data in the juvenile justice system and compare findings to the disproportionate minority contact core requirements (OJJDP, 2019). Disproportionate minority contact refers to the rates of contact between the juvenile justice system and specific minority groups compared to the contact rates with the system and White youth. Disproportionate minority contact results show over-representation in the system but are underrepresented in lenient alternatives (Gonzales et al., 2018).

In a 2014 study on disproportionate minority contact, researchers established two contributing factors: differential offending and treatment, (Development Services Group, 2014). An element of these frameworks results in when decision-makers use their emotions developed from perceptions of minority youth and stereotypes used to impact punishment decisions. The existence of disproportionate minority contact goes far beyond racial society, such as trends of poverty, differences in educational successes across cultures, and residential instability, all of which affect juvenile justice systems in all states.

Last, Fulton County and disproportionate minority contact are joining concepts that explore the detention assessment's impact on recidivism risk amongst African American juveniles in the County. Fulton County holds an estimate of over 1 million

residents. It is an urban area. Regarding public safety, it surpasses other counties in rates of serious crimes, in which murder, robbery, and larceny remain high. The County faces threats of a decline in working-aged groups, an increase in unemployment among 25-34-year-olds, the highest rates of HIV and Syphilis in the nation, and an increase in serious and violent crimes. Weaknesses attributing to economic concerns were affordable housing production in communities that lack a workforce and cannot provide needed behavioral health services to uninsured populations throughout cities, (Fulton County, 2017). Studies show that White and other juveniles were less likely to recidivate than Black youth regarding socioeconomic status, geographic location of residence, and living situations (Sanchez & Lee, 2015).

With its high population density, Fulton County faces the effects of such concepts to impact minority youth. There is a differential opportunity for prevention and treatment, differential behavior, mobility effects, indirect effects, differential processing or inappropriate decision-making, justice by geography, legislation, policies, and legal factors (DSG, 2014). Gonzales et al. (2018) provided information in regard to disproportionate minority contact in Fulton County, in which it is more prevalent at the referral point of contact with the juvenile justice system, which means that African American youth have been referred to the system at 10 times the rate of White youth. Georgia's background with the system shows that African American males commit more juvenile offenses based on differential behavior. This factor is attributed to the concept that children living in impoverished neighborhoods are more likely to be aggressive, act out, and drop out of high school.

Conversely, limitations in the process of assessing juveniles before the decision points of diversion are that detention assessments focus on diverting low-risk youth offenders due to overpopulations of treatment programs, secured facilities, and cases petitioned to the Department of Juvenile Justice within Fulton County. When assessments are made to target high-risk groups, who enter the system and divert low-risk groups from being committed, there are variances in effective treatment (Baird et al., 2013). Low-risk groups placed back into the community are surrounded by external and interpersonal factors that influence criminal activity. Wylie and Rufino (2018) advised that studying additional concepts of juveniles' social lives can reflect risk factors leading to recidivism, such as poverty that causes a disadvantage to intervention opportunities and criminal gang activity that continues to influence reoffending.

Several studies have explored the benefits of utilizing risk assessments. It has been shown to allow juvenile justice professionals to assign specific levels of control over juvenile offenders appropriate to their level of risk of reoffending. Skeem et al. (2017) found that the benefits behind using risk assessment tools help personnel make better decisions for supervision and treatment needs. Additionally, a study conducted by Hay et al. (2016) analyzed whether Florida's Residential Positive Achievement Change Tool (R-PACT) predicts recidivism and if predictions vary across the different sub-groups of offenders, using a qualitative method. Results from the R-PACT administrations of the juvenile justice information system containing juvenile offending were used to gain placement and risk assessment information. Of the 5,162 youths who participated, 4,700 youths took one R-PACT and remained in Florida after release. The

study concluded that reoffending factors of prior offenses, school history, and relationships with peers and adults who are not family indicated the R-PACT's most predictive levels. This analysis provided evidence of risk factors in consideration of reoffending on those who have gone through incarceration.

Previous studies have found that risk factors of juvenile recidivism are useful concepts for prediction and reduction-oriented tools to help maintain effective deterrence programs and predict recidivism among juveniles placed back into the community (Skeem et al., 2017; Hay et al., 2016; Smith, 2018). However, the studies have not discussed how assessments, that measure youths between diversion and secure detention or placement in a social service program, impact the recidivism risk of low-risk youth offenders. The studies have not addressed the limitations of assessments when diverting low-risk groups from treatment or placement. This research is needed because detention assessments focus on shifting low-risk groups from being involved in the Department of Juvenile Justice, which lack considerations of internal and external risk factors at diversion decisions that may impact recidivism risks. Limited focus on recidivism may add to the recorded disproportionately high crime rates, mainly amongst African American juveniles in Fulton County (Hauer & Vaida, 2012).

Problem Statement

The problem addressed in this research is that detention assessments focus on diverting low-risk groups from being involved in the Fulton County Department of Juvenile Justice, which may lack considerations of internal and external risk factors at decision points of diversion that impact recidivism risks. Concerns about involving low-

risk groups in criminal proceedings that may label them as criminals may limit the focus on recidivism, adding to the recorded disproportionately high crime rates, mainly amongst African American juveniles in Fulton County (Hauer & Vaida, 2012).

Over the years, the Department of Juvenile Justice has begun using detention assessments to reduce detention populations by diverting low-risk youth offenders from being referred to the system. However, in Georgia, African American juveniles continue to have the highest rate of arrest. Previous research has touched on the concepts of risk factors leading to recidivism but has not explained the risk of reoffending when juveniles are placed back into communities with a lack of opportunities and differences in treatment by the system.

The present research was a qualitative study to explore personnel's experiences within the Fulton County juvenile justice system with the current assessment's process and impact on recidivism risks with African American youth in Fulton County, Georgia. Fulton County juvenile justice personnel such as intake officers, attorneys, judges, detectives, social services, and intervention program professionals, who currently work with juveniles, can provide expanded amounts of information about the insight of the current assessment's process. Such use of personnel in this study allows for understanding of how targeting low-risk groups at decision points of diversion from detention may impact recidivism risks while exploring the structure and function of the current assessment's process. I used Heidegger's (1962) philosophy and the advocacy coalition theory to explore how stakeholders in the juvenile justice system consume

different belief systems. These factors affect states, such as Georgia, that face disproportionate minority contact in specific counties and issues of limited resources.

Purpose

This qualitative study aimed to advance the understanding of the essence of the lived experiences of Fulton County juvenile justice system personnel in utilizing the detention assessment tool as a means to rehabilitate juvenile offenders. From there, further understanding of the detention assessment's positive and negative effects on low-risk youth offenders and its impact on recidivism risks of African American juveniles are explored. As a result, individuals involved in juvenile justice can develop platforms to connect coalitions to implement alternate intervention programs. Creswell (2012) asserted that qualitative methods aim to provide more detail, make it naturalistic, and allow researchers to conduct in real-world settings without manipulating the phenomenon.

Utilizing Martin Heidegger's (1962) phenomenological approach to inquiry, interviews with juvenile justice personnel are used to explore the use of the detention assessments as a means to rehabilitate. This uncovered its impact on internal and external risk factors associated with an increased risk to reoffend amongst African American youth in Fulton County, Georgia. Focus on this aspect informs the nexus between disproportionate minority contact and the impact on the risk of recidivism amongst African American youth in Fulton County. The phenomenological inquiry approach emphasizes a person's lived experiences, in which their perspectives and meanings is thoroughly interpreted to explore educative meaning. Using Heidegger's (1962)

phenomenology, four characteristics of phenomenology, (description, reduction, essence, and intentionality, in respects to priori), are used to make sense of the participants lived experiences working within the Fulton County juvenile justice system utilizing the detention assessment tools as decision-making instruments.

The phenomenon of this study is that detention assessments focus on diverting low-risk groups from being involved in the Fulton County Department of Juvenile Justice, which may lack considerations of internal and external risk factors associated with an increased risk to reoffend amongst African American youth in Fulton County, Georgia. This issue involves aspects of Fulton County, such as it being a county of high population density, having an independent court system, factors of interpersonal relationships, and a detention assessment that measures risk levels of crimes already committed.

Utilizing Heidegger's (1962) philosophy of lived experiences to disclose the "meaning of everyday ordinary human existence," I examined and developed a successful understanding of the participants' experiences in the realms of working in their policy environment and their views of the effects of the detention assessment (Horrigan-Kelly et al., 2016, p.1). The secondary theoretical framework for this research was the advocacy coalition theory. Coalitions have formed over the years to implement better decision-making when placing juveniles in the justice system.

This research fills a gap in understanding how Georgia's detention assessment instrument used by Fulton County focuses on low-risk youth offenders and the impact on recidivism risks. Participants' interviews consisted of open-ended questions, which

allowed them to provide efficient and detailed responses. Additional sub-questions were completed to clarify topics; participants received copies of the transcripts recorded from audio-recorded interviews for review and certainty of comments.

Qualitative research designs offer textual information on what individuals think and why. In Clarke's (2017) study, it is addressed that Creswell (2012) suggested that the qualitative method may have one to two research questions to focus on and to use what and how questions when interviewing. These practices can provide a more flexible approach allowing for foundational conversation. Qualitative research methods enable in-depth questioning of participants to enable the researcher to understand their feelings and experiences on how decisions are motivated to conclude the phenomenon. In Chapter 3, a deliberated discussion of the research method is provided.

Research Question

The research question that provided the platform of this study is: What are the Fulton County juvenile justice personnel's experiences with the current assessment's process and impact on recidivism risks with African American youth?

Theoretical Foundation

For this phenomenological study, Heidegger's (1962) philosophy and the advocacy coalition theory are applied. Heidegger's (1962) philosophy allows for an interpretive approach in which human experience, beliefs, and actions are studied. Overlaying this philosophy with the advocacy coalition theory, I applied meaning to a real-world setting that involves to existing actors, being the professionals within the

Fulton County juvenile justice, and the world that surrounds them, being the Fulton County juvenile justice system.

Heideggerian Phenomenology

Heidegger's (1962) philosophy focuses on the circularity of understanding which new ideas and meaning is developed renewed interpretation of preconceptions of existing and historical conditions (George, 2020). Emphasis on this form of understanding is based on the hermeneutical circle, which examines the described experiences to find meaning of the lived experiences, allowing for understanding of the expression in semantic forms (George, 2020, Hurley, 2021). Hermeneutics is the study of interpretation, in which being and knowing helps understand human existence in the experiential life. Hermeneutics implies that there is no single reality in which human understanding is ever involving allowing for new meanings to be established through the means of edify.

In this study, I explored the participants' responses to the interview questions describing their lived experiences in utilizing the detention assessment tool as a means to rehabilitation of juvenile offenders. Their responses provided better understanding of the detention assessment's positive and negative effects on low-risk youth offenders and its impact on recidivism risks of African American juveniles in Fulton County. From this enactment of understanding, I applied the advocacy coalition theory that targets actors, policy learning, and policy change. Hermeneutics implies that knowledge is developed through lived experiences; inserting this thought into the setting of the juvenile justice system, the actors learn from the roles they hold within the entity. The interpretations

these professionals make from their experiences reflect in their beliefs that contribute to the process of policy learning, and policy change.

Advocacy Coalition Theory

In features of policymaking environments and the policy process, Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith's (1993) theory of advocacy coalition is relative to expressing the actors' roles. Advocacy coalition theory focuses on the actors who congregate to advocate the beliefs behind policy issues and solutions. Three primary concepts upheld by this framework are the actors, policy learning, and change. As it gears in on the interaction between many groups, it is an actor-centered policy formation theory. Behaviors of stakeholders about activities, rules, and institutions within the political sub-system environment exemplify belief systems of ontological and normative beliefs. Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith (1999) express the importance of analyzing policy sub-systems to understand actors' roles within government bodies in various jurisdictions and policy issues.

In the use of juvenile justice personnel in this research, they are dynamic in the decision-making process. Participation within coalitions gives a normative insight into the social problem. They can describe their policy core beliefs, ways of achieving goals, and define the effects on secondary ideas (Weible & Nohrstedt, 2012). The advocacy coalition theory's actor portion expresses the roles and responsibilities of formal and informal stakeholders in political sub-systems. A sufficient actor-centered basis consists of goal-oriented, rational, and understanding stakeholders who push for the public's general welfare. The main idea for policy change is that an issue can be resolved when

shared ideas are developed from different experiences, and other solutions from actors can form (Weible et al., 2009). Through the growth of knowledge, belief systems can adapt to shared deep core beliefs and secondary aspects. When policy sub-systems concentrate on the achievement of policy learning, the transformation of policy change can occur. When this happens, policy learning can take place.

Policy changes stems from practical implementations, beliefs, coalition members, and policy. Policy-oriented learning and belief change commit to policy change. There will be a resistance to change; however, knowledge leads to changes in understandings and intentions (Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1993). The advocacy coalition framework describes that a consensus needed for significant policy change is affected by the behavior and beliefs of actors within sub-systems. The experiences of juvenile justice personnel can help explain how targeting better treatment alternatives for low-risk groups at decision points of diversion may impact recidivism risk. The need for achievement of policy learning and change within the Department of Juvenile Justice are expressed through interviews of personnel as their roles and responsibilities are discussed. In Chapter 2, I provide a detailed conversation of the advocacy coalition framework.

Nature of Study

Within this study, I utilized a qualitative phenomenological research approach to explore Fulton County juvenile justice personnel's experiences. Those who uphold careers as judges, lawyers, intervention program administrators, law enforcement, and policy interest groups. Such occupational experiences show a nexus to the background of advocacy coalition theory. A diverse group of people unite on a competitive level to

approach a solution to a social issue. In this sense, individuals at different decision-making points in the juvenile justice system can provide many views from their self-interpreted experiences of the impact of the detention assessment when diverting low-risk groups from incarceration and the impact on recidivism risks.

In recruiting 15 Fulton County juvenile justice personnel within the GDJJ, I explored the data gathered in the interviews, which depicted descriptive themes. I used the NVivo 2012 program to analyze, code, and categorize the collected qualitative data. I was able to interpret information to discuss juvenile justice personnel's views of the detention assessment instrument's effects on low-risk youth offenders and how it impacts the risk of recidivism of juveniles in Fulton County, Georgia. Individual, collective, and aggregated explanations are valued within this qualitative study.

Qualitative research has been more acceptable over the years by practitioners and researchers based on interpreting perspectives and critical social science attributions to research. Some notable strengths of the qualitative approach are perceptions of homogeneous exploration, understanding of the phenomenon through open-ended inquiry, and understanding humanistic or ideological behaviors of values, assumptions, and beliefs from experiences (Choy, 2014). Because qualitative evidence stems from human experiences, emotions, and perceptions, it translates to personal ramifications.

This view tends to question quality, credibility, and trustworthiness, including transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Leung (2015) finds that two schools of thought, Dixon -Woods et al. (2004) and Lincoln et al. (2005), stressed aspects of methodology and rigor of interpretation of results. As Dixon-Woods et al. (2004)

produced a criterion for assessing clarity and appropriateness, Lincoln et al. (2005) confirmed research logistics, validated as processes and results, are transparent and can be systematically replicated (Leung, 2015).

Martin Heidegger's (1962) phenomenology is best suited for this study because the juvenile justice personnel's knowledge and views are factors of their lived experiences. In this, the methodology of hermeneutics is applied to better understand the interpretations of the participants' responses in connection with how assessments impact recidivism risks amongst African American youth in Fulton County, Georgia. The phenomenological inquiry approach emphasizes a three-step process to understand a person's experience. Therefore, the steps of intuiting, analyzing, and describing communicate the interpretation and essence of the participants experiences (Umanilo, 2019).

Definition of Terms

Definitions are provided for terms frequently used.

Detention assessment instrument (DAI): an assessment made up of a checklist of standards or categories associated with ratings to apply to minors for detention risks (Thomas, 2013).

Disproportionate minority contact (DMC): Differential selection of youth of color coming in contact with the juvenile justice system more frequently than others.

Diversion in terms of low-risk groups: a decision point where juveniles can receive warn-and-release treatment to avoid unnecessary use of resources (OJJDP, 2019).

Juvenile Delinquent: a minor 17 years old or younger who commits a criminal act that would be charged as a crime if committed by an adult.

Low-risk youth offenders: Juveniles who obtain a seven or lower on a detention assessment and are likely to be released after arrest.

Race: individuals who identify as Black, White, and others.

Recidivism: behavior is reverting to crime after the release from treatment or custody (Sanchez & Lee, 2015).

Risk Factors: Concepts that factor in the prediction of the probability of reoffending (Clarke, 2017).

Risk Levels: an overall risk score criteria, based on low, medium, or high risk, used in detention assessment to guide intake officers in distinguishing whether to detain or release a juvenile who has been arrested (Thomas, 2013).

Relative rate index (RRI): measures racial disparities amongst the youth of color and White youth at different stages of the juvenile justice system (Rovner, 2014).

Suburban areas: smaller areas surrounding cities and are less densely populated (National Geographic, 2011).

Urban areas: developed areas of high density containing multiple housing capacities, roads, railways, and bridges (National Geographic, 2011).

Assumptions

In taking an interpretive approach to the research of this study, philosophical, methodological and practical assumptions are developed. In the facets of ontological and epistemological frame of reference, I believe that the construction of belief systems is

structured by a hierarchy that constitutes a platform of ontological and normative beliefs. Therefore, these beliefs may make it difficult for actors in a policy sub-system to adapt to external suggestions when implementing core beliefs into policy. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) discussed Frederick Erickson's (1986) findings that a qualitative approach is guided by epistemological and methodological beliefs, discovering truths and perspectives. In respect to an axiological perspective, I believe that researchers study events or variable comparisons and fix their world views based on their knowledge and research aims of the real-world situation.

Furthermore, I gather that utilizing a qualitative phenomenological approach allows for an interpretive, naturalistic advance to this subject matter. Heidegger's (1962) philosophy promotes the value of *a priori* cognitive in which the researcher's experiences is as important to the meaning of interpretation as the participant's experiences. Philosophical orientation is the connection between assumptions and orientations to reality in adhering to an inductive approach, focused on specific situations or people and words rather than numbers (Burkholder, 2016; Maxwell, 2013).

From a practical standpoint, assumptions surrounding this topic are that interviews of Fulton County juvenile justice personnel who work, day in and day out, with minors would provide an understanding of behavioral aspects of the juveniles they supervise, utilization of detention assessment instruments on the juveniles, and the impact on recidivism risks. Past research was successful in including professionals' input on mental health, prevention, the use of risks assessments, and how risk factors impact recidivism amongst youth offenders at 17 and 18 years of age (e.g., Baglivio & Wolff,

2017; Clarke, 2017; Hammond & Loannou, 2015; Skeem, et al., 2017). Another assumption is that open-ended interview questions can produce similar themes, categories, and concepts.

In addition, Slobogin (2013) concluded that using risk assessments to predict recidivism of juveniles was subject to error. Another assumption concluded from the findings is that diverting low-risk youth offenders to untreated conventions can provide opportunities for further reoffending. The impact of detention assessment instruments on assessing recidivism risks for African American youth is low due to the failures of applying disproportionate minority contact requirements. Differential treatment and opportunity exist in areas of Fulton County that hinder advancements of change.

Scope and Delimitations

The problem addressed in this research is that detention assessments focus on diverting low-risk groups from being involved in the Fulton County Department of Juvenile Justice, which may lack considerations of internal and external risk factors associated with an increased risk to reoffend amongst African American youth in Fulton County, Georgia. In Fulton County, Georgia, these decisions are displayed as limited focus on recidivism, adding to the recorded disproportionately high crime rates, mainly amongst African American juveniles (Hauer & Vaida, 2012). Aspects of experiences of the juvenile justice system before detention assessments, lack of opportunities for youth that live in high-density areas, and differential opportunity and treatment amongst juveniles of minority youth are addressed within this study.

The study's focus was chosen because low-risk juveniles are not receiving treatment for criminal activities when they do not accumulate enough points to be placed in a detention center. From there, they are released back into environments that are not supportive of making changes to benefit their community. Populations excluded from direct contact are the Fulton County juveniles; instead, the study focuses on the juvenile justice professionals who work within the guidelines of the juvenile justice system's policies and procedures. They can elaborate on the process and means of detention assessments and changes that have been or not been made to implement better care of low-risk youth offenders.

Therefore, the advocacy coalition framework and Heidegger's (1962) phenomenology are chosen to complement this area of study. The advocacy coalition framework exposes interactions between diverse groups based on activities, rules, and institutions within the political system environment, allowing for the understanding of coalitions, expansion of policy learning, and the basis of the policy change and assessment. Heidegger's (1962) philosophy translates meaning to human existence and being. Connecting these two frameworks, formed coalitions acquire diverse individuals with their own beliefs, to effectively promote policy change. Individuals have to refrain from producing ideas that are attractive to the majority as this can lead to the contorting and reduction of self-interpretation of what separates their ideas and beliefs from others.

The study can explore the need, functions, and use of detention assessments. Interviews uncover a better understanding of how the professionals view the use of detention assessments, its effects on assessing juveniles, bias behind the instrument, and

if the tool is being used as intended. Accurately describing the research context and the study's central idea can enable other researchers to transfer the results to their meaning (Trochim, 2020). Other researchers can judge how sensible the transfer is from this study's context to theirs based on the detailed information.

Limitations

A qualitative approach is based on textual information of what individuals interpret from their experiences and what can be gathered. The nature of this study was to explore the detention assessment's positive and negative effects on low-risk youth offenders and its impact on recidivism risks of African American juveniles from the lived experiences of the Fulton County juvenile justice personnel. Since the participants interviewed did not involve intake officers and juvenile court judges, the researched group could not be assumed to represent that sample population as a whole. This limitation counteracts the study as to providing more in-depth experiences and viewpoints of those who administer, and sentence based on feedback of these evaluations to further this qualitative study.

Being neutral in collecting descriptive responses from participants for each question helped identify common themes and patterns through interpretation of the participants' responses. Past disputes argued that qualitative data results are not objectively verifiable. This notion is derived from the belief that the data collected is based on the researcher's interpretation, which can be limited, leaving out critical information (Choy, 2014). Aspect of the researcher's interpretation is that phenomenology research holds the consideration of researcher bias. In the aspects of

hermeneutics, the researcher remains open minded to further considerations of understanding as interpretation is incomplete or provided in partial, because further possible meanings of the researcher's preconceptions exist as the journey of understanding can go deeper and become richer (George, 2020).

Reasonable efforts to address bias limitations are to accurately report the context provided by participants in the interview approach. Researchers taking the role of interviewers need to remain open to changes in their views on the experiences of experts in their field of discipline. Therefore, the use of a reflective journal to record research notes throughout the stages of literature review, research design, data collection, and analysis provided assistance with making aware my bias and preconceived ideas throughout my research. The use of a reflective journal, as a research strategy, allowed for better understanding in the process of analysis of the data gathered as ideas that are assumed, not fully understood, or views that were perceived are analyzed in Chapter 4.

As for limitations using the qualitative approach, it is noted as being very time-consuming in its data collection process, such as interviewing every participant. Yauch and Steudel (2003) explained that the open-ended inquiry gives participants more control of the shared context within the data collected. However, the beneficial aspects of qualitative information are that it supplies soft data, such as impressions, photos, and symbols, whereas hard evidence forms numbers. The qualitative approach is aimed at providing more detail as open inquiry in nature. The research design fitting the data needed to accomplish the purpose of this research is a hermeneutic inquiry design. This

design uses interpretive measures to address language, nature, and events with meaningful concepts to make understanding possible (Clarke, 2017).

Significance of Study

This research fills a gap in understanding how Georgia's detention assessment instrument focuses on low-risk youth offenders and the impact on recidivism risks on African American juveniles in Fulton County. The problem is that detention assessments focus on diverting low-risk groups from being involved in the Fulton County Department of Juvenile Justice, which may lack considerations of internal and external risk factors associated with an increased risk to reoffend amongst African American youth in Fulton County, Georgia.

The findings of this study to the advancement of knowledge in the field of discipline of the juvenile justice system contributes the need to address the impact of detention assessments coupled with internal and external risk factors that increase the risk to reoffend. These factors are not limited to the considerations of differential treatment and opportunity, as well as cultural bias that affects decision-making amongst actors in the juvenile justice system. In terms of the advancement on practice and policy, the findings of this study addressed the importance of imposing treatment needs for low-risk offenders. The study addresses that updates in policy and procedure need to be applied to the existing detention assessment. These changes should incorporate the aspects of internal and external risk factors that increase the risk to reoffend. In that, considerations of rehabilitation include applying corrective measures, skill development, and implementing ways to unite juveniles into positive environments.

Social change is developed through educated improvements made to practices and policies. In corporation with the factors related to the Heidegger's (1962) philosophy and advocacy coalition framework, this study reflects the Dasein or existence of the actors in a policy environment that has been standing before generations of employees with minimal changes. This study is unique because it addresses the needed comradery among juvenile justice advocates to implement changes in Georgia's detention assessment instrument for low-risk groups who often reoffend more frequently than high-risk groups (GDJJ, 2014).

Skeem et al. (2017) added that risk assessments are necessary for the juvenile justice system when surveying each youth's re-arrest and intervention needs to achieve appropriate preventative interventions. By addressing the efficiency measures of detention assessment instruments considering low-risk groups and external and interpersonal risk factors surrounding the juveniles, this study can provide additional information to expand knowledge for the juvenile justice system's field and discipline.

