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Workforce Development Strategies that Impact Reentry of Released Females in New York City

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Walden University

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Walden University

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Shonae Mills

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Walden University
2022

Abstract

Workforce Development Strategies that Impact Reentry of Released Females

in New York City

by

Shonae Mills

MS, City University of New York: Hunter College 2009

MS, Hofstra University 2001

BS, University of Maryland: Eastern Shore 1999

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

Formerly incarcerated women often find it difficult to reintegrate into their communities after release. For this population, adjustment to changes directly impacts their reentry success in all areas of life. Previous research has identified significant gaps in social services for formerly incarcerated females (FIFs). Service providers' perspectives about practices and policies to address the problem are inadequate, and as a result, service provisions suffer. Therefore, this qualitative study was used to examine the shared experiences of 15 workforce development professionals who assist FIFs during their reentry process to evaluate and assess the most effective methods or policies that assist this population. This qualitative study involved using the cognitive social career theory to guide research and analysis. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data as well as inductive coding to analyze data. Study findings indicated the need for workforce development policy, program-specific development, and changes in support systems, techniques, and methods used to service FIFs during the reentry process. In addition, there may be positive social change implications for criminal justice and economic policy reform to help create a more effective and holistic workforce development program for the formerly incarcerated female.

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Dedication

This work has been difficult, challenging, rewarding, and exciting, but it would not be achievable if not for my kids. I dedicate my work, time, and sacrifices to Shonia and Joseph. I want you two to know that pursuing your dreams takes courage and strength, and I have made it this far because of both of you. Know that the skies are not the limit, and you can dream and achieve beyond the moon and stars. It was your love that was my strength to succeed and dream.

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I thank everyone that has been a part of this journey with me, my friends, and fellow program/classmates, and for all the supportive texts, emails, calls, and prayers.

Table of Contents

List of Tables	iv
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Background	4
Problem Statement	7
Research Questions	12
Theoretical Framework	12
Nature of the Study	14
Definitions	15
Assumptions	16
Scope and Delimitations	16
Limitations	17
Significance of the Study	18
Summary	20
Introduction	21
Literature Search Strategy	22
SCCT	23
Literature Review	29
Reentry Challenges for Female Ex-Offenders	29
Recidivism and Female Ex-Offenders	39
Employment and Female Ex-Offenders	42
Employment Issues and Potential Solutions	46

Summary	49
Chapter 3: Data Collection and Analysis.....	52
Introduction.....	52
Research Design and Approach	53
Role of the Researcher	55
Methodology	56
Sample Size and Setting.....	56
Data Collection Procedures.....	59
Data Analysis	61
Bias and Ethical Considerations	62
Trustworthiness.....	63
Protection of Participants’ Rights and Ethical Procedures	64
Summary	66
Chapter 4: Results	68
Introduction.....	68
Data Collection	68
Data Organization	72
Research Collection Findings	75
Support Systems.....	75
Positive Support Systems.....	76
Negative Support Systems	77
Program Solutions.....	79

Techniques and Methods	82
Effective Techniques and Methods.....	83
Ineffective Techniques and Methods	85
Trustworthiness and Reliability of the Data	86
Summary	88
Chapter 5: Conclusions	90
Introduction.....	90
Interpretations of Findings.....	91
Support Systems.....	94
Techniques and Methods	94
Program Solutions.....	95
Limitations to the Study.....	97
Recommendations for Future Research	99
Social Implications.....	102
Conclusion	108
References.....	110
Appendix A: Invitation Letter.....	125
Appendix B: Invitation Letter During COVID-19 Pandemic.....	126
Appendix C: Semi-Structured Interview Questions	128
Appendix D: Research and Interview Question Alignment	129
Appendix E: Potential Research Participant Organizations.....	131
Appendix F: Recruitment Flyer	132

List of Tables

Table 1. Sample Size, Research Participants 74

Chapter 1: Introduction

Formerly incarcerated women are a vulnerable group of citizens who are often underserved, underestimated, and disconnected from the community. Many formerly incarcerated individuals believe their needs, wants, desires, aspirations, and goals are not addressed, considered, or cultivated during reentry (Cobbina, 2010). Berriman (2005) stated formerly incarcerated females (FIFs) have several obstacles to achieving their life and social goals. The impact can be so severe they cannot achieve their personal and reentry goals. In every state across the United States, men and women have faced challenges not based on their race, religion, or creed but on their choices (Decker et al., 2015). Those choices have led to criminal involvement, and ultimately incarceration. It is that criminal involvement that has caused this group to become disenfranchised. Clear (2007) stated mass incarceration and returning individuals to the community in which they once lived has greater implications than local and state policymakers anticipated. Addressing issues such as employment, criminal involvement mandates, family issues, and housing for policymakers and formerly incarcerated individuals has proven to be a struggle for all stakeholders (Duwe, 2017). Formerly incarcerated individuals have not received comprehensive services to address all their life needs when returning home, and a primary area of concern has been employment (Nally et al., 2013; Vigne et al., 2008). Bushway and Apel (2012) said completing training or securing employment immediately after returning home has been an indicator of successful reentry and led to an indirect decrease in individuals' potential to re-offend.

For formerly incarcerated individuals, employment security and employment options are two of the biggest obstacles to be addressed upon transition from incarceration to returning to the community. The rate of successful reentry decreases if the individual is unable to address these employment issues. In addition, recidivism rates increase exponentially for this population when employment opportunities are decreased or minimal (Berg, 2011). Areas that must be addressed include childcare, housing, sexual/emotional abuse, substance use/abuse, employment, family, identity, and mental health to ensure success with employment and overall reintegration of FIFs (Scroggins et al., 2010). As life challenges of formerly incarcerated individuals multiply and the complexity of their situation increases, their ability to engage fully in the reentry process becomes difficult, which diminishes reentry success. Therefore, services need to exist to address the life and social challenges this group faces.

Throughout the United States, there have been various reintegration programs that look to address obstacles to the reentry process. Yet, a comprehensive program that ensures an all-inclusive approach to the reentry of FIFs is still missing. Even large metropolitan cities such as New York City, with more than eight million people, lack a comprehensive program for formerly incarcerated individuals. Currently, in New York City, there are about 29,769 females incarcerated, and 24% are released from incarceration yearly (Sawyer, 2019). Hence a need for large metropolitan cities like New York City to provide services to those released from correctional facilities. A comprehensive approach or program to respond to this need would have to include

services that ensure FIF addressed her motivations for change while addressing childcare, transportation, employment, and mental/physical health.

The Correctional Employment Opportunities (CEO) program in New York City is a workforce development organization that assists formerly incarcerated individuals with employment, education, and life skills development with services and resources, so program participants can address their life challenges and difficulties. Although the CEO provides many valuable reentry skills, they have not addressed all life and social areas of ex-offenders, especially FIFs. These areas include childcare, drug use/abuse, and mental/physical health issues (Zweig et al., 2011). Therefore, not able to completely provide the necessary services for the reentry success of the FIF.

Also, the career development organization called the More Than a Job Club focused on the reentry and employment needs of FIFs by providing services involving career exploration, support groups, job development, and assistance and referrals to social service benefits (Snodgrass et al., 2017). The More Than a Job Club works with individuals to address immediate needs involving locating gainful employment. However, they cannot address all the reentry needs of FIFs; therefore, the organization and formerly incarcerated females work together to follow up with referrals to other organizations to provide support and services the original organization lacked (Herrschaft et al., 2009). The inability of FIFs to procure comprehensive services in one program location further puts a strain on the reentry process and their ability to achieve reintegration success (Yesberg, 2015).

A successful reintegration process includes the ability to address employment, life, and social issues for this population are major indicators for reentry success (Flavin, 2004). Herrschaft (2009) stated life areas that need to be addressed for female ex-offenders to be successful include but are not limited to childcare/eldercare, physical and mental health, education, and employment/vocational training. Thomas et al. (2016) said a successful reentry process for a FIF must include addressing mental and physical health concerns, life skills and personal skills development, transportation issues, and social service benefits. Hence, the need for policies and or programs must be comprehensive in their service delivery to effectively assist the FIF.

Programs currently designed to address the employment and reentry of FIFs have been inadequate in terms of addressing issues that impact the reentry process and rates of re-incarceration (Flavin, 2004). Currently, there is no comprehensive program for this population. Blitz (2006) stated the creation of a comprehensive reentry program for FIFs directly relates to the decrease in the recidivism rate for this group. There is a lack of comprehensive programs across the United States that effectively and consistently impacted the FIFs reentry success and reintegration rates. It is my belief this type of study would influence public health, community economic development, and the criminal justice system, and foster significant individual and community changes. potential individual changes that this study can create.

Background

Competition for locating and securing gainful employment can be intense and emotionally challenging for job seekers. Also, the job search process, development of an

impactful resume, interviews, and follow-up interviews can be overwhelming for FIFs (Cobbina, 2010). It has been challenging to secure employment among the ex-offender population in cities such as New York City because of the competition from the average jobseekers with no criminal history. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the current unemployment rate in the United States was 3.5% (BLS, 2022). In 2021, the unemployment rates of states such as New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania in June 2021 were 4.3% (BLS, 2022). This translates into millions of individuals who are seeking employment in states with city populations.

According to a study conducted by the Bureau of Justice System in 2021 stated the rate of formerly incarcerated individuals finding and maintaining employment was 34%. Berg and Huebner (2011) said formerly incarcerated individuals face challenges such as stigma and rejection during the job search and hiring process that negatively impact their motivation to pursue future opportunities. Additionally, this group's stigmatization incrementally diminishes their opportunities for reentry success. Low rates of employment opportunities among this group have the potential to lead to criminal activity in response to negative results they experience during the job search process (Alession et al., 2014; Nally et al, 2011).

The FIF has dealt with the rejection and prejudice from employers in response to her previous criminal history. This compounds their mental and emotional well-being because the inability to obtain gainful employment not only impacts individuals but their families as well (Berg & Huebner, 2011). These challenges have led to FIF medicating with drugs or alcohol or engaging in illegal activities to avoid addressing the challenges

(rejection and discrimination) to her reintegration process (Shivy et al., 2007). Hence, the FIF will engage in illegal activities that are familiar to her.

The population and focus of this study are New York City workforce development professionals who work with FIFs within this city and their ability to provide reentry programming and services that address the specific needs of female ex-offenders. A review of necessary resources and services was provided to address challenges and variables that impact the successful reentry of FIFs. FIFs have continued to face life challenges once released from incarceration involving physical and mental health, employment issues, family issues that include child and elder care, reconnection with families, and children in foster or kinship care (Berger et al., 2013; Gunnison et al., 2011). This impacts the FIF's ability and motivation to change her life and not re-offend because of feelings of hopelessness. Furthermore, Berger et al. (2013) said the challenges faced by the FIF during reintegration directly impact the recidivism rates and reentry success if not addressed. Therefore, the lack of reentry programs must incorporate the necessary and effective resources for addressing the various obstacles to FIF reentry to minimize her reoffending.

The most successful reentry programs involve addressing various life concerns of ex-offenders all at once. Concerns involving childcare, transportation, social service benefits, employment, and education significantly impact an ex-offender's ability to fully engage in the necessary steps of her reentry process. Mainly her ability to adhere to reintegration mandates and achieve required milestones such as housing, or employment has a direct influence on her reentry (Cobbina, 2010). In addition, Gunnison and Helfgott

(2011) stated that unaddressed life issues could negatively impact offenders' overall reentry, and their motivation not to re-offend. Providing formerly incarcerated individuals with services, skills, and tools to address their challenges in achieving reentry goals is to be the main objective of a reentry program. Successful programs for the formerly incarcerated individual have provided resources and services before release and immediately after release for a structured period (Bushway & Apel, 2012, Doherty et al., 2014). Hence, when a program is being created and implemented it would require policy and program creators or administrators to understand and address the challenges participants may endure and have the ability to make adjustments that affect the challenges and or obstacles (Severson et al., 2011). According to Duwe (2015), programs that incorporate different and creative methods to enhance change and increase motivation have successfully minimized reoffending rates. It is those types of programs or organizations that effectively assist their participants and have led to reentry success.

In this study, I explored workforce development strategies and methods that either advance or hinder the reentry process or goals of the FIF. Program developers and administrators require objective information that they can use to develop new, efficient, and effective programs and services created specifically for the FIF population. The objective of this study was to provide various program and policy developers with the data needed to create a more comprehensive and impactful reentry program for FIFs.

Problem Statement

When FIFs return to their communities with mandates from the justice system and family, they must adjust their life, behavior, and decisions to fulfill those mandates

(Leverentz, 2011). They must reengage in society as law-abiding citizens and find gainful employment. FIFs must not only address the reentry mandate of obtaining gainful employment but also address their roles within families and communities (Salem et al., 2013). Blitz et al. (2005) said FIFs must find appropriate reentry resources and services to ensure they do not re-offend and can reintegrate within their communities. The overall issue for returning female ex-offenders is locating a comprehensive reentry program that effectively addresses all their needs (Cobbina, 2010). The most predominant factor that hinders successful reintegration for FIF is the inability to find and secure gainful employment and obstacles to maintaining employment (Doherty et al., 2014; Scroggins, 2010; Wesley et al., 2018). Additionally, formerly incarcerated individuals, criminal justice supervising agency professionals, and community organizations have also identified the main obstacle to long-term successful reentry is the inability to obtain and maintain employment (Wesley, 2018). With the lack of an inclusive (one-stop-shop) program available to the FIF, she finds herself enrolled in various programs to address all her needs and has difficulties complying with all program participation requirements (Shivy, 2009). Hence, picking one program to participate in that likely does not address all her needs successfully. Therefore, some problem areas go unaddressed which can lead to FIFs reoffending (Herrscraft, 2009). The lack of comprehensive services in one location creates additional obstacles to the FIF addressing all her reentry challenges and goals.

According to a Bureau of Justice report in 2005 claimed over half a million individuals are released from prison annually and 75% of them are rearrested within

5years of their release (BJS, 2005). Men and women released from correctional facilities have received minimal preparation and inadequate assistance and resources before they are released, making their reentry into communities challenging (Visher & Mallik-Kane, 2007). Other reentry issues have involved how ex-offenders must deal with the impact of their criminal convictions in terms of securing housing opportunities, and social service assistance (Coates, 2015). Socioeconomic factors play a significant role in determining successful reentry outcomes for all formerly incarcerated individuals. Criminal records, limited education, the stigma of being female, and lack of employment history have contributed to limited gainful employment opportunities for FIFs (McGrew & Hanks, 2017). Often, released prisoners find employment in low-skill jobs or industries such as food service, wholesale, maintenance, or manufacturing (Urban Institute, 2008). Ex-offenders often experience obstacles to finding employment within public and private job sectors because they cannot obtain the professional and technical licenses needed due to their criminal convictions (Holzer et al., 2003). When there are limited legal employment opportunities and resources available, individuals who are reintegrating into their communities are more likely re-offend (Wikoff et al., 2012). Implications of reoffending are felt within the FIF community, family, and individuals. These implications include and are not limited to economic hardships for the individual and family due to lack of income, the increased potential of reoffending then, and return to the criminal justice system, which impacts the society, community, family, and the individual.

This study is needed because current research has addressed obstacles to the reentry process and specific employment challenges that affect formerly incarcerated

males versus females. Furthermore, current studies have involved techniques and programming designed for formerly incarcerated males as a method to assist formerly incarcerated females in their reentry process. This study was specifically focused on how methods used by workforce development organizations and professionals working with FIFs are effective in terms of securing employment and reentry into communities for the FIF. Furthermore, I looked at the perspective of workforce development professionals and how their knowledge, skills, policies, and techniques have been successful or not in terms of assisting FIFs with reintegration goals. This study is used to fill a current gap in research involving professionals working with FIFs and identify effective tools, techniques, and policies that work for both professionals and FIFs to meet their goals. With that knowledge, female-specific programming and policies will be created to ensure the formerly incarcerated female's reentry success.

Additionally, the lack of gender-specific solutions for reentry and employment for FIFs creates a range of challenges, including finding gainful employment and securing housing, addressing mental and physical health conditions, and reconnecting with family and friends (Blitz, 2006; Blitz et al., 2005; Bushway & Apel, 2012). Many studies have focused on factors that affect successful reentry and the results have shown that obtaining and maintaining gainful employment is a primary factor in permanent successful reentry. Once employment is secured, the possibility for successfully maintained reentry increases threefold (Shivy, 2007; Travis et al., 2001). Therefore, understanding how workforce development strategies, policies, and tools assist the FIF in effectively addressing the

reentry process will directly influence the creation and implementation of programs, services, and resources that assist the FIF with reentry.

The creation of policies and programming to address individual goals and needs of the FIF and ensuring services delivered are effective in accomplishing reentry goals will help in terms of addressing obstacles FIF face to maintaining reentry and gainful employment. Therefore, the perspectives of professionals who work directly with ex-offenders in terms of securing employment were explored to identify the essential steps and procedures to help assist this population during the reentry process. Research participants for this study were professionals within the field of workforce development, employment, rehabilitation, and vocational counseling professionals who work directly with FIFs. Their points of view regarding the reentry process of the FIFs have not been researched previously. Therefore, I explored the impact this relationship has on the FIF reentry success and the creation of comprehensive programming and or policies.

