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Mass Incarceration in the State of Louisiana and its Impact on the Mental Health of Incarcerated Men

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Walden University

College of Psychology and Community Services

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Samika T. Miner

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Walden University
2024

Abstract

Mass Incarceration in the State of Louisiana and its Impact on the Mental Health of

Incarcerated Men

by

Samika T. Miner

MS, Walden University, 2015

BS, Walden University, 2013

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Criminal Justice

Walden University

November 2023

Abstract

Louisiana has been experiencing high levels of incarceration in recent years, but the cause(s) of the issue has not been thoroughly investigated. How mass incarceration impacts the mental health of incarcerated men was thoroughly explored in this study. The purpose of this qualitative research study was to explore the possible causes of mass incarceration to develop an effective strategy for reducing overcrowding in Louisiana prisons. The grounded theory was used as the theoretical framework to collect data that in return allowed the hypothesis to be formed from the collected data. The study investigated the observation of 20 formerly incarcerated African American male participants who served a minimum of 10 years in a Louisiana prison facility and were released between 2018 and 2022. The general qualitative research was used to explore mass incarceration in the state of Louisiana and how it impacts the mental health of incarcerated men. The main research question addressed the participants' perceptions regarding existing psychiatric and rehabilitative services within Louisiana prison facilities. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with each participant, consisting of 11 qualitative open-ended research questions. The results indicated that mass incarceration plays a significant role in the mental health of incarcerated men in Louisiana prisons. The implications of the study for positive social change include petitioning politicians to change existing laws and/or policies, ensuring the defendants receive fair trials, advocating for the full human and civil rights of incarcerated people, bringing awareness to the public, and getting involved with organizations who are working to put an end to mass incarceration.

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Dedication

This project is dedicated to my late maternal grandmother, Mrs. Iola “Dorothy” Miner and the Love of My Life, the late Marshall E. Selph. Thank you both for always believing in me and my abilities. I love you both eternally.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Mass incarceration in the state of Louisiana prisons numbers has exploded more than the average prisons in the United States (Prison Policy Initiative, 2021). There are numerous reasons why mass incarceration occurs in Louisiana prisons, including politicians' response to longer sentences and more life sentences, executions, harsh punishment for nonviolent crimes, mandatory minimum sentencing, private prisons and profit motive, lack of mental health services, and problematic probation and parole (American Civil Liberties Union Louisiana, 2020a). Even though Louisiana's penal system persists to demonstrate that there is no correlation of mass incarceration reducing and/or deterring crime, it is believed that mass incarceration does play a vital role in reducing and/or deterring crime (Miller et al., 2019). One of the main reasons why mass incarceration in the state of Louisiana outnumbers the mass incarceration rate in any other state is due to the "tough on crime" policies also known as "three strikes" laws, "truth-in-sentencing" laws, and the "war-on-drugs" policies (American Civil Liberties Union Louisiana, 2020b). Under these statutes, a person who is convicted of more than one felony crime will receive longer and harsher prison sentences.

Although Louisiana Governor John Bel Edwards endorsed into law the most extensive criminal justice reform that focuses on steering nonviolent, nonsex offenders, and less serious offenders away from prison, Louisiana presently remains one of the states with the high incarceration rates (American Civil Liberties Union Louisiana, 2020a). The state spent almost \$730 million on adult correctional institutions in 2019, excluding the additional tax dollars spent by parishes and municipalities (Graybill, 2020).

Moreover, recent studies have shown that African American males represent 33% of Louisiana's federal and state prisons (Brown, 2020). According to Brown (2020), African American men receive sentences that are on average 20.4% longer in comparison to White men. Most of the crimes were considered lower-level offenses.

Due to the public's favor of harsher prison terms, many prisoners undergo psychological changes to sustain themselves during their prison experience (Brown, 2020). Mass incarceration can create or exacerbate mental health conditions that leads to prison violence, self-harm, and/or suicide (American Psychological Association, 2019). However, increasing harsh policies and confinement conditions both pose challenges to the mental health of incarcerated individuals (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2021). The American Association of Suicidology (2019) fact sheet based on 2016 data showed that 80.38% prison suicide and/or suicidal attempts occurred among African American men in Louisiana prisons.