The juvenile justice professionals who work within the guidelines of the juvenile justice system's policies and procedures can elaborate on the process and means of detention assessments and changes that have been or not been made to implement better care of low-risk youth offenders. Juvenile justice personnel can provide firsthand knowledge of the instrument's necessity, mechanisms, and effects, whether good or bad. These perceptions stem from experiences of adapting to changes in policy within their organization that may need implementation. Still, when there are too many actors and sub-systems within, changes are not as simple.

These assessments try to accommodate the Disproportionate Minority Contact committee's concerns, where bias is avoided; however, minority youth are over-represented in the juvenile justice system as racial and ethnic disparities impact recidivism rates in Fulton County. Implications for positive social change from this study promote the awareness of internal and external factors that contribute to reoffending. Aguinis and Glavas (2012) asserted that social factors of demographics, economics, culture, and environments are essential concepts of recidivism. Smith (2018) espoused that race was significantly associated with youths' progress in the Future Generation reentering program. With the collaboration of the use of social service programs incorporated into the procedures or policies of the juvenile justice court's diversion decisions better practices can be made to consider the atmosphere of the low-risk youth offenders outside of the courthouse and detention facilities.

Summary

National arrest rates indicate a decline in juvenile arrest; however, African American juveniles have the highest rate. In reflection on national figures, Georgia faces disproportionately high crime rates among African American youths in Fulton County. Through multiple recommendations throughout the years of making the juvenile justice system more effective in reducing recidivism rates, detention assessment instruments were introduced to preliminary procedures before placement decision points. In using such tools, the goal was to divert low-risk groups from being committed to the juvenile justice system. Previous research has not addressed the actions of diversion that may lack considerations of internal and external risk factors that can impact recidivism risks. I used

a qualitative interview design to gather information from open-ended questions to understand the effects of detention assessments on low-risk youth offenders and its impact on African American juveniles' recidivism risk in Fulton County. In Chapter 2, I provided an overview of the literature related to this current study's topic.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The need for detention assessment instruments in the juvenile justice system was to lower the number of youths placed in detention facilities. Past research has discussed different assessments included in evaluating a minor's need for detention after being arrested. National arrest rates show a decline in arrest rates; however, juvenile recidivism continues to be high in Georgia (Buckner, 2011). The problem addressed in this research is that detention assessments focus on diverting low-risk groups from being involved in the Fulton County Department of Juvenile Justice, which may lack considerations of internal and external risk factors associated with an increased risk to reoffend amongst African American youth in Fulton County, Georgia.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to advance the understanding of how detention assessments affect low-risk youth offenders and impact recidivism risks of African American juveniles in Fulton County, Georgia. The comprehensive literature review explored the detention assessment instrument and its impact on recidivism risk with African American youth in Fulton County, Georgia. This chapter discussed the literature search strategy, theoretical foundation, and literature review of related concepts within this study.

Literature Search Strategy

The literature review consists of articles collected from multiple online databases, such as Google Scholar, Sage Journals, and Walden University Scholar Works. Keywords used to conduct research were *juvenile recidivism, risk assessments, levels of risk, risk factors of juvenile recidivism, gangs, disproportionate minority contact, juvenile*

recidivism in Georgia, juvenile recidivism in Fulton County, interventions for juveniles, social risk factors, juveniles and peers, Black and White youth, social construction, policy design, Heidegger's (1962) phenomenological inquiry, advocacy coalition theory, juvenile justice coalitions, and detention assessment instruments.

Theoretical Foundation

The theoretical frameworks chosen for this interpretive study are Heideggerian phenomenology and Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith's (1993) theory of advocacy coalition. Heidegger's (1962) interpretive phenomenology allows the use of a second theory to overlay phenomenology. The advocacy theory was utilized to further the understanding of the interaction between many groups of actors within a political sub-system environment and their effects on policy change.

Heidegger's (1962) philosophy ontologically addresses that there is not a single reality based on the context of human experiences in the world around them (Hurley, 2021). The advocacy coalition theory exemplifies an actor-centered rational that focuses on the actors who congregate to advocate their beliefs of ontological and normative ideals behind policy issues and solutions. Using these frameworks as a corresponding theoretical foundation, the idea is to bring opposing interpretations together based on their existence in the organization to make better and informative policy change.

Hermeneutical Phenomenology

Heidegger's (1962) philosophy concentrates on interpretive phenomenology, in which interpretation is guided by what it means to be and the basic facts behind how entities appear. This philosophy of interpretation promotes hermeneutics phenomenology.

Hermeneutics is the study of interpretation, in which being and knowing helps understand human existence in the experiential life. This framework, ontologically, announces that humans interpret their reality in the frame of the world around them, in which there is no single foundational outlook of reality (Hurley, 2021). The aspect of circularity of understanding is implied within this philosophy, in that, new ideas and meaning develops renewed interpretation of preconceptions of existing and historical conditions (George, 2020).

Moreover, circularity as a process is demonstrated in the hermeneutical circle, which examines the described experiences to find meaning of the lived experiences, allowing for understanding of the expression in semantic forms (George, 2020; Hurley, 2021). In correlation to my ontological and epistemological perspective, I believe that the construction of belief systems is structured by a hierarchy that constitutes a platform of ontological and normative beliefs. Therefore, these beliefs may make it difficult for actors in a policy sub-system to adapt to external suggestions when implementing core beliefs into policy. In this, focusing on the concepts of Heidegger's (1962) philosophy can help avoid the difficulties of self-interpretation. Interpretation should not be formed by foundationalism, whereas beliefs should be vigilant of the advancement of flexibility of new information (George, 2020).

Such concepts of Heidegger's (1962) philosophy are lived experiences with everyday order, Dasein in the sense of examining personal existence, experiences with institutions, relation to time, and the care structure (Horrigan-Kelly & Dowling, 2016; George, 2020). These aspects are developed over time as self-interpretations are

positively and continuously evolving. Considerations of having a positive attitude or open mind to received information reflects the possibilities of interruption from researcher bias. Heidegger's (1962) phenomenology values the researcher's experiences in the world being studied. The process of the hermeneutic circle is not vertical, in which it moves back and forth from the individual's experience to the whole of the experience in all lived experiences (George, 2020).

In relation to this study, I explored the participants' responses to the interview questions describing their lived experiences in utilizing the detention assessment tool as a means to rehabilitation of juvenile offenders. Their responses provided better understanding of the detention assessment's positive and negative effects on low-risk youth offenders and its impact on recidivism risks of African American juveniles in Fulton County. From the participants' subjective realities pertaining to their occupational roles at multiple decision points of apprehension of a youth offender and time working within the Fulton County juvenile justice system, the phenomenon of the study was explored.

From this enactment of understanding, hermeneutics implies that knowledge is developed through lived experiences, as well as considering temporality; inserting this thought into the setting of the juvenile justice system, the actors learn from the roles they hold within the entity and experiences with changes of the practices within overtime. The interpretations these professionals make from their experiences reflect in their beliefs that contribute to the process of policy learning, and policy change.

Advocacy Coalition Framework

Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith's theory of advocacy coalition described a complex policymaking environment surrounding the policy process as coalitions of actors form to advocate beliefs behind policy issues and solutions. I discussed this theory and its relationship to the detention assessment instrument and coalitions amongst the field of juvenile justice in detail within this section.

Actors

The policymaking system is multiplex. Aspects of interactions between policy actors, directly and indirectly, adhere to the political dynamics of identifying the problem, contributing to policy formulation, and forgoing policy change and evaluation. For such progress within the policy cycle, an actor-centered policy formation theory is explored (de Medeiros & Gomes, 2018). The Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) exposes interactions between diverse groups based on activities, rules, and institutions within the political system environment. The ACF's focus is to further the understanding of coalitions, expansion of policy learning, and the basis of the policy change and assessment. The stakeholders' behaviors depict how successful the process can be, as policy demands from informal actors reflect the effective establishment of formal actors' policies.

Additionally, Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith's (1998) Advocacy Coalition theory measures the belief system's stability of coalitions over time. The construction of belief systems is structured by a hierarchy that constitutes a platform of ontological and normative beliefs. These beliefs may make it hard to adapt to external suggestions when

developing core beliefs into policy. Analysis of policy sub-systems allows for understanding actors' roles amongst geographical boundaries, such as government bodies in various jurisdictions and policy issues (Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith's, 1999). These power networks are policy coalitions that are dynamic in the decision-making process. Their participation within the partnerships gives normative into the public problem, described as policy core beliefs and ways of achieving goals, defined as secondary beliefs (Weible & Nohrstedt, 2012).

When discussing actors, it is essential to understand each type as it pertains to their roles. Chikowore (2018) described formal actors as legislators, civil servants, and individuals of the executive and judiciary bodies who oversee initiating policies. Chikowore (2018) described informal actors as individuals who bring ideas towards the social problem, are affected by the policies, and ensure that the policies are effective. These individuals are pressure or interest groups and political parties of civil societies, citizens, research institutions, and the media.

Both political sub-systems have a hand in specific parts of the policy cycle as formal groups are responsible for the entire policy formulation process. Informal groups make demands, propose alternatives, gather knowledge through research, and promote political activism for policy formulation (Chikowore, 2018). Reflection of an adequate actor-centered approach consists of goal-oriented, rational, and understanding stakeholders who push for the general cause. Weible and Norhrstedt (2012) advised such effectiveness of engagement depends on the expansion of science and technical information included in debates and the mobilization of advocacy coalitions.

Policy Learning

Moreover, with such unity comes respect for knowledge growth. The ACF finds that the chances of an issue being solved involve developing ideas from different perceptions and conflicting beliefs from actors (Weible et al., 2009). Sabatier (1998) posited that the ACF's primary focus is to push policy actors towards an alliance to center their interest towards the social problem and its solution. Through such formulation, belief systems are formed. All actors ultimately reach their individual goals. Accumulated belief systems adapt to shared deep core beliefs, policy core beliefs, and secondary aspects.

Deep core beliefs come from the individual's perspective of society in the world. Policy core beliefs outline key policy positions and basic strategies for achieving the belief systems' deep core beliefs (Chikowore, 2018). The secondary aspects focus on instrumental concerns, such as funding, decision-making, and production of policy goals (Chikowore, 2018). This transformation stems from policy sub-systems concentrating on achieving policy learning gearing towards change.

Change

Learning in the policy process is an example of coalitions enduring changes in their understanding and intentions regarding policy beliefs. Policy-oriented learning helps clarify and modify beliefs systems to perceive goals more proficiently. Policy changes pertain to changes in ideas, coalition members, and policy. Policy-oriented learning and belief change produces policy change, such as the conflict in coalitions, actions after significant events from actors, and crises that follow (Nohrstedt & Weible, 2010). ACF

explains that there will be a resistance to policy change, which initiates minor implementations to existing policies (Sabatier and Jenkins-smith, 1993). Policy brokers can create mediation environments between opposing coalitions with similar solutions by including strategic interest-based behaviors and institutionalized veto points. Adjustments in procedures lead to beneficial changes in governmental programs.

This current study aimed to perceive the impact that Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith's ACF has on juvenile justice personnel's roles through their experiences and perceptions with the current assessment's process with low-risk youth offenders and the impact on recidivism risk amongst African American youth. ACF posits that a consensus needed for significant policy change is affected by actors' behavior and beliefs within sub-systems. Specific Fulton County juvenile justice personnel make up different actor roles pointed out in the ACF.

Previous literature has used the ACF to explore the process of policy continuity and change of drug policy in a Brazilian sub-system from 2000 to 2015 (Sampaio, 2016). In efforts to make changes, the study used mixed methods to address conflictive debates between actors and other coalitions that hinder the adoption of policy alternatives. Considerations of beliefs, positions held by governmental administrators, and areas of consensus and controversy play a role in every organization's complex policymaking environment. The ACF explains that individuals and other organizations involve different coalitions that affect the process of policy change. However, when there are factors that influence continuity or modification, the possibilities of a congregation can exist (Sampaio, 2016).

This concept of focusing on an actor-centered basis consists of goal-oriented, rational, and understanding stakeholders who push for the public's general welfare. Fulton County juvenile justice personnel's perspectives can help explain how targeting low-risk groups at decision points of diversion may impact recidivism risks. Such interviews can further explore the structure and function of the current assessment's process and affect the likelihood of recidivism amongst African American youth in Fulton County, Georgia (GA).

This study contributes to understanding how coalitions can be helpful to advocates involved in the encouragement of policy change. In terms of the use of detention assessments, professionals can further explain the likelihood of a change to help low-risk juveniles. Their roles and responsibilities are outlined in their interview responses. The steps of scanning, analysis, response, and assessment later dignify leadings to resolutions. I discussed the detention assessment instrument and other critical concepts in the section that follows.

Key Concepts

In conducting my research literature review, key concepts that surfaced are detention assessment instruments, risk levels, recidivism, coalition and disproportionate minority contact, and Fulton County and disproportionate minority contact. The five concepts discussed within this study are essential in understanding the scope and outlining this research's purpose. My literature review resulted in five themes, as each study was categorized based on the topics discussed. Some studies heightened the significance of detention assessments, risk levels, and recidivism. In contrast, others

focused on coalitions and Fulton County conditions connected with background and requirements of disproportionate minority contact in Fulton County. I discussed each point in detail in the sections that follow.

Detention Assessment Instrument

The 1998 Department of Justice (DOJ) investigated several Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) facilities initiated in the Memorandum of Agreement. Within this agreement, the establishment of the Detention Assessment Instrument (DAI) was created. The investigation led to an inspection of about 35 days between April and October 1997 of multiple secured facilities within GA. The Special Council collaborated with ten expert consultants within the field of juvenile justice to help with these inspections, as their expertise fluctuated in administration, psychiatry, medicine, psychology, and education (DOJ, 2015). Correspondence of the investigation was guided by the Acts of the Civil Rights of Institutionalized Persons, 42 USC § 1997a et seq., and the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994, 42 USC § 14141 (DOJ, 2015). Under the scope of these Acts, the investigation consisted of various routine documents, interviews of staff members and residents, and tours of the facilities to witness all environments.

In correlation, the study noted multiple findings as to the conditions that violated all youths' federal rights in the GA detention facilities visited. Such violations included disciplinary terms. For example, being overcrowded and understaffed, lack of protection from harm, minimal standards for classification, and inadequate mental health care for the juveniles held within (DOJ, 2015). Other findings were abusive disciplinary practices

based on lack of positive incentives, abuse from staff, inadequate education due to no room in the school to hold all youth at the facility, and improper medical care (DOJ, 2015). Delayed probable cause hearings, discipline without due process, and an unawareness of the grievance process were other problems uncovered.

The findings from the study uncovered the issues that many youths' lives were at risk of harm, deterioration of the mentally ill, insufficient medical attention, and educational setbacks. The cause of these effects proclaimed a lack of resources and other inadequacies. Sixteen minimum remedial measures were recommended within the DOJ's note to the Governor at the time. Most of the recommendations pertained to correcting inconsistencies with youth who were detained.

An example was the number of children held for status or probation violations at youth detention centers because they did not have stable family conditions (DOJ, 2015). In GA, a status offense is a crime that a juvenile would be charged with, as the offense would not be a crime if an adult made it. A misdemeanor is a minor offense. It is punishable for up to a year in jail with a fine of up to \$1000. A felony is a severe crime in the realms of grave harm and an offense of damage to a person or property. Felony sentences range from a year to life in prison, with significant additional fines.

Years after this investigation, the DJJ displayed a continuance in reforming the conditions for juveniles. Congress called House Bill 242 (HB 242) for amending. A change made to HB 242 was that a minor was charged as an adult for criminal offenses at 17 in GA. The minimum age is 13 because any age under 13 cannot form the preconditions of criminal intent to commit an act of delinquency—efforts behind these

changes aimed at improving GA's juvenile code. The Special Council solicited input from many stakeholders within the political environment, focusing specifically on juvenile delinquency issues. As secondary aspects to consider, the coalition found that the juvenile justice system accumulated much of the taxpayers' funding but did not show enough return for investors (GSUL, 2014).

Findings from the Special Council pointed out five areas needing necessary adjustments. First, a significant number of low-risk groups of misdemeanor and status offense crimes filled a large portion of detained youth; second, low-risk offenders held another considerable proportion of detained youth. Third, the use of risk and needs assessments were ineffective in reforming decision-making; fourth, a lack of community-based program services left judges with no extra alternatives other than committing juveniles to state facilities. Fifth, the State inadequately collected uniform data on juvenile offenders (GSUL, 2014).

The State was spending many resources on misdemeanants, and status offenders considered low-risk groups and had not experienced improved public safety outcomes like lower recidivism risks. Recommendations from the Special Council targeted the State's treatment of out-of-home facilities for high-risk groups and the use of DAIs and other tools to build evidence-based programs and community supervision (GSUL, 2014). The second recommendation was to reduce recidivism with the use of decision-making instruments. Added benefits of using risk assessment instruments would divert low-risk groups from unnecessary placement and make better supervision decisions for treatment needs to reduce recidivism for high-risk groups (Skeem et al., 2017).

Sanchez and Lee (2017) indicated that measuring juvenile recidivism was complex, in which there is no uniform national recidivism rate for juveniles. However, the introduction of HB 242 functioned in conjunction with decision-making tools to combat recidivism risk. Once the Bill was passed, it required the Board of Juvenile Justice to formulate a detention assessment tool. The court code, HB 242, required the use of DAI before decisions were made on detention for a juvenile offender. On January 1, 2014, all jurisdictions in GA began using the DAI.

Moreover, the DAI provided in the Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice (GDJJ) standards of operating procedures as policy number 20.11 obtains the goal of guiding all detention decisions to ensure consistency in determining the placement of a minor (GDJJ,2018). It is described as a risk assessment that is objective and uniformed as it measures the youth's current and past offenses. Other risks measured are:

- The youth's behaviors to make effective and informed decisions,
- The need for secure or nonsecure detention, and
- Even conditional or unconditional release.

The development of risk assessments included the structure of risk levels that fluctuated depending on each juvenile's recidivism risk. Over time coalitions of juvenile justice personnel and stakeholders came together to formulate policies and procedures to care for youth within the juvenile justice system. Advocates formed the criteria of the disproportionate minority contact.

Risk Levels

The GDJJ's DAI was implemented in 2000, in which it gave more structure in decision-making and greater consistency when youth engaged an intake officer after apprehension by law enforcement. Juvenile court intake officers utilize DAI's to guide all the detention decisions, as one DAI is to be completed per detention incident (GDJJ, 2018). The goal was to reduce inappropriate detention by categorizing youth between who can be released and who requires detention resources. The critical component of the DAI was its ability to measure youth by using risk levels. The establishment of ranking methods was based on levels of risk. There are six items assessed in the DAI: the most severe offenses, other current crimes, pending crimes, past adjudications, the youth's history of runaways, escapes, failure to appear, and their current legal or supervision status (Thomas, 2013).

The idea behind assessing the six items is to identify youth who need to be placed in a detention facility, direct resources to protect the public and ensure more high-risk youth are detained than those of less risk. The DAI measures the youth's risk of offending or fear to surrender before the court. The levels of risk are scores of twelve or above being high risk, eight to eleven being medium risk, and seven or under being low risk. Each item is scored within these ranges, and only when there are mitigating or aggravating circumstances can overrides occur, in which detention is necessary regardless of risk level (Thomas, 2013). In high-risk situations, the goal is to detain unless there are policy or circumstantial overrides. Juveniles who obtain a seven or lower on a detention assessment and are likely to be released after arrest. Groups of medium

risk can be released with conditions unless there is an override. Lastly, low-risk groups receive unconditional release unless there is an override. The scoring system's aspects aim to provide youth who score low or medium-risk levels to obtain the least restrictive nonsecure detention possible or unconditional release alternatives (GDJJ, 2018).

The GDJJ's (2018) DAI breakdown is as follows: class I offenses pertain to aggravated child molestation, aggravated sodomy, aggravated sexual battery, murder, armed robbery with a firearm, voluntary manslaughter, and rape, which are all worth 15 points. Class II offenses are aggravated assault, aggravated assault of a correctional officer, aggravated assault with intent to rape or rob, aggravated battery, armed robbery with no firearm, arson in the first degree, arson in the second degree, battery of a school official, carrying weapons within school safety zones, function, or property, armed robbery of a control substance from a pharmacy, possession for sale of drugs near a park or house project or in, at, or near a school and trafficking of cocaine, illegal drugs, or marijuana. Also, in this class, offenses of child molestation, criminal attempt of kidnapping or murder, hijacking of a motor vehicle or aircraft, kidnapping, possession of schedule I or II drugs for sale, and trafficking of methamphetamine are all worth twelve points.

In continuance of the GDJJ's (2018) DAI, class III offenses worth 10 points pertain to criminal property damage in the first degree. Also, cruelty to children, escape with a dangerous weapon, vehicular homicide, possession of marijuana or a schedule III, IV, or V drug for sale, criminal attempt of trafficking methamphetamine, and purchase or possession of a schedule I or II drugs. These charges do not include one ounce or less of

marijuana. Class IV offenses are all misdemeanors and are worth eight points, and they consist of arson in the third degree, burglary, escape involuntary manslaughter, cruelty to children, and vehicular homicide. Class V offenses are worth six points and are all other types of felony offenses not mentioned or high and aggravated misdemeanors. Class VI are all other misdemeanors not listed, possession of one ounce or less of marijuana, and worth four points. Class VII offenses are:

- Status or administrative offenses,
- Probation violations,
- An aftercare intervention program,
- A court detention order, and
- A DJJ order is worth two points.

The second item on the DAI is additional current charges. If the youth have two or more additional felony charges, it is three points. If the minor has one additional felony charge, it is worth two points. One or more additional misdemeanor, status offense, or violation of probation is worth one point. Lastly, if there are no extra charges, there are no points added to this item. In the end, each items' scores are added to gather a final total, and a determination of placement or nonplacement is distinguished. When a juvenile is charged with twelve or more points on the DAI, a face-to-face intake is not required, and the minor is sent to a secured facility for placement.

In relation, DAI's are prediction-oriented instruments that assess risk and are structured to evaluate the youth's risk of recidivism (Skeem et al., 2017). On the other hand, Comprehensive Risk and Needs (CRN) assessments assess multiple factors to

reduce the risk of recidivism. Youth who require such reduction-oriented instruments are those in treatment. Both reviews were necessary to produce more rational decision-making alternatives but were held at different decision points during a youth's arrest process. Youth scoring in the high-risk range on the DAI requires placement in secure detention. After treatment interventions, these youth groups would undergo a CRN before the DJJ removed it from procedural use. When youth score a low-risk level, the intake officer determines that they are not required to be placed into a detention facility. The child is then released to a parent, guardian, legal custodian, or a person with the ability to provide sufficient supervision for the youth's care and return to court when required (GDJJ, 2018).

On the aspects of sentencing, Monahan and Skeem (2016) found that there are problems with using risk assessments in sentencing points, in which the DJJ removed CRN's. The issues that arose were confusing risk and blame, failing to decipher risk assessments from risk reduction, excepting individual reasoning based on group data, and how risk assessments in terms of sentencing affect racial and economic disparities in confinement. The strength of reviews faces racial disparities at levels of juvenile placement as well as sentencing decisions. In this, DAI's use is practical for distinguishing levels of risk for placement or nonplacement choices just as prediction-oriented instruments.

Recidivism

Sanchez and Lee (2015) defined recidivism as behavior reverting to crime after receiving treatment or custody. Recidivism studies help measure various criminal justice

programs' effectiveness. In the State of Georgia, the problem deriving from the social issue of African American juveniles continuing to have the highest arrest rate is that juvenile recidivism continues to be high amongst African American juveniles in Fulton County. Addressing the aspects of crime can be considered a result of interpersonal relationships that influence reoffending and other factors as poverty, criminal gang activity, family structure, and school involvement (Gonzales et al., 2018). Risk factors are associated with adverse behavioral outcomes, which is why DAI's, and risk assessments incorporate such concerns in determining levels of risk. Clarke (2017) explained that the more risk present in a juvenile's life is consistent with a higher risk for juvenile recidivism.

Risk reduction continues to be a topic of interest within studies of juvenile offending. Baglivio et al. (2017) initiated that reducing childhood experience exposure is necessary for reducing recidivism. The study of Skeem et al. (2017) found that there is a need to assess the construct of the validity of reduction-oriented instruments. In turn, changes to assessment tools would accurately measure individual juveniles to provide better-informed risk reduction interventions. Deciphering between predictive-oriented risk assessments and risk reduction takes an understanding of both aspects.

Offenders who show a higher risk of recidivism are those in need of treatment. When developed from accurate accounts of juvenile risk, assessments can target specific markets to result in more favorable treatment (ter Beek et al., 2018). A study done by Wylie and Rufino (2018) concludes that minors can be rehabilitated when placed in a diversion program matching their risk level. Youth who commit less serious offenses

would not be incarcerated. Instead, they would be placed in an intervention program allowing a second chance as the idea behind using a DAI but with further guidance.