Purpose of the Study

I explored the viability of current reentry programs which involve using workforce development approaches to assist FIFs. Ferney (2008) said current reentry programs involve providing individuals with the foundation to return home, comply with parole and probation mandates, and reconnect with their communities. I explored how workforce development professionals can assist the FIF in terms of ensuring successful reentry and achieving necessary mandated goals associated with reentry. In addition, I gathered pertinent information on what strategies and or policies have been effective or

ineffective by obtaining direct feedback from the workforce development professionals on their experiences of working with the FIF population.

Employment development for the formerly incarcerated can be affected by obstacles like employment rejection, employer biases based on the individual's previous criminal history, and the individual's inability to secure professional licensure (Atkins & Armstrong, 2011). Hence, the inability to successfully find secure employment to meet the criminal justice system mandates of release and assisting families financially once home increases the probability of reoffending (Blitz, 2006; Hong et al., 2014; Nally, 2013). Therefore, the goal of this study was to find the best workforce development approaches and services to assist the FIF population to fulfill her release mandates and allows her the ability to engage in activities that promote economic and personal growth.

Research Questions

RQ1: What aspects of reentry programs which involve using workforce development approaches are useful in terms of maintaining successful reentry goals?

RQ2: How do the workforce development tools, or strategies of job readiness impact the reentry process for FIFs?

Theoretical Framework

For this study, I used the social cognitive career theory (SCCT) developed in 1994 by Lent and Brown. This theory was used to explain how career or educational choices are made. The SCCT is based on three main variables: (a) self-efficacy (individual confidence in completing a task), (b) personal beliefs that one has skills to achieve success, and (c) expectations and outcomes of said goal (Lent & Brown, 2008). This

theory was derived from Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory, which involves understanding cognitive and motivational processes that influence behaviors and decisions. Bandura (1986) said decisions are based on interwoven traits such as persistence, self-motivation, and autonomy. These traits influence the thoughts and actions of individuals (Lent et al., 1994). The SCCT involves Bandura's concept but applies to the career and educational decision-making process. This theory stated career choices and actions are impacted by self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and environmental factors (Brown & Lent, 1996). The tenets of SCCT aligned with this study because it showed individuals make career choices based on several factors, such as external environment and internal motivation (Lent, 2005). Hence, if a FIF does not address her external issues like family responsibility and or employment obstacles, these issues will negatively affect her ability to maintain employment (Morani et al., 2011). These types of obstacles can lead to the FIF making decisions that are based on immediate needs being fulfilled and not logical consequential thinking.

The SCCT was used as the framework in this qualitative study because it involved exploring the experiences of professionals working with FIFs and the choices they used to serve this population. Additionally, I explored the professional's ability to make decisions that provided appropriate services to ensure successful reentry. The SCCT was used to examine how internal and external factors impact career choices and vocational success, which is the study's overall premise and intended impact. According to Lent et al. (2002), the more students are presented with services and resources to assist in the career decision-making process, the more successful they are in school and their careers.

Lent's study examined how college counselors worked with students by implementing services and strategies that addressed academic and career decisions, which involved developing career and academic procedures that are used by career counselors that effectively influenced students' decisions. In this study, I explored the impact of workforce development professional services and programming and its ability to influence the successful reentry of the FIF population. I examined how the influence of the workforce development professional and services delivered have made an impact on the career decisions of the FIF. Based on the SCCT decisions and actions are based on various external and internal factors, such as self-awareness, environmental factors, and individual skills and abilities. I explored and analyzed the importance and reliability of current workforce development evidence-based techniques and methods that were used to ensure the ongoing motivation and success of career planning and rehabilitation for the FIF population.

Nature of the Study

The issue of successfully reintegrating back into society after being released for the formerly incarcerated individual has been analyzed by policymakers, program administrators, and community leaders. They have explored what factors assist in terms of ensuring successful reentry and have found employment to be a vital factor. Bushway and Apel (2012) said employment was the main catalyst for successful reentry after release. For this study, understanding how workforce development professionals use services and resources to assist the FIF in terms of securing and maintaining employment

is the phenomenon under study. I used a qualitative approach because it allowed for the exploration of participants' perspectives, behaviors, and judgments

Additionally, by using a qualitative approach, I was able to not only explore participants' behaviors but was able to be immersed in their experiences. Research participants are workforce development professionals working with FIFs providing services needed to assist FIFs and their return to society. Challenges faced by FIFs include employment issues like discrimination or stigma toward gender or criminal history (Gunnison & Helfgoft, 2011). In addition to employment obstacles, the FIF faced family and mental/physical health issues that impact their ability to remain home (Leverentz, 2011). This study was able to highlight the various areas which workforce development professionals and the FIF must address to ensure a successful reentry process.

Definitions

Reintegration: The transition of offenders from prison to community supervision (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2021)

Vocational Rehabilitation: Vocational rehabilitation is made up of a series of services that are designed to facilitate the entrance into or return to work by people with disabilities or by people who have recently acquired an injury or disability. A form of rehabilitation that involves vocational and educational goals (NARIC, 2013).

Workforce Development: Education, employment, and job-training efforts are designed to help employers obtain skilled workforces and employees to succeed in the workplace (Canadian Vocational Association, 2018).

Assumptions

This study had several assumptions, the first assumption was once criminal justice and vocational/educational workforce development policymakers are presented with data from this research, there would have to be changes made to current policy and programming to enhance the reentry process. Additionally, there would be changes made to the current policies and programming that addressed the reintegration process and identified obstacles that are specific to the FIF. The second assumption was that increased employment and educational participation would translate into decreased reoffending and increased reentry rates for FIFs. The third assumption was that using appropriate and comprehensive workforce development methods during the reintegration process will increase the FIF community engagement and participation. Furthermore, there will be an evident increase in employment and education opportunities among the FIF population. That increase will ultimately lead to increased revenue within communities. The fourth assumption was once there is an increase in vocational and educational opportunities for the FIF, there would be a reduction in reincarceration of the FIF. Therefore, leads to a better quality of life for formerly incarcerated women and their families, especially in the areas of communication, family dynamics, and family member roles.

Scope and Delimitations

I addressed the reentry of FIFs due to challenges faced during successful reintegration into communities, with a primary focus on employment and education choices. I focused on implementing evidence-based techniques within workforce development as well as their impact on the recidivism of female ex-offenders. The goal

of this study was to increase the reintegration success of FIFs by obtaining a better understanding of workforce development policies or methods that increase the FIF's educational and employment opportunities. I focused on assessing how workforce development professionals used resources and services to assist the FIF during her reentry process. The overall goal of this study was to address methods or strategies that successfully assist female ex-offenders with reintegrating within communities and how replicating that would help the FIF population in maintaining reintegration success.

Since my goal was to address challenges to maintaining the reintegration of FIFs, it was imperative to address and explore the perspectives of professionals assisting the population if there were to be real policy changes. Therefore, I reviewed and analyzed current documented policies, methods, and procedures that have proven effective with formerly incarcerated individuals.

Limitations

Limitations of this study can impact the findings and results of the study. This qualitative study has limitations in terms of reliability and generalization of results. Qualitative studies can present limitations in terms of generalizing data and applying it to larger populations. First, I used purposeful sampling, which can influence the generalization of the target population as it is not transferable to large population studies. Purposeful sampling is a selective form of sampling (Palinkas et al, 2015). I used my judgment to pick participants, therefore I created criteria for research participants and narrowed the scope of knowledge explored. The second limitation involved the method

by which data was collected, face-to-face semi-structured interviews. Face-to-face interviews are time-consuming and can lead to researcher or participant bias. Due to the potential for bias, it was essential to address any limitations during data collection and analysis. These limitations were addressed by reviewing and identifying my personal biases as well as the participants' bias in the data.

Significance of the Study

The re-entry process for FIF has been complicated due to current policies, laws, program restrictions, and mandates. Finding gainful and stable employment and locating stable housing is vital in terms of refraining from criminal activities for recently released offenders (Garland et al., 2011). Compared to formerly incarcerated males, FIFs have to address additional life obstacles such as undiagnosed physical, emotional, and mental health issues, establishing their role as caregivers for children and or elderly parents and adhering to post-release mandates and personal goals for reentry (Holtfreter & Wattanaporn, 2016). When a previously incarcerated individual participates in and completes a reentry program, the likelihood of him or her reengaging in criminal activity decreases within the first 2 to 3 years (Whitehead, 2011). When programs, services, and resources address individual basic needs as well as after release, reincarceration rates may be reduced drastically, which leads to reentry success (Scroggins, 2010). Therefore, finding appropriate programs, resources, or activities has always been essential to ensuring reentry success. Locating and exploring comprehensive approaches, programs, and policies involving the reentry of FIFs was the focus of this study. Understanding the needs of professionals in the field and how they work with this population is essential to

designing comprehensive approaches, policies, and reentry programs that are effective and efficient in terms of assisting FIFs.

Study results can be used to contribute to the fields of criminal justice, vocational rehabilitation, and community economic development by showing the importance of professionals working with this specific population in policy and program development. Study findings can be used to create programs, policies, and laws that address employment issues for the FIF. Concerns that are specific to FIFs such as housing, physical and mental health, and continued rehabilitation are also reviewed in terms of policy and program development. The findings of this study will further her development of efficient workforce development methods and strategies that can be used in various fields and organizations involving ex-offenders. Additionally, the study can contribute to additional research involving retention rates of reentry programs. After 2 to 3 years of incarceration, ex-offenders can have difficulty finding activities to maintain their reintegration (Rogers, 2017). Furthermore, a lack of progress in an individual career or education also impacts continued reentry success (Nally, 2013). Therefore, there is a need for the creation of more comprehensive reentry processes, policies, and programming that not only addresses immediate needs involving employment but also underlying issues of physical and mental health and wellness, housing, family dynamics, and legal documentation for FIFs.

This study will have an impact on future studies involving this challenging population as well as the development of policies, programs, and initiatives that directly impact their reintegration. Specifically focusing on ways to improve reintegration

policies by addressing female-specific reentry challenges. This study includes knowledge about enhancing the reentry experiences of the FIF and the necessity to develop gender-specific comprehensive programming and policies. Additionally, information from this study can indirectly impact the lives of the FIF and her family by increasing her potential in maintaining secure and stable employment. Therefore, minimizing her belief that she must offend to respond to her reentry challenge and mandate of employment.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the shared experiences of workforce development professionals as they attempt to assist FIFs with reintegrating within their communities as well the as challenges they face preventing successful reentry. I examined the use of programming and services to ensure the employment and educational success of FIFs and their ability to reintegrate into their communities. The study revealed the need to create more specific policies, reentry programs, and workforce development programs to increase and enhance the reentry and reintegration of FIFs. Furthermore, I analyzed the current use of workforce development strategies in select reentry programs and the ability to transfer and generalize techniques to other programs.

Chapter 2 includes specific challenges faced by the formerly incarcerated involving reentry and reintegration. Additionally, a review of current reentry programs and policies' successes and the lack of successes were explored. Also, the SCCT was explored in terms of how it was used to address the study's main objectives. Finally, workforce development strategies or tools that influence the employment or vocational and educational choices of the FIF were explored.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Formerly incarcerated individuals reenter their communities with minimal foundational skills to assist in their reacclimating. The inability to reintegrate into their communities results in their engaging in previous criminal behavior or recidivating. FIFs deal with many challenges, issues, and circumstances when coming home. These include housing, parole or probation mandates, employment, education and training, and cash and food benefits. In addition, returning individuals must address reestablishing their roles within their family, taking care of children and/or elderly parents, and addressing mental and physical health issues. Blitz (2006) said when these areas go unnoticed or unaddressed, the result is reoffending as a solution, and that leads to reincarceration as the only alternative. Currently, the recidivism rate among newly released individuals within the first 3 years of release is at least 68% (Benecchi, 2021). Within 5 years of release, at least 76% of 300,000 prisoners were released between 2005 and 2010 (BJS, 2018). The recidivism rate in New York in 2010 is 9% (Herrschart and Hamilton, 2011). Between 2010 and 2013, a total of 10,217, or 42% of ex-offenders, were released (Department of Corrections and Community Supervision, 2014). Based on these numbers, many criminal justice institutes and systems developed policies and programs to address the reintegration process. However, there continued to be a disconnect because these programs, resources, and services are not holistic or comprehensive in terms of their approaches to addressing reentry obstacles (Musgrove et al., 2012).

Rogers (2017) said many FIFs, and males recidivate due to a lack of support and services as well as the inability to find resources within their communities during their

reentry process. FIFs must address life issues that are specific to their gender and roles in communities (Scroggins, 2010). It is these gender-specific issues that have presented a major obstacle in terms of providing comprehensive and efficient services to ensure successful reentry. Childcare, transportation, and health and wellness profoundly impact FIFs' vocational training as well as educational and employment pursuits (Duwe, 2017).

Social and life area difficulties faced by FIFs when reintegrating within communities have a direct impact on overall reentry success (Buchanan, 2006). Subsequently, it is imperative to identify interventions that lead to efficient and successful results. In this chapter, I provide a review and analysis of current literature regarding current reentry and reintegration policies, current workforce development program interventions, and the SCCT. Finally, I review the methodology and present findings regarding the gap in the literature.

Literature Search Strategy

In this study, I used the following databases: Criminal Justice Database, Political Science Complete, SocINDEX with Full Text, Business SourcePsycInfo, and Academic Search Complete. These databases included many articles, journals, reports, books, and dissertations in the criminal justice field focusing on prison services, reentry and reintegration services, counseling issues, recidivism, and community issues. Narrowing keywords for the search was essential to addressing vital information for the study. In this study, I used the following search terms: *female, women, ex-convicts, ex-offenders, reentry, reintegration policy, mental health, policy outcomes, the transition of females within the community, parental implications of returning to me, then I act of social media*

on job search, and employability of both formerly incarcerated males and, employment for ex-offenders, females and work challenges, female ex-offenders and employment, criminal record and work, female reentry process, challenges to reintegration, and recidivism rates for females.

SCCT

I explored workforce development programs as an efficient tool to ensure the successful reintegration of FIFs. Various studies have identified the main factor needed for successful re-entry as obtaining and maintaining gainful employment (Duwe, 2017; Gunnison & Helfgott, 2011). No studies focused specifically on the impact of interventions in terms of reentry successes or failures. Furthermore, no studies explicitly focused on the impact workforce development programs have on the reentry process. Consequently, I examined foundational concepts of workforce development when working with FIFs. In addition, I analyzed the impact of workforce development as a tool to ensure reentry success among this population. The overall objective of this study was to identify solutions, methods, and specific interventions that assist the FIF with achieving her reentry goals that can be replicated and implemented by other programs throughout the country.

The theory used for this study was the SCCT. This theory was ideal to explain connections between workforce development interventions and the reentry process. In this section, I explore the theory's historical development, current tenets, and current implications. In addition, I explored the rationale for using this theory and its relevance to the overall study.

The theory was created to explain the career planning decisions of individuals during transition periods in their life (Johnson, 2013). This theory was developed from Bandura's social cognitive theory a behavioral change theory that involves analyzing an individual's choices and how those choices influence the individual's behaviors and actions (Brown, 2011; Young, 2015). The SCCT was created in 1994 by Lent, Brown, and Hackett to expound on how the individual's choices or actions influence his/her career choices and actions. Additionally, Lent (2008) stated that SCCT is said to evaluate the individual's ability to stay motivated in their career decisions and path when there are both positive and negative internal and external factors.

This theory has been utilized in studies to examine both the academic and career choices of individuals of various ages and life experiences. Conklin et al. (2013) conducted a study on college students maintaining his/her selected degree major. The study's findings indicated how essential it is for the career and or academic advisor to be aware of the many factors that influence the completion of academic activities and the pursuit of a career and their link to the student's major to assist students effectively. Consequently, with that understanding, the advisors can provide the necessary interventions to assist the students in their academic and career journeys. The previously mentioned and similar studies in academic and career development have examined the importance of providing interventions that assist the individual with identifying the internal (self-talk)/external (environment) factors, thought/decision processing, and the impact of self-efficacy (my ability) in career exploration, development, and advancement (Brown, 2011; Chartrand, & Rose, 1996). It is the understanding that these factors have

assisted a professional in effectively assisting a student or individual in achieving academic and or career pursuits and success (Lent, 1996).

One of the tenets of SCCT is to assist individuals in clearly defining their career focus, identifying their challenges and attributes to the career or job they would like to pursue, and applying the findings to make a clear, concise career or job plan (Berg, 2011). The current interventions presented to the incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individual when preparing to transition back into the community have addressed decision-making skills, which greatly influence their choices once they return home (Buchanan, 2006; Doherty et al. 2014; Desmarais, 2016). The FIF's ability to make choices in the type of job or career they want to pursue, engagement in criminal activities (re-offend), type of daily activities in which to participate, and to interact with family, friends, and or community (Doherty et al. 2014). These choices have required a level of awareness of what motivates the FIF. Therefore, when the FIF understands her internal/external influences and motivations regarding her choices and actions it is assumed that will lead her to healthier and more effective decision-making skills (Holtfreter, 2014). This study examined the impact of workforce development program professionals and the methods or policies they utilize to influence assisting the FIF to secure gainful and meaningful employment or other vocational endeavors that maintain the individuals' engagement with release mandates. The SCCT is a career theory that looks at decision-making, goal setting, skill and aptitude, and the motivation of the individual to assist in developing a successful career path (Brown et al., 2013). Thus, I examined how the decisions and behaviors of the professionals operating in their career

choice of helping the FIF have impacted the FIF reentry success. Additionally, an exploration of the effectiveness of workforce development as an intervention strategy to assist this population in increasing their involvement within their personal life, community, and reentry process.