Severe health issues due to the spread of infectious diseases have also been reported in Louisiana's overcrowded prison facilities (American Civil Liberties Union Louisiana, 2020a). Therefore, addressing the long-standing issue regarding mass incarceration by proposing to dismiss the use of prisons for lower-level offenses and seeking alternatives to prisons such as probation, rehabilitative treatment, and/or community service is crucial. In this study, I examined the perceptions of formerly incarcerated men in the state of Louisiana regarding mass incarceration and its impact on the mental health of incarcerated men.

Background

Mass incarceration in the state of Louisiana has been an issue since the 1980s (American Civil Liberties Union Louisiana, 2020b). According to the Prison Policy Reform (2020), the total correctional population was 66%, with most of the population being African American men. Presently, Louisiana's prison population is more than double the U.S. average (American Civil Liberties Union Louisiana, 2020b). Therefore, understanding why Louisiana prisons are more overcrowded than in any other state can aid in strategies and solutions to combat the issue. This understanding can provide relief to policymakers, prison reform organizations, Louisiana government officials, and prison administrators, and can guide these individuals in creating and/or altering existing prison reform legislations.

According to the Louisiana's Department of Correction (2021), Louisiana does not have the capacity to house incarcerated individuals serving time in state correctional facilities (e.g., the Louisiana State Penitentiary "Angola"). Furthermore, according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics (2016), it is crucial that correctional institutions function below capacity to deter prison overcrowding and numerous constitutional issues, including medical negligence, unsanitary facilities, racial segregation, and religious discrimination (as cited in Hobbs, 2018). In 2018, the federal courts ordered that Louisiana prisons (i.e., the Louisiana State Penitentiary and Elayn Hunt) prison population be reduced from over 4,000 prisoners to 2,641 prisoners within a few months because of numerous issues being brought to the forefront in a lawsuit against the Louisiana State Penitentiary regarding constitutional issues (Hobbs, 2018). Substantial

charges were decreed to restore the constitutional rights of incarcerated individuals. Over the next several years, the Louisiana correctional system was under the authority of federal court orders (Hobbs, 2018).

In addition to reports being filed against constitutional issues as related to the overcrowding issue in Louisiana prisons, issues regarding funding to provide adequate housing to incarcerated individuals were also reported. According to Hobbs (2018), Louisiana prisons are presently congested because inmates can no longer be housed at state institution(s). The overcrowded cells in Louisiana correctional institutions have become a political and financial burden at both the state and local levels (Hobbs, 2018).

Thus, in this qualitative research study, I addressed issues regarding the overcrowded prison population in Louisiana and its impact on the mental health of incarcerated people (see American Civil Liberties Union Louisiana, 2020a). The data from this research study revealed the numerous reasons why Louisiana prisons are overcrowded resulting in health problems including but not limited to inadequate shelter, psychiatric disorders, outbreaks of diseases, an increase in prison violence, and self-harm. This study was needed to show evidence regarding the relationship between mass incarceration and the aspects of mental health of incarcerated males in Louisiana prisons. Additionally, the results of this study could guide the state to begin correcting the stated issues.

Problem Statement

U.S. prisons are extremely overcrowded, possibly more than ever from March 2020 to July 2021 (Prison Policy Initiative, 2021b). Although the U.S. represents only

5% of the world's population, it presently holds 25% of its inmates (American Civil Liberties Union Louisiana, 2020b). As a result of the "tough on crime" statutes, mass incarceration numbers are more than double in the state of Louisiana. For example, one of every 86 adults in Louisiana is presently incarcerated in the criminal justice system (Prison Policy Initiative, 2021b). Thirty-four thousand Louisiana residents are in state prisons, 12,000 are in local jails, and 3,100 are in federal prisons (Prison Policy Initiative, 2021b). In Louisiana, incarcerated individuals, specifically men, are most likely to receive life sentences without the possibility of parole than in any other state (American Civil Liberties Union Louisiana, 2020a). How this issue impacts mass incarceration in addition to mental health and rehabilitation services was thoroughly explored in this study.