Hay et al. (2016) exemplified such concerns in a quantitative study that analyzed whether Florida's Residential Positive Achievement Change Tool (R-PACT) predicts recidivism and if predictions vary across the different sub-groups of offenders. Researchers used results from the R-PACT administrations of the juvenile justice information system containing juvenile offending, placement, and risk assessment information. Out of 5,162 youths, 4,700 youths took one R-PACT and remained in Florida after release. Bivariate results distinguished findings between the R-PACT scales and reoffending. The study concluded that reoffending factors of prior offenses, school history, and relationships with peers and adults who are not family indicated the R-PACT's most predictive levels. The analysis depicted a risk assessment instrument used to predict recidivism among juveniles released back into society. It provided evidence of risk factors in consideration of reoffending on those who have gone through detention placement.

Coalitions and Disproportionate Minority Contact

Since 2006, many stakeholders in the juvenile justice system have partnered together to make the DAI race-neutral and bias-free. Some of these collaborations have included the Designated State Agency, Georgia Council of Juvenile Court Judges, Georgia Bureau of Investigations, Judicial Council of Georgia, Administrative Office of the Courts, Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice, and the Georgia Public Defender Council. The correspondence of these organizations was to gather and analyze the State's

collected data in the juvenile justice system, comparing findings to the disproportionate minority contact (DMC) core requirements (OJJDP, 2019). DMC refers to the rates of contact between the juvenile justice system and specific minority groups compared to the contact rates with the juvenile justice system and White youth.

DMC is defined by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) as the disproportionate number of minority youth compared to their share of the youth population overall. Results show over-representation in the juvenile justice system but underrepresented in lenient alternatives (Gonzales et al., 2018). Past DMC efforts in 1988 focused on differences in confinement and amending the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974.

Examining disproportionate minority confinement targeted the proportion of juvenile minorities in facilities that exceeded their proportion in the general population (Hauer & Vaida, 2012). After years of research leading to the assessments and insertions of risk assessing tools, confinement was no longer the main point at multiple decision points of the juvenile's arrest process. Instead, contact became the new focal point. It focused on all decision points as racial disparities can occur at other juvenile arrest process stages than just detention or placement. Contact is the stage of the juvenile's engagement with law enforcement, also called the referral stage.

Fagan (1996) announced factors of age, geographical location of courts, community structural features, prior records, and procedural differences as primary components of disproportionate confinement. Fagan found that elements of type and severity of offenses and differential behavior lead to excessive contact. More recent

studies determine that the scope of this perspective was founded on factors of differential offending and differential treatment (DSG, 2014). In 2008, Piquero furthered DMC's research and noted that discretion in decision-making heightened racial bias as juvenile minorities were confined in more significant numbers for all offenses.

Distinguished as disproportion, the factors are higher for less severe crimes (Hauer & Vaida, 2012). Dejong and Jackson's (1998) research depicted the geographic location of a court as an important factor in determining decisions. The Sentencing Project's policy brief on disproportionate minority contact explained that specific crimes, such as drug offenses, occur more frequently in compressed urban areas (Rovner, 2014). The results differ from suburban areas because such crimes occur within the distance of public housing complexes, schools, or parks. Areas with segregated housing can impact DMC turnouts (Rovner, 2014).

The researchers established two frameworks to contribute to DMC in the Development Services Group's (2014) study on DMC: differential offending and treatment. Differential offending focused on outside the court system, which targeted interpersonal and external risk factors. These factors include the juvenile's family, neighborhood social contexts, low-performing public schools, and greater exposure to violence (DSG, 2014). These factors coincide with the National Research Council (2013), who determined that minority youth are born and raised in severely compromising familial, educational, and community environments that create the platform for adverse behaviors and events. The issues ranging from such outcomes included problems in social relationships, involvement in school, and prosocial behavior (NRS, 2013).

Moreover, the framework of differential treatment is referred to as differential selection or systems factors. The platform behind this concept's scope is how the justice decision-making actions are structured, in which minority youth face disadvantages. Two theories that fall under differential treatment are bias theory and racial or symbolic threat theory (DSG, 2014). When decision-makers use their emotions developed from perceptions of minority youth, stereotypes factor into punishments. Leiber and Fox (2005) found that such judgments consider African American youth a threat to middle-class standards and public safety. In the long run, these decisions contribute to the factors leading to delinquency, harping on internal characteristics and external risk factors (Bridges & Steen, 1998). The National Research Council (2013) announced that DMC's existence goes far beyond "racial society;" it also includes poverty trends, differences in educational successes across cultures, and residential instability, all of which affect the juvenile justice system.

Fulton County, Georgia and Disproportionate Minority Contact

Fulton County is GA's 144th county, which encompasses 528.7 square miles. Cities of the north end include Sandy Springs, Roswell, Alpharetta, and Stone Mountain, whereas, the south end contains College Park, Fairburn, East Point, Palmetto, Hapeville, and South Fulton, and Union City. Between both sections lies the City of Atlanta. Fulton County's population accounts for 10% of GA's total population (Fulton County, 2020). Based on the Fulton County Government 2017 Environmental Scan, internal and external focuses were population, economy, public health, public safety, and technology. The County remains the most populous within the State, with an estimate of over a million

residents. Regarding public safety, Fulton County has an urban nature. It surpasses other counties in rates of serious crimes, in which murder, robbery, and larceny remain high.

The environmental scan uncovered the following threats:

- A decline in working-aged groups,
- An increase in unemployment among 25-34-year-olds,
- The highest rates of HIV and Syphilis in the nation, and
- An increase in severe and violent crimes.

Weaknesses attributing to economic concerns were affordable housing production in communities that lack a workforce and cannot provide needed behavioral health services to uninsured populations throughout the city. Sanchez and Lee's (2015) qualitative research on GDJJ's number of offenders committed to the juvenile courts from 1993 to 2003 uncovered that recidivism rates were higher for Black and male juveniles than White juveniles and females. White and other juveniles were less likely to recidivate than Black youth regarding socio-economic status, geographic location of residence, and living situations (Sanchez & Lee, 2015).

Going back to the DSG study, the OJJDP's DMC manual on technical assistance provided multiple explanations for DMC, including sub-categories of the differential offenders and differential treatment frameworks. These aspects included a differential opportunity for prevention and treatment, differential behavior, mobility effects, indirect effects, differential processing or inappropriate decision-making, justice by geography, legislation, policies, and legal factors (DSG, 2014). With its high population density, Fulton County faces the effects of such concepts to impact minority youth. Differential

opportunities for prevention and treatment consider accessibility, in which treatment and prevention resources are not accessible amongst the community for some as it is for others. These factors relate to the location of the programs and mobility opportunities for these programs.

With Fulton County's rates of 25-34-year-olds being unemployed, it collaborates with indirect factors contributing to crime and DMC. Indirect effects include economic status, location, education, and the factors portrayed within juvenile justice system involvement, all linked to race and ethnicity (DSG, 2014). Smith (2018) explored recidivism outcomes of juveniles about risk assessments, mentoring programs, the influence of neighborhood conditions, and parental monitoring to help maintain effective deterrence programs and efforts. Results indicated that the mentoring program was not beneficial to offenders on probation and chronic offenders. However, vulnerable populations were presumed to benefit highly from mentoring programs.

Gonzales et al. (2018) provided information about DMC in Fulton County from 2006 to 2014. Findings displayed DMC to be more prevalent at the referral point of contact with the juvenile justice system, which meant that African American youth were referred to the juvenile justice system at ten times the rate of White youth (Gonzales et al., 2018). African American youth held more referrals than White, which implied that for every three White youths diverted from the juvenile justice system, only two African American youths were diverted. GA's background with the juvenile justice system has found that African American males commit more juvenile offenses based on differential behavior. This factor is attributed to the concept that children living in impoverished

neighborhoods are more likely to be aggressive, act out, and drop out of high school.

Gonzales et al. (2018) outlined that, in 2015, 80% of African American youth in Atlanta lived in communities facing poverty compared to 6% of White youths.

Moreover, the Massachusetts DMC assessment depicted justice by geography as a DMC factor when police patrolling in urban minority neighborhoods is more aggressive than suburban areas. These factors result in the likelihood of African American youth being arrested than White (Kauffman, 1997). Here is where measuring DMC becomes a concern. DMC is measured in many ways, in which two are by using proportions or using rates. When comparing ratios, the breakdown of youths' race within the general population is compared to youths' race at different decisions or contact points in the juvenile justice system (OJJDP, 2019). However, using proportions does not allow researchers to study changes in youth populations over time or distinguish disparity levels between jurisdictions.

The OJJDP requires states taking part in the federal Formula Grant Program to utilize the relative rate index (RRI) to measure DMC (OJJDP, 2019). Rovner (2014) explains that the RRI measures racial disparities amongst the youth of color and White youth at different stages of the juvenile justice system. Using this method provides an understanding of the volume in activity from one contact point to the next. Policymakers and practitioners within the field of juvenile justice can examine contact points that may need implementation of new procedures. RRI's can also provide population-based rates, which can be compared over time between multiple jurisdictions.

The rationale behind selecting these concepts is to address the background, function, use, and need of DAIs. The topics of detention assessment instruments, risk levels, and recidivism distinguished why, when, and how the DAI's were established in GA. The key concepts, coalitions and disproportionate minority contact, and Fulton County and disproportionate minority contact distinguish the surrounding effects of environments and usage of the DAI, as multiple actors of the juvenile justice system influence differential aspects that hinder the positive impact DAI's may have on juveniles.

Summary

Chapter 2 discussed the literature about developing DAIs and their effects on low-risk youth offenders in Fulton County, GA. Different methods have been utilized to research detention assessments and juvenile recidivism; however, the qualitative approach seems to be the most useful to acquire better insight into the field and participants. The present study provided a comprehensive understanding and filled the gap of understanding the use of DAIs on low-risk youth offenders and its impact on recidivism risks for African American juveniles in Fulton County, GA. Explanation on the development of the DAI, risk levels, recidivism, coalitions and DMC, and Fulton County, GA, and DMC can contribute to the extent of knowledge on the gap based on interviews of various Fulton County juvenile justice personnel. In Chapter 3, I discussed the research design and methodology utilized in this study. Incorporated in the chapter is a discussion on the researcher's part, how participants were obtained, the ethical protection of participants, data gathering, and methodology of the study.

Chapter 3: Research Method

This qualitative study aims to advance the understanding of how detention assessments affect low-risk youth offenders and the impact on recidivism risks of African American juveniles in Fulton County, Georgia. To accomplish this goal, the lived experiences of Fulton County juvenile justice personnel suited such needs. In Georgia, arrested juveniles undergo a detention assessment, in which determinates of risk levels are made. When that minor generates low-risk value, they are diverted from detention. Diversion helps with overpopulation in detention centers, overuse of resources, and reducing inconsistencies with detained youth.

The results of this study provided an understanding of the effects of the DAI on low-risk youth offenders and the impact on recidivism risks for African American youth in Fulton County. Expansion of knowledge may lead to policy and procedural changes. Chapter 3 discussed the research design and approach, the setting and sample used, instrumentation and materials acquired, and data collection methods and analysis procedures. Evidence of efforts to ensure validity, trustworthiness, and ethical deliberations are included to address the complete qualitative method design.

Research Design and Rationale

This study's research question is: What are the Fulton County juvenile justice personnel's experiences with the current assessment process and its impact on recidivism risks with African American youth? The central phenomenon is that detention assessments focus on diverting low-risk groups from being involved in the Fulton County Department of Juvenile Justice. Using the detention assessment as a decision-making tool

may lack consideration of internal and external risk factors associated with an increased risk to reoffend amongst African American youth in Fulton County, Georgia. I used Heideggerian phenomenological inquiry and advocacy coalition theory to understand the central phenomenon. Phenomenology was chosen as the researcher tradition because it is an approach that focuses on understanding the essence of a phenomenon through human experiences. Such experiences provide grammatical and psychological contributions to the meaning of expressions (George, 2020). The interpretation of these experiences provides rich subject-based information for educative meaning.

Ravitch and Carl (2016) explained that Madison (2011) described three principles of qualitative research, which are interpretive assumptions and data collection methods that are context-specific and flexible and uses methods of analysis in the understanding of complexity, detail, and context (p.3). The educational use of qualitative inquiry is explained here, as it provides many approaches to research, while quantitative studies focus on the cause and effects of outcomes. Erickson (1986) found that a qualitative approach is guided by epistemological and methodological beliefs, discovering truths and perspectives (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Responses of personnel within the Fulton County juvenile justice system do just that, making the quantitative research approach unsuitable to meet such needs.

Much research, in terms of risk assessments and recidivism risks for juveniles, has covered the discovery of risk factors leading to recidivism but has not explored the effects of the risk assessments specifically on low-risk youth offenders nor the impact of these assessments on recidivism risks of African American juveniles in Fulton County,

GA. In Clarke's (2017) qualitative study, a sample of nine personnel within Florida's central region was used to explore the aspects of juvenile recidivism among 17- and 18-year-olds. The risk factors uncovered were peers, family criminal and mental health history, environment, truancy, substance abuse, and parent bond. Past research has indicated factors, but not how they impact recidivism risks of low-risk youth offenders. Social change implications recommended that the Florida DJJ focus on reducing recidivism for juveniles aged 17 and 18 by reducing the number of youth adults entering the criminal justice system.

Researchers study events or concept comparisons and fix their worldviews based on their knowledge and research aims of a real-world situation. Qualitative methods involve an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the subject matter and cannot be limited to one specific discipline or theory (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Utilizing the qualitative method, data collection consists of identifying, collecting, organizing, reviewing, and analyzing data to reveal a world phenomenon (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

Qualitative designs allow researchers to understand the setting or context of the problem or issue participants experience (Creswell, 2012). In qualitative studies, Yanch and Steudel (2003) noted that the open-ended inquiry gives participants more control of the shared context within the data collected. Participants' characteristics are observed and described as the researcher collects, analyzes, and interprets data (Creswell, 2012). Compared to quantitative studies, the benefits of qualitative research are that it is often

less costly due to smaller sample sizes, and it allows researchers to interact firsthand with participants based on the data collection methods within this approach.

Using a phenomenological foundation, this qualitative study aims to advance the understanding of how detention assessments affect low-risk youth offenders and impact recidivism risks of African American juveniles in Fulton County, GA. Phenomenological research is classified as qualitative inquiry and has a philosophical orientation.

Philosophical orientation is the connection between assumptions and orientations to reality in adhering to an inductive approach, focused on specific situations or people and words rather than numbers (Burkholder, 2016; Maxwell, 2013).

The phenomenological design utilized in this study was hermeneutics. Clarke (2017) explains that this design uses descriptive and interpretive measures to address language, nature, and events with meaningful concepts to make understanding possible. Hermeneutics focuses on gathering knowledge for interpretation practices. It is suitable for examining detention assessments and their impact on low-risk offenders from Fulton County juvenile justice professionals with expertise and experience.

As a methodology of interpretations, hermeneutics considers understanding problems of social aspects. In other words, the focus is on issues that arise from human actions and text with a meaningful explanation (Mantzavinos, 2020). To support this study's purpose, I utilized a hermeneutic design to explore the Fulton County juvenile justice personnel's experiences using the detention assessment and the effects on low-risk youth offenders that tend to reoffend.

Interpreting what personnel in this field can express and explain through their responses can help recommend appropriate solutions to advance the DAI in combating the main problem areas causing recidivism, such as lack of treatment opportunities that heightened risk to recidivate. In the chance to interview well-absorbed personnel in the Fulton County juvenile justice system, I wished to bring to light implementations that can be made to the DAI process when diverting low-risk youth offenders from placement. Ideas of how Fulton County, GA, can reduce differential treatment and opportunity factors to reduce recidivism risks for African American juveniles are discussed.

The qualitative approach consists of methods other than the one chosen, phenomenological. These methods are ethnography, narrative, ground theory, and case study, which are unsuitable for this study. In ethnography, the focus is on context or culture, in which the sample size is not particular, and data collection is based on observation and interviews (Sauro, 2015). This research is founded on factual information, such as daily observations, tables, figures, and sketches. The narrative method was a close consideration for use, focusing on individual experiences and sequence, using a sample size of one to two participants, and gathering stories from individuals and documentation (Sauro, 2015). Audio-recorded virtual face-to-face interviews via Zoom are suitable for this research's needs. The stories and documents of the participants' life were not necessary. The narrative design was not chosen.

Moreover, the ground theory did not support this research's purpose. Its focus is to develop a theory grounded in field data with a sample size of 20 to 60 participants. No particular number is needed for the sample size, and data collection derives from

interviews, documentation, reports, and observations (Sauro, 2015). Data collection involves interviews that lead to open, axial coding (Sauro, 2015). Lastly is the case study method. This form of research is used to understand an entity, event, or individual. As case studies inquire about particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic designs, these studies are excessive for this present study

Role of the Researcher

In this study, my role as a researcher was a naturalistic observer. Such observation is used to observe the participants in their natural environment without manipulation by the researcher or observer. In this, I collected information from the participants based on open-ended interview questions to receive in-depth responses on their experiences.

Professional Relationships

As a law enforcement officer with the Atlanta Police Department (APD) for seven years, I worked with various juvenile justice professionals in Fulton County. I do work alongside detectives in APD and Fulton County in the process of arresting juvenile delinquents. However, the professional relationship with attorneys, detectives, and social services and intervention programs professionals, such as community behavior specialists, case managers, program managers, and therapists, is on a when-needed basis. Personnel such as those listed work within various agencies of the justice system in Fulton County. There are no concerns regarding power over participants.

In the arrest process of a juvenile within Fulton County, the process is apprehension, fill out the juvenile intake sheet, contact Fulton County juvenile intake over the phone to explain what we are currently working with, and then be told to

standby for a callback. At that time, the intake officers investigate the juveniles' criminal history, current charges, and other categories on the detention assessment. The GDJJ mandates these protocols.

If the minor accumulates 12 points, law enforcement can transport the juvenile to the Metro Youth Detention Center after taking them to be fingerprinted. If not, we are told to reach out to their parents to pick up the minor and provide them with an arrest citation with a court date. When no parent or legal guardian is available to retrieve the child from law enforcement custody, we must call the Georgia Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS). The engagement with DFCS workers is then initiated. They will have to come and take custody of the minor. DFCS has an overwhelming number of cases they must respond to, meaning law enforcement officers awaiting their services may have to sit with the minor for hours after their shift has ended. We are only connected about the relationship between judges and attorneys within the DOJ if a child must go to court.

Regarding my educational and professional background, I obtained much training and knowledge in courses on qualitative research, interviews, and interrogations. These similarities of courses helped develop my skills in active listening, and I incorporated these qualities and my experiences working alongside the use of the detention assessment instrument as a decision-making tool into the data collection in this research study.

Researcher Bias

I have firsthand knowledge of the first decision point of the juvenile arrest process, in which I may make contact with the same child numerous times. Based on this

experience, my interest in understanding the detention assessment process, its effects on low-risk youth offenders, and its impact on recidivism risks of African American juveniles were highly motivated by the continuous contact of the same juveniles and tedious paperwork. The results of this study focus on enabling juvenile justice personnel of Fulton County to express their experiences with the detention assessment. Their experiences express what positive attributes or challenges exist in reducing recidivism in Fulton County within the current juvenile justice system while utilizing this tool as a means of decision-making.

The interviewing method allows researchers an in-depth understanding of the issue from experts within the subject being researched. The interviewer sets the tone of the process based on the environment setting, transparency, and respectful interviewer attributes. Techniques such as building trust, rapport and observing body language responses are aspects of the interpretive interviewer. An attentive listener and observer show respect towards the worlds of others (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Understanding that personal views affect what may be learned, researchers must avoid bias and accept the ability to question participants, view their feelings, but focus on answers relating to their lived experiences.

One reflection about the value of interviewing as a data collection tool is that the interviewer can immerse themselves in the study to develop detailed and contextualized accounts of experiences and views (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). From this, this study's research goal is to gain rich subject-based information from the experiences of the Fulton County juvenile justice personnel while avoiding my own biases. Individuals who

participated provided contextualized data reflecting qualitative research's natural and interactive values. I had the ability to precode, interview, collect data, conduct thematic analysis, and generate conclusions (Creswell, 2012).

Ethical Considerations

Reflexivity is a continuance assessment of the researcher's identity, positionality, and subjectivities (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). This definition constitutes the consideration of bias. I developed a bias towards the DAI's positive effects and other Fulton County juvenile justice personnel's efforts in assisting juveniles based on my experiences with detention assessment requirements and protocols. To avoid inserting my own bias and better understanding of utilizing this tool as a means to rehabilitation, I reflected on a journal of presumptions based on experiences of what I began the study with and the changes in these preconceptions as the study involved (see Appendix C). To gain more knowledge of the essence of the phenomenon, I solicited participants at multiple points of the juvenile arrest process who can provide detailed experiences of the use of the detention assessment as it relates to their job responsibilities. Hermeneutics implies that there is no single reality that human understanding is ever evolving, allowing for new meanings to be established through edify. When interpreting the recorded interviews, I upheld an open mind to changes in my views from my experiences, as expert participants of the study added more information than already known.

The benefits of using a qualitative phenomenological study are that in-depth knowledge provides a better understanding of the study's participants' lived experiences. According to Ravitch and Carl (2016), being open to critical self-reflection and change

allows the researcher to be susceptible to opinions, research approaches, and acknowledge differences between the researcher and participants can provide a quality-based study. From here, the researcher can be reflexively engaged in the interactions with others, building on credibility for the research.

Methodology

Participant Selection Logic

Sampling Strategy

Qualitative methods help gather data to understand the frequency of traits that connect reoccurring themes within more extensive data sets. Data saturation is described as a point in qualitative research where there are no longer new themes in a study's data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Mason (2010) explains that there is no specific number to sample in qualitative research. The researcher interviews the interviewees until no new themes emerge; individual interviews would provide comprehensive information. Once there is a recurring pattern in the study's themes to give enough data to sufficiently answer the research question, saturation has been made.

In using a purposeful sample, the key is to minimize these risks and benefits from the potentials of homogenous exploration of understanding humanistic behaviors, beliefs, and assumptions through firsthand experiences (Choy, 2014). After receiving permission from Walden Institutional Research Board (IRB), to proceed with my research, I recruited a sample of 15 staff members who work within the Fulton County juvenile justice system. These professionals include program managers, police officers from different units and backgrounds, a district attorney, detectives, a social worker and a

behavioral specialist within the GDJJ in Fulton County. The GDJJ serves youthful offenders up to 21 years of age.

With neighborhood, school, and community safety connections, 3,500 DJJ employees work together at 26 facilities and 97 community service programs within GA. The organization's goal is to redirect juveniles in their care from criminal activity, have them take responsibility for their delinquent behavior, and guide them in becoming positive members of their communities. The efforts to rebuild the youth led to the protection of victims and the chances to rebuild their lives (DJJ, 2020).

Population Recruitment

A letter of request for permission to conduct the study with the organization was sent to the director of community initiatives to obtain permission to recruit participants. The letter discussed the study's purpose and requested permission to use the agency as a research tool for participants in Fulton County. Written consent was obtained to utilize the organization's participants in Fulton County to gather information for the research in the director letter of permission to collect data. The director of community initiatives contacted potential participants through the invitation letter of participation. Participants interested in participating in this study contacted me by email advising "I Consent" to confirm their agreement.

Some interview best practices are to build rapport and trust, as interviewing invites the participants to provide the study as much information as possible. The interviewer must use questions that draw out the participant and allow engagement. Strong interview models exemplify commitment, encouragement, precise information,

honesty, open-ended questions, and good body language (Laureate Education, 2016). In the first steps in developing rapport are transparency and comfort, I provided the IRB approval letter to the director of community initiatives to show that I adhere to specific ethical regulations. Current conditions of social distancing practices have made virtual face-to-face interviews by Zoom a convenience. Participants could attend interviews wherever they were and at agreed scheduled times.

The use of juvenile justice personnel from Fulton County, such as intake officers, attorneys, judges, detectives, social services, and intervention program professionals, was purposely chosen to add credibility to this qualitative research findings, as they work, day in and day out, with juveniles. Originally, intake officers and judges were a part of the recruitment, but due to the tension surrounding the detention assessment's capabilities in helping to reduce juveniles' participation in criminal activity and time constraints, interviewing this specific group of personnel was not accomplished.

However, I was recommended to some of the other staff members within Fulton County that assist children regularly and are connected to the outcomes of DAIs. Fulton County courts advised police officers, attorneys, detectives, social services professionals, and intervention program professionals. A phenomenological design comprises five to 25 participants from a population for sample size; therefore, a purposeful sample is sufficient to address the research question, as I interviewed 15 participants.

In communication with the director of community initiatives, efforts of recruiting 15 participants were pursued. Patton (2002) implied that purposeful sampling enables the researcher to choose specific participants and sample sizes suitable for the research and

resources available. These efforts displayed a sample strategy of purposeful sampling. The participants' experiences working in Fulton County within the GDJJ with youth residing in Fulton County provided information relevant to this study's purpose. The requirements for participation recruitment are that they had to work within the Fulton County juvenile justice system. The participants also had to uphold employment positions of intake officers, attorneys, judges, detectives, social services, or intervention program professionals, which was later changed to police officers, attorneys, detectives, social services professionals, and intervention program professionals, as noted. The participants of this study held employment in nonprofit and public organizations within Fulton County. They all provided a service or treatment to juvenile delinquents based on their occupational titles and duties.