Since the inception of social cognitive career theory in 1994, it has been utilized within vocational psychology, organizational psychology, and career and academic development fields (Bennett & Amundson, 2016). Studies over the past 20-plus years have shown the evolving nature of this theory for various populations and redefined the creation of intervention in the world of work and career transitions. Lent et al. (2008) introduced SCCT as an extension of Bandura's social cognitive theory concentrating on the interrelated concepts of motivation, skills/aptitudes, outcome expectations, and decision-making (p.34). SCCT, although a theory based on decision-making, the foundational aspects are rooted in social cognitive theory tenets (SCT) established by Bandura. SCT was created to explain the behaviors and actions of individuals based on their learning from the environment (Brown, 1996). Bandura (1989) believed that human behavior is learned behavior and that the individual's personality traits and cognitive behaviors could affect the immediate environment. In addition, the foundational concepts of the social cognitive theory are one's personal beliefs, expectations, self-perceptions, and affect choices and actions (Young et al., 2015).

Additionally, Bandura (1989) claimed an individuals' emotions are impacted by their environments, impacting individuals' behaviors. However, the creation of social cognitive theory was rooted in understanding individuals' behaviors and decision-making

practices. It grew into a counseling theory utilized by many professionals in various fields such as psychology, counseling, and business to understand how behavior impacts an individual environment and community (McWhirter, 2013). As previously mentioned, social cognitive theory assisted in the development of social cognitive career theory to understand the impact of decisions, behaviors, actions, and environmental factors on career choices.

In 2008 a study on employee well-being was conducted by theory originators Brown and Lent. It focused on the potential of using SCCT and SCT in creating interventions for work satisfaction and dissatisfaction. The study looked at an individual's subjective and psychological well-being as it relates to job satisfaction. Additionally, the study focused on the utilization of SCCT and SCT in creating strategies and real interventions that impact work and life satisfaction. According to Lent and Brown (2008), an individual's ability to have work satisfaction is rooted in their ability to have their intrinsic traits match the work in which they engage. In addition, they claimed the ability to maintain longevity within a job or career is dependent on extrinsic factors such as work-related praise, work skill competency, and skill ability (Lent & Brown, 2008). They further concluded these extrinsic factors directly impact work outcomes and work satisfaction.

Lent and Brown (2008) said when the SCCT was applied to job satisfaction analysis; a review of individual emotions, the ability to self-regulate one's emotions, and self-awareness techniques must be addressed in the creation of job interventions to assist the individual with job satisfaction and personal well-being must be considered (Lent &

Brown, 2008). Understanding the nature of job satisfaction and well-being can lead to effective strategies and or interventions to address employee burnout (Rogers, 2017). Therefore, this study reinforced SCCT as a theory in the reintegration process of formerly incarcerated females and addressed the complexities of this population's return to and maintenance within employment. It also aided in identifying, assessing, and analyzing the complexities of the decisions, policies, and programs to enhance personal successes and achievements within the educational and vocational areas versus poor decisions that lead back to re-incarceration.

Conklin et al. (2013) study on the self-efficacy of college students when choosing their degree major and the utilization of SCCT to analyze personal motivation, personal perception of the ability to succeed within the field of choice, and the overall motivation to commit and pursue a career by undergraduate college students provided another aspect as to how SCCT is an effective theoretical lens for this particular study. This study's methodology included 200 students recruited from the Mid- Atlantic of the US, ages ranging from 17-32 years old. Various other considerations such as race/cultural background, gender, gender identification, and types of academic minors/majors were implemented in the study. The findings of this study showed the interrelated variables of commitment, motivation, perception of abilities/skills, and outcome expectations as it applies to academic choice (2013). Identifying and navigating the internal/external factors that directly impact reintegration success is critical to the FIF. When analyzing workforce development concepts and their ability to efficiently assist the individual

during their reentry process, it is vital to identify how workforce development interventions assist in decision-making and, therefore, influence reentry's overall success.

Literature Review

When conducting a literature review within the areas of social justice, business and economics, social services, vocational and education, criminal justice, employment, technology, and workforce development, the following themes have arisen as challenges faced by the formerly incarcerated female during her reentry process, recidivism issues, employment challenges, and the lack of employment options. Among the many reviewed studies regarding reentry challenges for ex-offenders, specifically, females indicated there are many obstacles to their reentry process and how they impact recidivism rates. During the literature review, a reoccurring concept for this study surfaced, which was employment, and the hardships of obtaining or retaining employment while managing all the life issues experienced by the ex-offender are challenging. In addition to identifying and understanding the factors and challenges within the reentry process within the ex-offender population, it was essential to research the current solutions utilized and if these solutions have effectively addressed the crucial issues within the reentry process. The following sections of this chapter have explored the themes previously mentioned as they provided a foundation for the direction of the study and its research.

Reentry Challenges for Female Ex-Offenders

The formerly incarcerated FIF has many obstacles to be addressed to ensure she has a successful reentry process and returns home. The road to successful reentry is lined with challenges that must be addressed to minimize the potential of reoffending (Benissa

et al., 2013). The FIF has several challenges to address to ensure reentry success, such as housing, employment and education, physical and mental health issues, and the changes in her family dynamics (Berman, 2005). Returning home is not just answering the correctional supervision with parole or probation. It is about setting herself up with activities that encourage positive choices and actions (Buchanan, 2006). It has been stated in various studies that finding stable employment is one of the vital factors in maintaining reentry success (Bushway, 2012). The FIF must address other life areas such as family, housing, education, etc. (Cortes & Rogers, 2010). According to a study conducted with 155 programs within 10 different metropolitan cities that provide services to the formerly incarcerated female, the main areas of need are childcare and eldercare, health care and mental health counseling, education and employment, and support services (Scroggins & Malley, 2010). Although each program has attributes that effectively assist the female ex-offender in one or two specific areas, none of the programs had the capacity and capability to address all the living areas at one time. The result of the study showed the need for more comprehensive services for female ex-offenders to ensure successful and long-lasting rehabilitation and reintegration into their community.

Although this qualitative study explored the reentry process, the employment challenges the formerly incarcerated females face, and how the current strategy of workforce development addresses said challenges. It is vital to have a clear understanding of this population's challenges. Exploring the challenges to the reentry process of a female ex-offender is essential to understanding the issues that impact reintegration and how workforce development organizations and professionals can address the issues. One

of the most difficult tasks for the formerly incarcerated individual is to return to their community after release (Petersilia, 2001). Spjeldnes and Goodkind (2009) stated returning home can be one of the most challenging steps an inmate must prepare for, to address the uncertainty of life and its changes since incarceration that an individual will experience once they are home can create insurmountable stress. Therefore, the creation of appropriate services, resources, and programs must be in place to assist the individual with their reentry process before and after release.

The reentry process is full of obstacles that need to be addressed, so the formerly incarcerated female must obtain and maintain successes such as education or employment to help ensure a path to reentry success. The formerly incarcerated female must address mental and physical health conditions, housing, family dynamics, substance and drug use, and healthcare issues upon release (Fontaine, 2013). In addition, the difficulties of navigating and obtaining the services to address these issues daily must also be addressed. Thomas et al. (2016) stated the mental health implications on the reentry of the formerly incarcerated individual had been a lack of follow-up with appropriate service once the individual is released. Moreover, this lack of follow-up significantly impacts maintaining reentry within the first year of release (Gunnison, 2011; Hong et al., 2014). In addition, Luther et al. (2011) studied the impact of the individual vulnerabilities of the formerly incarcerated individual and their reentry process. The study supported the notion that unaddressed mental and physical health, housing, and substance use issues greatly impact reentry success. Reentry success needs to have resources and services before and during the reentry process. Many formerly incarcerated individuals return

home to large metropolitan cities with large urban communities that are already overrun with their challenges to services and resources, making it more difficult for them to have reintegration success. Wikoff et al. (2012) claimed the obstacles of the formerly incarcerated individual and the challenges within their home community would only heighten the challenges to their reentry. The notion that reentry for these individuals is simple and full of services upon their return is an illusion. The reentry process is full of challenges that can hinder the rehabilitation and reintegration of the formerly incarcerated individual (Holtfreter, 2014). Furthermore, gender-specific challenges to reentry can feel overwhelming to both the formerly incarcerated female and the service provider (Greiner, 2015). Hence, more information is needed about the specific gender obstacles the formerly incarcerated female faces.

The specific reentry obstacles for formerly incarcerated females that strain their success in rehabilitation are the mental, emotional, and physical abuse they faced before incarceration (Lurther, 2011). In addition to the abuse faced, the formerly incarcerated female has experienced a challenging time reconnecting with family, especially their children (Morani et al., 2011). According to La Vigne and Halberstadt (2010), a formerly incarcerated female must address these two obstacles to succeed in her reentry. Furthermore, Welsey and Dewey (2018) stated that female ex-offender has many challenges in returning home compared to their male counterpart, such as the family dynamics and history of abuse that has hindered the female's successful return. They further stated that because these issues go unaddressed during and after incarceration, the

potential for resolving the issues once the home is poor. Thus, affecting the rehabilitation and reentry process of the formerly incarcerated female.

Additionally, Salem et al. (2013) conducted a study on the reentry issues for female ex-offenders and proper reintegration planning. The study showed the FIF faces challenges that are not limited to the typical reentry issues of housing, employment, or responding to correction supervision, but the previous history of abuse and unrecognized mental health issues. Another study reviewed the issues faced by homeless female ex-offenders and found that issues of abuse and mental health issues are prevalent amongst this group. They have a profound impact on the reentry success of these women (Opsal, 2012). According to Bennis et al. (2013), the unaddressed issues of abuse (emotional and physical) and mental health conditions maintain a negative outlook for reintegration. The unaddressed issues of abuse and mental health conditions impact the successful reentry of formerly incarcerated females.

In addition, the other areas that need to be addressed include family dynamics, a mother returning role, custody or reunification of mother and child(ren), childcare, and/or eldercare issues (Richardson, 2014). These additional areas have presented an obstacle to reentry success. The stress of returning home, returning to your role within your family, and fighting for your previous role in the family has presented a challenge to the female ex-offenders (Scroggins & Malley, 2010). Bloom and Brown (2009) stated motherhood had been a great motivator for women when returning home. Yet, employment, housing, and physical and mental health challenges have had a greater impact on reentry success.

Additionally, Bloom and Brown (2009) found that returning home does not minimize the mothers' challenges before incarceration, such as poor relationships with significant others and or children, the inability to locate and maintain gainful employment, and the lack of parenting skills. These multiple obstacles and barriers have intensified the ability of a formerly incarcerated mother to fail in her reentry process. According to Western et al. (2015), reentry is difficult because it encompasses social and financial reintegration. Many factors continue to impact that reintegration and the individual's ability to do it successfully. The family relationship is a great overarching factor that influences other areas such as employment, housing, finances, and stability. Western et al. (2015) stated family dynamics had been a powerful indicator of reentry success, as it has had a direct impact on the actions and behaviors of the formerly incarcerated female by the amount of encouragement, support, and forgiveness the family will give to the ex-offender. The impact of the family and support network on reentry for the female ex-offender has not been researched in detail, as most reentry studies have been based on the male ex-offender reentry process. Therefore, leaving a challenge in developing the appropriate and or efficient programming for the family and the returning individual.

The re-entry process for the male and female ex-offender is different from each other. In that, the gender-specific obstacles are significantly different and influential. According to Cobbina (2009), the difference between the male and female ex-offenders' reentry process significantly impacts the reentry and rehabilitation rates of either gender. In addition, it was found in Cobbina's (2009) study that female reentry success compared

to her male counterpart is deeply rooted in her familial relationships. Cobbina (2009) postulated that the correlation between the ex-offender's relationship with her family significantly impacts her successful overall reentry experience. According to the study, family support includes financial aid, emotional support, and childcare assistance (p.218). These areas of support allow the female ex-offender to succeed in the first phase of her reentry process, especially in employment and following up with supervision mandates of probation and parole (Rogers, 2017). The family dynamics and the role of the female ex-offenders within the family unit profoundly influence the reentry process and its success. Therefore, understanding its potential impact is essential to creating programming that addresses another need for the formerly incarcerated female.

Another area previously mentioned with significant influence on the reentry process has been mental health conditions. The research studies on the formerly incarcerated female's challenges lead to understanding what specific mental health issues can impact her ability to reintegrate and eventually engage in positive activities and behaviors once released. Wesley and Dewey (2018) presented research on the pathway to incarceration and the implications of reentry planning for female ex-offenders with mental health issues. According to their study, the reintegration of female ex-offenders with mental health issues needs to be addressed pre- and post-release with a focus on their ability to reengage with their community and the workforce. They suggested the importance of understanding familial obligations, the role expectations, and the additional challenges for recently released women when creating a successful reentry process. As the formerly incarcerated female return "home" to address childcare and

sometimes custody and reunification issues, it is important to evaluate all factors that impact reentry to create an effective policy or program.

Furthermore, it is essential to work with the returning female on the stigma related to her criminal history and lack of education or skills for the world of work as this can lead to recidivism (Bennett and Amundson, 2016). The study comprised formerly incarcerated women attending a reentry program between 2014 and 2015 for approximately eight months. The study's conclusion found the need to have comprehensive services to address many issues female ex-offenders face. Additionally, the study found that most females require specific services that address issues outside of employment and training. Those issues present a major obstacle to females engaging in employment.

Successful reintegration into one's community has led to many beneficial actions within the community and the individual. It leads to minimal rates of recidivism for the ex-offender. Valera et al. (2017) conducted a study on the tenets of successful reintegration with 20 individuals with a previous criminal history. They conducted semi-structured interviews to gather data on the elements of the reentry process. The study found the following to ensure successful reentry: (a) linking offenders to society; (b) institutional and community anchors; (c) social supports; and (d) personal epiphany (p. 8).

One factor is not more important than another; they all must work together to achieve reentry success. Therefore, impacting the individual's need to re-offend impacts recidivism rates. This study highlights the factors necessary to ensure reentry success.

Yet, a model needs to be implemented in various settings (urban, rural, and suburban) to ensure transferability and gain more data. This study supports all previous studies on the reentry process of ex-offenders and the elements needed for successful reintegration.

In addition, Cobbina (2010) conducted a study on the process of reintegration among currently and previously incarcerated females. This study looked at the factors that impact the success or failure of her reentry process. It examined the reentry process for the female ex-offender as it found and documented that the reintegration process is loaded with many obstacles and complex issues. There were 50 participants in a comparative study, both current and previously incarcerated women participated in face-to-face interviews regarding their experiences. The inclusion criteria for the sample group included women on parole that returned to incarceration after 2 years and women that never returned after 2 years after release. Findings showed family and community support, supportive parole officers, and post-release services that address the reintegration issues were all valid for the reentry of the study participants. The study's overall goal was to compare how current and former female prisoners experience their reintegration process. The study's findings could have been helpful to assist with the development of a reentry policy that focuses on the issues of the formerly incarcerated female. Although there are future implications for the findings, the findings currently support the notion of the complexities of reentry for female ex-offenders.

Several studies regarding the reentry process and recidivism rate of female ex-offenders with similar findings. Forrester et al. (2014) conducted a study on the reentry process and recidivism rate of women; it was found that both pre-and post-release

programming or services must look at the complex needs, wants, and life issues of the female. In a study of 31 women in a qualitative study on the factors that impact successful reentry and lowered reoffending rates, it was found that interpersonal and societal issues have a great impact on remaining home. Additionally, this study ensured reentry success, addressing self-esteem and self-identity issues in a comprehensive approach to rehabilitation. The implications of self-esteem and self-identity of a female ex-offender are directly related to choices of adhering to release requirements or reoffending. Therefore, an indication of the importance of programming is by looking at the whole individual when assisting with the reentry process.

It was noted in several studies that the re-entry processes for male and female ex-offenders are different. This difference can profoundly impact the success of reintegration for the female ex-offender. According to Herrschaft et al. (2009), it is vital for reentry programming to develop a gender-specific process. A study that focused on these differences between males and females was conducted with a sample size of 37 individuals with a previous criminal history or survivor experience. The data collection instrument was a two-question survey that gathered information on the impact of an event that caused a notable change in the individual. The purpose of the data collected was to understand better how males and females process events and experiences and how that information can be used to create effective reentry processes and procedures for females. Herrschaft et al. (2009) claimed that men and women express their thoughts and feelings in two ways; status-related factors and relationship-related factors. In addition, the study found that women often attribute the change to support and relational connections in their

lives. While men attribute the successful change to life status factors such as employment or a specific event or experience (p. 14). This study further supported the idea that successful reentry for females is rooted in the positive support surrounding them versus the employment skills or opportunities that they can pursue. The reentry process is full of obstacles requiring the individual to have the fortitude to persevere to find the needed resources for success. Additionally, to ensure reentry success, it is imperative local, city, state, and federal agencies have the appropriate resources to provide to the formerly incarcerated individual (Benett & Amundson, 2016). Appropriate services and resources for the returning individual can significantly impact reentry success rates.