Instrumentation and Data Collection

According to Archibald et al. (2019), videoconferencing has offered researchers and participants the capabilities to uphold qualitative data collection. This qualitative study collected data through prewritten interview questions, field notes from researcher presumptions, interview answers, and audio recordings. Interviews were held over Zoom for virtual face-to-face communication. Using Zoom provided convenience to the participants considering the current COVID-19 pandemic's social distancing requirements, schedules, and location choice. Zoom is a video communication platform founded by Eric Yuan in 2011. It is provided across desktops, mobile devices, videos, content, and voice sharing forms.

Prewritten interview questions were developed as a protocol to help stay focused on the questions that needed to be answered (note Appendix A). Patton (2015) informs those protocols are used as an instrument of inquiry and conversation. The interview questions are based on the research question and research design of hermeneutics to understand the detention assessment's effects on low-risk youth offenders that tend to reoffend due to environmental considerations and lack of equal treatment and opportunity. This design consisted of the hermeneutics circle. The hermeneutic circle allowed the participants' described lived experiences to be examined to find meaning in the complex policymaking environment. Such examination allowed for understanding the expression in semantic forms (George, 2020, Hurley, 2021). In this study, the participants are the actors, and the DJJ is the environment.

In developing interview questions, the literature review was used as a reference tool to develop subject matter questions. These questions allowed for the solicitation in-depth details of the participants' lived experiences on aspects of using the DAI as a means of rehabilitation. Further discussion of behavioral aspects of the juveniles they supervise, positive and negative attributes in utilization of detention assessment instruments on the juveniles, and the impact on recidivism risks of African American juveniles in Fulton County, GA, are discussed. Questions were developed in a neutral language to avoid revealing the researcher's biases that can cause influence towards how the participants' answered.

Data collection in this study consisted of internet interviews through Zoom. The Researcher's interview background was in a secure and isolated room to ensure privacy

by avoiding others overhearing the interviews. Participants were encouraged to do the same. Moreover, of the 15 interviews held over Zoom, eight participants were at home, and I was in my home office, four were in their work office, and I was in a single room work office, and three were in their vehicles, and I was in my home office. Each interview appropriated 45 minutes to an hour and was audio recorded. Utilizing Zoom and audio recording capabilities allowed observation of the participants' nature while still taking note of their answers. The meetings took an hour with 15 minutes of an introduction, a conclusion on debriefing the participant, and 45 minutes of questioning. Face-to-face interviews help establish relationships and allow interviewers to observe emotions as easily as hearing tones change.

Using open-ended inquiry allows researchers to collect viewpoints from experiences and gain unexpected insights from the learned perspective of participants. This form of inquiring interpretive measures adheres to the degree of validity. To ensure the data collected covered the particulars of validity, the design of the literature review and open-ended questions were used as forms of exploratory means for participants to elaborate on their experiences. Follow-up questions were asked for clarity and more details to particular responses.

Rubin and Rubin (2012) assessed that the assurance of accuracy comes from the researchers' ability to transcribe what was stated by interviewees and allow them to go over transcribed responses for feedback and clarification. Participants had firsthand knowledge relevant to the topic of this study. They could speak from experiences and accurately remember occurrences and processes within their career position. After every

interview, the debriefing process was upheld to allow participants to ask further questions about the research study, the following steps as to their participation in the study and the intentions of the study. These steps displayed the assurance of accuracy and credibility in this study. Content validity was confirmed by allowing participants to read over their answers for each question and provide feedback wherever needed concerning the researched phenomenon; however, no added discussion, corrections, or feedback were made.

Credibility is developed through the research design as qualitative data is accurately obtained, transcribed, and summarized. Allowing participants to recheck their responses ensured valid data collection on the meanings expressed through their lived experience. The hermeneutics design within this study was aligned with addressing the research question. As field notes before, during, and after the interviews enhanced my initial presumptions and interpretations of the centered phenomenology, reflexivity was maintained for data analysis and interpretation of the data as a whole.

A transcriber was hired and used to transcribe the audio-recorded interviews verbatim one week after each interview and provided all responses on a word document. The transcriber was asked to sign a confidentiality agreement to secure confidentiality. The transcriber accurately transcribed every interview as I was able to recheck the interviews for accurate recording by the audio recordings. Reading and rereading transcribed interviews, allowed me to be more informative of the data collected.

Data Analysis Plan

Data analysis involves taking raw data from interview responses and making them clear and convincing answers to research questions (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The hermeneutics circle, which examines the described experiences of participants to find meaning of the lived experiences for understanding the expression in semantic forms and the seven steps of data analysis by Paul Colaizzi's (1978) are utilized. These steps include making sense of transcribed interviews by reading and rereading them. The next step is to identify and pull-out phrases or sentences that pertain to the investigated phenomenon, form interpretations from statements of similar meaning, and group the formulated meanings into themes. The following steps are to provide an exhausted description of all themes that emerged, describe the fundamental structure of the central phenomenon through summary, and ensure credibility of the data (Applebaum et al., 2018).

In this study, to uphold confidentiality, a pen name (P1 through P15) was used to represent each participant. They provided their experiences on the effects of detention assessments on low-risk youth offenders and their impact on the risk of recidivism on African American youth in Futon County, GA, through each interview question. After having the transcriber transcribe the interviews, and validation by participants, I reread all of the interviews while listening to the audio recordings to ensure the interviews were accurately transcribed. From there, I could take field notes towards my presumption list as I continuously read and reread the interview answers in their whole context to immerse myself, as the researcher, to begin the first step in Colaizzi's (1978) data analysis process.

This first step of Colaizzi's (1978) method was consistent with the hermeneutic circle as examination of the data collected from the participants are studied in partial and as a whole later in the processes.

In the second step of this process, I utilized NVivo 12, a computer-aided qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS), updated in March 2018 by QSR International. Such software is a tool that provides better data management, coding process, and data analysis. Using the software allowed me to identify and pull-out phrases and outlier themes that emerged and pertained to the investigated phenomenon. The primary phenomenon is that detention assessments focus on diverting low-risk groups from being involved in the Fulton County Department of Juvenile Justice. Using the detention assessment as a decision-making tool may lack considerations of internal and external risk factors associated with an increased risk to reoffend amongst African American youth in Fulton County, Georgia. Each interview was saved in a separate file in the software and coded one by one.

Coding was used to find concepts, events, examples, themes, names, and places relevant to the study. These capabilities are coupled using Heidegger's (1962) four characteristics of phenomenology, description, reduction, essence, and intentionality, in respects to *priori*. The next step was to sort, summarize, and compare the coded data to form interpretations from statements of similar meaning. Line-by-line coding or open coding can be tedious, but so can the stages of sorting labels across all interviews (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

NVivo 12 mechanisms enabled accessible sorting functions and organization of the data under selected labels and numbers of entries saved under the developed labels. These forms of rich data collection allowed the steps of sorting, resorting, comparing, summarizing, and weighing each interviewee's different experiences to integrate commonalities (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The themes allowed for easy retrieval and analysis of relationships within the responses. Conducting data analysis, I used descriptive coding to summarize answers into a word or noun that resembled the response topic.

The fourth step was to group the formulated meanings into themes. The answers are categorized using the codes of words that described the data. The following nine terms were labeled in NVivo 12: detention assessment, risk factors, Fulton County, unity, recidivism/reoffending, the justice system, funding, social service programs, and changes. Seven sub-themes emerged: positive impact of the detention assessment, negative impact of the detention assessment, positive and negative impact of the detention assessment, impressionable minds, support system, treatment needs/punishment, and escalation. In reading transcripts line by line, markers were made of the reoccurring themes, keywords, and other in-depth details.

Lastly, steps 5, 6, and 7 are depicted in Chapter 4, as I provided an exhausted description of all the themes that emerged, described the fundamental structure of the central phenomenon through summary of all the data as a whole, and ensured credibility of the data. The NVivo 12 software provided capabilities of upholding Colaizzi's (1978) method in collecting, storing, sorting, and retrieving data. Using NVivo 12 guided

gathering, sorting, and managing context to adhere to the forms of validity in qualitative research. In respects to Heidegger's (1962) hermeneutic circle, I used these themes, emerged from the described experiences of participants, to find meaning of the lived experiences for understanding of the positive and negative attributes of the DAI. The steps guided the collecting and understanding data and identifying fundamental structure in the validating process.

Issues of Trustworthiness

All steps involving a naturalistic study acquire fresh and natural results that allow for a balanced and thorough conclusion, but most importantly, credible and accurate (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). In making a social issue understandable, researchers provide correct interpretations of the participants' thoughts, experiences, and emotions for the information to be understood by others. Credibility is developed through the research design as qualitative data is accurately obtained, transcribed, and summarized. Other alternative criteria for reviewing the quality of research exist in determining credibility. Transferability, dependability, and confirmability are other factors that play into quality (Trochim, 2020). Credibility is enhanced when interviewees are chosen by their relevant knowledge for the research topic and their ability to add detailed examples for themes.

Rubin and Rubin (2012) assessed that the assurance of accuracy comes from the researchers' ability to transcribe what was stated by interviewees and allow them to go over transcribed responses for feedback and clarification. The study can obtain richness and nuance by conducting thorough data analysis. The steps displayed accuracy and credibility in this study. Participants had firsthand knowledge relevant to the topic of this

study. They could speak from experiences and accurately remember occurrences and processes within their career position.

When asked to elaborate on short, specific answers, this compelled an addition of rich, detailed information. The transcriber accurately transcribed every interview as I was able to recheck the interviews for accurate recording. All participants reviewed a transcription of their interviews and were given a chance to review, provide feedback, clarify any misinterpretations, and withdraw any statements needed to be removed to continue securing validity within the study.

In terms of the validity of a qualitative research study, transferability reflects generalization, which inquires the result's ability to be transferred to other settings, contexts, or groups. Each participant was described thoroughly, from their occupation, duties, selection to their characteristics, and the content of their responses to establish transferability. Accurately describing the research context and the study's central idea can enable other researchers to disseminate the results to their meaning (Trochim, 2020). Other researchers can judge how sensible the transfer is from this study's context to theirs based on the detailed information.

Qualitative research must account for the dynamics of the context of changes over time in terms of dependability. Duplication of this study can be done based on the details' efficiency, which ensures dependability correlates with the transferable research. Description of participant selection, characteristics, and context allows for confirmability. Trochim (2020) describes confirmability as the extent to which other researchers can confirm results.

I initiated the steps of checking and rechecking throughout the study. Rechecking consisted of going back over recordings and transcripts of interviews to make sure content was recorded precisely. Further steps are utilizing the NVivo 12 to organize commonalities found in interviews and overlooking any notions of bias in my interpretations against my listed presumptions throughout this study by providing the interviewees the opportunity to validate transcribed interviews. Throughout the method process, I accrued greater legitimacy for this study's quality using the steps of affirming credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Ethical Procedures

Ethics are classified as moral principles that set the platform of an individual's behavior as they conduct any activity. In the realms of researching, a rational approach to research stands firm against actions that demonize or minimize the participant's experiences, values, thoughts, ideas, and any other personal contributions to the study's phenomenon. In this, the researcher must be open to the expert ideology brought on by the participant. The American Psychological Association (2010) and Walden University IRB policies and procedures provide ethical principles that I followed throughout my study.

I submitted an IRB application for approval (IRB Approval 03-01-21-0980313). Participants received the informed consent form and were required to send me an email of "I Consent" to participate in the study. The consent forms explained the study's goal, the data collection and analysis process, and the risks and benefits. Participants were advised of the choice to withdraw the involvement of their participation at any time

without conflict. Multiple steps are used in obtaining confidentiality, in that participants were provided the opportunity to critically assess any ethical concerns involving their work environments. Number codes are used to represent participants. Audio recordings, transcripts, and hard drives containing interviews are stored in a combination safe. Five years after completing the study, all data removed from the computer and stored on the flash drive will be destroyed.

Summary

In this qualitative study, I explored the detention assessment effects on low-risk youth offenders and the impact on recidivism risks for African American youth in Fulton County, GA, through the experiences of juvenile justice personnel. Chapter 3 discussed the research design, method, data collection, procedures on data analysis and issues of trustworthiness. The researcher's role was also explained in detail the primary duties of protecting involved participants' rights and the importance of confidential fundamentals. The data analysis results of each virtual face-to-face interview via Zoom are provided in Chapter 4. In Chapter 5, research findings are encapsulated, and conclusions and implications for change are discussed.

Chapter 4: Results

This research aimed to advance the understanding of the lived experiences of the Fulton County juvenile justice personnel in using the detention assessment tool to rehabilitate young offenders. From there, I explored a further understanding of the detention assessment's positive and negative effects on low-risk youth offenders and its impact on the recidivism risk of African American juveniles. Such exploration led to an understanding of the central phenomenon. The central phenomenon is that detention assessment focuses on diverting low-risk groups from being involved in the juvenile justice system, which may lack consideration of internal and external risk factors associated with reoffending amongst African American juveniles in Fulton County.

In Chapter 4, I provided the findings acquired from investigating a sample of 15 juvenile justice professionals within the Fulton County Juvenile Justice system. The fundamental research question that helped create the basis of this study was: What are the Fulton County juvenile justice personnel's experiences with the current assessment process and its impact on recidivism risks with African American youth? This research question was directly connected to prewritten open-ended interview questions that are informed from the literature review and refrained from biased influence to alter the participants' responses.

In receiving approval from the Walden IRB, I utilized the qualitative research method to center on juvenile justice personnel's experiences. They are familiar with the risk factors that cause juveniles to reoffend, and the aspects of the detention assessment effects at their point in the juvenile arrest process. In this study, I intended to advance the

understanding of what personnel in this field can express and explain through their responses. They can offer recommendations on solutions to increase the DAI's efforts to combat recidivism. The participants can provide implementations that can be made to the DAI process when diverting low-risk youth offenders from placement and ideas of how these changes can reduce differential treatment and opportunity factors to reduce recidivism risks for African American juveniles. During the data collection process, interviews were conducted to receive in-depth detail about the participants' experiences. During the data analysis process, themes emerged from the participants' responses describing the central phenomenon's fundamental structure. I provided a follow-up process for feedback and validation to the participants.

Chapter 4 consists of the following sections: description of the setting I provided the participants, pertinent demographics of the 15 participants, data collection method utilized, data analysis involving coding categories and surfacing themes, and evidence of trustworthiness through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. In coordination with Colaizzi's (1978) method and Heidegger's (1962) hermeneutic circle, Steps 5, 6, and 7 are depicted, as I provided an exhausting description of all the themes that emerged, described the fundamental structure of the central phenomenon through a summary of all the data as a whole, and ensured credibility of the data. The study's detailed results and an overview of its findings are concluded at the end of this chapter.

Setting

The participants of this study held employment in nonprofit and public organizations within Fulton County. They all provided a service or treatment to juvenile

delinquents based on their occupational titles and duties. The mandates of this study required participants to work within the Fulton County juvenile justice system and uphold employment positions of intake officers, attorneys, judges, detectives, social services, and intervention program professionals.

After receiving approval from IRB, I provided the director of community initiatives with the letter of cooperation, who then emailed 20 potential participants the invitation letter of participation. Fifteen potential participants advised by email that they are interested, while others reported they had no time. I sent the informed consent form to the 15 interested participants, which they emailed back "I consent." From there, interviews were scheduled.

This study was conducted using Zoom to hold face-to-face interviews. Use of the prewritten interview questions as a protocol (Appendix A) was made, as it guided the direction of the interview. In describing the research, I provided each participant with copies of information emailed earlier in the recruitment process to remind them of the purpose of the study. The same 17 questions, prepared beforehand, are asked of each participant as all interviews are audio-recorded using an Aomago Digital Voice Recorder. As stated in the procedures of the informed consent form provided to each participant, they were reminded that they would receive a copy of their transcribed interviews for their return feedback, if any.

Demographics

Purposeful sampling was utilized to select the potential participants, resulting in 15 participants capable of volunteering in this study. This form of nonprobability

sampling allows the researcher to minimize risks and benefit from the potential of homogenous exploration of understanding humanistic behaviors, beliefs, and assumptions through firsthand experiences (Choy, 2014). As such, each participant was selected based on their employment and background working with juvenile delinquents. These positions work daily with juvenile delinquents while providing a service or treatment. I used a pen name (P1 through P15) to represent each participant to uphold the confidentiality of the identity of all participants in the study.

Table 1*Independent Participant Demographics*

Participant	Occupation	Years working with juveniles	Gender	Race/Ethnicity
P1	Program manager	15 years	Male	African American
P2	Program manager	10 years	Male	African American
P3	Police officer	6 years	Female	White Hispanic
P4	Police officer	5 years	Female	African American
P5	Police officer	10 years	Male	White not Hispanic
P6	Assistant District Attorney	6 years	Male	White not Hispanic
P7	Detective	8 years	Male	African American
P8	Detective	7 years	Female	White Hispanic
P9	Police officer	10 years	Female	African American
P10	School Social Worker	28 years	Female	African American
P11	Behavioral Specialist	7 years	Male	African American
P12	Detective	5 ½ years	Male	White not Hispanic
P13	Case Manager	6 years	Male	African American
P14	Police officer	10 years	Male	African American
P15	Detective	7 years	Female	African American

Table 1 provides the independent participants' demographics. The participants are juvenile justice personnel of Fulton County. They expressed their perspectives on the detention assessment and the challenges of reducing recidivism in Fulton County within the current juvenile justice system. Intake officers and judges were invited to participate in this study; however, the professionals rejected participation due to time constraints.

The positions included:

- two program managers,
- five police officers,
- one district attorney,
- four detectives,
- one school social worker,
- one behavioral specialist, and
- one case manager.

Different positions allowed for knowledge of diverse perspectives and experiences.

However, all participants shared the same aspect that a DAI is a helpful tool in categorizing juveniles, recidivism is a significant issue among juveniles, and there is a need for treatment services for low-risk offenders.

For each participant's response, pen names are used, and employment location was retained to maintain confidentiality and background information. The participant's perspective was also provided to understand the detention assessment process, its effects on low-risk youth offenders, and its impact on recidivism risks of African American juveniles.

Data Collection

The process to collect data was successfully approved in July 2021. Once approval to collect data was achieved, the data collection process of virtual face-to-face interviews with 15 participants occurred over seven months through Zoom video conferencing communications and audio recordings. Each participant was asked the same 17 interview questions in the exact order. The prepared questions enabled in-depth questioning of participants to allow them to explain their experiences about the central phenomenon. The primary phenomenon was that detention assessments focus on diverting low-risk groups from being involved in the Fulton County Department of Juvenile Justice. Using detention assessments as a decision-making tool may lack consideration of internal and external risk factors associated with an increased risk to reoffend amongst African American youth in Fulton County, Georgia.

Moreover, of the 15 interviews held over Zoom, eight participants were at home, and I was in my home office, four were in their work office, and I was in a single room work office, and three were in their vehicles, and I was in my home office. Each interview appropriated 45 minutes to an hour and was audio recorded. Utilizing Zoom and audio recording capabilities allowed observation of the participants' nature while still taking note of their answers.

An analyst, certified by the International Association of Law Enforcement Intelligence Analysts, was hired to transcribe each interview one by one verbatim, using Microsoft Word Document that was saved under the participants' pen names on a flash drive. Once the transcriber returned a completed transcription of an interview, a paper

copy of the transcript was provided to the participant to make changes, clarifications, and additional commentary to the discussion.

Afterward, NVivo 12 software was utilized to organize coded data based on concepts, events, examples, themes, names, and places relevant to the study. The software allowed the capabilities of collecting and understanding data using descriptive coding to summarize answers into a word or noun that resembled the response topic. In compliance with Walden's IRB policy, files of this study are saved on a flash drive and stored in a combination safe. The files will be secured for up to 5 years after data collection. Five years after the study has ended, the flash drive will be destroyed, audio recordings and NVivo files will be deleted, and all paper documents will be shredded.

Data Analysis

In this study, I exercised the hermeneutics phenomenology fundamentals and methodological values, as well as Colaizzi's (1978) data analysis method. The objectivist hermeneutic circle consists of the focus of the experience in part and whole. The alethic hermeneutic circle, pre-understanding, allowed descriptive and interpretive phenomenology to investigate and interpret lived experiences of research participants. In connection with Colaizzi's (1978) phenomenological method of data analysis, the participants' descriptions implied meaning to this research.

Colaizzi's (1978) method is on finding, understanding, describing, and illustrating the participants' experiences. The development of this research utilized the implementation of the seven stages of data analysis grouped from Colaizzi (1978). These seven stages include:

- Making sense of transcribed interviews by reading and rereading them,
- Identify and pull-out phrases or sentences that pertain to the investigated phenomenon,
- Form interpretations from statements of similar meaning,
- Group the formulated meanings into themes,
- Provide an exhausting description of all themes that emerged,
- Describe the fundamental structure of the central phenomenon through summary, and
- Ensure the credibility of the data (Applebaum et al., 2018).

In allowing participants to describe their experiences related to the phenomenon through interviews, the analytical approach of Colaizzi (1978) enabled isolation of the thematic statements. By identifying recurring themes in the data, Colaizzi's (1978) method of data analysis allows a clear and logical process of exploring the experiences, and the hermeneutic circle enables studying the context of the interviews in partial to the human existence in the world of the complex policymaking environment as a whole.

After having the transcriber transcribe the interviews and validation by participants, I reread all the interviews while listening to the audio recordings to ensure the interviews were accurately transcribed. From there, I was able to take field notes on my presumption list as I continuously read and reread the interview answers in their whole context to immerse myself, as the researcher, to begin the first four steps in Colaizzi's (1978) data analysis process while applying the hermeneutic circle method throughout each interview.

In the reading of transcripts line by line, markers were made of the reoccurring themes, keywords, and other in-depth details. From there, answers are categorized using the codes of words that described the data. In moving inductively from coded units to more significant representations of themes, I began to exhaust descriptions of all the themes that emerged through interpreting the data. Utilizing Tables F1 through F9 (see Appendix B), I noted initial emerging themes that surfaced from the data collected in partial through interpretation of the interviews individually and their respective sub-themes. Nine themes emerged: detention assessment, risk factors, Fulton County, unity, recidivism/reoffending, the justice system, funding, social service programs, and changes.

Rereading the categorized data in Tables F1 through F9, I was able to draw out seven sub-themes: positive impact of the detention assessment, negative impact of the detention assessment, positive and negative impact of the detention assessment, impressionable minds, support system, treatment needs/punishment, and escalation. A third review of the contents in Tables F1 through F9 was made to refine the labeling of the themes to ensure components of the participants' responses are grouped appropriately. Using these tables as a reference, I referred to the answered interview questions with the listed themes and meanings in mind to examine my comprehensive understanding and interpretation of the participants' lived experiences. Through this fifth step of the Colaizzi's (1978) method, I could reflect on my presumptions list and notate changes in the notes of my preconceptions based on my existence within this entity.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Studying personal ramifications is prone to questioning trustworthiness through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Qualitative evidence derives from human experiences, experiences, and emotions, as Choy (2014) outlined. Dixon - Woods et al. (2004) and Lincoln et al. (2005) stressed aspects of methodology and rigor of interpretation of results. A criterion for evaluating clarity and appropriateness was created by Dixon-Woods et al. (2004), and Lincoln et al. (2005) confirmed that research logistics, established as processes and results, are transparent and can be systematically replicated (Leung, 2015).

Credibility

I achieved credibility through respondent validation of the interviews as each participant provided relevant knowledge of the research topic. After each interview, I reviewed the audio recordings to make written notes of detailed themes that surfaced. The verbatim transcribed interviews received from the transcriptionist enabled me to read each line for line with clarity. I forwarded each participant's individual transcribed interviews for their feedback and clarification. Taking these steps in member checking helped to accurately account for responses in which the participants all corresponded that there were no corrections or additional feedback to be made.

Transferability

Trochim (2020) clarified that transferability reflects generalization. This explanation confirmed that other researchers could transfer the results to different settings, contexts, or groups. In this study, each participant was described thoroughly. I

concentrated on contextual descriptions in observation and interpretation to report the results of social meaning from the interviews. The participants' occupations, duties, and characteristics and the content of their responses established transferability. Using a purposeful sampling of juvenile justice professionals from different departments within the Fulton County juvenile justice system lessened the risk of systematic bias while expanding validity.

Dependability

Dependability in qualitative research allows for confirmability and transferability. Trochim (2020) describes confirmability as how other researchers can confirm results. Other researchers can repeat this study to ensure validity by checking and rechecking data throughout the study. This process began with overlooking any notions of bias in my interpretations by having interviewees validate transcribed interviews. Rechecking consisted of reviewing recordings and transcripts of interviews to ensure the participants' recorded content was precise and then utilizing the NVivo 12 to organize commonalities found in interviews.

Confirmability

As important as research must be dependable, research must be confirmable to the extent that other researchers can repeat the study and that the findings are consistent. I instituted evidence of confirmability through the methods of adhering to reflexivity and detailed documentation of changes and advancements in the study by taking notes of my preconceptions. Utilizing the NVivo 12 tools of coding coupled with documented notes, interpretations are derived from responses of experiences from the participants. As I

continued to update the changes of my presumptions as the study pursued, I remained on course and cast aside the interpreter's bias.

Results

Each participant was asked the same 17 questions that focused on their experiences of aspects of juvenile behaviors, utilization of detention assessment instruments on juveniles, and the impact it has on recidivism in Fulton County. The participants are represented as P1 through P15. The results are displayed through the surfacing themes that emerged from their views of the interview questions. Table 2 provides a summary review of the surfacing themes from the interview questions. Tables F1 through F9 provides a detailed review of the emerging themes from the correlating interview questions.

Table 2*Surfacing Themes from Interview Questions*

Theme	Description of Theme
Detention assessment	Implementation of the DAI in the juvenile justice system was to reduce incarceration rates of juveniles and focus on rehabilitation.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive impact of detention assessment 	Sub-theme 1. Sub-theme of detention assessment.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negative impact of detention assessment 	Sub-theme 2. Sub-theme of detention assessment.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive and negative impact 	Sub-theme 3. Sub-theme of detention assessment.
Risk factors	Internal and external risk factors that impact recidivism.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impressionable minds 	Sub-theme 4. Sub-theme of risk factors.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support system 	Sub-theme 5. Sub-theme of risk factors.
Fulton County	The conditions and demographics of communities or neighborhoods in Fulton County contributes to the risk of recidivism.
Unity	The way coalitions in the juvenile justice system function collaboratively.
Recidivism/Reoffending	Recidivism is defined as behaviors reverting to crime after releasement of treatment or custody.
Treatment needs/Punishment	Sub-theme 6. Sub-theme of recidivism/reoffending.
Justice system	African American juveniles are over-represented in the juvenile justice system but underrepresented in lenient programs.
Funding	The contribution of funding is a major aspect to financial support to function.
Social service programs	Social service programs are geared towards aiding and support to juveniles.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Escalation 	Sub-theme 7. Sub-theme of social service programs.
Changes	Changes in Fulton County's juvenile justice system functions, including adding social service programs, to provide better methods to reduce recidivism.

Theme: Detention Assessment

The 1998 DOJ's investigation of several DJJ facilities led to the utilization of detention assessments on every juvenile arrested. The purpose was to reduce incarceration rates of low-risk juveniles and focus on rehabilitation. The implementation of the DAI was to decrease overcrowding of the detention centers, enhance the minimal standards for classification, and answer to the number of children in custody for reasons of not acquiring a stable home environment (DOJ, 2015). The Fulton County Juvenile Court (2017) explained that using the DAI allowed adjudicatory detainment decisions based on combined experiences of intake officers, the police, and prosecutors.

One of the recommendations from the Special Council was to reduce recidivism with the use of decision-making instruments. The angle was to divert low-risk groups from unnecessary placement and make better supervision decisions for treatment needs to reduce recidivism targeting the high-risk groups (Skeem et al., 2017). From the participants' responses, interview questions that implied a theme of the detention assessment. Three sub-themes surfaced:

- positive impact of the detention assessment,
- negative impact of the detention assessment, and
- positive and negative impacts of the detention assessment.

Sub-theme 1: Positive Impact of the Detention Assessment

According to Holman and Zeidenburg (2013), a small number of juveniles may be rehabilitated when placed in a secured detention facility. However, such actions do not deter the majority of juveniles. Three participants found that the impact of the DAI was

positive. P2 stated, “The DAI is a tool that promotes the opportunity for rehabilitation.”

In the same fashion, P7 replied:

I feel that the point system is a great tool. I think it is an eye-opener. I think the point system is good. I don't think every child should be in jail for making a bad mistake, but if it's a bigger mistake, of course, you know we have to take them to jail.

These responses correlated with two of the five areas of concern in the DJJ facilities that needed necessary changes. The first area focused on the large portion of low-risk groups detained in the youth facilities. The second area was that low-risk felons held a large number of the detained youth (GSUL, 2014).

Moreover, another recommendation of the Special Council targeted the development of evidence-based programs and community supervision (GSUL, 2014). P11's response touched on the concept of social service programs being a part of the DAI decisions. P11 expounded, “The DAI gives facilities that provide help to work with children who have the potential to change their lives.” The National Research Council (2013) found that well-designed community programs to target recidivism factors and their reduction can improve juveniles' welfare rather than placing them in an institution. The three participants exhibited agreeable conceptions of the key concept DAI as the literature elaborated on the DAI's existence in the juvenile justice system to resolve violations of juveniles' rights.

The participants discussed their knowledge and perspectives of the detention assessment's impact since its implementation in the procedures of the juvenile justice

system. They believe the DAI positively impacted juveniles' risk of reoffending, giving youths a second chance to change before developing a documented criminal background.

Sub-theme 2: Negative Impact of the Detention Assessment

On the other hand, nine participants felt there was a negative impact: the courts gave no punishment for the crimes committed. According to GDJJ (2018) youth that score as a low-risk offenders, intake officers are not required to place them in a detention facility. Custody is transferred to a parent, and the child is released from law enforcement to go home. P1 explained, "Kids know what they are doing, they know how many points they have, and they know how far they can push that envelope." P12 implied, "They know how to work the system. They know if they are going to get taken into custody or if they're not and kind of how to navigate that. Almost probably better than we [police] do." P4 stated, "The DAI has showed a negative effect because there is no attached treatment plan, and kids are sent back to the same unsupportive environments."

In the same sense as P4's response, P3 stated, "The points are based off of crimes that are committed, but I don't think that's enough. There's more that should be done to assess the individuals." In terms of the key concept risk levels, the research literature addressed how Thomas (2013) explained the six items assessed in the DAI: The most severe offenses, other current crimes, pending crimes, pass adjudication, use history of runaways, escapes, failure to appear, and their current legal or supervision status. P8 implied, "Using a point system to measure risk to reoffend is not always accurate." P5 replied, "When children are sent home to their parents because they have not made enough points to face consequences, they gain a sense of being invisible to the law."

Thomas (2013) explained that assessing the six items of the DAI allows the DJJ to identify youth who need to be placed in a detention facility, to direct resources to protect the public, and detain more high-risk juveniles than low-risk juveniles. P9 found that “The DAI is pointless because it is assumed to be a one-size fits all solution.” P14 stated:

I think we’re destined to keep repeating the same foul. If there is no consequence, no matter how many points there are. Anything short of seriously injuring or killing someone, I don’t believe that the point system helps in that aspect because there’s no consequence before their crimes have escalated.

P10 and P15 had similar responses. P10 stated, “So, on that end, it was not a deterrent because I felt that it encourages the behavior more. The thought was, ‘Well they’re just going to let me go anyway.’” P15 discussed, “When there are minimal punishments because they are low-risk offenders, juveniles will view their actions as not so bad.”

The participants found a negative impact that diminishes the focus on rehabilitation because treatment programs are not mandated conditions for juveniles categorized as low-risk offenders. P6 expressed that low-risk juveniles do not adhere to a punishment. Being placed in a treatment program can help deter them from criminal activity.

Sub-theme 3: Positive and Negative Impacts of the Detention Assessment

Thomas (2013) discussed that the critical component of the DAI was the ability to measure youth by using risk levels as the GDJJ (2018) explained that the goal of implementing the DAI was to reduce inappropriate detention by categorizing youth between low, moderate, and high risk. Two participants felt there was a positive and

negative impact of the detention of assessment. P6 stated, “The DAI may be valuable if it’s the first time ever being apprehended, but it is not as valuable for a juvenile who continues to participate in criminal activity.” P13 explained:

On the one hand, it’s great a young person can actually get out because they’re not holding up the justice system. They might’ve made a mistake as a first-time offender, and now they learned a lesson. Then there are those who take advantage of the opportunity.

Skeem et al. (2017) addressed that DAIs are prediction-oriented instruments that assess risk and are formed to assess the youth’s risk to reoffend.

Theme: Risk Factors

Gonzales et al. (2018) discussed crime due to external and internal risk factors contributing to reoffending. These risk factors included criminal gang activity, family structure, and school involvement. Clarke’s (2017) study uncovered corresponding risk factors of peers, family criminal and mental health history, environment, truancy, substance abuse, and parent bond. Through the interview responses, the surfacing theme of risk factors arose. Two sub-themes that surfaced are impressionable minds and support systems.

As the literature review explains, past studies have focused on risk reduction by addressing social risk factors. Baglivio et al. (2017) expanded the explanation of reducing childhood exposure to crime to minimize recidivism, and Skeem et al. (2017) insisted on changes to assessment tools to provide comprehensive reduction interventions. P9’s response was similar to the recommendations of these studies as P9 implied, “Focusing

on the needs of the child individually is an essential consideration for treatment and behavior change.” Both studies complemented a focus on targeting specific treatments and correspondence with juveniles’ personal needs (ter Beek et al., 2018). P1 insisted, “The juvenile justice system should implement actions that incorporate the juveniles’ needs instead of having one solution for all situations.” P3 added, “It [DAI] may have been a solution in the past, but crime is different now. Juveniles are different now.”

Gonzales et al. (2018) addressed interpersonal relationships influencing the risk of recidivism, as recidivism is a key concept throughout the literature review discussing the effects of social bonds. P15 stated:

I feel that it kind of makes juveniles continue to make the same bad decisions because no one is trying to prevent them from escalating from low-risk to higher-profile offenders. If there is no concentration on why they offended or trying to find the basis for what’s going on, of course, the arrest rates are going to skyrocket.

P4 commented, “If they don’t get treatment, nothing is going to change.” P12 shared, “Placing most of the focus on rehabilitation and not much on corrective measures adds to disproportionately high arrest rates amongst African-American juveniles in Fulton County, Georgia.” Wylie and Rufino’s (2018) study touched on this aspect, concluding that youth could be rehabilitated when accommodated with a diversion program matching their risk level.

In this fashion, low-risk offenders can be placed in intervention programs instead of being placed in a detention facility. P6 asserted, “With no punishment or placement in

a program, juveniles are able to go back to the environment where they came from and recommit crime.” P7 remarked, “If we’re not doing anything to help them when they get out of detention or police custody and just give them a slap on the wrist, that may push them to want to do crime even more.”

Sub-theme 4: Impressionable Minds

Nine participants used the phrase “impressionable minds” to discuss the impact on the risk of reoffending amongst juveniles. P2 advised that minors compare themselves with other juveniles and pull more towards those with a more favored status. P10 found that youth in middle and high school years are prone to the type of support system associated with their current state of living. P15 informed, “Juveniles are young and impressionable and are very likely to participate in activities that will gain popularity and respect amongst their peers.” Revisiting Baglivio et al.’s (2017) study, a child’s exposure to crime contributes to recidivism P1 imparted:

Rap is consumed by the dope game right now. Dope money is funneling, and dope boys have become smarter. But to these young impressionable minds or these young individuals on the low end of the totem pole, this is what they see. “I want to be that.” And so, to be “that,” they have to affiliate with “that.”

P14 advised, “Juveniles tend to be what they are around like most people. So, they are their environment or who they hang around.” Hay et al. (2016) concluded in their study that reoffending facets such as prior offenses, school history, and relationships with nonfamily peers and adults indicated the most predictive recidivism factors. P11 expressed, “Depending on the individuals they encounter; the engagement will influence

the child's mind. Children must communicate with role models and peers with positive attributes to provide them." P13 stated:

And honestly, sometimes they didn't want to do it [deviant act], but because of the environment, just so they can be safe, they would have to succumb to peer pressure. In school, they would have to claim a particular set [group within a gang], or they couldn't wear clothes that were less than because they will be talked about; they would be ridiculed.

In addition, other participants initiated corresponding responses. P3 replied, "So, whether it's their friends or their family, they're influenced by what's going on around them." P6 commented:

When children are by themselves, they tend not to participate in criminal activity, but when they are with friends, they feed off one another and act out. "They recruit other children to join them who share the likeness of making money from their criminal acts.

P7 wheeled, "When the streets portray the best lifestyle of getting money and looking cool, the kids want to show that image of themselves in front of their peers and put on a persona that they don't really hold."

These responses ensue evidence of juveniles adapting to internal and external aspects that minors connect with individuals fitting their goals and lifestyles of what they know life to be at that moment. In connection, Dishion et al. (1999) pointed out that there are unexpected consequences attached to the gathering of children with similar risk

factors as this may increase negative attitudes, antisocial behavior, attachment to antisocial peers, and association with deviancy.

Sub-theme 5: Support Systems

All the participants advised social bonds have a significant role. Their responses correlated with the idea that whether the social bond is negative or positive, juveniles can connect with others, fitting their goals and lifestyles in their current state. Six participants referred to support systems impacting the risk of reoffending amongst juveniles. P4 condemned:

I think one of the issues, in my personal opinion, is kids are having kids at a young age. So, I really feel like they don't have the necessary support system.

They don't know any better because their parents had them at a young age.

P5 addressed, "Younger males without a father present in the home form groups and sometimes join gangs forming a bond that they will do anything to retain, keep their status up inside, and strengthen it." Clarke (2017) addressed children raised in environments with a lacking support system, where parents indulge in criminal activity, tend to convert to the same patterns.

Family structure is vital in juvenile recidivism as P8's response sheds light on deviant norms, and P12 expressed the importance of home structure. P8 explained, "When juveniles have unhealthy social bonds, such as friends that represent deviant norms, they find themselves constantly in trouble with the law." P12 related, "You know, if there's a juvenile who's committing crimes, who doesn't have a structure at home or any family life or any quote-on-quote support systems, I think it's going to be

very hard for that juvenile to not reoffend.” Huschek and Bijleveld (2015) protested that a minor’s behavior is connected to parents as these occurrences are an intergenerational continuity of behavior that promotes relationships with others involved in deviant behavior. P9 stated:

Yeah, so the thing that I ran into a lot is that a lot of the kids didn’t have, and they wanted to fit in. So, with that, they would join these gangs. And the gangs would guarantee them new shoes, new clothes, and other kinds of stuff. But they would have to be – they would have to join in the gang. Children turn to such groups to feel the emotional connection and belonging they do not get at home.

The participants inclined those characters of a positive support system included the community, school staff, peers, and family. The participants’ ideals correspond to Clarke’s (2017) findings that positive relationships with community members and parents can reduce recidivism. P10 advised:

Having a positive support system in friends rubs off on a child just as a negative support system. If you have friends who are about that life [participating in crime] and you’re interested in about that life, then I think you would be encouraged to go down that road. That’s a huge impact, as well, especially with our middle school to high school students.

Theme: Fulton County

During the Fulton County Government 2017 Environmental Scan, the main focuses were population, economy, public health, public safety, and technology. The factors of Fulton County’s conditions and demographics are internal and external reasons

why the County surpasses other counties in GA in murder, robbery, and larceny crimes. These factors correlated to the key concept of Fulton County and DMC. The surrounding effects of the environment and usage of the DAI reshape how multiple actors of the juvenile justice system influence differential aspects that hinder the positive impact the DAI may have on juveniles. As addressed by the Fulton County Juvenile Court (2017), “Georgia’s Detention Assessment Instrument was developed to address and mitigate disproportionate minority contact by providing an objective, uniform and risk-based assessment for making pre-adjudicatory detention decisions.”

Regarding differential treatment and opportunity, treatment opportunities for low-risk groups, and the reason for DMC requirements, the participants contributed that the conditions, demographics, and the juvenile justice system in Fulton County as impacting factors throughout their responses. The theme of Fulton County surfaced from the participants’ interview responses. P13 discussed the structure of many African American communities in Fulton County:

One thing about certain communities is that they are considered the hood. When you live in the hood, it’s not really the hood. It’s a neighborhood you take out the neighbor; all that’s left is the hood. In such communities, the make-up adds to the attraction of crime. When you don’t have adequate churches or mess around and have liquor store, gun store, liquor store, gun store, those take up a community over community centers or over parks. Having such businesses draws in crime which requires police to conduct directive patrols. From the presence of officers

in specific areas builds on the perspective that the area is overpoliced, and more police encounters are made.

P14 added, “Resources are based on the community and those representing the community. Based on what the neighborhood looks like, the options may not be the same.” P13 and P14’s responses depicted the type of businesses and funding projects targeted in such communities that influence crime.

P7 advised, “Fulton County is predominantly a Black County, so nine times out of ten, you are going to run into a Black offender more than you do a White offender.” P4 explained why policing practices might seem to target patrolling in specific communities more frequently than others. P4 stated, “The community that police are in acquire more attention for the safety of those who don’t participate in criminal activity but have to live near the trap homes, areas where there is a drive-by shooting because of gang retaliation, and burglaries from their own neighbors.”

In addition, the participants addressed treatment opportunities and concerns based on the conditions and opportunities of Fulton County. P6 expounded, “Looking at per arrest compared to the general population; it does not accurately reflect, which is why there are disproportionately high arrest rates amongst African American juveniles in Fulton County.” P8 explained, “There are programs in Fulton County, but they are not being used nor publicized by those who run the program.” P9 commented, “Communities in Fulton County grow within. Whether in poverty or wealth and kids continue with what their parents are doing and what their environment is doing.”

Differential treatment and opportunity are essential considerations when striving for better living conditions in Fulton County. Fulton County Juvenile Court (2017) illustrated the fallacy of fervent prosecutors who magnify juvenile criminal activity in urban areas to be the cause of disintegrating communities. In actuality, the devastation of disadvantaged communities is the cause of unequal conditions by major societal corps. P10 exposed, “Social economics plays a significant role in differential treatment and opportunity in Fulton County. Disparities are developed when families lack the means to afford or retain the help they need, even when affording their lawyer versus being provided one through the courts.

P13 exemplified:

Social economic backgrounds are important factors of how a child is treated and their opportunities for treatment and change. Children without good backgrounds, role models, or initiation in treatment programs will eventually face a judge again. These minors will be those who fall by the wayside because they are not granted the same opportunistic resources as those with money and parents that hold a wealthy social status.

P15 answered, “Having fewer means of receiving the help provided in Fulton County adds to the aggressive behavior of youths in impoverished neighborhoods.”

The DSG (2014) study noted that there is a decline in working-aged groups and an increase in unemployment rates of 25-34-year-olds. These findings are influential contributions to crime and disproportionate minority contact. P2 emphasized the importance of removing minors from adverse environments in the communities within

the County and providing help with employment, housing, education, and other necessities.

P2 explained:

If someone was incarcerated and you're trying to make them do better, you cannot put them back in the same situation they came out of. They are going to go back to the same habits. This theory leads back to socialization and how they socialize. There are different unwritten rules in some areas than in others. The goal is to remove minors from their environment and help them gain employment, housing, education, and other necessities.

McCarthy, Schiraldi, and Shark (2016) explained that juveniles released from detention facilities are typically from communities where they have already experienced hardships. From this, they need to acquire a positive and prosocial perception of themselves to feel like they fit into society. The risk of reoffending is prevalent when sent back into their communities without proper follow-up interventions or assistance to help them become acclimated with a purpose. P6 reflected on the perception of Fulton County's current state:

Looking at Fulton County, Atlanta specifically, the demographics are highly made up of the African American community. Those of low-income households generally commit high-risk crimes. There is a significant difference in education rates and income. These findings are the opposite outside of Atlanta.

Moreover, P9 expressed the continuance of poverty in a community. P9 noted that children continue the lifestyle of their parents and in the communities in which they live.

Eight participants pointed out that the population of Fulton County is majority African American; addressing the City of Atlanta, most participants advised there are many low-income housing communities. Gonzales et al. (2018) discussed that African American males commit more juvenile offenses based on differential behavior, which is attributed to the concept that children living in impoverished neighborhoods are more likely to be aggressive, act out, and drop out of high school.

Theme: Unity

In 1998, the DOJ used a Special counsel collaborated with ten consultants within juvenile justice under the titles of administration, psychiatry, medicine, psychology, and education to resolve the issue in secure juvenile facilities. Since 2006, many stakeholders in the juvenile justice system have partnered to make the DAI race-neutral and bias-free. These partnerships included the Designated State Agency, Georgia Council of Juvenile Court Judges, Georgia Bureau of Investigations, Judicial Council of Georgia, Administrative Office of the Courts, Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice, and the Georgia Public Defender Council (DOJ, 2015).

Fayoyin (2015) explains that strategic networking is valuable in children and youth development. Throughout the participants' responses, the theme of unity surfaced.

P1 explained that treatment centers function better when partnerships exist with probation officers, judges, and school principals. P11 advised success happens when different groups in the community unite and work together to give the proper help needed to make families in need prosper. P11 stated:

The child's home life quality includes a sufficient amount of food, attention given to the child, the opportunity for positive guidance, and economics. It takes different groups in the community to function together in ways to give the proper help needed to make these families flourish.

P10 expressed the lack of unity among the various diversions in the juvenile justice system:

Because I may not know that a student has had some offense, there would be no way for me to know unless maybe there was a meeting between the courts, school, and social worker, or I was notified of it. So, I wouldn't know if the points situation was a deterrent for them or if it wasn't.

P3 and P5 explained a lack of knowledge on what occurs in the juvenile court systems and other police department jurisdictions to advise on how treatment and opportunities differ for children across Georgia. P6 stated, "At times, it seems like probation is not on the same page with the courts, and the courts are not on the same page as law enforcement, as things are done as each platform seems fit." P1 expressed that low-risks groups are not being sent to treatment programs; however, P1 continued that it begins with advocates visiting the courts and speaking with judges or probation officers to recommend their services. P13 stated, "However, the biggest thing is communication within the juvenile justice system to assign children in need of help with the appropriate resource available. Communication will alleviate the majority of the problems in Fulton County."

Regarding DMC concerns, in Chapter 2 of this study, DMC was defined as the disproportionate number of minority youth compared to their overall share of the youth population. Results show over-representation in the juvenile justice system but underrepresented in lenient alternatives (Gonzales et al., 2018). Past DMC efforts in 1988 focused on differences in confinement and amending the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974. In correlation with these findings, P10 explained:

Because there's no collaboration and communication between resources and especially schools with particular youth and on the legal side or on the law enforcement side that there's a huge lack there, and I think it would be a more positive impact if we could fix that gap. Then the no follow-up limits success.

P10's response resembles how past concerns are still relevant and why confinement was no longer the main focal point of the juvenile's arrest process after years of research leading to the assessments and insertions of risk assessing tools. Instead, contact became the new principal point. It focused on all decision points in which racial disparities can occur at juvenile arrest stages other than just detention or placement. Recent studies determined that this perspective's scope was founded on differential offending and treatment factors (DSG, 2014). In 2008, Piquero furthered DMC's research and noted that discretion in decision-making heightened racial bias as juvenile minorities were confined in more significant numbers for all offenses.

In the production of other treatment alternatives, P2 advised, "Advertising to build relationships with schools, police departments, community members, and other agencies surrounding the youths' lives will create a union of support." P3 continued with:

So, I mean, if there was some type of uniformity within the juvenile system, this would ensure that these low-risk offenders are being followed up on or they are not on the same path. There needs to be more communication and unity within. So, none of them get lost in the mix and are provided another opportunity to commit a low-risk crime or aggressive crime.

The Sentencing Project's policy brief on disproportionate minority contact explained that specific crimes, such as drug offenses, occur more frequently in compressed urban areas (Rovner, 2014). The results differ from suburban areas because such crimes occur near public housing complexes, schools, or parks. Areas with segregated housing can impact DMC turnouts (Rovner, 2014). These factors increase the risk of excessive contact between law enforcement and juveniles. Moreover, differential treatment introduces the concept of differential selection under the aspects of how decisions are made in the juvenile justice system.

According to the literature reviewed, two theories fall under differential treatment, bias theory and racial or symbolic threat theory (DSG, 2014). Differential selection refers to how the justice decision-making actions are structured. Stereotypes factor into punishments when decision-makers use their emotions developed from perceptions of minority youth. Leiber and Fox (2005) found that such judgments present a societal view of African American youth as threatening middle-class standards and public safety.

Theme: Recidivism

Recidivism is behaviors reverting to crime after releasement of treatment or custody. In Georgia, the social issue of African American juveniles having the highest

arrest rate correlates to juvenile recidivism continuing to be high amongst African American juveniles in Fulton County. As discussed in Chapter 2, Gonzales et al. (2018) addressed that crime results from interpersonal relationships that influence reoffending and other factors such as poverty, criminal gang activity, family structure, and school involvement. In this study, recidivism can be interchanged with reoffending. Recidivism, also referred to as reoffending, was a surfacing theme within the participants' responses.

The participants expressed their beliefs about how social risk factors contribute to the risk of recidivism. P1 advised, "Outlets as in social media, the media, and peers are conflicting attributes of recidivism." P12 explained that the absence of a positive family support system increases the risk of reoffending. P6 found that this factor is also associated with bonds within the community. P8 stated, "My experience with juveniles and social bonds has revealed that offending behavior is caused by weakened social bonds with law-abiding individuals in their communities." P11 added:

If children see crime, then they will know about crime. You only see what you know. This can increase the risk of reoffending as it does for children who have already been in trouble and don't receive help to prevent them from reoffending.

A study by Wylie and Rufino (2018) concludes that minors can be rehabilitated when placed in a diversion program matching their risk level. Youth who commit less serious offenses would not be incarcerated. The concept of risk levels constitutes minors who need to be placed in a detention facility or sent home to their parents. P7 stressed the juvenile justice system faces the challenges of the risk of juveniles reoffending when

diverted from treatment or placement. Another focus was on the risk of recidivism and the possibility of escalation in crime participation and levels.

Participants explained that juveniles reoffend because they lack specific needs, and punishments are lenient. P3 expressed, “I don’t want to leave it at low-risk crimes because eventually, they’re going to keep taking bigger risks until the punishment meets the crime.” P4 responded, “Some of them start off like breaking into cars. Next, you know, instead of breaking into cars, they’re carjacking. After carjacking, it’s arm robbery and even moving up to murder. Before you know it, it’s the worst of the worst crimes.”