Recidivism and Female Ex-Offenders

Throughout research on the factors that impact reentry and recidivism rates amongst ex-offenders, there is a correlation between successful reentry and recidivism. Recidivism is identified as the act of re-offending that causes the offenders to be rearrested, reconvicted, and sent back to jail/prison within 3 years or less of initial release (nij.gov). A study conducted by the National Institute of Justice in 2005 on the recidivism rate nationally stated that 67.8% of the 404,638 ex-offenders were released from 30 out of the 50 states of America. Further tracking of recidivism rates showed an increase to 76.6%, 5 years after release. These numbers include male and female ex-offenders (nij.gov). Therefore, understanding the factors that impact recidivism is essential to developing legislation, policies, and programming that impact the reentry process, and directly and indirectly, impact recidivism rates.

There has been considerable research conducted that focused on identifying offender recidivism risk factors to identify characteristics that exacerbate reoffending. Numerous studies have found prior criminal history, lifestyle instability (unemployment, frequent moves), and continued negative peer associations as risk factors for recidivism. A study on the recidivism risk factors of males and females found commonalities between reoffending factors between males and females (Olson et al., 2016). This study found that prior criminal involvement, length of time incarcerated, and negative associations are risk factors that impact recidivism and the reentry process. Additional areas such as the ability to self-regulate (antisocial cognition, antisocial behavior, antisocial personality patterns, and antisocial associations) and one's temptations were recognized as risk factors for both males and females in their reentry process and recidivism rates (Rettinger & Andrews, 2010). Yet, there has been a call to identify gender-specific factors for women. It was found in this study the areas such as the following are specific to a woman's pathway to criminal involvement and reoffending: being a "street woman" (homelessness, substance use, and prostitution), drug connection (use and or sale), being harmed or harming others, battered woman, and being economically motivated (p.32).

Additionally, Duwe (2014) conducted a study on the reliability and validity of a recidivism risk assessment tool used in Minnesota and found the tool is useful, however there needed to be adjustments to address the specific gender risk factors. This study found that this assessment tool for reentry and recidivism factors in both males and females leads to identifying previous criminal involvement, length of time incarcerated,

and the number of disciplinary actions while incarcerated present risk factors for both males and females (p. 586). It further uncovered gendered specific factors for females such as types of prior nonviolent or violent crimes, age upon release, and mental health/suicidal thoughts as additional factors to consider for reentry success, recidivism, and reoffending (p. 610). Understanding the many factors that impact recidivism does assist with the development of appropriate, efficient, and holistic reentry policies and programming.

According to Huebner et al. (2010), understanding the recidivism patterns for women is essential to creating correctional programs during incarceration and post-incarceration, specifically to address the needs and challenges of women. Furthermore, they suggested the current policies and programming for correctional facilities have been developed for male offenders and assumed that the same methods would work for female offenders, which has been proven to be inappropriate and ineffective in addressing female offenders' needs. Their study identified several factors for the likelihood of re-offending specific to female offenders, such as the connections between imprisonment behavior/conduct with post-release outcomes (re-offending), supportive family and children, and drug use/abuse.

Many studies over the past decades have examined reentry and recidivism factors specifically for females to bring attention to the need to have accurate services for females and have resulted in similar identified recidivism factors as mentioned earlier. There is a significant difference between the male and female reentry process and challenges to be addressed. Weisberg et al. (2015) stated that the reentry, re-offending

tool utilized to assist programmers or policymakers is male orientated and needs to have a gender-specific approach to effectively assess the reentry and recidivism factors for female offenders. The study further supported the idea that although male and female offenders have similar recidivism factors, female offenders have specific factors which impact their ability to remain integrated within their community.

Several studies on the current recidivism assessment tools have shown that they are male-oriented, therefore creating reentry programming and policies for female offenders based on male factors. The conclusions of these studies were unanimous in that to accurately assist female offenders with reentry; there must be adjustments to the assessment's tools with female-specific issues in mind (Eisenbarth et al., 2013; Griener et al., 2014; Johnson & Singh, 2016; Walters & Cohen, 2016). The overall challenges a female ex-offender faces in her reentry process and the potential for recidivism are essential and specific components that need to be addressed in planning, policy development, and programming. It is vital to have a gender-responsive and specific policy, planning, and programming to address the reentry process and the correctional initiatives pre- and post-release (Wesley & Dewey, 2018). Finally, the struggle of reentry and recidivism of female offenders can be linked to employment challenges once they return home.

Employment and Female Ex-Offenders

The FIF needs to secure and maintain stable and gainful employment similar to everyone else for similar reasons, such as supporting him or herself and their loved ones, pursuing life goals, and strengthening their communities. The factors that influence the

employment process of the formerly incarcerated are employment challenges such as the lack of work experience, lack of employable skills, and or education; the most challenging of all factors is employment discrimination. Duwe and Clark (2017) stated having stable post-release employment is vital in maintaining release and ensuring a successful reentry. Employment has been shown to reduce the risks of reoffending for both male and female ex-offenders (Ramakers et al., 2016). Ensuring stable employment and managing reentry obligations can be challenging for both male and female ex-offenders but having the necessary support and resources would improve the reintegration process. The importance of understanding the various employment factors for the ex-offender points to the development of policies and programs that effectively serve the needs of this population.

Factors like work hours and wage amount correlate to incarceration time and lack of work experience, the number of criminal convictions and felony convictions, and finally, the difference in work hours and wage for female offenders versus male offenders (Decker et al., 2015; Duwe et al., 2017). Currently, several studies have examined the employment issues of ex-offenders, re-entry, recidivism, rates, and methods to address the challenges yet most of the information is male-orientated. Therefore, leaving very few studies that focused solely on the employment factors for female ex-offenders mention similar issues in education, lack of work experience, skill set, conviction amount, and criminal charge. Female-specific factors such as child or eldercare commitments, mental health stability, and financial independence have been researched and found to have an impact on employment and re-entry success but a clear direction as to how to make a

permanent positive change has not been developed (Cobbina, 2012; Johnson, 2014; Young and Powell, 2015; Rodermond et al 2016.). Hence the need to be explored further and understood to create policy and programming to ensure successful reentry for the FIF.

Female ex-offenders' criminal and reentry experiences differ from male offenders in several ways, such as the pathway to criminal activity, issues and concerns of reentry, and factors for recidivism. The pathway to crime for women is normally influenced by life circumstances and female-specific issues such as a history of substance and physical abuse, and the need to care for family members (Yesberg, 2016). Additionally, a female ex-offenders reentry challenges in employment are different from those of her male counterpart. In general, ex-offenders frequently face rejection, prejudice, and discrimination and can be repeatedly knockdown if not ignored altogether. Even though getting a job on release is proven to reduce reoffending. The female ex-offender faces various challenges, unlike her male counterpart, and those challenges have impeded her re-entry success, especially in the area of employment. Spjendes and Goodkind (2009) claimed the increase in the incarceration of females has led to the need for additional services to address the specific life areas of this population.

Additionally, their study analyzed the barriers to employment for both males and females and found that both genders have similar areas to be addressed, education and skill level for employment, mental and physical health issues, and parenting and family issues. It was found that the lack of specific policy and societal barriers to reintegration gravely impact the re-entry of both genders but are more significantly challenging to

females. The study's findings further revealed the need to have comprehensive services and a support network of services to assist with the reentry process for both males and females. The study highlighted the need to have gender-specific integration programs that focus centrally on female offenders' reentry challenges. Consequently, this study and many before it have supported the need for additional research on employment struggles and policy development, and program planning for female ex-offenders.

The ability of female ex-offenders to maintain employment must have several factors considered and addressed. Richardson and Flowers (2014) stated the rehabilitation of female ex-offenders compared to their male counterparts is multifaceted and required more innovative development and planning to address their needs. They also claimed the ability to obtain and maintain gainful employment showed an inequality between the two genders. Inequality in the type of employment, the wages/salary, and the low low-skill employment she will obtain compared to her male counterpart (p38). Furthermore, their study findings supported a notable difference in gender and stigma related to gender and its impact on the employment and reintegration success of the formerly incarcerated female. Gender differences impact the re-entry process, the individual's ability to be successful, the recidivism rates of one gender from the other, and the need for specific programming to address the differences (Decker et al., 2014; Richardson et al., 2014; Spjelden et al. 2014).

Consequently, the challenges and gender differences presented in the ex-offender population make it essential to provide the formerly incarcerated female with skills and or abilities that increase her opportunities and ability to remain home. According to

Wheeler and Patterson (2008), the ability for an ex-offender to overcome their criminal past must attend and complete a vocational training program. Additionally, Rogers (2017) stated for the reintegration and employment of an ex-offender to be successful, they must find gainful, competitive full-time employment or complete vocational training in a skill area and when all of those steps are achieved there is significant impact on the individual's re-entry process. The importance of the female ex-offender obtaining stable employment or skill training cannot be overshadowed by her ability to be successful in the labor market. It is vital to review the types of programming for this population in all areas of employment and gender-specific services for formerly incarcerated females to be successful.

Employment Issues and Potential Solutions

In addition to addressing the various issues once the incarcerated individual returns home, it is essential to their success to ensure employment is maintained and secured. It is understood the ability of the individual to secure gainful employment directly affects their rate of recidivism. According to Lockwood et al. (2016) study on the effects of re-entry programs, employment, and recidivism rates in the Indianapolis metropolitan area for the formerly incarcerated individual found the previously mentioned are directly linked to finding stable and gainful employment. Upon returning to their previous community, the formerly incarcerated competes with other job seekers, which have the marketable skills, qualifications, and or certifications required for the job, the time employed, no employment gaps, and the education level required for the positions in which the formerly incarcerated individual lacks. Therefore, these

employment obstacles need to be resolved for the formerly incarcerated individual to compete and find gainful employment.

When establishing an employment program for the formerly incarcerated individual, ex-offenders must face barriers with solutions as it relates to job searching. For these areas to be adequately addressed services are to be delivered before and after release. Thompson (2010) stated vocational/educational aspirations have been successful because of planning before release, yet the follow-up when home in society is also essential to the ex-offender's engagement and success. The need for a closer examination of how to improve the recidivism rates of ex-offenders has taken a deeper look at the vocational and employment resources available to this population upon re-entry. Before addressing the types of employment or educational resources available, a clear understanding of the issues this population has and will face such as discrimination, low wages, or even the inability to apply for specific jobs because of their criminal conviction is required. Thompson's study highlighted the essential need to structure activities and events which enhanced the ex-offender's knowledge of the world of work, and the structure of employment search and provided career counseling before and after release (Thompson, 2010). Program administrators need to be aware and diligent about addressing the several challenges of ex-offenders. The challenges that formerly incarcerated individuals must address to ensure their success once released do not end with employment barriers due to criminal convictions but can include the emotional, physical, and psychological limitations associated with being incarcerated, released, and returning to their community. Richardson and Flowers (2014) claimed that the barriers

for ex-offenders can include both seen and unseen disabilities, and these barriers need to be addressed. These areas of challenges and disparities for which an administrator will have to address and implement solutions. An individual recently released from incarceration normally returns to a community with a stigma based on the criminal conviction, not the person returning home.

Furthermore, the resources, restrictions, and challenges the individual will face are not based on their character or motivation to change but on their conviction history (Decker et, 2015). It is equally important to prepare the formerly incarcerated before release and before employment to address their marginal employment once home and the potential of negative outcomes when home. Nally (2013) stated the formerly incarcerated will be marginally employed, with much of the population making less than \$5000 annually (p. 50). Nally (2013) further postulated that the restrictions placed on the formerly incarcerated, such as the inability to apply for city, state, and federal benefits (food stamps, housing assistance) hinders their ability to engage the community without significant challenges fully.

Kintock Group conducted a study on implementing employment and vocational training resources as a factor for reentry and reintegration in Pennsylvania with at least 423 participants over 2 years. After 2 years, there was an additional period to review the participant's commitment to their rehabilitation and employment. In the end, the study found it essential to individual success to ensure services are in place to assist the individual throughout their reentry process. Current employment-based reentry programs look to provide services to reduce recidivism (Bushway &Apel, 2012). However, there is

a lack of wrap-around services and policies to assist in combating the challenges of reentry. Research shows that graduates of employment-based reentry programs have lower rates of reoffending. Programs such as the Center for Employment Opportunities that solely focus on working with ex-offenders in the New York Metropolitan area have proven to be effective in assisting ex-offenders with obtaining and maintaining gainful employment with pre-and post-employment services. Jengeleski and Gordon (2003) postulated the development of holistic programming that addresses the employment and training challenges of the ex-offender and addresses the life skills, decision-making, and interpersonal skills of the individual warrant re-entry success. Finding gender-specific programming has been a challenge for the formerly incarcerated female. Re-entry programs have been designed with male ex-offenders in mind over the past decades. There is minimal research on current programs specific for female ex-offenders, therefore, presenting a need for studying the reentry process, especially the employment and recidivism of the formerly incarcerated female.

Summary

This literature review has unearthed the following findings regarding the reentry process of the formerly incarcerated female; the reentry process is full of expected and unforeseen challenges. These challenges have a great impact on the recidivism rates of the individual. Additionally, understanding these re-entry challenges is essential to developing and implementing reentry policy and programming. According to several studies, several significant factors impact the success of the female ex-offender reentry process that need to be considered when creating effective and efficient planning and

programming for release from incarceration. Life areas to be addressed during the reentry process are child/eldercare, family commitments and obligations, mental/ physical health specific to females, the pathway to criminal involvement, and employment discrimination that is gender specific.

Additionally, the findings of this literature review exposed the lack of gender-specific policy development within the correctional system or the workforce development industry to assist formerly incarcerated females. Furthermore, the creation of many programs within the correctional system for pre- and post-release is misdirected and inefficient in addressing the needs of female ex-offenders. The major flaw in preparing the formerly incarcerated female for release and reintegration is that the programs were still tailored for male offenders. Furthermore, it perpetuates the obstacles for female ex-offenders in finding the appropriate reentry programming to ensure her needs, concerns, and issues are addressed.

This study has examined the reentry programs that service female ex-offenders with their employment challenges and how they meet the needs of this specific group. All previous studies have examined the factors that lead to successful entry. Yet, the main issue of contention has been the examination through the male lens. The study explored the professional perspective of individuals working with the formerly incarcerated female and addressed the life areas specific to this population that impede or propel reentry success. The majority of the studies conducted on the female's perspective of reentry challenges or successes have been self-reported by the female ex-offender; this study

desires to present the side of the professional implementing the policies, programming, and corrections needed to service this population.

Officials in local, state, and federal government and nongovernment agencies involving criminal justice and the reentry of ex-offenders continue to struggle to create creative and efficient ways to serve the needs, desires, and concerns of FIFs. Current policies and programs are used to fulfill criminal justice requirements involving assisting ex-offenders with finding employment once released. However, these methods have been male-dominant and outdated, and therefore unproductive for female ex-offenders. I introduced and explored how workforce development professionals working with female ex-offenders ensure a successful reentry process for this population. In Chapter 3, I explain the study's methodology and research design and why it was the most effective method for this study. Additionally, I explain the sample size, sampling methods, data collection methods, and ethical issues that were addressed in this study.

Chapter 3: Data Collection and Analysis

Introduction

In Chapter 3, I provided a detailed description of the qualitative research method used for this study on workforce development, employment specialists, and or professionals working with FIFs searching for gainful employment. I addressed the research design, sampling size, data collection methods, and the instrument used. Additionally, I include an overview of the role of the researcher during the data collection process, ethical implications, and how those issues were mitigated. I also explain my data collection and analysis processes. I used a qualitative approach to look at the shared experiences of workforce development professionals and their ability to use workforce development services and strategies to impact the successful reentry of female ex-offenders. This was the best approach that allowed for the best method to gather real-time data to understand processes and how they impact the phenomena.

Additionally, this approach allowed for information regarding the implications of reentry processes and the employment of FIFs as well as policy and procedural changes to be collected and analyzed. The role of the researcher is discussed in this chapter. Understanding my role in the study allowed for the alleviation of bias by creating checks and balances as well as processes that ensure the legitimacy of my role. This chapter includes the challenges and successes of the research design as it applies to the study by detailing the sample size, setting, and participants. Purposeful sampling was conducted to ensure the sample group consisted of individuals who could provide the knowledge and experiences needed to answer the research questions. The data collection process

involved using semi-structured interviews with research participants to obtain data. I believed that the data collection process would produce authentic and transparent information. The steps used to ensure the trustworthiness and ethical protection of participants are discussed in detail in this chapter. Additionally, I present a detailed overview of the study's reliability, validity, and transferability, as well as data analysis and processing procedures.

Research Design and Approach

This study involved exploring workforce development professionals who work with female ex-offenders in workforce development programs and how these programs impacted the reentry process of this population. The following research questions were addressed in this study:

RQ1: What aspects of reentry programs which involve using a workforce development approach are useful in terms of maintaining successful reentry goals?

RQ2: How does the workforce development strategy of job readiness impact the reentry process for FIFs?

For this study, a general qualitative research method was used. I examined professional perspectives in the field and insights regarding the impact of workforce development on reentry and recidivism of FIFs. Creswell (2013) said the qualitative study method involves researching the shared perspectives of study participants and implications for effective change. This research design allowed for the dialogue between me and the study participants to be freer and more transparent. Furthermore, the

qualitative approach allows different participant perspectives and thoughts to create a general understanding of shared life experiences and phenomena. (Ospal et. al, 2016).