According to Vincent et al. (2016) advised that low-risk juveniles should not be viewed as having “no risk” because circumstances may influence the risk of continuance in criminal activity. P11 provided some reasons juveniles reoffend, “However, I believe they recommit crime because they have to go home, return to their environment, and return to the reality they live in once we close for the day.” P4 expounded, “I believe they would commit crimes because no real punishment is happening. So, juveniles think it’s a game when they’re not disciplined in no form or fashion.”

Juvenile court intake officers utilize DAIs to guide all the detention decisions, as one DAI is to be completed per detention incident (GDJJ, 2018). P8 explained that the procedures of the DAI allow juveniles of low risk to be placed in their parents’ custody without immediate consequences. Five participants discussed the impact of the DAI on the disproportionately high crime rates among African American juveniles in Fulton County, Georgia, and recidivism. P8 explained:

The detention assessment instrument's procedures entail a score of ten or above suggests a juvenile to be detained. Most of the time, the juveniles are moderate to high-risk offenders, primarily if the minor used a firearm during the commission of the crime. However, the procedures of the detention assessment allow juveniles of low risk to be released to their parents without immediate consequences. So, they can recommit crimes.

P10 distinguished, "I can speak from when I used to be at the truancy center, the impact was an escalation in criminal behavior on their part, and a decrease in school attendance and graduation." P12's response continued this notion that an increase in arrest rates will continue because the DAI does not mandate treatment conditions for low-risk juveniles. P15 responded, "Low-level offenses eventually upgrade to high levels if the juveniles do not receive proper rehabilitation and punishments."

Sub-theme 6: Treatment Needs/Punishment

Regarding the concerns behind low-risk groups who continue to commit low-risk crimes, most participants discussed the need for treatment not being applied. Treatment is viewed as intervention and punishment. P1 explained, "Food and shelter are examples of the basic things that drive juveniles to recommit crime." P5 stated, "They're committing these low-risk crimes, so the idea is just 'I'm invisible.' They will continue criminal acts, and eventually, they will get to the higher ones." P12 advised, "The concern behind no real punishment is that low-risk groups will eventually graduate in the level of corruption and frequency in crime they commit."

Within the literature review, the use of assessments by juvenile justice professionals was to help guide them in the selection of the best form of treatment to place juvenile offenders to rehabilitate (DOJ, 2015). Previous studies did not address the limitations of assessments when diverting low-risk groups from treatment or placement. The risk of recidivism must be the interest of the topic for all tools and programs of treatment to target specific needs (Hay et al., 2016; ter Beek et al., 2018).

Skeem et al. (2017) found that the benefits behind using risk assessment tools help personnel make better decisions regarding supervision and treatment needs. P13 stated, “After juveniles commit the same crimes repeatedly and gain knowledge that there is no proper punishment, they will eventually escalate to more severe crimes.” P14 responded, “There are no severe repercussions as the minors go home to their parents and sleep in their beds.” Without proper treatment or punishment, the participants discussed that there is a risk of recidivism. P4 explained, “There is a risk of juveniles being released and committing the same crimes.” As P11 expressed, “The challenge is keeping juveniles out of trouble.”

Detention assessments focus on diverting low-risk youth offenders due to overpopulations of treatment programs, secured facilities, and cases petitioned to the Department of Juvenile Justice within Fulton County (DOJ, 2015). P9 stated:

The ones [juveniles] I’ve dealt with, they already knew that there was a system [point system]. Some of them already knew that the crimes that they committed wasn’t even high enough for them to even go in [detention center], and then some of them didn’t even care.”

Low-risk groups placed back into the community are surrounded by external and interpersonal factors influencing criminal activity.

P7 explained, “For some kids, police come in contact with, and they have a bad criminal history, and the current crime they committed is serious, and they don’t take them into custody, this allows them to back on the street.” As discussed in Chapter 2, Wylie and Rufino (2018) advised that studying additional concepts of juveniles’ social lives can reflect risk factors leading to recidivism, such as poverty that causes a disadvantage to intervention opportunities and criminal gang activity continues to influence reoffending.

Theme: Justice System

Gonzales et al. (2018) determined that African American juveniles were over-represented in the juvenile justice system but underrepresented in lenient programs. These findings are depicted in Hauer and Vaida’s (2012) study that addressed the proportion of juvenile minorities in facilities that exceeded their proportion in the general population. The surfacing theme of the justice system arose from the interview responses. The use of the detention assessment instrument affects all decisions or contact points of the juvenile justice system. When each unit within Fulton County’s juvenile justice system understands the DAI process, it can help distinguish better risk levels for placement, intervention, or other diversion alternatives that positively impact recidivism risks.

P1’s explanation discussed how the public might perceive that the court system could be seen as a system made for African Americans to fail. P1 responded:

They [juveniles] are told when to move, stand on this side of the wall, and walk on the side. You go get your tray and sit on this side of the table. The system has to break that up because this school is not going to be any different from this jail to that kid. Basically, the juvenile will be comfortable in a detention center or jail. Now, if you go to Alpharetta, it's almost like a food court in there. Kids moving different ways. They're not told to wait and walk in this line, and you can't leave here until this time. That is systematically programming these kids in certain behaviors in some way.

P1 expressed how the juvenile courts may advise these conditions are set in place because minors get out of control, but the youth in Fulton County are not as different as those in other counties. P9 replied that juveniles are attached with a criminal record when thrown in jail for minor offenses. These comments reflect the literature under the key concept of coalitions and DMC, in which factors of differential offending and differential treatment are prevalent matters of decision-making (DSG, 2014). Piquero (2008) noted that discretion in decision-making heightened racial bias as juvenile minorities were confined in more significant numbers for all offenses.

The key concept of Fulton County and DMC reflected the weaknesses of Fulton County, in which economic concerns are affordable housing production in communities. The lack of a workforce and behavioral health services for uninsured populations were linked to these communities throughout the county. P1 illustrated the similarities between the school systems in Fulton County and the jail. P1 described:

Programmatically, as a society, if you look at what kids go through in school, they are in a room all day. When they go in the cafeteria, they have to walk in a line to get their trays. Now you equate that to you equate that to the behaviors in jail.

P1's perspective is that children are systematically programmed to behave aggressively in reaction to the government's repression. P11 expounded that the courts and the community play a role in labeling the child a criminal, which leads the child to believe they cannot change. Sanchez and Lee (2015) displayed that White and other juveniles were less likely to reoffend than Black youth compared to socioeconomic status, geographic location of residence, and living situations.

It is explained that the Fulton County Juvenile Court is independent, which means that the judiciary court is safeguarded from any influence from other branches of government. Judges are empowered with the discretion to make decisions based on their tenure, training, and compensation. Development Services Group's (2014) study on DMC developed the framework of differential treatment referred to as differential selection or systems factors. The platform behind this concept's scope is how the justice decision-making actions are structured, in which minority youth face disadvantages. P8 stated, "There is a significant difference in treatment and opportunity for African American juveniles."

Leiber and Fox (2005) found that such judgments consider African American youth a threat to middle-class standards and public safety. P13 stated:

Sometimes the courts don't want to waste time on that specific young person because they feel like you know, it's just a waste. Unfortunately, I've been

outside of the courtroom where a juvenile case was being heard, and after the case was done, they couldn't really do too much. I heard the prosecutor say to me, "I can't wait until this kid turns 17, so we can charge him as an adult."

Two theories that fall under differential treatment are bias theory and racial or symbolic threat theory (DSG, 2014). Stereotypes factor into punishments when decision-makers use their emotions developed from experiences with minority youth. Sanchez and Lee (2017) indicated that measuring juvenile recidivism was complex, and there is no uniform national recidivism rate for juveniles. P6 stated, "The way the juvenile justice system rates arrest may be the problem when viewed in terms of statistics by the public."

Theme: Funding

Funding is an essential source of change, progression, and movement. During the 1998 DOJ study, the coalition found that the juvenile justice system accumulated much of the taxpayers' funding but did not show enough investors' returns (GSUL, 2014). The surfacing theme of funding, in the participant's responses, is described as the contribution of monies that provides financial support to function. In discussing the theme changes, P4 suggested more government funding in low-income communities, as funding is significant to providing the necessary resources.

Families, social service programs, and state governments need financial support to function. The participants expressed concerns about a lack of funds. P9 stated, "Many parents complain that they do not have money. This affects juveniles when they have to attend court and cannot afford the bond." P14 suggested, "Instead of juveniles hanging out, stealing things with friends, different activities that can be put on need to be well

funded to give them something else to do and see then what goes on in their normal environment.” P14 added, “So, it depended upon how hands-on that diversion program is and how much funding they have. It’s one thing to say you have a program, but if you don’t have the money to back it up, and it does take money and resources.”

According to the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention 2020 fiscal report, the Office of Justice Programs (OJP) provided Georgia with \$1,710,051 in formula grants. The OJP allocated these funds based on 2017 juvenile data population under 17. P1 stated, “Funding is always the key cause.” P7 explained that poverty causes suffering to many of the communities in Fulton County. Investors should sanction investments in resources such as job placement, community, and afterschool programs to deter children from “going out in the streets.” “Most individuals who work in social service are nonprofit organizations, and sometimes these organizations have time limits,” advised P7.

P2 explained, “Funding is always a challenge for wanting to do more. Wanting to do more means taking the youth on trips and showing them different meanings of life and success. And having adequate staff members to address the youths’ needs inquires funding.” Within the OJJDP report, states are required to report performance measures of the grants received. Through clear performance goals, coalitions are to function in correspondence to adapt successful turnarounds for the funded activities (OJJDP, 2020). P1 discussed time restrictions on nonprofit organizations that need funding to continue, which P2 suggested, “If investors do not see a turnaround for their investments in

detention centers, spend the money on us. Send us the low-risk individuals. We can treat and provide for them. We, too, have connections and partnerships.”

Another aspect of funding is understanding its importance in the dynamics of policymaking. P14’s response insinuated that the policy that reflects the allocation of grant funding to communities based on the youth population has to incorporate aspects of how communities are formed in specific Fulton County areas. P14 described:

So, it’s a poor neighborhood or random neighborhood, their resources may not be the same as opposed to something on a different side of town where they have more funding, working-class people, and access to different outlets or afterschool programs like on the other side of town, but it’s not the other side of town.

Appropriate funding decisions must consider the characteristics that form in such neighborhoods that reflect individuals having to fight to survive. P4 stated:

It doesn’t seem like kids are involved in activities like this anymore. It’s like they go home, go outside, and experience someone getting shot. They see people laid out dead on the ground. They see the dope boys getting money. They want to be like the dope boys- getting money, shoes, and clothes.

P6 pointed out, “The right funding can help, but it takes the right people.” This concept comes from knowledge of specific programs obtaining numerous amounts of money through investments, grants, and other funding but not making a difference in guiding juveniles from participating in a crime. P14 stressed that diversion programs that are genuinely engaged in the juveniles’ lives need funding, in which how much resources

they can provide depends on how much money they possess. A checks and balances system must be attached, involving a solid coalition of actors.

Theme: Social Services

Social service programs are supportive systems that target building individuals and providing services for human needs. In this study, the theme of social service programs surfaced: treatment facilities, sports programs, DFCS, supervision programs, and community centers providing services to children and families. Many of the participants responded that the changes to the DJJ when implementing the DAI in their procedures allowed for the opportunity of social service programs to unite with juveniles in need. P1 implied that treatment centers could show children different realities outside their environments.

Moreover, P11 advised that nonprofit organizations contain the benefits of offering GED opportunities, family services, counseling, and other educational and job-related benefits. In the study of Chapman et al. (2013), the continuum of care and exploration of probation and residential dispositions resulted in a high rate of prevention in an escalation of criminal activity in youth. The key concept of risk levels is distinguished within discussions on social service programs. Three participants mentioned the value of behavioral assessments for placing children in treatment programs that match their needs. P1 and P2 explained that the treatment centers receive low-risk juveniles, in which they use behavioral evaluations to assess the totality of a child's life.

These procedures help reveal the juvenile's needs so that the social service programs can pair them with a life coach and a therapist. When juveniles are diverted

from custody, low-risk level offenders are generally welcomed into community centers. P2's response reflected substances of the continuum of care as depicted in the study of Chapman et al. (2013). P1 explained that treatment centers know what the juveniles need because they function within the juvenile justice system, receiving the opportunity to observe many different juveniles and their problem areas. P11 described youths could receive a second chance, but if treatment needs are not met, there will be an endless cycle of crime for the child to survive.

Sub-theme 7: Escalation

In response to social service programs, a sub-theme arose, escalation. P10 stated that when a juvenile's needs are not met and considered low risk, they will more than likely "escalate into some behaviors that would be classified as moderate or high-risk." P13 focused their perspective on the idea that children acting out is a sign for help, but when support is not provided, the chances of juveniles escalating in crime may occur. Community-based supervision is an effective alternative, in the reduction of escalation in crime, to residential services that could be more restrictive and costly (Chapman et al., 2013).

This response goes back to the literature review in which groups labeled low risk do not imply "no risk" as internal and external factors may contribute to the involvement in delinquent behavior (Vincent et al., 2016). The participants' responses displayed the ideal of implementing changes in Georgia's detention assessment instrument to consider the risk of low-risk groups who reoffend more frequently than high-risk groups (GDJJ,

2014). P8 advised, “The DAI has allowed courts to look at treatment programs for children as adults do, but they have to utilize these programs.” P10 stated:

When you’re not providing the need, whatever the driving force is for them to be considered moderate or high risk, if that need isn’t met at the time that they are low risk, then they are most likely to start to escalate into some behaviors that would be classified as moderate or high risk.

In the study of juveniles in Connecticut, it was found that juvenile residential programs depicted two types of programs, specialized commitment programs and Connecticut juvenile training schools, specifically for high-risk juveniles (Chapman et al., 2013). This is an example of how high-risk juveniles receive more aimed intervention measures than low-risk youth offenders. P15 expressed, “There are not a significant amount of treatment opportunities low-risk groups can obtain when diverted from the DJJ besides probation.”

When assessments are made to target high-risk groups, who enter the system and divert low-risk groups from being committed, there are variances in effective treatment (Baird et al., 2013). However, P11 advised, “Yes, we can give a second chance to the juveniles, but if we are not helping them make the second chance worth wild, it will be a cycle of crime to survive in the world these children live in.” P1 informed, “The DAI allowed centers like this to take part in these kids’ lives. Playing a central role in exposing them to the different experiences outside what their neighborhoods are going through.”

In addition, Skeem et al. (2017) discussed that risk assessments, like the DAI, are necessary for the juvenile justice system when surveying each youth's re-arrest and intervention needs to achieve appropriate preventative interventions. However, the main point of the participants was to divert children to these programs to help change their life. P4 explained, "It's not so much the fact of putting them in custody but try something with the kids we come in contact with. Don't just send them home with no punishment or diversion. They need services. They need help." P5 insisted, "If there is no treatment attached to the conditions of being released to their parents, then juveniles are going to be arrested again and again."

P11 explained their services involving a juvenile:

During my assessments, we analyze the home structure, friendships, the child's thinking process, and many other factors that draw out primary causes of negative behavior from their backgrounds. Identifying these factors displays children of low, moderate, and high risk of offending. The evaluation helps determine where to divert the children, whether it be this program, counseling, or a more intense program with remedial practices that include follow-up visits with the child and the family.

P12 suggested, "The elements of home life, support systems, living conditions, school attendance, and academics are significant factors that the DAI should incorporate in their decisions of placement or treatment for a juvenile." P1 advised that their treatment center had a low recidivism rate, focusing on socialization and building a connection with the children. A low recidivism rate allows treatment centers to continue serving minors and

receiving funding from stakeholders and investors. Baglivio et al. (2017) described that reducing childhood experience exposure is necessary for reducing recidivism. P4 stated:

It would help if you had more opportunities for change and more activities so these kids could get out of the streets. I think, especially in Metro-Atlanta, they don't have anywhere to go. It's like school, home, school, home. So, pretty much they go outside and see a lot of things like shooting and killings and things of that nature. I feel like if they had more activities and things like that to be involved in, they wouldn't take the route that they take towards crime.

Theme: Changes

The OJJDP's DMC manual on technical assistance provided multiple explanations for DMC, which touched on the differential opportunity for prevention and treatment and differential behavior (DSG, 2014). Most participants recommend implementations that the juvenile justice system could make to how it functions in terms of adding social service programs to conditional offers of placement for low-risk juveniles, ideas on funding allocations, and practices of coalitions within the juvenile justice system. The surfacing theme from these responses was changes. The theme of changes is about implementations made to the way Fulton County's juvenile justice system functions, including adding social service programs to provide better methods to reduce recidivism.

Wylie and Rufino (2018) advised that juveniles can be rehabilitated when placed in a diversion program matching their risk level. P11 insisted, "The juvenile justice system should implement changes like using behavioral specialists when referring

children to treatment or placement to attend to low-risk groups and treatment concerns.”

In turn, P7 proposed implementing follow-ups for low-risk juveniles, where a social worker checks in on them after an offense. Wylie and Rufino (2018) found that analysis of additional concepts in a juvenile’s social life can uncover leading risk factors of recidivism that effects intervention opportunities.

On another note, P4 suggested the government apply more funding to low-income neighborhoods. Parents lack the economic means to show their children something other than the crime surrounding their communities. Differential opportunity is a relatable topic of the key concept of coalitions and DMC. Differential opportunities for prevention and treatment consider accessibility, in which treatment and prevention resources are not accessible amongst the community for some as it is for others. As P4 expounded, the government can put more money into secure community centers. P1 expounded:

Being innovative in treatment goes back to the importance of building relationships with other agencies in connection with juvenile services. Coalitions pertain to having professional partnerships that will bring attention to the treatment plans of the center. More referrals and promotions allow other agencies to understand what occurs from one decision point to another in processing a juvenile. These actions build more of a community that cares. When kids see that there are individuals within the system that cares, we can’t go wrong.

About the practices of coalitions within the juvenile justice system, the advocacy coalition theory’s focal point is the actors who assemble to support the beliefs behind policy issues and solutions to change. P1 stated, “We have to begin with community-

based planning. Involving the community refers to being present in neighborhood meetings and knowing what the youth face every day.” P4, P6, and P8 advised on meetings between all involved in the juvenile justice system to discuss trends in crime, treatment opportunities, and possibilities of a task force from all departments involved in the juvenile justice system. P1 advised, “You can’t use the same techniques you used ten years ago and expect for it to work. You have to be willing to develop new themes, new policies, and new programs.” P6 suggested, “Changes in documentation can help treatment programs accurately build programs to adhere to treatment concerns of low-risk offenders.” P2 advised, “What is one of the old-school tactics that still work today is engaging in community events, like community centers and programs, that bring people together. Many people don’t know their neighbors, which means they don’t know the children.”

Summary

This study explored the experiences of juvenile justice personnel on the effects of detention assessments on low-risk youth offenders in Fulton County, GA. The participants included two program managers, five police officers, one district attorney, four detectives, one school social worker, one behavioral specialist, and one case manager. I managed comprehensive, virtual face-to-face interviews guided by open-ended questions. Using these instrumentations enabled understanding viewpoints and explaining experiences working with low-risk juvenile offenders. The primary research question that was a platform for this study was: What are the Fulton County juvenile justice personnel’s experiences with the current assessment’s process and impact on recidivism

risks with African American youth? I utilized the hermeneutic circle and the seven steps of Colaizzi's (1978) data analysis in this study. To conduct these steps, I operated audio recordings, transcripts, and NVivo 12 to obtain the outcome of nine primary surfacing themes and seven sub-themes. I explored and discussed the results by analyzing the data gathered from the participants' responses to the interview questions.

In this chapter, I provided the findings acquired from investigating a sample of 15 juvenile justice professionals within the Fulton County juvenile justice system through data collection and data analysis. I displayed trustworthiness through a detailed explanation of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. In Chapter 5, I deliberated on the interpretation of the research's findings, limitations, recommendations for further research, and suggestions for social change.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Juvenile recidivism has been a long-standing issue in the field of juvenile justice. In Georgia, matters of disproportionately high crime rates have shown to exist mainly amongst African American juveniles in Fulton County. Despite this situation, previous studies have not discussed how assessments, that measure youths between diversion and secure detention or placement in a social service program, impact the recidivism risk of low-risk youth offenders. The studies have not addressed the limitations of assessments when diverting low-risk groups from treatment or placement.

This qualitative study aimed to advance the understanding of the essence of the lived experiences of Fulton County juvenile justice system personnel in utilizing the detention assessment tool as a means to rehabilitate juvenile offenders. From there, further understanding of the detention assessment's positive and negative effects on low-risk youth offenders and its impact on recidivism risks of African American juveniles are explored.

Fifteen participants have shared their experiences of the positive and negative effects on low-risk youth offenders and its impact on recidivism risks of African American juveniles. Using a phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of the personnel, they are able to describe their experiences in using the detention assessment, its effects on assessing juveniles, the bias behind the instrument, and if the tool was being used as intended. I used prewritten interview questions to explore this central phenomenon and obtain a deeper understanding of the personal, organizational, and policy aspects that have shaped the participants' experiences.

Using Colaizzi's (1978) method and the hermeneutic circle, I identified emerging themes specific to the usage, effects of the detention assessment, and surrounding factors associated with recidivism in Fulton County from the participants' expressed experiences. The responses from the participants' introduced implementations that can influence positive social and policy changes to enhance the detention assessment and reduce the risk to recidivate.

The director of community initiatives assisted in obtaining voluntary participants. The participants criteria required that they held employment positions of intake officers, attorneys, judges, detectives, social services, or intervention program professionals. As noted, the criteria were later changed to police officers, attorneys, detectives, social services professionals, and intervention program professionals. The participants of this study held employment in nonprofit and public organizations within Fulton County. I confirmed these requirements were met and that all potential participants provided a service or treatment to juvenile delinquents based on their occupational titles and duties before conducting the interviews. Data collection was accomplished through prewritten interview questions, NVivo 12, and Zoom video conferencing communications and audio recordings of 15 participants.

The fundamental research question that helped create the basis of this study was: What are the Fulton County juvenile justice personnel's experiences with the current assessment's process and impact on recidivism risks with African American youth? Data analysis of the 15 interviews identified nine primary surfacing themes: detention assessments, risk factors, Fulton County, unity, recidivism/reoffending, the justice

system, funding, social service programs, and changes. Seven sub-themes emerged: positive impact of the detention assessment, negative impact of the detention assessment, positive and negative impacts of the detention assessment, impressionable minds, support system, treatment needs/punishment, and escalation.

Interpretation of the Findings

The objective of this qualitative study was to advance the understanding of how detention assessments affect low-risk youth offenders and impact recidivism risks of African American juveniles in Fulton County, Georgia. I discussed the results concerning the research question: What are the Fulton County juvenile justice personnel's experiences with the current assessment's process and its impact on recidivism risks of African American youth? The research was aided by the collected and analyzed evidence derived from interviews of juvenile justice personnel. My interpretations of the findings are included in this section. The nine primary surfacing themes and seven sub-themes have been grouped based on commonalities of the concluding results in the next section. Table 3 displays the grouped themes and the reason for grouping them.

Table 3*Grouped Primary Themes*

Themes	Reason Themes are Grouped
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Detention Assessment • Risk Factors • Recidivism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In discussion of each theme, the relevance of grouping them together is based on the circumstances of how each theme is an influence on the other. • Based on the concluded interpretation of there being no mandated punishment or treatment measures to combat internal and external risk factors, youth offenders categorized by the DAI as low risk are more susceptible to recidivating. • The DAI was developed to consider risk factors of the juveniles as determining attributes in labeling youth high, moderate, and low risk. However, the risk considered in the criteria do not include internal and external risk within the juvenile's environment that increase the risk of recidivism.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fulton County • Unity • Justice System 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I concluded that the findings extended the knowledge of how Fulton County personnel perceive the impact of the DAI's process on African American youth's risk of recidivating, in terms of how environmental conditions contribute to how decisions are made in the justice system, how juveniles respond to day-to-day living and choices, and how communities and school systems function. • These themes touch on the strength and weaknesses of Fulton County's as attributing factors of economic concerns such as affordable housing production in communities that lack a workforce and issue where the government cannot provide needed behavioral health services to uninsured populations throughout cities. • The participants express the need for unit amongst stakeholders, investors, departments, and other government entities to come together to work on such problems as this issue reflects the conditions of the justice system.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding • Social Services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I concluded that the aspects of differential treatment, opportunity, bias theory, and racial or symbolic threat approach extend the knowledge of how decision-making attributes to funding are connected to the risk of recidivism of African American youth in Fulton County. The funding allocated to states is to support the state, community endeavors, and tribal considerations that target the deterrence of delinquency and the promotion of the safety and well-being of youth (OJJDP, 2020). • Funding is an essential source of change, progression, and movement. The participants found that families, social service programs, and state governments need financial support to function.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The theme Change remained ungrouped as many of the participants reflected ideas for positive advances towards the juvenile's social life aspects, communication, and procedural changes that would affect policy.