The use of interviews in this qualitative design approach allowed for more in-depth data collection for me to use to better understand common themes. The grounded theory design was not appropriate because this approach involves discovering a theory based on the participants' shared experiences (Creswell, 2013). This approach did not work for this study as I was looking at already shared experiences of professionals in workforce development programs as a part of the reentry process for female ex-offenders. Furthermore, I explored the present impact and not a theory. I was not looking to create a new direction or theory involving reentry and rehabilitation, but rather to address current trends and patterns. Ethnographic research would have been a possible approach because workforce development with formerly incarcerated individuals can be considered a study of culture. Still, this study's sample size of 15 participants did not fit the basic parameters of this approach. The ethnographic approach requires a larger sample size of individuals who have interacted with one another for long periods (Creswell, 2013). Finally, a case study approach would not have been an appropriate approach because it usually involves one case that is related to a major unsolved issue. Creswell (2013) said a case study approach is specific to one setting or event. The researcher must have an in-depth understanding of the case, and the sample size must be small. Therefore, this was not appropriate for this study. Additionally, I examined various research participants in various settings, which would not be appropriate for a case study approach. Hence the most effective and appropriate approach was a general qualitative study approach.

Role of the Researcher

As the researcher of this qualitative study, it was my role to be an observer-participant. As a participant, I asked more thought-provoking and probing questions to understand the perspectives of the research participants. Although I had previous experience in this field as a rehabilitation and workforce development professional, that was more than 5 years ago. As a rehabilitation counselor who collaborated with individuals with substance use or abuse disorders and had criminal histories, I would assist them to address challenges involving reacclimating within their communities. I assisted these individuals with locating, enrolling, and completing various employment, education, and vocational training programs. Due to my previous professional experience within the field of workforce development, I implemented a check and balance system that ensured transparency and avoidance of conflicts of interest. In addition, I had colleagues not participating in the study, review the research participation guidelines and questions to further ensure transparency and minimize any biases.

I also used member-checking to ensure the credibility the of data. Member-checking method entailed returning data to research respondents to check for the accuracy of their responses ensuring transparency between the research participant and myself. The technique of member checking was implemented, which provided the participants the opportunity to review the collected and transcribed data, make any corrections, and provide clarity (Birt et al., 2016). Member checking was a key step in the research data collection process by maintaining the collected data's credibility and

validity. Member checking was conducted at least 30 days after the final semi-structured interview was transcribed and this protocol step was vital to the study's overall success.

Methodology

In the methodology section of Chapter 3, there is a detailed description of the setting and site used for this study. A description of the strategies and methods utilized to identify the sample and sample size, a description of the data collection and data analysis process; a discussion of the value of the data collected; and the ethical protections of each participant have been discussed in this section.

Sample Size and Setting

In this qualitative study, it was vital to get a sample size with an adequate number of participants for saturation. According to Creswell (2013), data saturation would help ensure the data collection, and that the findings can be generalized when the study is replicated. Consequently, I utilized various organization sites for this study, which provided workforce development services to FIFs. The study utilized community-based organizations (CBO), nonprofit organizations, and non-government organizations (NGO) that allowed the researcher to obtain data from the organizations on the flexibility and ability to make immediate and direct changes to the organization's policy and programming to meet the requirements and needs of their stakeholders and organization participants. Settings such as employment agencies, vocational training facilities with job placement services, job readiness, and placement agencies, substance use disorders clinics, vocational and educational training programs, and advocacy organizations were included as possible location sites to locate research participants. Each of these settings

has professionals with diverse educational backgrounds (ranging from High School diplomas to master's degrees), work-related experiences, and skill sets utilized to assist the formerly incarcerated female in obtaining and maintaining her reentry goals. In addition, these professionals held positions requiring skills ranging from vocational or rehabilitation counseling, job placement counseling, technical skills training, employment specialists, and managers. For this study, it was important to have professionals with various skills and experiences that provided different perspectives on workforce development policies and services for the FIF.

Once the appropriate sites were identified the next step was to secure the appropriate sample size of 15 participants. Having had efficient sampling size in a qualitative study will provide adequate data collection and the generalization of the data collected (Creswell, 2013). Additionally, when considering sample size, it must be considered that not enough can lead to misinformation or redundancy, and having a too large sample size provides limited in-depth inquiry because of time restrictions to collect data (Sandelowski, 1995). With that in mind, I decided to secure a sample size of 15 research participants.

I believed that 15 participants would provide enough saturation, generalization, and in-depth inquiry into the shared phenomena. The next step in the study was identifying the sampling strategy that would be utilized to get the most appropriate participants, which was a purposeful sample strategy. In purposeful sampling, it is vital to identify the setting (sites) and sampling size before engaging in participant recruitment (Creswell, 2013). Purposeful sampling is a preselected criterion based on the research to

be studied and this sampling strategy focused on the similarity in characteristics, background, and occupation of the participants (Berg, 2004). Therefore, this strategy would be the best method to identify the appropriate research participants necessary for this study.

The sample size of any qualitative research should be large enough to obtain enough data to sufficiently describe and explore the phenomenon of interest and address the research questions. This study's sample size was 15 professionals from various settings within the field of workforce development, employment, or vocational training. After IRB approval was obtained, the next step in the recruitment process was to secure the 15 workforce development professionals using phone and email requests to potential organizations, programs, and or individuals that fit the sample size criteria. This included reaching out to various organizations via phone calls using a brief phone introduction of myself and the study or email to send an introduction or inquiry to participate letter. It was believed that 15 participants from various organizations would provide different perspectives on workforce development. As the primary and only recruiter for this study, I reached out to professional organizations such as AVRASA and NYCETC with members ranging from vocational, educational, rehabilitation, and workforce professionals, or companies to provide additional recruitment resources. Also, I reached out to organizations that worked directly with ex-offenders, such as The HOPE Program, EPRA, Employment Works, CEO (Center for Employment Opportunities), and the Women's Prison Association. I utilized substance use disorder treatment facilities such as START, Educational Alliance, and the New York State Substance Use Authority-

OASAS which has a database of centers or facilities that fit the criteria of providing services to ex-offenders searching for employment with substance use disorder. With a listing of 100 locations to locate potential participants for study participation, interest letters were disseminated with an outline of the study's required level of participation (face-to-face individual interviews for at least 45 minutes to an hour and the opportunity for the participant to review transcribed data for corrections and clarity). Consequently, this recruitment process was forthcoming and data-driven, as all steps of sampling and recruitment were implemented effectively.

Data Collection Procedures

In this study, data collection was conducted via the Zoom meeting platform due to COVID-19 pandemic restrictions for each participant. Data collection notes identified all participants' demographics, such as where and when the collection took place or what professional title they held (Creswell, 2013). The type of collection method utilized was face-to-face individual semi-structured interviews. According to Polkinghorne (2005), face-to-face interviews provide a first-hand account of the actual event or experience. When using this type of data collection method, it is the researcher's responsibility is to break down the collected information into themes and details for analysis. Semi-structured interviews provided the researcher with the opportunity to develop questions ahead of time that spoke specifically to the research study question(s). This method was beneficial because it allowed the researcher to control and direct the interview and assisted the participants with understanding the premise of the research (Barriball & While, 1994). Therefore, minimizing the potential of gathering unnecessary data. This

method assisted in the gathering of data that would lead to a better understanding of the phenomena. Additionally, semi-structured interviews allowed for flexibility and transparency in the participants' responses, which created a space for them to elaborate and be more authentic in their areas of experience.

The validity of this instrument utilized was addressed by having many sources to ensure credibility, reliability, and validity. Consequently, it is suggested to have various safeguards to ensure the previously mentioned data triangulation (Creswell, 2013). This study meant having various data sources to collect from, such as archived programs and public documentation. Additionally, there was a check and balance system to minimize researcher bias which was research member check-ins. Finally implementing an external process audit was utilized throughout the data collection process (Berg, 2009).

Professionals either currently or previously in the field of workforce development, vocational or educational training, and employment vetted the semi-structured interview questions created for this study to ensure the direction of the interview questions aligned with the research study questions. The vetted professionals used were: Supported Employment Department Director (currently), Rehabilitation Counselor (retired), a vocational training program recruiter, and two Employment Specialists (previously employed). This step was useful to the overall process because it allowed for alignment and guided the direction of the data collection. Implementing these procedural steps would assist with addressing the validity, reliability, and credibility of the research instrument and study, which increased the potential for transferability of the study to another setting.

This qualitative study approach did not require a pilot study before the first one-on-one interview of research participants as there was no need to address any misunderstandings in the research questions about the phenomena or shared experience being studied. The data collection began with the first participants identified by RP1, the setting, and the professional title indicated as the only identifiers. Subsequently, all participants were given the RP2- RP15 designation to ensure confidentiality of all. During data collection, all data was recorded via the Zoom platform on the computer, and field notes or written responses were stored in a locked cabinet that was securely locked up when not in use and will be secured for a minimum of three years. Upon completing the study, all written documents will be shredded by a professional company to ensure the destruction of all confidential information. To ensure transparency with the research participants, the researcher conducted random check-in regarding the confidentiality process to ensure all participants were fully aware of how their information will be handled and used upon completion of the study. The researcher provided all research participants the opportunity for member checking to allow for questions, concerns, and clarity of the information collected.

Data Analysis

During the data analysis phase, I utilized inductive coding. This method allowed me to collect all the data without creating predetermined codes (Thomas, 2006). This was vital for research because the participants' experiences are undocumented and unresearched; therefore, data-heavy collected information would be incomplete and uninfluenced by previous input. This method allowed for more authentic data collection

and coding of the participants' emotions, thoughts, reactions, and responses to the programming process, and the workforce development program's impact on the reentry and recidivism of female ex-offenders. Inductive coding was the best approach because it allowed for the data to create its themes and directions of the themes. According to Thomas (2006), inductive coding allows the researcher to create categories or themes by reducing the large amount of data collected, clarifying the themes and patterns developed by the data, and showing the links between the study variables, objectives, and study findings.

Throughout the collection and analysis process, I was able to look for common themes or trends to emerge. I also reviewed current documentation and identified potential themes to address from the interviews. I was able to identify emergent themes or trends that focused on the responses related to the successes and challenges in the delivery of workforce development services. I utilized the NVIVO data collection and analysis program to maintain large amounts of data and quickly access the data when needed. Also, this program was used to analyze the data collected.

Bias and Ethical Considerations

As mentioned previously, I have not been employed in the workforce development field for more than five years; therefore, minimizing the potential for bias with the study participants selected was low. Moreover, the potential for a power struggle or conflict of interest was minimized because the researcher has been removed from the study field for 5 years and more (Creswell, 2013). All potential ethical issue was addressed by consistent study transparency with study participants. The process began

with obtaining appropriate institutional review board (IRB) approval before the research started and then providing a clear explanation and purpose to all research participants. Furthermore, participants were informed about how their information would be used in this study to effect change (Rudestam & Newton, 2015).

Trustworthiness

In any research study, a test of trustworthiness has been addressed in the following areas: credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability (Creswell, 2013; Elo et al., 2014). The more a study can provide answers in these four areas, the higher the level of trustworthiness would be throughout the process, the findings, and the conclusions. Concerning credibility, I conducted a triangulation of sources. I used archived, current documentation, program data found on the organizations' websites, and other sources that assisted in showing credibility within the study (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2002). According to Creswell (2013) and Patton (2002) triangulation is a method of addressing study credibility by showing the linkage in various resources about the same topic. Hence, showing consistency and truthfulness in the topic being investigated. When looking at internal validity, it is essential the information collected can be retested in various settings and circumstances, and the same results are found. I used triangulation to address the issue of transferability to increase the ability to have the study used in another setting. This method would answer the question of external validity. Can this study be transferred to other areas, sites, and fields and yield the same credibility and transferability? An additional step was to be utilized such as prolonged involvement. According to Krieffing (1991), prolonged involvement in the natural setting or with the

research participants or increasing the number of member check-ins during the collection process is vital to ensuring credibility. Furthermore, it is important to address any pitfalls, such as presumed researcher bias or prejudice, when addressing credibility and transferability. This was addressed by implementing a check and balance system that required a colleague review by a peer or the committee members (Creswell, 2013, Rudestam, 2015). After said peer/colleague review was conducted, I applied the suggestions.

Finally, confirmability was addressed by ensuring the data was based solely on the participants' responses. Confirmability is the ability to use the conclusions of this study within other settings. Therefore, a detailed description of the setting, participants, and the participants' experiences will assist in the transferability of the study. Also, the removal of research bias would increase conformability and reduce any pollution of the collected data. Confirmability is based solely on the participants' thoughts and responses, not on my thoughts. I ensured confirmability by detailing my thoughts, biases, and procedures used by journaling throughout the data collection and analysis process. Consequently, ensuring that others can review and audit the data collected.

Protection of Participants' Rights and Ethical Procedures

Conducting a research study is very helpful and essential to addressing issues within the community. Creswell (2013, 2009) stated ethical issues can arise during any phase of the study. It is the measures employed by and the responsibility of the researcher to minimize or terminate any ethical issues that can interfere with or change the findings or conclusions of the study. The research process and development of conclusions must

not violate the research participants' rights, or the population being indirectly studied, the FIF. The first step to ensure participants' rights and privacy was to obtain IRB approval from Walden University on the data collection and analysis plan before beginning. I obtained Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval #03-10-20-0366026 before contacting any workforce development organizations or programs within the New York City Metropolitan area. I protected the research participants' anonymity by not requiring identification through the research participants' names, dates of birth, or social security numbers. However, I did ask for site information and the research participant's professional title during the data collection phase and mentioned them in the research results.

I began the recruitment process with recruitment letters in email form to potential sites explaining what the study is about and how site professionals can participate in the study. Furthermore, any site gatekeepers were informed about how the information gathered will be used. Consent and right-to-terminate forms were created, explained, and provided to the site gatekeepers and individual research participants. Informed consent has been recognized as an integral part of ethics in research carried out in different fields. It was of the utmost importance to specify what data would be collected and how it was used.

I did not utilize research study participants among the populations considered vulnerable, as it is the workforce professionals being explored, not the female ex-offender. Additionally, there was no potential for research participants to experience negative responses to questions during the semi-structured interview, thus migrating any

need for follow-up services or resources. Participants were informed that if they were unable to complete all the required participation levels for any reason, their information would not be utilized in the study. Their information will be disregarded in a confidential manner that protects their confidentiality and identity.

Finally, I did not provide incentives for research study involvement. Therefore, mitigating any conflict of interest, power struggle, or unenticing of a biased response from participants. As mentioned previously, I have not worked in the field for over five years and have not worked at any of the sites in over four years. Therefore, conflict of interest and or power differential was minimized if not terminated altogether. Once data (interview responses) were collected, it was vital to have proper and secure data storage. Therefore, I used a locked file cabinet to hold signed documents and an encrypted passcode computer to maintain the Zoom interviews. In addition, I was able to maintain all the data in a passcode-protected computer whenever not in use, and will be maintained for no less than 3 years after the study is completed. After five years of completing the research study, a professional company will shred the data to ensure the proper disposal of all information. All mentioned approaches and steps have ensured the study's ethical validity, reliability, confirmability, and credibility.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the experience of workforce development professionals as they assist the formerly incarcerated female in reentering her community and finding employment. In Chapter 3, the rationale for using a qualitative approach was reviewed. A comparison of other approaches was explored, and

the justification for using this approach will be presented in detail. There will be a detailed explanation of how and why the sample size, population, and sites were selected. The population for this study will be workforce development professionals, including employment specialists, vocational and education counselors, job developers, vocational training specialists, and job placement specialists who work in various employment, educational, vocational training, and substance abuse outpatient programs throughout the New York City Metropolitan area. I applied purposeful sampling to ensure the basic criteria of professional background are included in the sampling group. In this chapter, I explained the data collection instrument, semi-structured interviewing, the data collection and analysis steps used, and how trustworthiness was addressed—triangulation, checks and balance system of study auditing, and member check-ins.

In Chapter 3, I provided a breakdown of procedural steps used to collect data. After collecting and analyzing data, I provide a detailed and comprehensive report of findings in Chapter 4. I address study variables, workforce development, and reentry success. I also answer research questions. In Chapter 4, I present findings and themes in data.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

Workforce development programs or organizations, which formerly incarcerated individuals use upon reentry, provide multiple services but are not comprehensive in terms of service delivery. Workforce development programs or organizations primarily address the issue of returning to work as well as other life areas that impact employability. Nyamathi et al. (2018) said these programs were designed to return or introduce individuals to work by providing essential work readiness skills or training needed to obtain and maintain employment, but they have not addressed housing, childcare, or legal identification, as well as social services that have a profound impact on successful reentry and reintegration. In this research study, I examined perspectives of employment and vocational professionals working with FIFs, as well as their ability to assist FIFs with obtaining employment effectively. Furthermore, I examined how programming or policies impact FIFs' ability to be successfully reintegrated into society as gainfully employed individuals. In Chapter 4, I discuss the data collection process, data analysis, trustworthiness of data, findings, major themes, and trends.