Detention Assessments, Risk Factors, and Recidivism

As proposed by the 1998 DOJ investigation, the process of the DAI has decreased overcrowding of the detention centers, introduced standards for the classification of risk levels, and created a pathway for an interventional measure to be incorporated in treatment and punishment decisions (DOJ, 2015). Three participants reported positive attributes to the purpose of the DAI, ten discussed the negative considerations, and two explained the positive and negative impacts. The participants reported that the positive qualities of the DAI are that the courts can put rehabilitation efforts in place to assist children and youth are given a second chance to make better decisions. The interview data identified that most participants found that categorizing youth as low-risk offenders allow for diversion from placement in a facility or mandatory intervention, which neglects treatment concerns that can prevent or reduce recidivism risk.

I concluded that because there are no mandated punishment or treatment measures to combat internal and external risk factors, youth offenders categorized by the DAI as low risk are more susceptible to recidivating. Targeting the appropriate treatment need of a juvenile can reduce the risk of reoffending. For example, two meta-analyses reported the effectiveness of school-based intervention efforts in decreasing delinquent and aggressive behavior as it was effective when targeting minors who were at risk of reoffending for the specific behaviors that were treated (Wilson et al., 2002; Wilson et al., 2003). Latessa and Lowenkamp (2004) stressed the concept of excluding low-risk offenders from youth correctional facilities. They promoted placing low-risk juveniles in treatment and supervision intervention programs specific to their needs.

Based on the participants' experiences, knowledge, and observations, they reported that the criteria of the DAI do not elude an assessment that addresses treatment needs. Judges or defense and prosecution attorneys are held responsible for determining treatment concerns without knowledge from a complete evaluation of the juvenile's needs. Participants in this research reported that treatment needs are unmet because there is no treatment plan to gear the juveniles away from participating in crime, and low-risk juveniles do not adhere to punishment. For instance, being placed in a treatment program can help deter youth from criminal activity. Baglivio et al. (2017) expanded the explanation of reducing childhood exposure to crime to minimize recidivism. Wylie and Rufino's (2018) study touched on this aspect, concluding that youth could be rehabilitated when accommodated with a diversion program matching their risk level.

Clarke (2017) discussed risk factors of peers, family criminal and mental health history, environment, truancy, substance abuse, and parent bond. Gonzales et al. (2018) discussed criminal gang activity, family structure, and school involvement. All participants advised social bonds are an impactful consideration in reducing recidivism. Nine of the participants distinguished youth as having impressionable minds. Six participants discussed their concerns about a support system. The perception of those participants displayed the belief that minors connect with individuals fitting their goals and lifestyles of what they know life to be at that moment.

Meldrum et al. (2013) explained that youth who obtain the attention of peers who respond favorably to delinquent behavior would continue to participate in crime. Clarke (2017) advised that youth pull towards their peers when there is a lack of a positive

family support system, and the juvenile has the need to belong. All participants advised that social bonds have a significant role in the risk of juveniles continuing in criminal activity and escalating the level of crimes they commit.

The theme of detention assessment surfaced as participants discussed the implementation of the DAI in the juvenile justice system was to reduce incarceration rates and focus on the rehabilitation of juveniles. The theme of risk factors represents internal and external factors that impact recidivism, which are behaviors reverting to crime after releasement of treatment or custody. Based on the Fulton County juvenile justice personnel's experiences with the current assessment's process and impact on recidivism risks of African American youth, I found that the DAI's impact has broadened the opportunity for directing low-risk youth offenders to treatment programs.

Still, the criteria do not include an evaluation of treatment concerns that can identify risk factors to combat in efforts to reduce the risk of reoffending. Criminal involvement prevention efforts can be affected when there is a closer bond to deviant peers and a disconnect from prosocial individuals (Wooditch et al., 2014). Clarke (2017) and Rufino (2018) expand the knowledge that further analysis of additional concepts of a juvenile discovers other risk factors that influence recidivism to apply treatment interventions.

Fulton County, Unity, and Justice System

In Georgia, the problem deriving from the social issue of African American juveniles continuing to have the highest arrest rate is that juvenile recidivism continues to be high amongst African American juveniles in Fulton County. The participants reported

that the demographics of Fulton County, having a majority African American populace, is a contributing factor of DMC. As well, Fulton County surpassing other counties in GA on crimes of murder, robbery, and larceny. Differential treatment and opportunity are essential considerations when striving for better living conditions in Fulton County. Fulton County Juvenile Court (2017) illustrated the fallacy of fervent prosecutors who magnify juvenile criminal activity in urban areas to be the cause of disintegrating communities. In actuality, the devastation of disadvantaged communities is the cause of unequal conditions by major societal corps. Most participants advised that the conditions, demographics, and the way the juvenile justice system functions in Fulton County are impacting factors contributing to recidivism.

I concluded that the findings extended the knowledge of how Fulton County personnel perceive the impact of the DAI's process on African American youth's risk of recidivating, in terms of how environmental conditions contribute to how decisions are made in the justice system, how juveniles respond to day-to-day living and choices, and how communities and school systems function. Exposure to positive and negative circumstances influences the juvenile's view of what life should be and how one is to operate to live. Regarding differential treatment and offending, decision-makers may hold biased perceptions of youths coming from low-income areas as stereotypes can impact treatment decisions. Bridges and Steen (1998) explained that how professionals perceive and identify clients can lead to inequalities in treatment. Previous literature on DMC expressed the geographic location of a court as an important factor in determining decisions (Dejong & Jackson, 1998; Sanchez & Lee, 2015).

Five participants discussed the environmental conditions of Fulton County being a consideration of the effects of differential treatment and opportunity on African American juveniles in Fulton County. The Sentencing Project's policy brief on disproportionate minority contact explained that specific crimes, such as drug offenses, occur more frequently in compressed urban areas (Rovner, 2014). Piquero (2008) furthered DMC's research and noted that discretion in decision-making heightened racial bias as juvenile minorities is confined in more significant numbers for all offenses. These aspects touched on the conditions of differential offending and treatment. The National Research Council (2013) incorporated risk factors into why minority youth of severely compromised community environments display adverse behaviors. DSG (2014) suggested such exposure to violence and other criminal activity contributes to problems in social relations, involvement in school, and prosocial behavior (NRS, 2013).

The theme of Fulton County reflected the conditions and demographics of Fulton County communities, contributing to the recidivism risk. Unity as a theme incorporated how coalitions in the juvenile justice system function and the influence of different aspects that affect the positive impact DAIs may have on juveniles. I found that when every actor in the juvenile justice system can share their perspectives based on expert experience and knowledge, it can significantly change the DAI and its functions. As participants express their concerns about juveniles being systematically programmed, where the school is no different than the functions of how a detention facility operates, coalitions may implement policymaking in the form of environmental management. This interpretation is consistent with Fagan's (1996) study reported factors of age,

geographical location of courts, community structural features, prior records, and procedural differences as primary components of disproportionate confinement. Gonzales et al. (2018) determined that African American juveniles were over-represented in the juvenile justice system but were underrepresented in lenient programs.

Bridges and Steen (1998) and Leiber and Fox (2005) addressed those actors of the juvenile justice system make decisions subjectively based on their emotions developed from perceptions of minority youth, in which these stereotypes factor into punishments. Such judgments consider African American youth a threat to middle-class standards and public safety, which contributes to the factors leading to delinquency, harping on internal characteristics and external risk factors. Coalitions must integrate deep core beliefs with policy beliefs to collaborate on effective policy change. One cannot subdue the other.

Funding and Social Services

Funding is an essential source of change, progression, and movement. The participants found that families, social service programs, and state governments need financial support to function. One of the participants expressed how poverty afflicts many of the communities in Fulton County, specifically Atlanta. Gonzales et al. (2018) delineated that, in 2015, 80% of African American youth in Atlanta lived in communities facing poverty compared to 6% of White youths. As secondary aspects to consider, the 1998 DOJ coalition's study discovered that the juvenile justice system amassed much of the taxpayers' funding in which there was an insufficient return for stakeholders who invested (GSUL, 2014).

I concluded that the aspects of differential treatment, opportunity, bias theory, and racial or symbolic threat approach extend the knowledge of how decision-making attributes to funding are connected to the risk of recidivism of African American youth in Fulton County. The funding allocated to states is to support the state, community endeavors, and tribal considerations that target the deterrence of delinquency and the promotion of the safety and well-being of youth (OJJDP, 2020). With its high population density, Fulton County faces the effects of such concepts to impact minority youth. Differential opportunities for prevention and treatment consider accessibility, in which treatment and prevention resources are not accessible amongst the community for some as it is for others (DSG, 2014).

The participants collaboratively found that putting more money into intervention programs and community centers can help reserve adequate staffing and provide capital for better program development. It was found that children living in impoverished neighborhoods are more likely to be aggressive, act out, and drop out of high school (Gonzales et al., 2018). Social service programs are private and nonprivate agencies that also function according to the budget allotted to the program. The theme of social service programs, in this context, are various independent programs or government agencies geared toward aiding and support to juveniles. These programs are a part of the juvenile justice system and correspond to requests for treatment needs, whether placement, intervention, or other diversion alternatives that positively impact recidivism risks (Fulton County Juvenile Court, 2017).

The theme of funding focused on the contribution of financing as a significant aspect of financial support to function. All participants explained the importance of providing youth with outlets away from the crime and violence within their communities. All the internal and external risk factors surrounding the individual juvenile weigh in on their choice to change their lives. I found that having the means to utilize social service programs over detention facilities for low-risk juveniles can combat differential opportunity, which affects prevention and treatment efforts, in which resources are not accessible amongst some communities. This interpretation is consistent with findings in the literature review, as the theory of differential opportunity advises youth from low socioeconomic environments to face fewer opportunities for success which leads them to success by any means (DSG, 2014).

Changes

The findings in this study show that because there are no mandated punishment or treatment measures to combat internal and external risk factors, youth offenders categorized by the DAI as low risk are more susceptible to recidivating. Many of the participants' responses suggested potential changes in Fulton County's juvenile justice system functions. The participants mentioned various ideas for change, including adding social service programs, changes made within the juvenile justice system, and commentary on juvenile justice system coalitions. The essence of policy change is resolving an issue with shared ideas developed from different experiences and other solutions from actors (Weible et al., 2009).

I concluded that furthering such recommended changes can enhance the juvenile's social life concepts. There can be an interference in risk factors that influence aggressive behavior and criminal participation. Removing children from the norms of the surroundings that may increase criminal activity can decrease the risk of reoffending. Imitating the plans of including all actors, informal and formal, in community-based planning can broach different ways to prevent, treat, and serve youth who may be faced with becoming involved in crime. Clarke's (2017) study found that bonds formed with prosocial values, people, and institutions helps youth develop positive rational thinking when faced with the pressures of engaging in criminal acts (Hirschi, 1969).

All participants focused on a more unified environment incorporating communication gearing towards procedural implementations. Those participants of social service programs initiated the idea of including behavioral assessments in decisions made on all low-risk youth offenders. This aspect stems from community-based planning. Another solution was to mandate an intervention program for the diversion decisions of low-risk youth offenders. Targeting the juvenile's needs can help guide the child away from reoffending and engage them in more positive atmospheres. The risk of recidivism must be the interest of the topic for all tools and programs of treatment to target specific needs (Hay et al., 2016; ter Beek et al. , 2018).

The theme changes promoted the consideration of placing more government funds in low-income communities and involving the residents, stakeholders, and those who work in the community. I found that by including the evaluation of a behavioral assessment, evaluations can assess more of an approach to environmental risk factors,

and the juvenile justice system can assign appropriate intervention efforts. Lastly, I believe the DAI criteria alone do not satisfy the labeling of a juvenile as a low-risk offender. This interpretation corresponds to the literature review, in which the risk of recidivism is higher when positive support systems are absent in unstructured settings (Clarke, 2017).

Theoretical Foundation

The theoretical frameworks used in this interpretive study was Heideggerian phenomenology and Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith's theory of advocacy coalition.

Hermeneutic Circle

Hermeneutical phenomenology focuses on the interpretation of existence. In this, the participants' lived experiences as Fulton County juvenile justice system personnel using the detention assessment tool to rehabilitate juvenile offenders can be understood. From there, I explored the use of the DAI as a decision-making instrument through shared expressions of the DAI's positive and negative effects on low-risk youth offenders and its impact on recidivism risks of African American juveniles. This topic is not addressed in previous literature; however, it is an important contribution to examining the participants' lived experiences that may warrant future research. Three participants reported positive attributes to the purpose of the DAI, ten discussed the negative considerations, and two explained the positive and negative impacts. The circularity of understanding is implied within this philosophy, in that, new ideas and meaning develops renewed interpretation of preconceptions of existing and historical conditions (George, 2020).

Moreover, circularity is demonstrated in the hermeneutical circle. The process examines the described experiences to find meaning of the lived experiences, allowing for understanding the expression in semantic forms (George, 2020, Hurley, 2021). From the participants' subjective realities about their occupational roles at multiple decision points of apprehension of a youth offender and time working within the Fulton County juvenile justice system, the phenomenon of the study was explored.

Positive Impact of the Detention Assessment

Holman and Zeidenburg (2013) discussed that a small number of juveniles may be rehabilitated when placed in a secured detention facility. P2 stated, "The DAI is a tool that promotes the opportunity for rehabilitation." P7 believed the point system is useful in deflecting youth from detention who may have made a bad choice to participate in crime. These participants' responses stem from the occupational duties that require them to service juveniles of low, moderate, and high risk of recidivism. They understand the circumstances surrounding the juveniles' lives that influence criminal behavior, which leaves them with no other options.

In correlation with these experiences, the GSUL (2014) study discussed that the first area of change in detention facilities was focused on the large portion of low-risk groups detained in the youth facilities. The second area was that low-risk felons held a large number of the detained youth. P11 expounded, "The DAI gives facilities that provide help to work with children who have the potential to change their lives." Working day in and day out with juveniles, P11's experience addressed using evidence-based programs and community supervision, such as social service programs to improve

the juveniles' welfare instead of placing them in an institution. As explained in the literature review, The National Research Council (2013) found that well-designed community programs to target recidivism factors and their reduction can improve juveniles' welfare rather than placing them in an institution.

Negative Impact of the Detention Assessment

On the other hand, ten participants expressed the DAI as having a negative impact, in which the courts gave no punishment to low-risk juveniles for the crimes committed. P1 explained, "Kids know what they are doing, they know how many points they have, and they know how far they can push that envelope." P12 implied, "They know how to work the system. They know if they are going to get taken into custody or if they're not and kind of how to navigate that. Almost probably better than we [police] do." P4 stated, "The DAI has showed a negative effect because there is no attached treatment plan, and kids are sent back to the same unsupportive environments."

According to GDJJ (2018) youth that score as a low-risk offenders, intake officers are not required to place them in a detention facility. The participants found a negative impact that diminishes the focus on rehabilitation because treatment programs are not mandated conditions for juveniles categorized as low-risk offenders. P9 found that "The DAI is pointless because it is assumed to be a one-size fits all solution." P14, P10, and P15, all expressed from their experience that juveniles recidivate when there are no consequences, in that, there is no deterrence to deflect the youth from further criminal involvement. The participants reflect on incidents when they have to repeatedly engage the same juvenile and go through the same process of handling the child when in their

custody. Their reality dignifies a repeated cycle of seeing that there must be some form of corrective measures to steer the youth away from making the same bad choices.

Positive and Negative Impacts of the Detention of Assessment

Lastly, two participants described their interpretations of the positive and negative impacts of the detention assessment. As the literature and data collection discussed, Thomas (2013) advised that the critical component of the DAI was the ability to measure youth by using risk levels. The GDJJ (2018) explained that the goal of implementing the DAI was to reduce inappropriate detention by categorizing youth between low, moderate, and high risk. P6 stated, “The DAI may be valuable if it’s the first time being apprehended, but it is not as valuable for a juvenile who continues to participate in criminal activity.” P13 explained that the opportunity for a juvenile who made a mistake to seek help instead of being placed in a detention center is beneficial for them to change. But some juveniles take advantage of the point system and continue to commit low-risk crimes that do not generate enough points to face more serious consequences.

The participants’ responses expressed their experiences as their existence provides understanding of the sub-political world of the juvenile justice system, in which Heidegger (1962) refers to this concept as the essence of Dasein. The Fulton County Juvenile Court (2017) explained that using the DAI allowed adjudicatory detainment decisions based on combined experiences of intake officers, the police, and prosecutors. The actors in this point of the DAI process do not include intervention personnel. The participants explained that this leaves out treatment concerns, a relevant consideration in the decision-making process. Interactions between diverse groups based on activities,

rules, and institutions within the political system environment, the participants all provided perceptions based on their experiences working with juveniles within the limits of their occupations.

Advocacy Coalition Framework

Coalitions have formed over the years to implement better decision-making when placing juveniles in the justice system. In features of policymaking environments and the policy process, Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith's (1993) theory of ACF is relative to expressing the actors' roles. I used the ACF to explore how stakeholders in the juvenile justice system consume different belief systems. Which have an effect on the impact of the DAI process and the risk of recidivism. These factors affect states, such as Georgia, that face disproportionate minority contact in specific counties and issues of limited resources. Three primary concepts upheld by this framework are the actors, policy learning, and change. As it gears in on the interaction between many groups, it is an actor-centered policy formation theory.

Actors

The ACF exposes interactions between diverse groups based on activities, rules, and institutions within the political system environment. Fayoyin (2015) explains that strategic networking is valuable in children and youth development. The theme of unity focuses on how diverse groups' functioning in the juvenile justice system influence differential aspects that affect the positive impact DAIs may have on juveniles. Throughout the participants' responses, the theme of unity surfaced.

A sufficient actor-centered basis consists of goal-oriented, rational, and understanding stakeholders who push for the public's general welfare. As informal actors in the juvenile justice system, judges, police officers, attorneys, and social service staffs' experiences of juveniles are critical in social change. The main idea for policy change is that an issue can be resolved when shared ideas are developed from different experiences, and other solutions from actors can form (Weible et al., 2009).

Policy Learning

Sabatier (1998) posited that the ACF's primary focus is to push policy actors towards an alliance to center their interest towards the social problem and its solution. Through such formulation, belief systems are formed. This aspect demonstrates the key concept of coalitions and DMC discussed in chapter 2. The participants' responses elaborated on the theme of unity and the importance of communication between different units associated with the juvenile justice system, to effectively combat youth recidivism. ACF depicts policymaking as it occurs in a policy community comprised of actors from different professions, credentials, and organizations. The stakeholders' behaviors depict how successful the process will be, as policy demands from informal actors reflect the effective establishment of formal actors' policies.

The ACF outlines, "Its primary strength is that it focuses on the interactions of these key actors and their beliefs and values about how problems should be solved, and centers on policy change. Further, at the heart of ACF is that 'politics affect policies,'" (Oakley, 2018, p. 4). Regarding DMC concerns, in Chapter 2 of this study, DMC was defined as the disproportionate number of minority youth compared to their overall share

of the youth population. Results show over-representation in the juvenile justice system but underrepresented in lenient alternatives (Gonzales et al., 2018). Past DMC efforts in 1988 focused on differences in confinement and amending the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974.

Judges, police officers, attorneys, and social service staffs' experiences with juveniles are critical in social change. The differential treatment goes beyond racial society; it includes perceptions of poverty trends, differences in educational successes, cultures, and residential stability. The actors' deep core beliefs of individuals living in these conditions guide and constraints policy core beliefs in policy sub-systems. Sotirov and Winkel (2016) imposed cultural ideals connected with the ACF to reduce policy actors' cultural biases. By removing cultural biases from the foundation of cognitive structure, the policy environment can uphold more deliberate cross-cultural associations amongst different advocacy coalitions. Some participants expressed unity and communication in alliances to impact recidivism risk.

The ACF depicts that all actors reach their individual goals when assembled belief systems adapt to shared deep core beliefs, policy core beliefs, and secondary aspects. From that, reducing recidivism involves situating funding in means that complement goals. In this, Secondary elements, such as funding, decision-making, and production of policy goals, are affected by the results of organizations sponsored, as in social service programs.

The actor role and policy learning aspect of ACF assumes that actors have limited cognitive abilities in which the development of a policy acquires multiple sub-systems to

form and collaborate (Chilowore, 2018). The implementation of the DAI allowed for social service programs to accentuate. However, to be more prominent, such programs acquire funding, promotion, and referrals of juveniles to be placed in the programs to attain their services and be a part of policy development and changes to combat recidivism.

Change

Policy-oriented learning and belief change produces policy change, such as the conflict in coalitions, actions after significant events from actors, and crises that follow (Nohrstedt & Weible, 2010). P4, P6, and P8 advised on meetings between all involved in the juvenile justice system to discuss trends in crime, treatment opportunities, and possibilities of a task force from all departments involved in the juvenile justice system. To initiate such implementation, policy brokers would be used to create mediation environments between opposing coalitions that have similar solutions. Adjustments in procedures can be made to produce beneficial changes in governmental programs.

The participants' responses exemplified the importance of the ACF's actor role and policy learning aspects. In efforts to make the DAI policy impactful, the framework describes that a consensus needed for significant policy change is affected by the behavior and beliefs of actors within sub-systems (Chikowore, 2018). The Fulton County Juvenile Court (2017) explained that using the DAI allowed adjudicatory detainment decisions based on combined experiences of intake officers, the police, and prosecutors. The actors in this point of the DAI process do not include intervention personnel, which leaves out treatment concerns, a relevant consideration in the decision-making process.

Chikowore (2018) described informal actors as individuals who bring ideas toward the social problem, are affected by the policies, and ensure that the policies are effective. The process after the DAI evaluation upholds a separation in the governing bodies at different decision points that does not reflect a unified decision-making coalition. Based on the responses from the participants, the impact of the DAI on low-risk offenders' risk to reoffend has been ineffective in Fulton County.

Moreover, as the ACF displays interactions between diverse groups based on activities, rules, and institutions within the political system environment, the participants all provided perceptions based on their experiences working with juveniles within the limits of their occupations. Analysis of policy sub-systems allows for understanding actors' roles amongst geographical boundaries, such as government bodies in various jurisdictions and policy issues (Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith's, 1999). In discussing the actors, and the participants, it is essential to understand their roles as they discussed their point of contact with juveniles before or after the DAI evaluation. The participants, as informal actors, uphold the duty to ensure that policies are effective; however, the DAI has been described as a "one size fits all."

The sub-system actors include participants that are the primary unit of analysis to pursue an understanding of a policy's undertaking (Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1999). The surrounding effects of environmental factors tied in with the usage of the DAI and how multiple actors of the juvenile justice system influence differential aspects that affect the positive impact DAIs may have on juveniles. The ACF explains that actors in sub-

systems are distinguished by a geographical area, an issue, and policy actors (Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1999).

Policy change occurs when there is an adherence to gathering shared ideas developed from different experiences and other solutions from actors. P1's response provided an example of utilizing other stakeholders in the community to plan and strategize, "We have to begin with community-based planning. Involving the community refers to being present in neighborhood meetings and knowing what the youth face every day." This concept involves those who live, work, and invest in the community. In aspects of the ACF, a clear understanding of the social issue can generate the means of policy learning and policy change (Chikowore, 2018).

Coalitions have formed over the years to implement better decision-making when placing juveniles in the justice system; a part of these decisions draws on the need for applying risk factors as an essential assessment criterion for combating reoffending. As these risk factors continue to evolve and sustain, the risk of recidivism is prone to occur. Addressing changes in the DAI process, it is disclosed in the participants' responses that a behavioral assessment given to low-risk juveniles by a mandated intervention program after being released to their parents can reveal the internal and external risk factors that prevent rehabilitation.

Concerning inconsistencies in treatment and opportunity for African American juveniles, advocacy coalitions of diverse actors must congregate to gather differentiating policy beliefs and deep core beliefs to mitigate better policy implementations. These focuses can aim at prevention and treatment plans for low-risk youth offenders who may

potentially become moderate to high-risk offenders. A unity of diverse actors can form a check and balance to avert issues of racial and cultural biases, explained in bias and racial societal theories, in decision-making.

The essence of policy change is resolving an issue with shared ideas developed from different experiences and other solutions from actors (Weible et al., 2009). This current study aimed to perceive Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith's ACF on juvenile justice personnel's roles through their experiences with the current assessment's process with low-risk youth offenders and the impact on recidivism risk amongst African American youth. ACF posits that a consensus needed for significant policy change is affected by actors' behavior and beliefs within sub-systems. Specific Fulton County juvenile justice personnel make up different actor roles pointed out in the ACF, which may have more of an effect on aspects that effect the impact of the DAI process on juvenile offenders and the risk of recidivism.

To conclude, hermeneutics implies that knowledge is developed through lived experiences, as well as considering temporality; inserting the advocacy coalition theory into the setting of the juvenile justice system, the actors learn from the roles they hold within the entity and experiences with changes of the practices within overtime. The interpretations these professionals make from their experiences reflect in their beliefs that contribute to the process of policy learning, and policy change.

Limitations of the Study

This qualitative interpretative study explored the detention assessment's positive and negative effects on low-risk youth offenders and its impact on recidivism risks of

African American juveniles from the lived experiences of the Fulton County juvenile justice personnel. This approach is based on textual information of what individuals interpret from their experiences and what can be gathered. Initially, as discussed in Chapter 1, the requested criteria for participants are intake officers, attorneys, judges, detectives, social services, or intervention program professionals. However, intake officers and judges rejected participation in this study, but I was advised to consider other personnel that works within the Fulton County juvenile justice system.