Data Collection

Once Walden University IRB approval was received, I conducted an internet search of organizations within New York City that serve formerly incarcerated, paroled, or ex-offenders who are female. Additionally, I searched the Internet for workforce development, employment training, and skills training programs, which generated suggestions like STRIVE, the HOPE Program, St. Nicks' Alliance, and the New York

City Training and Employment Coalition (NYCTEC) which provided a database of programs within New York City that provide employment and vocational training services. I used NYCTEC to locate employment skills training programs that worked with low-income individuals and potentially formerly incarcerated individuals. Due to my previous work experience as a workforce development professional and rehabilitation professional, I was aware of two organizations, the Association of Vocational Rehabilitation in Alcoholism and Substance Abuse (AVRASA) and the Commission on the Certification of Rehabilitation Counselors (CCRC) that possessed databases of professionals who work within the fields of WD, employment or training skills, and vocational rehabilitation counseling. I was able to obtain the names of organizations, telephone numbers, and email addresses of vocational rehabilitation and employment counselors. I also searched the CCRC database of certified rehabilitation counselors (CRCs) within New York state, which generated a list of hundreds of rehabilitation counselors. My ability to use the database was hindered by the number of potential participants as the list did not state where CRCs worked, which resulted in ineffective recruiting techniques. Due to the CCRC database's exhaustive list of all certified rehabilitation counselors within New York State, it did not assist in narrowing the potential participant pool to only metropolitan areas of New York City.

To assist me with establishing my potential organizations or individuals to contact to participate in the study I used Microsoft Word to create a running list that housed all the names of potential organizations, contact persons, email addresses, and phone numbers on this list to assist me with keeping records of recruitment attempts.

The recruitment process began with blind emails sent to contact persons listed on the organization's website, specifically targeting media, public relations, vocational/educational, skills or work training, policy, and organization inquiry departments. As previously mentioned, all participants were professionals with work experience in vocational, educational, and skills training, or employment or work development who are currently working or previously worked in these fields, were located within New York City, and worked with the FIFs. I included in each email an introduction and recruitment statement that explained the study's purpose, information explaining how to participate in the study, and my contact information. Additionally, I included a recruitment flyer that provided my contact information and allowed potential participants to share it with their colleagues either within or outside their organizations. The recruitment process also included making calls to organizations or programs asking for contact information of professionals identified as vocational rehabilitation or employment counselors who fit participant criteria. Once I received contact information, I reached out to individuals via phone calls and briefly stated the purpose of my call, or I sent recruitment emails and flyers. Response rates during the first 3 weeks of recruitment were minimal. I initially received responses from potential research participants indicating they were unable to participate due to the COVID pandemic; while others did not respond to my invitation to participate in the current study. I attempted a second round of participant recruitment with the same individuals I previously contacted. For 4 weeks, I attempted to contact individuals without any response or an automated response of being out of the office at this time.

Due to receiving no response after the first 7 weeks of my recruitment process, I began another Internet search for additional programs or organizations that provided workforce development services to the FIF. This search generated similar names of organizations previously found. After continued outreach and recruitment attempts, I received a response from three individuals who expressed interest in participating in the study. Once I secured individual participation with a written or verbal confirmation, I sent informed consent forms for review and signature. I then scheduled interviews using the Zoom platform with each research participant once I received the completed consent forms.

After 3.5 months of outreach, recruiting, and re-engagement of previous potential contacts, I secured and scheduled three interviews. Interviews were conducted using Zoom and recorded on my computer. Interviews ranged from 32 to 43 minutes, and participants were asked open-ended questions (see Appendix D). After each interview, I thanked each participant for participating in the study and informed them they would receive an invitation to review, and fact-check their responses within a few weeks. I also asked each participant to share a referral source I could follow up with to potentially gain additional research participants. I obtained one additional potential source from each participant. I included a new potential participant in a Microsoft Word document as a referral source. I made a third attempt to recruit from previously identified programs and organizations using follow-up emails that included a recruitment flyer (see Appendix F) as well as an email stating the purpose of the study, which resulted in two additional responses. From this third recruitment attempt, I was also able to secure the participation

of three more research participants from the referral sources generated by my first set of interviewees.

The initial recruitment process was challenging; at the end of three-plus months of recruiting amid a global pandemic, I was able to receive five responses out of forty emails sent to participate in the study. Of the five responses received, I secured and conducted three interviews. Another round of emails was sent out that included direct referrals from study participants after about two weeks, resulting in another four responses and five referrals resulting in six additional completed interviews. The overall recruitment process took at least nine months because of the challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. The obstacles in recruitment due to the pandemic caused a delay that eventually resulted in a request for approval for Institutional Review Board (IRB) extension. The recruitment process resulted in seven direct contacts and seven referral recruits who completed the study interviews. All data collected from the interviews were recorded in Zoom onto my computer's hard drive then transcribed into the NVIVO software and analyzed using the same software.

Data Organization

The primary focus of the study is how the current implementation of workforce development strategies by the workforce development professional has assisted the formerly incarcerated female in her re-entry process, with a focus on employment, vocational, training, or educational goals from the professional's perspective. Based on the research questions and data collection of the programmatic achievement and challenges faced by the professional, it is the study's goal to identify the policies and

methods or procedural changes that effectively assist the formerly incarcerated female in reintegrating into her community and meeting her employment mandates.

For this study, I needed to obtain 15 participants to complete 15 interviews to achieve the required saturation for the study. Although I faced significant challenges when recruiting research participants due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the shutting down of many programs and offices, and the necessity to use Zoom as the interviewing platform versus face-to-face, I secured and completed all fifteen interviews, after numerous recruitments attempts and referrals from research participants.

Once the data collection process was completed, I began the coding process by transcribing all 15 interviews into the NVIVO software. Williams and Mosen (2019) stated not having pre-convinced codes, or pre-coding, before reviewing data is not unheard of in qualitative studies. As it allows the researcher the flexibility and creativity to identify themes within the data. Additional codes emerged with further uploading, transcribing, and reviewing of the raw data. In their research, Hewitt-Taylor (2001) noted that emergent codes or themes in the raw data are common and can present the researcher with more opportunities for coding. All 15 participant interviews were included in the final research sample and coding process. According to Hennick et al. (2019), saturation is met when enough information is collected to replicate the study or when collecting more data does not generate any added information. Based on the sample size of 15 I was able to transcribe and analyze the data and determined I achieved a good saturation for this study.

Table 1*Description of Research Participants*

# Of Active participants	Professional Title	Field of Work
6	Rehabilitation Counselors	Treatment facility/Hospital Based
1	Senior Level Rehabilitation Counselor	Treatment/ Hospital Based
3	Workforce Development Senior Management	Employment Readiness/ Skills Training Program
1	Employment Counselor/Specialist	Skills Training Program
1	Skills Training Counselor	Skills training/Employment Readiness
1	Social Worker	Employment Readiness/Skills training program
2	Vocational Rehabilitation Director	Nonprofit Organization

Once I transcribed the data in NVIVO 12 software, the coding process began with sorting and identifying emergent themes. The dominant themes that emerged from the data were: (a) support systems, (b) employment challenges, (c) program challenges, (d) program solutions, and (e) techniques and methods. These themes were identified as the most prevalent and repeatedly referenced by all the research participants. These themes were more prevalent than others which lead to this chapter focusing on the following themes: support systems, program solutions, and techniques and methods.

Research Collection Findings

In this section, I examine each theme and how they are connected to the Social Cognitive Career Theory.

Support Systems

When analyzing support systems within an organization and their ability to impact the organization, the staff, and the participant, it is vital to understand the best support system utilizing the implementation, and execution process used to meet the desired goal. Support systems can come in the form of a policy, strategy, or technique utilized in the daily operations of an organization or program. Support systems can maintain participants' involvement and/or program longevity. According to participant data, support systems have been identified as policies, actions, and methods used to maintain program participants' continued enrollment and/or engagement with the organization or program. Research participant 8 stated there are different types of support the participants might need before entering the program or during the program. Research

participant 8 further stated throughout the process it can be found a program participant has a housing issue that interferes with his/her employment goals and therefore someone from the program has to work with that client to resolve the issue. Also, a client could present with a mental health condition that did not surface until 3-4 months into the program. So, then the next step is for the professional to collaborate with the individual to address her mental health issues and concerns by connecting the client to resources that can assist her either before or while engaging in employment activities. Based on the data collected from various research participants it is vital to have an understanding of the issues the individual is dealing with and how the organization can stand in the gap for the individual by utilizing support systems to engage clients in program services. Support systems fill a void and can positively and negatively affect individuals and the organization's ability to meet both of their goals. According to the data collected, support systems can be broken down into two areas; positive and negative support systems that have had an impact on the ongoing engagement and success of program participants.

Positive Support Systems

Positive support systems foster a sense of community and an environment of trust and care between the organization, the staff, the participant, and the local community. Positive support systems foster a partnership between all stakeholders in the success and goals of the program participant, which is the formerly incarcerated female returning home. Research participant 10 summarized positive community support stating, "Help to maintain program success is knowing your community and knowing the resources in your community, having partnerships with the community so that even if I

didn't know it and didn't have the capabilities of providing it in my program, I knew that I could send my client to program X, Y, Z and she would be better served while receiving services from my organization. Having those community resources help the program provide the best overall care for the individual.”

According to the data, I believe positive support systems encourage the idea of an “I can” attitude for the actual individual, which fosters the internal motivation to maintain steps towards successful program involvement and/or completion and successful reintegration within their community. The idea that positive support systems within an organization, program, or policy can encourage an “I can” attitude has alignment with the social cognitive career theory (SCCT). According to SCCT, having a positive outlook and expectation of your abilities, tasks, and goals will encourage positive thinking and actions by the individual (Lent and Brown, 2008). Furthermore, the data confirmed how the SCCT tenet of positive cognitive thinking leads to positive self-efficacy and reliance. Positive support systems encourage an individual and partnerships within the community and help to increase the individual's ability to reintegrate successfully. However, there are other areas to consider, the potential negative sides to support systems, and their ability to derail re-entry success.

Negative Support Systems

Negative support systems can deter both organization staff and program participants from achieving their goals. Negative support systems include creating organizational policies or standards that do not adhere to the organization or program's mission and/or vision. In addition, the inability to close the gap in services or meet the

needs of the individual whom the organization or program serves. Negative support systems can be identified as how the formerly incarcerated female lives, and how her home environment, and community continue to harm her reintegration. According to Decker et al. (2015), an individual's environment in which they return home after incarceration has a significant impact on how they reintegrate and how successful their reentry process will be. Hence, when an organization is developing policies and or programming to address these types of negative support systems, it is essential to understand all the potentially negative pitfalls the FIF may face. Areas such as compliance with the justice system mandates, family dynamics, physical/mental health systems, and community issues/concerns can and have had a major negative effect on the FIF. Failures in these various systems can derail the formerly incarcerated female's reentry process and ability to engage and or complete a workforce development program. Therefore, the organization of the programs must take these areas into account and create systems, policies, and techniques to counter and respond to negative support systems. When looking at support systems, it is important to have a clear understanding of both the positives and negatives and how both affect the individual, the organization, and the community because both systems impact the overall re-entry success. Effective policy and programming are based on designing strategies, techniques, and methods that individuals can support and engage in because it matches and answers their known and unknown needs.

Additionally, when a program or policy is designed to fill in the gaps for the needs of the individuals and the community it serves it will generate successful outcomes

(Nyamathi, 2018). Therefore, an organization or program developer must consider the whole person when creating policy, standards, or programming for the formerly incarcerated female. According to all research participants, negative support systems have impacted their ability to work effectively with the FIF. Research participant 7 stated, “When resources within the organization or surrounding community are under par or scarce the formerly incarcerated female and professional faces insurmountable challenges to a successful re-integration. It is those challenges that create an environment of hardships and loss versus one of reentry and reintegration success.” Additionally, social cognitive career theory supports previously mentioned states and data found that proper supports and support systems are essential to individual career success and the notion they can be successful. Furthermore, based on the SCCT, when individuals have confidence in their abilities, they can envision success in their career tasks, activities, and path. Hence, supporting the idea the lack of resources that both the professional and FIF need to engage in the reentry process can lead to unsuccessful reintegration, the lack of program participation, or program completion. A lack of appropriate and useful resources can be seen as the lack of individual capabilities and or skill sets that impact career choice and success. The lack of appropriate support systems to assist in the development of individual confidence in one’s skills and potential for success is directly linked to one’s ability to be re-entry successful.

Program Solutions

Program solutions were the next primary theme identified as essential to planning and executing an effective reentry and reintegration process and being able to identify the

individual's progress. Program solutions have the responsibility of understanding or clarifying the deficiencies within an organization or program when it comes to delivering services or products, their mission or vision by developing solutions to those organizational shortcomings. Furthermore, program solutions look to address the program shortcomings with techniques or policies to increase efficiency and positive results. In this section, I review the challenges organizations or programs have when working with FIF and how the theme of program solutions can address those challenges. According to Sered and Norton (2019), the reentry of the formerly incarcerated female is thwarted by challenges ranging from employment challenges; lack of proper photo identification or documentation of work history or professional skills, issues with employment discrimination, family structure, or family dynamics issues, foster care involvement, and issues with the support systems assisting the female with navigating her reintegration into her community. However, based on the data collected, it was determined that organizations, programs, and policies are developed to solve this challenge, to assist the FIF with their reentry process and reintegration back into their family and community. According to research participant 10,

“Many successful reentry paths are those stories lined with supports and system solutions that work. Systems and individuals work together to ensure the individual's success.”

The data further showed that understanding the program systems or techniques that work is the goal of many organizations. I believe that the best way to get those answers is to get the input of the professionals who implement the

techniques and strategies essential to creating systems, standards, policies, and or programs that work to achieve the goal of successful reintegration. According to research participants, successful program solutions should include feedback from the staff and participants within the program. Research participant 4 stated, that program solutions impact how the formerly incarcerated female is viewed, managed, encouraged, and directed throughout her reentry process. All research participants believed that program solutions should include the perspective and experiences of individuals it will impact directly to be useful. Furthermore, program solutions should empower professionals to do their job well.

The Social Cognitive Career Theory supports this idea because it postulates career choice success is obtained when the individual can maintain a professional environment of self-confidence, self-competence, and self-motivation (Lent and Brown, 2008). In addition, SCCT supports the notion of effective program solutions because it shares in the concept that effective and efficient working systems will increase the self-efficacy and confidence of the individual and or the professional to perform their duties. Consequently, the data supported the importance of program solutions by identifying the effective program solutions that assist in solving program deficiencies or individual challenges by presenting both the professional and the individual with an array of solutions to choose from. The research participants believe having a menu of choices attempts to meet individual needs and organizational challenges which increases the potential of both being successful.

A review and analysis of current program solutions' effectiveness are vital to the creation and implementation of new and or adjusted program solutions that result in effective positive outcomes. Program solutions must be created to address the individual's needs, the community's needs, and the organization's needs, specifically in the case of the FIF, her needs and wants, and her release mandates. Additionally, Blitz (2006) postulated that motivating the formerly incarcerated female during her reintegration has lasting change when delivered from a policy that directly impacts the individual's hierarchy of needs. Furthermore, Nyamathi et al. (2018) state when needs have been met, the potential for successful reentry increases. Appropriate individual solutions include addressing employment challenges and physical/mental health issues that can impact full engagement within a program or overall reentry process. Hence, according to the study data, program solutions are to be designed to create an active system or set of actions that can be utilized by program/organization staff to assist program participants in addressing their needs to achieve their goals. Program solutions as a policy, organizational standards, or best practices can impact the re-entry success of the FIF directly and indirectly. Hence, the need for constant review, redevelopment, and reimplementing of responsive and creative solutions.

Techniques and Methods

The third theme identified in the data is Techniques and Methods. Techniques and methods can change the course of an individual organization, program, and policy success. The development and implementation of a specific technique or method are based on several factors such as previous proven reliability and validity scores,

scientifically proven outcomes, organizational standards, outcomes that need to be fulfilled, trial and error, and sometimes just luck (Hermalin et al. 2007). Organizational or program techniques are designed to bring together an idea and a target goal and are actions used to reach that goal (Boudreaux et al. 2020). Based on the data collected, most participants agree that finding and utilizing effective methods and techniques are vital to an organization, program, and individual success. Participant 10 articulated as follows: "One of the most effective methods is, actually to take a more holistic approach, so it's not just me, it's the entire team, and it's for the individual we are working with."

Throughout this section, data will be presented to show the current effective and ineffective techniques utilized by workforce development professionals. Many of the research participants stated for reentry success, there must be a partnership between the organization, the individual, and the community. In addition, many of the research participants stated partnering with fellow community organizations to identify the needs of both the returning citizen and the community can potentially create holistic services and an environment of trust from which all stakeholders benefit. According to most research participants having a comprehensive approach to creating and executing techniques and methods for the FIF is the most efficient and effective way to assist with their reintegration.

Effective Techniques and Methods

Research participants stated effective techniques and methods encourage trust among program participants, the organization, and the community. Furthermore, participants stated that organizations and or policy techniques and methods need to be

creative and open to addressing the needs and concerns the of individuals they serve. Organization programs and policymakers are taking time to address the actual needs of the individual in conjunction with the organization's goals, using various techniques or methods such as individual and group counseling. Ten of the 15 participants stated that scientifically proven methods like cognitive behavioral therapy and motivational interviewing have proven to be effective in assisting program attendees in achieving their goals. To have an effective reintegration, all research participants believe it is vital to have scientifically proven techniques or methods that assist the professional in meeting the individual's needs and the criminal mandates because it speaks to the validity and reliability of the technique/method to produce positive results. For example, research participant 7 said, "When meeting the needs of the program participants, it is vital to have various effective and reliable tools at your disposable, therefore, allowing you the professional creativity and flexibility in service delivery."

Also, the data suggested using techniques and methods that work to create a realistic and achievable plan for the formerly incarcerated female is paramount to re-entry success. Thus, the formerly incarcerated female can be fully invested by engaging in and completing the reentry program and process. The idea of having techniques and methods that effectively assist the professional when working with the FIF further solidifies the tenets behind the SCCT, that career decisions and actions are made based on the alignment of self-confidence, internal and external motivations, and the belief in one's ability to learn and apply new things. Hence, having the ability to be confident in one's ability to execute tasks and goals is important to one's ability to succeed. Therefore,

when the professional is provided with the appropriate techniques and methods to work with the FIF, they can and will believe they can effectively do their job and assist the FIF in their reentry process. Twelve out of the fifteen participants mentioned in addition, that developing and implementing internal program methods based within their organization on the professionals' knowledge and experience has provided positive outcomes for the organization and the individuals they serve.

Ineffective Techniques and Methods

As there are effective techniques and methods to assist the professional and the individual client, there are ineffective techniques also. According to the data, ineffective techniques and methods discourage the individual and the professional. Ineffective techniques and methods are not limited to procedures utilized by the professional but also how the organization develops programming, policy, and standards. Additionally, ineffective methods impact how the program participant interacts with the organization, program, and reintegration. Research participants shared that one of the most ineffective techniques and methods included implementing policy or programming that does not have the individual needs as an integral component but looks to program or organization quotas or benchmarks. Several research participants shared that if the program participant feels the organization or programming is not focused on the participant's needs, then the participant will be disconnected from the program and retreat or, worst of all, drop out of the program. Research participant 12 shared this statement:

The quantifying of people's dysfunction so that you can write a grant because you see them according to the terms you now have created and not the way the

individual comes to you for help. It is about fitting the individual to meet the standards set forward by a policy, a grant, or a program method instead of the actual person it is meant to help.

The data repeatedly showed when policies, standards, and programming are created to meet benchmarks or organization goals solely versus incorporating the population the organization serves, the result is failure for the organization, the program participant, and the policy, techniques, and methods. The professional's techniques and methods to assist the formerly incarcerated female can be both effective and ineffective. It is the professional or the organization's duty to evaluate what scientifically sound technique will help meet its goals/benchmarks, yet also be effective in creating positive impacts on the individual and her reintegration process. Overall, techniques and methods must strike a balance between meeting organization or program quotas and ensuring the program professionals' and participants' motivations, needs, and wants are met. This in turn means the FIF reintegration goals are met and achieved.

Trustworthiness and Reliability of the Data

The data in this study must prove to be not only trustworthy but reliable. To achieve the integrity of the research, the methods used to collect and analyze the data must be reliable and valid. Reliability looks at the consistency of the procedures used to collect and analyze the data (Rust & Cooil, 1994). Furthermore, ensuring the reliability and validity of qualitative data collected means ensuring the methodology used, the sample size, the sample criteria, and the sampling process are scientifically based (Golafshani, 2003). This research implored several methods and standards to ensure data

reliability and validity. The first step was to ensure the saturation of the data collected. Saturation means collecting enough data without added information (Hennick, 2019). Saturation is vital because it indicates a robust amount of data was collected to analyze and draw from its findings and conclusions. The study's sample size is 15 research participants, and that sample size was obtained. Saturation was met in this study because the data showed similar responses from each research participant, and no new data or outcomes were identified.

Another method to ensure the trustworthiness and reliability of the data was triangulation by implementing the following. Triangulation means using various data resources to obtain data regarding the phenomena to be researched (Patton, 1999). For this study, the researcher used data triangulation. According to Guion (2002), data triangulation is when the researcher evaluates a phenomenon by categorizing the various stakeholders, analyzing the data, and identifying similar outcomes. The researcher obtained 15 research participants from various fields, as previously indicated in Table 1. Therefore, meeting the standard of trustworthiness based on ensuring various stakeholders were identified and included in the study and their information was analyzed for study findings.

Finally, I conducted member checking to further ensure reliability and trustworthiness. Member checking is a technique that required me to share the transcribed data with various research participants for their review. The member-checking process allowed the research participant to double-check the data collected during their interviews for inconsistencies and allowed them to provide additional or corrected

information (Creswell, 2007). I presented all 15 research participants with the opportunity to review their individual transcribed data; however, only seven responded with a desire to review their interviews. After the seven participants completed the member checking, it was found the current transcribed data accurately captured the participants' perspectives and input. Therefore, I concluded the data collected accurately reflected the research participants' thoughts, feelings, and ideas and were reliable and trustworthy.

Summary

In this chapter, I provided details regarding the analysis of the data collected. First, there was a description of how the data was collected, followed by a detailed description of the data collection process to ensure saturation, validity, and reliability. Most of the chapter was a presentation of the data findings. The data concluded with several emergent themes, yet this chapter focused on the most prevalent research themes: support systems, program solutions, and techniques or methods. Throughout the findings section, quotes from the research participants were included to show what the participants thought and reported about the themes as they applied to policy or programming for the FIF. Finally, there was a review of the validity and trustworthiness of the data collection and analysis process. Specifically paying attention to how the researcher utilized saturation, data triangulation, and member checking to ensure the validity of the data.

This chapter further highlighted the major themes within the study, which were support systems, program solutions, and techniques or methods. These themes are relevant because the focus of the study was to explore and examine the impact of current

workforce development strategies on the reentry process of the formerly incarcerated female from the professional's perspective. The findings showed the professionals believed in these themes and their impact on the work they do with the FIF.

Chapter 5 includes the findings and their connections to the literature review as well as data regarding FIFs returning home from incarceration. I also further address the SCCT and its impact on data and findings. Also, in Chapter 5, I provide further research recommendations based on collected data and gaps in the current literature. Finally, I address what had the most influence on the re-entry process and achieving employment success for FIF. Also, I further discuss how the identified study themes influenced the motivation and engagement of both the workforce development professional and FIF. Lastly, these themes were identified by the research participants as areas of improvement to enhance the FIF re-entry process and experience. Finally, I address how this study has implications for social change.

Chapter 5: Conclusions

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify how workforce development professionals assist FIFs while using current workforce development policies, strategies, and programming. Fifteen workforce development professionals were selected using purposeful criterion sampling to participate in the study. I used a semi-structured interview protocol to explore the experiences and subject knowledge of this population. I used Zoom media platform to conduct all 15 interviews and the NVivo transcription software to transcribe, sort, and analyze data.

The re-entry process for the FIF is fraught with many challenges that impact her ability to fulfill post-release mandates and her ability to reconnect with her family and community. Wesley and Dewey (2018) said female ex-offenders must overcome childhood and adult trauma and substance use and/or abuse to engage in their integration process. Doherty et al. (2014) said FIFs' reentry progress is challenging due to internal motivations and factors, which include but are not limited to substance use and abuse and the impact of unresolved traumas of childhood, being incarcerated, or being thrust into their family or community upon release. Furthermore, if these issues are not addressed, the FIF's ability to engage in reentry activities such as employment and even family or community activities will be thwarted due to the obstacles and negative consequences (Coates, 2015). A life of struggle for FIFs does not end when they are no longer incarcerated. They must engage in new lifestyles and learn to cope, adjust, and participate within families and communities. The FIF must understand how to develop the skills

needed to adjust to life after incarceration. The re-entry process for FIFs has many challenges and needs resources and opportunities to combat said challenges. Therefore, developing policies and programs that provide FIFs with effective tools, strategies and opportunities would improve their reentry process and their chance of success.

In this chapter, I discuss interpretations of research findings related to literature involving how reentry programs assist FIFs and the impact these programs have on the reentry process. I also discuss the findings and implications of SCCT. Finally, I conclude the chapter with an assessment of the limitations of this research, implications for future research, and implications for social change.

Interpretations of Findings

In this study, I focused on the shared experiences of workforce development professionals who work with FIFs during their reintegration process. I review themes that were addressed in Chapter 4 and explore connections to the research. In addition, I explain how the SCCT was relevant in terms of study findings. Furthermore, I exposed programmatic and policy challenges faced by research participants and their perceived inability to assist FIFs with achieving reentry success.

When addressing the reentry process and the challenges, it is vital to understand the challenges, the impact on the process, and how to develop strategies, methods, or policies to address them. According to Johnson (2014), the reentry process for FIFs is complex, with issues such as lack of identification, public assistance/government assistance, and medical insurance that need to be addressed to be successful. Family dynamics, educational issues, lack of proper identification, and mental or physical health

issues impact returning females' ability to reintegrate compared to their male counterparts (Herrschaft et al. 2009; Holtfreter & Wattanaporn, 2014). This can cause FIFs to struggle in terms of maintaining their reentry goals. There is an identified difference in services currently provided for returning males versus returning females and those differences have been shown to influence the reentry process of both. According to Holtfreter and Wattanaporn (2014), there is a lack of programs and policies that are gender-specific, so returning females struggle with being fully engaged or maintaining reentry processes. Due to the lack of understanding of the entry needs of FIFs, specific gender obstacles they face, and the magnitude of resources needed, it is hard to develop programs or policies to impact their reintegration processes effectively.

I highlighted the need for gender-specific programming by identifying what is missing in current workforce development programs to assist FIFs. According to research participants, the challenges FIFs face during the reentry process are associated with the lack of resources, training, and policies. Cook and Haynes (2021) said for their entry process to be successful, all parties involved must have the appropriate tools, resources, and motivation to engage in the reintegration process. Having confidence in one's ability to complete tasks associated with one's reentry process is paramount to being successful.

The data showed research participants believed that due to the shortcomings and inadequacies in resources, strategies, and tools within their programs or organizations they could not effectively assist FIFs. Additionally, Muthee et al. (2020) said when a program does not have the necessary resources to address formerly incarcerated

individuals' needs, poor outcomes inevitably result during the reintegration process. Resources to address housing, employment, education, medical and mental health, and family dynamics are critical for overall reentry success. Policies, organizations, programs, and professionals working with this population must have the necessary resources and capabilities to assist FIFs (Berman, 2005). Bushway (2012) said employment is a major factor in terms of the successful reintegration of formerly incarcerated individuals. Therefore, having appropriate and effective policies and programs to address the employment needs and challenges of FIFs is crucial to their reentry success.

There are many aspects of the reentry process that go unserved or underserved and have a significant impact on the FIF post-release success. Scroggins and Malley (2010) said employment and education services are significant resources to assist the returning individual, yet they are not the only significant factors that affect reentry. Therefore, understanding the multiple aspects of the reentry process, including potential pitfalls and achievements, will assist in the development of reentry programs or policies that can assist FIFs in being successful in terms of fulfilling their release mandates and successful reentry as well as potentially lower rates of recidivism for this population. Based on the research data collected research participants agreed on the importance of creating or improving current programming or policies to be creative and have a more holistic approach to services to serve the FIF.

Support Systems

The literature review indicated the importance of programs or policies that incorporate support systems that assist the formerly incarcerated individual upon release and reintegrating within their community. According to Valera et al. (2017), successful reentry is aligned with social support, community support, program support, and resources that all work together to ensure a successful reentry. Therefore, a policy creator and program developer must consider the previously mentioned elements when creating programming or policy to address the issues or concerns of the formerly incarcerated female. This is also supported by 12 of the 15 research participants who shared that the most effective program incorporates the individual, the community, the organization, and external organizational resources to address formerly incarcerated females' needs and concerns. The research participants further agreed that an agency that focuses on the needs and wants of the individuals while utilizing its resources to support the individual during this transition is a program with both successful individuals and programmatic outcomes.

Techniques and Methods

Research participants also shared the importance of techniques and methods that effectively address the formerly incarcerated female's reentry process. According to the data collected, research participants stated that effective techniques and methods are flexible and focused on individual needs. Furthermore, research participant 11 stated, "The most ineffective tools or methods utilized are the ones that look to comply with the organization's ability to respond to their funders' goals versus the individual or the

community they serve.” Additionally, various participants shared, that methods or techniques that are not specific to the population are counterproductive to the overall goal of helping the FIF achieve reentry success and longevity. This is also supported by the literature review in Chapter 2. The literature review states there is a difference in how male and female ex-offenders address reintegration issues; therefore, creating specific gender programming, policies and techniques is essential (Herrschaft et al., 2009). In addition, the literature review presented that the current tools utilized to assess the reentry and reoffending factors of the formerly incarcerated are male-oriented and therefore not truly applicable to females (Yesberg, 2015). Based on the data collected and the information found in the literature review, the current techniques and methods used for the formerly incarcerated female have not addressed their specific gender concerns and reentry issues. Hence, creating a gap in appropriate and effective policy, programs, or services for the FIF. As previously mentioned in the literature and current study the lack of appropriate programming leads to the lack of FIF engagement, motivation, and completion of her reentry mandates and goals.

Program Solutions

Finally, the data addressed program solutions as a theme with high research participant responses. The research participants shared that program solutions need to be comprehensive and targeted when addressing the needs of the formerly incarcerated individual, especially the FIF. Participants discussed how the reentry process for the FIF is significantly different from her male counterpart and that difference guides how they work with the FIF. Participants also believed due to the differences the programs and

policies must consider the home life and the community in which the female engages and plans on returning. According to the research, the formerly incarcerated individuals' life areas, and responsibilities must be aligned with their reentry needs and goals for the process to be successful. Additionally, Cortes and Rogers (2012) proposed addressing life areas in the reentry process is essential to the overall reentry success. In addition, addressing any underlining physical and mental health issues and their impact on the formerly incarcerated females' ability to fully engage in their reentry is vital to reentry planning (Thomas et al., 2016). Chapter 2 literature review and the data from the research participants support the perspective that appropriate and effective policies and or programs must not be solely focused on the mandate for reentry but include addressing FIF life areas (housing, family, and health issues) as they all have a great impact on her overall reintegration.

The review of the literature showed significant gaps in addressing the re-entry needs of the FIF in areas of education, vocational training, and life areas (health and mental wellness, housing, and food equity). This study data confirmed there are gaps in current policy, program development, and organizations to serve the FIF. For example, the impact of the mental health and abuse history of the FIF and its ability to derail their reentry process has gone unnoticed and there is a lack of research to highlight the significant influence of these two aspects on the reentry process (Opsal, 2012; Bennis et al. 2013; Salim et al. 2013). Additionally, Bennis et al. (2013) suggested that when the program does not address all life concerns of the FIF, especially mental health, it can have a devastatingly negative impact on the individual's reintegration. Not understanding

or misunderstanding the life challenges faced by the FIF means inappropriate resources, methods, policies, and programs created and implemented to respond to the problem, leading to the mismanagement or the lack of proper services and resources for this population. Thirteen out of the 15 participants stated that not having the proper resources to address this population's mental health or physical health issues has led to poor outcomes in their reentry process. Research participant 11 said it is essential for returning citizens to have someone or someplace to go after being released, having a connection to a specific program or another individual can assist the FIF with their immediate re-entry needs and ensure a successful reintegration process. The findings from this study have indicated that although there are current reentry programs and policies available to the FIF, many of the organizations are not capable to address the specific need of the FIF. Additionally, with the lack of proper policy and resources, the professionals' ability to administer effective services is hindered impacting their ability to render appropriate and effective services to the FIF.

Limitations to the Study

This qualitative study was designed to explore and understand the shared experiences of the workforce development professionals that work with the FIF in achieving her reentry goals. This qualitative study used semi-structured interview questions to collect its data. This data collection method attempted to create an environment of transparency and safety for the research participants to share their thoughts and experiences. Although I intended to create an environment that addressed

the need for transparency, generalization, and transferability, there were several limitations to be addressed to ultimately create that type of environment.

The first limitation of this study was the sample size of 15 research participants as it is not a true reflection of the actual number of workforce development professionals in the New York City metropolitan area. Therefore, the ability to generalize the study's findings to a larger group within or outside of New York City has its challenges. In addition to the limitation of the sample size, also the geographic location of the professionals, New York City (five boroughs) would only be for the experiences of professionals within this area and not the entire New York State. As the experiences and findings could be different due to geographic location. Hence limiting the generalization of the finding across varying types of communities (ex. urban, suburban or rural communities).

The second limitation of this study is the method of collecting the data; face-to-face interviews—this method of data collection presented challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic. While I was no longer able to conduct face-to-face, in-person interviews due to the COVID pandemic, I conducted Zoom internet interviews as an alternative to the face-to-face aspect of interviewing. Therefore, limiting my ability as an observing researcher to identify any environmental or personal factors (body language, organizational hierarchy, or colleague interactions) that may have influenced the participant's responses. Although the Zoom online platform was presented initially as a limitation, I believe online zoom interviews did yield significant data.

The third limitation of this study was although all the participants worked with the FIF in a professional capacity, the professionals worked in various settings and held various positions. Therefore, potentially presenting challenges to the shared experience of the research participants. Each position held and or workplace setting can experience its programming or policies differently and cause some impactful differences in the delivery of services and the overall shared experience. Hence, the researched phenomena may be impacted or have limitations to their findings and their ability to be transferable.