The personnel considered are police officers, attorneys, detectives, social services professionals, and intervention program professionals. However, interviewing the recommended personnel still provided substantial, informative detail to the central phenomenon of this study. The primary phenomenon was that detention assessments focus on diverting low-risk groups from being involved in the Fulton County Department of Juvenile Justice. Using the detention assessment as a decision-making tool may lack consideration of internal and external risk factors associated with an increased risk to reoffend amongst African American youth in Fulton County, Georgia. This limitation counteracts the study by providing more in-depth experiences and viewpoints of those who administer, and sentence based on the feedback of these evaluations to further this qualitative study.

Criticism of using a qualitative approach is that data results are not objectively verifiable. Choy (2014) discussed that the belief is that the data collected is based on the researcher's interpretation, which can be limited, leaving out critical information. In the aspects of hermeneutics, the researcher remains open-minded to further considerations of

understanding as interpretation is incomplete or provided in part because further possible meanings of the researcher's preconceptions exist as the journey of understanding can go deeper and become richer (George, 2020). Heideggerian phenomenology accepts the researcher's experiences as a means for further interpretation of an entity, holding that a circulatory concept of evolving information is gathered from different human realities.

I used a reflective journal to record research notes throughout the stages of literature review, research design, data collection, and analysis. Using a reflective journal as a research strategy made me aware of my bias and preconceived ideas throughout my research. Being neutral in collecting descriptive responses from participants for each question helped identify common themes and patterns by interpreting the participants' responses. Note-taking on the themes allowed a better understanding of analyzing the data gathered. My ideas that were assumed, not fully understood, or perceived views from my experiences are analyzed as the study continued to develop in Chapter 4. Researchers taking the role of interviewers need to remain open to changes in their views on the experiences of experts in their field of discipline.

As an interpretive phenomenological approach, a qualitative inquiry allowed for retrieving detailed information about the participants' lived experiences. Collecting rich, detailed information satisfied the means of answering the research question: What are the Fulton County juvenile justice personnel's experiences with the current assessment process and its impact on recidivism risks with African American youth? Yauch and Steudel (2003) explained that the open-ended inquiry gives participants more control of the shared context within the data collected. Moreover, the beneficial aspects of

qualitative information are that it supplies soft data, such as impressions, photos, and symbols, whereas hard evidence forms numbers. Another limitation of using a qualitative approach was that it is a very time-consuming data collection process.

I utilized the hermeneutic inquiry design to understand the essence of the lived experiences of Fulton County juvenile justice system personnel in utilizing the detention assessment tool as a means to rehabilitate juvenile offenders. From there, further understanding of the detention assessment's positive and negative effects on low-risk youth offenders and its impact on recidivism risks of African American juveniles are explored. Coupling the hermeneutic circle and Colaizzi's (1978) method, I identified nine surfacing themes and seven sub-themes. Using these research decisions helped address language, nature, and events with meaningful concepts to make understanding possible (Clarke, 2017).

Further research is needed to address the limitations of not being able to interview intake officers and judges who administer the DAI and use the DAI evaluations for detainment and sentencing decisions. Intake officers work more closely with the grading of juveniles on DAI evaluations. Another limitation of this research is that it did not include the lived experiences of the effects of the DAI and its impact on the recidivism risk of low-risk youth offenders and African American juveniles in Fulton County, Georgia. Research including these populations can provide even more in-depth experiences regarding understanding the phenomenon. Findings can then be applied to better-informed policy implementations to advance the DAI procedures and provide treatment opportunities for low-risk offenders.

Recommendations for Further Study

In 1998, the Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice facilities were reported as overcrowded, understaffed, lacked protection for children from harm, had minimal standards of classifications, and had inadequate mental health care (DOJ, 2015). From recommendations brought about from an audit to combat these problem areas, the Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice added the implementation of detention assessment instruments to the procedures of the juvenile justice system. However, as time has passed, those within the field of juvenile justice have found that detention assessments focus on diverting low-risk groups from being involved in the Department of Juvenile Justice. Detention assessments lack treatment consideration at diversion decision points that may impact recidivism risks.

More understanding of low-risk juvenile offenders is needed. Historical literature has addressed risk factors associated with recidivism using prediction and reduction-oriented tools. However, the studies have not explored how detention assessments, used to evaluate an arrested youth to determine the need for detention or not, relate to recidivism in the sub-group of low-risk youth offenders from the standpoint of coalitions within the juvenile justice system. Furthermore, no matter the occupational duties of the research participants in this study, evaluations of a DAI on every juvenile encountered are the ultimate decision-making tool.

Use of the DAI applies risk levels as the overall risk score criteria, based on low, medium, or high risk, to guide intake officers in distinguishing whether to detain or release a juvenile who has been arrested (Thomas, 2013). The fact that this is the overall

decision-making tool, regardless of what levels of apprehension an officer had to go through to place the juvenile in custody or what previous treatment considerations were proposed in the past, suggests that there is a need for organizational awareness. The focus needs to be on the unity of actors involved at all decision points of apprehension of the juvenile justice system when making decisions of placement or treatment of the juveniles they encounter.

The opportunity for low-risk youth offenders to go home after encountering police and being evaluated by the DAI indicates that the juveniles are being placed back into unsupportive environments to encourage positive social change. In addition, the participants found a negative impact that diminishes the focus on rehabilitation because treatment programs are not mandated conditions for juveniles categorized as low-risk offenders. From these findings, more awareness needs to be applied to implementing a required treatment plan through the use of social service programs and a complementing follow-up procedure for the duration of the treatment plan.

Future research and policy development is recommended for the Fulton County juvenile justice system in the areas of updating the detention assessment risk factors criteria from a “one-size fits all” to recognize internal and external risk factors which increase the risk of recidivism that surround the juvenile being evaluated and the use of including all actor of the juvenile justice system in decision making. An exploration of how implementing treatment plans directed by social service programs for low-risk juveniles is warranted since this would present the identification of measuring the DAI’s impact and procedural-based processes together to reduce recidivism risks. Another

appeal for subsequent analysis would be to explore the experiences of intake officers and judges who work more closely with the grading of juveniles on DAI evaluations, as well as the lived experiences of the population of those who were once graded as a low-risk youth offender and their association of living in Fulton County, Georgia.

Finally, examining the lived experiences of other juvenile justice personnel in other counties of Georgia, sharing their experiences of policy and procedural-based successes, challenges, and recommendations for change, can benefit overall policy initiatives. Real-world feedback can be beneficial to future policy and procedural improvement of the DAI usage, recognizing internal and external risk factors in each juvenile's life, the importance of unity amongst all actors or stakeholders involved in the juvenile justice system, and the appropriation of funding towards social programs to assist in the general welfare of the juveniles' lives, rooted in the findings and conclusions of this qualitative phenomenological study.

Implications for Social Change

The results and recommendations of this research, in connection with public policy and administration, show there is needed attention to the current protocol and structure of the detention assessment used as a decision-making tool in Fulton County's juvenile justice system. The issue is that detention assessments focus on diverting low-risk groups from being involved in the Department of Juvenile Justice. Using the detention assessment as a decision-making tool lack considerations of internal and external risk factors as treatment considerations are not included at decision points of diversion, which impact recidivism risks.

Moreover, in terms of policy and procedural changes, refining the DAI evaluation criteria, and adding a mandated behavioral assessment for low-risk youth offenders diverted from placement in a detention facility, positive social change for the general welfare can be implicated. By uniting all criminal justice entities, the community, stakeholders, the families of youth, and the youth in discussions about the policy change and DAI procedures, awareness of Fulton County's conditions can be explored. Therefore, better planning of state funding allocations can be directed to facilities in need, for example, intervention programs, community development, and after-school programs. When listed actors and organizations come together, this can affect the negative internal and external factors that increase the risk of recidivism.

From an empirical standpoint, most participants expressed that the DAI negatively impacts the recidivism risks of African American juveniles in Fulton County, Georgia. This finding indicates a need for policy change. Policymakers need to improve the criteria to include external and internal surrounding risk factors in connection to the juveniles' lives. Amid policy and organizational implementations, juvenile justice advocates such as actors who work in social service programs, local police departments, and other entities in connection with juvenile justice should be included in the discussion of policy changes. Their experiences can help apply logical reasoning to the policy change. This study can prompt social service programs to advocate their services and existence and become more relevant in the dynamics of policymaking as their perspectives depict the atmosphere outside of the courthouse and detention facilities.

In aspects of the weaknesses listed in Chapter 2 of Fulton County's community, such as economic concerns of affordable housing production in communities and the lack of a workforce and behavioral health services for uninsured populations, it was found that children living in impoverished neighborhoods are more likely to be aggressive, act out, and drop out of high school (Gonzales et al., 2018). With these factors in mind, recommendations for best practices would be to remove cultural biases from the foundation of the cognitive structure. Judges, police officers, attorneys, and social service staffs' experiences with juveniles and decisions made by the DAI evaluations are critical in social change. The policy environment can be able to uphold more deliberate cross-cultural associations amongst different advocacy coalitions.

Conclusion

Juvenile recidivism has been a long-standing issue. Nationally arrest rates have declined; however, these reports do not provide meaningful recidivism rates as each state measures recidivism differently. African American juveniles attain the highest arrest rates. Georgia faces disproportionately high crime rates, mainly among African American juveniles in Fulton County. Discrepancies in GDJJ facilities lead to the implementation of the DAI. The juvenile justice system included detention assessments in arrest procedures of juveniles to reduce arrest before referral, focus on criminal history, level of risk and the need for placement in a secured detention facility. Categorizing juveniles through the DAI's evaluations omitted internal and external risk factors surrounding the juvenile's lives.

By incorporating these factors in evaluation practices, the juvenile justice system can counteract such contributing factors of recidivism. Future studies should involve participants who conduct the DAIs and individuals from other counties in Georgia who utilize DAIs in their procedures. I used a hermeneutical phenomenological approach to procure a more comprehensive understanding of the detention assessment instrument's effects on low-risk youth offenders and its impact on recidivism risk among African American youth in Fulton County, Georgia. I explored the personnel's perspectives within the Fulton County juvenile justice system. The present study provided a comprehensive understanding and filled the gap of understanding the use of DAIs on low-risk youth offenders and its impact on recidivism risks for African American juveniles in Fulton County, GA. Indications revealed that the DAI criteria are outdated and need to be changed or complemented by a mandated behavioral assessment to reflect other risk factors that influence recidivism. Differential treatment and opportunity also create disparities in juveniles' ability to change, and the decision-making process of actors contributing to policy change is affected.

The research results showed that implementing the DAI was a favorable benefactor to reducing the number of low-risk youth offenders in youth detention facilities. Overall, to achieve positive social change, this study may aid the juvenile justice field in implementing, adjusting, and refining the DAI evaluation criteria or adding a mandated behavioral assessment for low-risk youth offenders diverted from placement in a detention facility. These assessments can reveal contributing internal and external risk factors associated with an increased risk to reoffend. The continuance

formation of diverse advocacy coalitions can also influence a more effective decision-making process to promote effective policy change.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

Opening Statement:

Thank you for taking the time to participate in my research. This interview will be audiotaped and transcribed. In providing you with a copy of the transcript, you can make any changes, such as clarifications and additional commentary to the interview. Are there any questions? If, at any time, you would like to stop or take a break, please feel free to advise me. May I now begin with the interview?

Foundation Question:

What are the Fulton County juvenile justice personnel's experiences with the current assessment's process and impact on recidivism risks with African American youth?

Interview Questions:

1. What is your occupation, and how long have you worked with juvenile delinquents?
2. When dealing with juveniles, what are your job procedures before a child's care is passed on to the next decision point?
3. From your experience, can you describe the procedures and protocol in place when a juvenile is in your custody?
4. Based on your experience and knowledge of working with juvenile offenders, what role do you think social bonds have on the increasing risk of reoffending?
5. Based on your experience and knowledge with working with juvenile offenders, what role do you think secondary aspects, such as funding and the use of resources, have on impacting the risk of reoffending?
6. What method is used to identify low, moderate, and high-risk offenders before diversion?
7. From your experience working with juveniles, what impact has the DAI had on low-risk groups' recidivism risks?
8. From your experience, can you explain the concern behind low-risk groups who continue to commit low-risk crimes, and why do you believe they recommit crime?

9. What effects do differential treatment and opportunity have on African American juveniles in Fulton County from your experience and knowledge?
10. What limitations does the instrument face when diverting low-risk groups from treatment or placement?
11. With Fulton County being a high-density population, what other treatment opportunities can low-risk groups obtain when diverted from the DJJ?
12. What changes do you think can be made to attend to low-risk groups and treatment concerns?
13. How can all criminal justice platforms connect on better levels to impact low-risk offenders and continuance in criminal activity?
14. Since the implementation of the DAI in GDJJ, can you describe how incarceration and DJJ decisions have changed?
15. Based on your knowledge, what are some of the reasons there are DMC requirements?
16. How can limited focus on recidivism of low-risk groups add to disproportionately high arrest rates amongst African American juveniles in Fulton County, Georgia?
17. How has the DAI impacted the disproportionately high crime rates among African American juveniles in Fulton County, GA?

Closing Statement:

I just want to thank you again for your cooperation in participating in my study and allowing me to document your perspectives. I will provide you a copy of your written interview for review and feedback.

Appendix B: Tables of Themes

Table F1

Table of Themes: Detention Assessments

Theme and Sub-theme (s)	Description from Literature Review
Theme: Detention Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Detention assessment instruments are developed to correspond to the emerging numbers of juveniles placed in secure detention facilities, committed, petitioned to the Department of Juvenile Justice, or transferred to adult court. • Predictive-oriented assessments, such as detention assessments, consider different factors than reduction-oriented assessments as risk and needs tools. Still, they both use risk levels as determinants of their purpose.
Sub-theme: Positive impact of detention assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Council (2013) – well-designed community programs can improve the welfare of juveniles • Holman and Zeidenburg (2013), a small number of juveniles may be rehabilitated when placed in a secured detention facility. • GSLU (2014) – Low-risk felons held a large number of the detained youth. • GSLU (2014) – Recommendations of the Special Council- the development of evidence-based programs and community supervision.
Sub-theme: Negative impact of detention assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GDJJ (2018) youth that score as a low-risk offenders, intake officers are not required to place them in a detention facility.
Sub-theme: Positive and Negative impacts of detention assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GDJJ (2018) - the goal of implementing the DAI was to reduce inappropriate detention by categorizing youth between low, moderate, and high risk. • Skeem et al. (2017) - DAIs are prediction-oriented instruments that assess risk and are formed to assess the youth’s risk to reoffend.

Table F2*Table of Themes: Risk Factors*

Theme and Sub-theme(s)	Description from Literature Review
Theme: Risk Factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baglivio et al. (2017) - reducing childhood exposure to crime to minimize recidivism. • Wylie and Rufino (2018) - youth could be rehabilitated when accommodated with a diversion program matching their risk level. • Gonzales et al. (2018) -external and internal risk factors contributing to reoffending. • Gonzales et al. (2018) - interpersonal relationships influencing the risk of recidivism. • Skeem et al. (2017) - changes to assessment tools to provide comprehensive reduction interventions. • Clarke (2017) - (risk factors) peers, family criminal and mental health history, environment, truancy, substance abuse, and parent bond.
Sub-theme: Impressionable minds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hay et al. (2016) - reoffending components: prior offenses, school history, and relationships with nonfamily peers and adults indicated the most predictive recidivism factors. • Dishion et al. (1999) - there are unexpected consequences attached to the gathering of children with similar risk factors • This may increase negative attitudes, antisocial behavior, attachment to antisocial peers, and association with deviancy.
Sub-theme: Support Systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarke (2017) - children raised in environments with a lacking support system, where parents indulge in criminal activity, to convert to the same patterns. • Clarke (2017) - findings that positive relationships with community members and parents can reduce recidivism.

Table F3

Table of Themes: Fulton County

Theme	Description from Literature Review
Theme: Fulton County	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="432 443 1056 521">• Fulton County Government 2017 Environmental Scan, the main focuses were population, economy, public health, public safety, and technology<li data-bbox="432 545 1056 597">• Fulton County surpasses other counties in GA in murder, robbery, and larceny crimes.<li data-bbox="432 643 1056 695">• The DSG (2014) - there is a decline in working-aged groups and an increase in unemployment rates of 25-34-year-olds.<li data-bbox="432 740 1056 863">• Fulton County Juvenile Court (2017), “Georgia’s Detention Assessment Instrument was developed to address and mitigate disproportionate minority contact by providing an objective, uniform and risk-based assessment for making pre-adjudicatory detention decisions.”<li data-bbox="432 863 1056 938">• Fulton County Juvenile Court (2017) - fervent prosecutors who magnify juvenile criminal activity in urban areas to be the cause of disintegrating communities.<li data-bbox="432 938 1056 1065">• Gonzales et al. (2018) - African American males commit more juvenile offenses based on differential behavior, which is attributed to the concept that children living in impoverished neighborhoods are more likely to be aggressive, act out, and drop out of high school

Table F4

Table of Themes: Unity

Theme	Description from Literature Review
Theme: Unity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="443 448 1050 548">• 1998 - DOJ used a Special counsel collaborated with ten consultants within juvenile justice under the titles of administration, psychiatry, medicine, psychology, and education to resolve the issue in secure juvenile facilities.<li data-bbox="443 570 1050 643">• Results show over-representation in the juvenile justice system but underrepresented in lenient alternatives (Gonzales et al., 2018).<li data-bbox="443 670 1050 719">• Development Services Group (2014) - perspective's scope was founded on differential offending and treatment factors.<li data-bbox="443 743 1050 841">• Rovner (2014) - The Sentencing Project's policy brief on disproportionate minority contact explained that specific crimes, such as drug offenses, occur more frequently in compressed urban areas.<li data-bbox="443 846 1050 889">• DSG (2014) - two theories fall under differential treatment, bias theory and racial or symbolic threat theory.

Table F5

Table of Themes: Recidivism/Reoffending

Theme and Sub-theme	Description from Literature Review
Theme: Recidivism/Reoffending	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Recidivism is behaviors reverting to crime after release of treatment or custody.• Gonzales et al. (2018) - crime results from interpersonal relationships that influence reoffending and other factors such as poverty, criminal gang activity, family structure, and school involvement. In this study, recidivism can be interchanged with reoffending.• Wylie and Rufino (2018) - minors can be rehabilitated when placed in a diversion program matching their risk level. In that, youth who commit less serious offenses would not be incarcerated.• Vincent et al. (2016) - low-risk juveniles should not be viewed as having “no risk.”
Sub-theme: Treatment needs/ Punishment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Skeem et al. (2017) - the benefits behind using risk assessment tools help personnel make better decisions regarding supervision and treatment needs.• DOJ (2015) - use of assessments by juvenile justice professionals was to help guide them in the selection of the best form of treatment to place juvenile offenders to rehabilitate.• Wylie and Rufino (2018) -studying additional concepts of juveniles’ social lives can reflect risk factors leading to recidivism.

Table F6

Table of Themes: Justice System

Theme	Description from Literature Review
Theme: Justice System	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Gonzales et al. (2018) - African American juveniles were over-represented in the juvenile justice system but underrepresented in lenient programs.• Hauer and Vaida's (2012) - addressed the proportion of juvenile minorities in facilities that exceeded their proportion in the general population.• Piquero (2008) - discretion in decision-making heightened racial bias as juvenile minorities were confined in more significant numbers for all offenses.• Development Services Group (2014) - factors of differential offending and differential treatment are prevalent matters of decision-making.• Sanchez and Lee (2015) - White and other juveniles were less likely to reoffend than Black youth compared to socioeconomic status, geographic location of residence, and living situations.

Table F7

Table of Themes: Funding

Theme	Description from Literature Review
Theme: Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• GSUL (2014) - the coalition found that the juvenile justice system accumulated much of the taxpayers' funding but did not show enough investors' returns.

Table F8

Table of Themes: Social Service

Theme and Sub-theme	Description from Literature Review
Theme: Social Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Social service programs are supportive systems that target building individuals and providing services for human needs.• Chapman et al. (2013) - continuum of care and exploration of probation and residential dispositions resulted in a high rate of prevention in an escalation of criminal activity in youth.
Sub-theme: Escalation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Baird et al. (2013) - When assessments are made to target high-risk groups, who enter the system and divert low-risk groups from being committed, there are variances in effective treatment.• Community-based supervision is an effective alternative, in the reduction of escalation in crime, to residential

Theme and Sub-theme	Description from Literature Review
	<p>services that could be more restrictive and costly (Chapman et al., 2013).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vincent et al. (2016) - low-risk juveniles should not be viewed as having “no risk” because circumstances may influence the risk of continuance in criminal activity. • Baglivio et al. (2017) - reducing childhood experience exposure is necessary for reducing recidivism. • Chapman et al. (2013) - found that juvenile residential programs depicted two types of programs, specialized commitment programs and Connecticut juvenile training schools, specifically for high-risk juveniles.

Table F9

Table of Themes: Changes

Theme	Description from Literature Review
Theme: Changes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Wylie and Rufino (2018) - juveniles can be rehabilitated when placed in a diversion program matching their risk level.• Differential opportunities for prevention and treatment consider accessibility, in which treatment and prevention resources are not accessible amongst the community for some as it is for others.

Appendix C: Summary of Researcher's Preconceptions and Bias

Topic	Beginning Phase of Literature Review and Research Design	Later Phase of Literature Review and Research Design	Beginning Phase of Data Collection and Analysis	Later Phase of Data Collection and Analysis
Why Detention Assessments are used	Used to evaluate juveniles who are low, moderate, and high risk based on the number of times they have been apprehended, to see if they have enough points to be placed in a detention facility.	The need for detention assessment instruments in the juvenile justice system was to lower the number of youths placed in detention facilities by assessing their risk levels to reoffend.	The need for detention assessment instruments was to lower the number of youths placed in detention facilities by assessing their risk levels to reoffend. and provide the opportunity for rehabilitation.	Detention assessment was to lower the amount of low-risk youth placed in detention facilities by assessing their risk levels to reoffend. And provide the opportunity for rehabilitation, but do not include external and internal risk factors of the juvenile to reduce the risk of reoffending.
Personnel's experience with DAI	Negative experiences with the outcome of results on the decisions made to release apprehended juveniles.	Positive experience in that the DAI reduces inappropriate detention by categorizing youth between who can be released and who requires detention resources.	The angle was to divert low-risk groups from unnecessary placement and make better supervision decisions for treatment needs to reduce recidivism targeting the high-risk groups.	Positive; Provides the opportunity of a second chance. Negative: There is no mandated treatment plan for low-risk offenders which leaves the youth to finding away to make their own choices to do better.
Social bonds and risk of recidivism	Interpersonal relationships have a major influence on juveniles reoffending or not.	Differential offending focused on outside the court system, targeting inter-personal and external risk factors such as the juvenile's family, neighborhood social contexts, low-performing public schools, and greater exposure to violence	Absence of a positive family support system and connection to the community increases the risk of reoffending.	Children raised in environments with a lacking support system, where parents indulge in criminal activity, tend to convert to the same patterns.
DAI impact on low-risk groups	Negative impact as juveniles who commit offenses deemed as low risk, based on the DAI's grading scale, have the opportunity to go back home and commit the same offenses they were locked up for; as they now know they will not face any serious consequences.	Divert low-risk groups from unnecessary placement and make better supervision decisions for treatment needs to reduce recidivism targeting the high-risk groups.	The DAI provides the opportunity for low-risk juveniles to have a probation officer or join an intervention program to help guide them away from criminal activity.	The impact is minimal, probation is not given to every low-risk youth offender. They are not mandated intervention. Families do not have the time to drop their children to the programs or pick them up due to their work schedule or caring for other children in the family.
Why are there DMC requirements	Youth of color are not treated fairly by the juvenile justice system.	Law Enforcement contact became the new focal point, in which racial disparities can occur at other juvenile arrest process	Fulton County's population is majority African American. Differential offending and	The type and severity of offenses and differential behavior lead to excessive contact. Children living in low-income

Topic	Beginning Phase of Literature Review and Research Design	Later Phase of Literature Review and Research Design	Beginning Phase of Data Collection and Analysis	Later Phase of Data Collection and Analysis
Connection of criminal justice platforms	Not all actors involved in the juvenile justice system understand the reason for using the DAI.	In the past the DJJ has used a Special Council of ten expert consultants within the field of juvenile justice to help inspect conditions of detention facilities in Georgia, as their expertise fluctuated in administration, psychiatry, medicine, psychology, and education.	Fulton County Juvenile Court is independent, which means that the judiciary court is safeguarded from any influence from other branches of government.	Being an independent court, there is a lack of communication of the court systems goals in utilizing the DAI and other entities in reducing crime, treating juveniles, and providing community involvement for the general welfare.
The conditions of Fulton County and criminal activity	Fulton Community is made up of many low-income communities.	Characteristics of Fulton County: a decline in working-aged groups; an increase in unemployment among 25-34-year-olds; the highest rates of HIV and Syphilis in the nation; and an increase in severe and violent crimes.	Minority youth who are born and raised in severely compromising familial, educational, and community environments that create the platform for adverse behaviors and events. Differential treatment and opportunity are essential considerations when striving for better living conditions in Fulton County.	Fervent prosecutors magnify juvenile criminal activity in urban areas to be the cause of disintegrating communities. Specific crimes occur more frequently in compressed urban areas. The results differ from suburban areas as such crimes occur near public housing complexes, schools, or parks. Areas with segregated housing can impact DMC turnouts. These factors increase the risk of excessive contact between law enforcement and juveniles.