Recommendations for Future Research

The first recommendation for future research is the need for specificity regarding the type of special needs and characteristics of the formerly incarcerated female. Take a closer look at working with a formerly incarcerated female at various levels of reentry, either in the early stage of reentry (one year or less) or after 5, 10 years, or more -post-release. Also examining whether women who are on parole or probation have different experiences in their reentry process. This type of study would examine if there were a difference between working with the reentry mandates or a parolee or probationer. Also, consider the type of offense committed and analyze how that factor can impact the reentry process. According to Cannonier et al. (2021), there are numerous factors, both internal (personal) and external (environmental), that impact the type of re-entry success an individual can have based on the type of criminal justice mandates they must engage in and complete. These potential studies would provide data that would be more specific to the FIF reentry process and the impact her criminal offense, background, and or release mandates have on her rehabilitation and reentry success.

The second potential approach is looking at specific workforce development tools, policies, or programs utilized and how it impacts the overall reentry process. Looking at specific tools, policies, or programs that can assist on closing the gaps as to the best practices for comprehensive programming or policy for the FIF. According to several research participants, they have found certain tools, practices, or methods either useful or ineffective and believe having several well-proven methods, tools or policies would only increase the FIF opportunities for success. Therefore, conducting a study that closely examines a specific tool or method can provide concrete data on what tools, policies, and programming are most effective with this population.

A third potential approach for further research is to gain the perspective of the formerly incarcerated female in the workforce development program or organization. Examining the tools, policies, or programming she feels is most effective in assisting her in her reentry process. Having the perspective of the FIF as to which tool, method or policy works the best to motivate, support, and encourage her involvement in the program and her reentry process can be very vital in increasing reentry success and reducing recidivism rates. There needs to be a better understanding of the tools and methods and how effective they are in assisting the FIF during her reintegration. Also, getting the perspective of the FIF experiencing the process using specific methods and tools would be critical to creating policy, programming, and organization for this population.

Finally, another research approach is based on the formerly incarcerated female's ethics and cultural background. This type of study examined the traits that impact the FIF

engagement in her reentry and workforce development programs. A study to examine the race, ethnic, or cultural background of the FIF would provide data and the potential impact of one's culture or ethnicity during their reentry process to a study conducted by the Sentencing Project in 2019 on incarceration trends, highlighted there is a difference in the rate of incarceration for minorities versus their white counterpart. In addition, the study stated the rate of black women incarceration to that of white women is a 1.7 rate of 100,000. Additionally, there is a difference in the reentry and recidivism rates among different minority groups compared to the white released individuals (Lockwood et al., 2015). Hence the need to explore the minority woman's experience in her reentry process and search for employment. The data from a study like this could inform policy and programming creation.

Overall, qualitative research is effective in exploring a phenomenon by obtaining the participants' lived experiences, which are their opinions, feelings, and ideas (Creswell, 2012). Which has helped give an emotional and personal perspective on the topic of study. Yet, this research method does have limitations in its ability to be applied to a larger population. Thus, the final recommendation for potential future research is to conduct a conductive research study that allows for large ger sample sizes, minimizing the opportunity for researcher bias, and increasing validity, reliability, and generalization (Creswell, 2012). Further research will only expand the knowledge of the best ways to work with incarcerated females.

Social Implications

Social change is about impacting an area that influences an individual, community, and even society. Dufney (2019) stated that social change requires information, foresight, and the willingness to adjust or change within society or institutions. This study examined the current workforce development policies, tools, methods, and programming standards of workforce development professionals to assist the FIF reentry. The data collected provided the professionals' perspective and showed the need for change in policy, programming and methods currently used. This research study will be used to propel social change within the workforce development field, and this can start with identifying the stakeholders for this study. By identifying the stakeholders of this study, this study and its results will be targeted at those that will be able to implement the necessary change needed for this population.

This study contained valuable information that various entities and or stakeholders can utilize to create a direct and efficient response to the need for impactful change for professionals working with the FIF. Identifying the stakeholders is essential to seeing how the study's information can be implemented in the appropriate and most useful areas. Potential stakeholders who can use this information include and are not limited to workforce development professionals, program and policy creators, community leaders, government and non-government leaders or organizations, and advocates of the formerly incarcerated female and the FIF. The list of potential stakeholders can extend past the previously mentioned individuals, indicating that this study can influence many different settings, industries, and environments. It is important to know the various

stakeholders can be effective in bringing about positive change in this area. The changes can impact the current standards and systems utilized that, directly and indirectly, influence formerly incarcerated females' lives.

The immediate impact of this study is the change in the attitudes and behaviors of the workforce development professionals working with the formerly incarcerated female. According to the research participants, it is the professionals' responsibility to meet the individual where she is in her reintegration process, assist in creating goals, and support the FIF. Thus, having a mindset and the ability to address the needs and wants of the person in front of you, not whom the professional wants to see. Therefore, changing an individual's personal and professional mindset on an issue or population can have a direct impact on how the individual interacts and or works with the issue or population—creating systems, procedures, or policies that impact the population directly and more efficiently.

Second, this study can further the creation of gender-specific policies and or procedures to assist organizations or programs working with the formerly incarcerated female. Nyaminthi et al. (2018) stated addressing the various life areas of the formerly incarcerated female to ensure her re-entry process is successful is vital to the individual's ability to reconnect with their family and community. Also, Galgano (2009) suggested that finding gainful employment during the re-entry process is as important as addressing other life areas that can hinder reentry. The idea no area in the reentry process is more important than another, and all areas need to be addressed to ensure solutions are developed and executed to address all reentry challenges (employment and life areas).

This research study supports the idea that addressing an individual's life areas while assisting them in obtaining and securing gainful employment is the path to sustainable reintegration. Thus, reentry programs and policies need to be holistic in their approach by addressing the formerly incarcerated individual's employment needs and specific life needs.

Another area for social impact from this study is the changes that will occur in the community to which the FIF will return and the need to have a holistic workforce development policy and programs in place to assist with the rehabilitation process. Developing the resources and connections in the services and systems which the FIF will utilize would be a social impact at work. When the formerly incarcerated individual is provided with the resources needed to reintegrate his/her community before release, during reintegration, and after initial reentry success, they are more successful and less likely to recidivate, and the resulting impact is more engagement within their community (Buntig et al., 2019). As a result of positive social change in policy and programming, the FIF can be gainfully employed, which in turn can provide the FIF with the ability to contribute to her community in various ways. For example, a gainfully employed and rehabilitated ex-offender becomes a tax-paying, law-abiding citizen (Doherty et al., 2014) and those types of actions and behaviors will, directly and indirectly, affect the recidivism rates within their community (Cantore, 2015) and lead to positive engagement within his/her family and community (Cook, 2015). These changes, directly and indirectly, affect areas such as the individual's economic standing and the community in which they live.

There can be an impact on the criminal justice system as well. A gainfully employed individual can lead to less criminal involvement and activity within the community because she will be participating in more productive and positive activities versus illegal activities. Power and Nolan (2017) stated lower recidivism rates occur when a formerly incarcerated individual is gainfully employed or vocationally or educationally engaged. Derooy et al. (2019) stated that when the FIF is gainfully employed or engaging in vocational and educational training, there is a direct positive correlation with involvement in their family, child, and community. Hence, a positive impact on education, healthcare, and the economic standings of the formerly incarcerated female and the community's economic advancement can be seen (Holzer, 2006; Goodwill, 2016). It is this type of impact that helps to maintain the FIF reintegration after her release from incarceration and decreases her recidivism rates.

Positive social change due to policy change or implementation can impact many areas of life for the individual, the community, and the nation. When exploring social change implications, looking at the actual policy change or policy restructuring, or program development and or change is useful and needed for goals and positive outcomes to be achieved. A policy or program that can impact the lives of an individual, or a community on a national, and global level is phenomenal. Currently, there are policy changes taking place locally, nationally, and even globally that can alter or improve the lives of many individuals from all walks of life. Some of these policies are guided by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs 2030 agenda for sustainable development. In its simplest description, the 2030 agenda is a plan for all developed or

developing countries to reach peace and prosperity by achieving some or all the 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs). The major tenets of the 2030 agenda are to improve health and education, reduce inequality, increase economic growth, and address climate change (United Nations, 2021). A few standout goals that can apply directly to this study stakeholders are SDGs # 8- decent work and economic growth, #9- industry innovation and infrastructure, #10 reduce inequalities, and #11 build sustainable cities and communities. These SDGs goals look to end inequality in each area and promote restructuring and development for women and men. According to SDG #10, inequalities in the economy are significant between the wealthy and the poor. Globally the poor account for 2-7 % of earned worldwide income compared to the wealthy with 40% of global income (United Nations, 2021). Hence, the objective of this SDG is to empower low-income earners to establish inclusion for all races, sex, and gender in economic prosperity. In addition, SDG #11 focuses on developing sustainable communities and cities, addressing the population increase while addressing the economic empowerment of urban cities. This SDG's tasks are to create career and business opportunities, safe and affordable housing, and inspire growth in businesses in these urban areas. The United Nations SDGs focus on countries implementing policies and actions that encourage growth and prosperity in various areas. Hence, the need and directive for global social change.

Countries, governments, states, and cities have developed policies, legislation, and programming addressing the multiple proposed SDGs. Accordingly, major cities like New York City have responded to the United Nations agenda by creating the

OneNYC2050 strategic plan. The OneNYC2050 strategic plan implemented in 2017 focuses on economic and educational equality, social justice, and being environmentally sustainable (onenyc.cityofnewyork.us). Although the strategic plan and its implementation are still in their infancy, there is a good chance policy and legislation will be created to impact the FIF's lives directly. When the OneNYC2050 agenda is reviewed closely, some areas have been identified that will impact the lives of the FIF. The plan is broken down into nine parts, addressing a specific issue within NYC. Specific to this study and population are the plans to address infrastructure, an inclusive economy, healthy lives, equity and excellence in education, and a vibrant democracy (onenyc.cityofnewyork.us). Each of the areas mentioned looks to increase awareness of the disparities in low-income neighborhoods, the lack of accessibility to resources that can educate and empower various neighborhoods, provide the opportunity for individuals from low-income neighborhoods to engage in better healthcare, education, and training, and to create more employment opportunities. With all these new initiatives, collaborative relationships, policies, standards, and programs will be developed, there is hope and demand for policy development to create direct and indirect change that will have an impact on the formerly incarcerated female. Consequently, the formerly incarcerated female would and should benefit from all the new policies created and the programs that develop from the policies. The FIF will now have access to resources and opportunities which she did not have access to upon release and reentry.

Finally, this study can contribute to a strategic plan of this magnitude by providing the data, knowledge, and power the policymakers and program developers

need to develop specific policies or programming inclusive of this population. Additionally, the policy and program developers of the OneNYC2050 can use this study's data and findings to highlight current and effective workforce development methods and programs to assist in the creation of new and more efficient policies, programming, and organizations to assist the professionals working with the formerly incarcerated female.

Conclusion

Current workforce development programs assist the formerly incarcerated female in achieving her reentry progress but have struggled to meet the overall needs of the population they serve. According to Cale et al. (2019), current professionals working with formerly incarcerated females do not have the best understanding or tools to assist them and therefore struggle with meeting the needs of the FIF population. Additionally, Duwe and Clark (2017) postulate many of the current reentry programs do not address many of the most basic various life areas such as housing, medical and or mental health, and family issues that impact the formerly incarcerated female's ability to maintain employment and be fully engaged in their reintegration process. Therefore, I explored the experiences of the workforce development professional working with the formerly incarcerated female, and what current policies or programming have been useful or ineffective in assisting them with their re-entry.

From the data, I was able to find that there is a lack of knowledge or understanding amongst policymakers and program creators about the needs of this population and the actual reentry obstacles the FIF and professionals working with the

FIF experience. Also, there is a lack of knowledge about effective tools and methods that professionals can use to assist this population in achieving sustainable reentry success and goals. Consequently, the next step would be for policymakers and program developers to gain more insight into the gender-specific reentry needs of the formerly incarcerated female and create policies, programming, and organizations that align with those needs. Creating programming and policy that assist the FIF directly looks to mitigate her specific challenges to reentry and effectively equip the professional working with her with the professional development and knowledge, financial and program resources needed. This can be achieved by conducting more research into the programs and policies that have an effective history and then testing those programs and policies. Underlying all these efforts must include the perspective of the formerly incarcerated female and the professional working with them on achieving reentry success.

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Appendix A: Invitation Letter

Dear Hope Program Staff,

I am conducting interviews as a part of a qualitative research study to understand our knowledge of how workforce development programs impact the re-entry and recidivism rate of female ex-offenders in metropolitan cities, such as New York City. As a professional in the field of workforce development, you are in the ideal position to provide valuable firsthand information from your perspective.

The individual interview will take about 30-45 minutes. I am simply trying to capture your thoughts, ideas, and perspectives on being a workforce development professional working and assisting this population and all the challenges and successes in their reentry process. Your responses to the interview questions will be kept confidential. Each interview will be assigned a number code to help ensure personal identifiers are confidential and not revealed during the analysis process and write-up of the findings.

There is no compensation for participating in this study. However, your participation will be a valuable addition to our research and findings could lead to greater understanding and policy development to improve the reentry process for the formerly incarcerated woman.

If you are willing to participate, please suggest a day and time that suits you and I will do my best to be available. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact me at

Thank you in advance for your time.

Shonae Mills

Appendix B: Invitation Letter During COVID-19 Pandemic

Dear Invitee,

My name is Shonae Mills. I am a doctoral student at Walden University's Public Policy and Administration program. I am kindly requesting your participation in a doctoral qualitative research study that I am conducting titled: The Impact of Workforce Development Strategies on the Re-Entry Rates of the Formerly Incarcerated Female. This study intends to assess the workforce development (job readiness, employment development, and retention) strategies that work best for the female ex-offender. The study includes completing one individual interview (approximately 30-45 minutes) with an opportunity to review your responses upon completion of the interview. The interview can be conducted by phone and or video conferencing in response to the current COVID-19 social distance restrictions. Participation is completely voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time. This study is completely confidential so all interviews will be given a number code to ensure any, and all identifiers are kept confidential.

If you would like to participate, please contact the researcher, Shonae Mills within 3-5 days of receiving this correspondence at shonae.mills@waldenu.edu. You will receive the Informed Consent letter for review and sign. Once your participation is confirmed, I request that you provide me with the days and times you are available, and I will make every effort to coordinate with your time.

Thank you for your time and participation

Sincerely,

Shonae Mills CRC, LMHC,
Doctoral Student, Walden University

Appendix C: Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. What are some identified challenges to their reintegration?
2. What obstacles do the program participants face to be continually enrolled in your program?
3. How does your agency address the obstacles?
4. What has been the most effective tool or technique to address the obstacles?
5. What tools have been beneficial in ensuring program completion?
6. What techniques had you found to be ineffective in maintaining participation?
7. What methods has your agency implemented to ensure or maintain program success?
8. What does your agency consider program success?
9. How has your agency addressed the issue of recidivism?
10. What in-house resources have been used to address the issue of recidivism?
11. How does your agency track the data on your participant's criminal involvement?
12. What would your agency implement to address the challenges to employment and reentry success?
13. Please specify the methods, strategies, and tools which you currently use or would like to use.

Appendix D: Research and Interview Question Alignment

Research Questions	Semi-structured Questions
<p>RQ1- How does Workforce Development truly impact the reentry and recidivism rates of female ex-offenders?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are some identified challenges to their reintegration? • What are some obstacles the program participants face to be continually enrolled in your program? • How does your agency address the obstacles?
<p>RQ2- What are the shared experiences of the professionals working with the formerly incarcerated female to maintain successful reentry goals?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What would your agency implement to address the challenges to employment and reentry success? • Please specify the methods, strategies, and tools which you currently use or would like to use. • What has been the most effective tool or technique to address the obstacles? • What tools have been beneficial in ensuring program completion?

<p>RQ3- What value does the professional place on the impact of its programming on the reentry success of the formerly incarcerated female?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What does your agency consider program success?• How has your agency addressed the issue of recidivism?• What in-house resources have been used to address the issue of recidivism?
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Appendix E: Potential Research Participant Organizations

1. Goodwill Industries
2. CEO (Center for Employment Opportunities)
3. EPRA
4. The HOPE Program
5. Osborne Association
6. NADAP
7. Fortune Society
8. Fathers Count/Reentry Plus
9. Strive
10. Wildcat
11. Exodus Transitional Company
12. America Works Incorporated
13. Judicial Process
14. Women's Prison Association
15. NEW- Training program
16. Hour Children
17. AVRASA
18. Mt. Sinai Hospital Addiction Services

Appendix F: Recruitment Flyer

Workforce Development Strategies that Impact Re-entry Outcomes

This Study is for Professionals working with the Formerly Incarcerated Female to achieve her Employment /Vocational Goals.

Research Participants will be asked to participate in:

1. An interview with researcher (30-45 mins)
2. Follow- up interview appt (30 mins to review data)

Location of Interviews...Due to COVID-19 social distance restrictions all interviews will be conducted via phone or video conferencing.

You are Eligible to Participate in the Study if:

1. Currently or previously worked with the formerly incarcerated female
2. Have professional experience assisting other in securing vocational or employment goals.
3. Currently work in the New York City area (5 boros)



If you have any questions as to whether you qualify for this study
Please feel free to contact,
Shonae Mills, Primary researcher