Presently, there are issues regarding the increasing number of mentally ill incarcerated male inmates among the mass incarceration population in Louisiana prison facilities. Therefore, exploring the possible cause(s) of the stated issues and finding solutions to reduce and/or deter mass incarceration was crucial to meet the health care needs of incarcerated individuals, to reduce prison violence, self-harm, recidivism, and prison costs. By exploring the impacts of mass incarceration in the state of Louisiana prison facilities, the conclusions and/or end results uncovered the dire need to reduce the stated issues and revealed the likely positive end results and/or outcomes as it related to improving these issues.

Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to better understand the perceptions of formerly incarcerated men in the state of Louisiana regarding the existing psychiatric services within prison facilities. I also explored existing mental health and rehabilitative services in the Louisiana prison facilities in addition to the tough on crime and/or crime control policies that lead to mass incarceration to develop an understanding of the possible modifications needed to promote adequate psychiatric needs of incarcerated individuals, prevent recidivism, and reduce overcrowding, prison violence, self-harm, and prison costs. In the state of Louisiana, African American men have a 1 in 3 chance of being incarcerated in comparison to White men (The Sentencing Project, 2018)

The number of African American male prisoners in the state of Louisiana has grown 30 times faster than the state's population since the late 1970s (Prison Policy Initiative, 2020). Therefore, this study was based on the perceptions of formerly incarcerated African American male participants who served a minimum of 10 years in the Louisiana State Penitentiary also known as "Angola" and the Elayn Hunt Correctional Center.

Research Questions

In this study, I explored the answers to the following questions:

Research question (RQ)1: What are the participants' perceptions regarding the existing psychiatric services within Louisiana prison facilities?

RQ2: How does the spread of infectious diseases among the overcrowded population affect the mental health of incarcerated men in Louisiana prison facilities?

Theoretical Framework for the Study

The theoretical framework is a beneficial tool in the study because it dictates the grounds and/or the significance for conducting research to help examine the research problem (Sabatier et al., 2018). The theoretical framework is also useful to help the researcher as well as the readers understand the context and/or factors in addition to the perspective of the research study. In this study, I explored mass incarceration in the state of Louisiana and its impact on the mental health of incarcerated men.

This study was crucial because I sought to demonstrate a correlation between mass incarceration and its impact on the mental health of incarcerated men in Louisiana prisons. Mass incarceration harms incarcerated individuals as well as their communities. For example, it imposes enormous financial costs on the public. By addressing the effects of Louisiana's mass incarceration, the cost for taxpayers could significantly be reduced. Additionally, taking into consideration alternatives to prison (e.g., probation, rehabilitation treatment, or community service) is a possible solution to help deter prison overcrowding and could reduce financial costs to taxpayers.

The inferences of this research study could promote social change in Louisiana's criminal justice system as well as effective punishment to help reduce mass incarceration. This study could also be beneficial to government agencies (i.e., law enforcement officials) and policymakers to explore the possible causes for mass incarceration. In addition, the outcome of this study could be beneficial to other states with high mass

incarceration rates. The data collected from this study could stimulate social change and uncover effective strategies to tackle mass incarceration, for example reducing prison sentences for lower-level offenses.

The grounded theory was utilized in this study. Grounded theory first collects data and then forms hypotheses from the collected data (Ravitch et al., 2018). The analysis from the collected data addressed the perceptions of formerly incarcerated men in Louisiana prison facilities. This framework was beneficial in reference to the factors of mass incarceration and other issues such as the spread of infectious diseases and how the stated issue(s) impacts the mental health of incarcerated male inmates with existing mental health issues (see Sotirov et al., 2019).

The grounded theory design was appropriate for this study because it used data from the research participants' experiences, viewpoints, and opinions. The data collected were beneficial to generate new theories grounded in the research participants' shared experiences. Additionally, scholarly journals, course textbooks, and respected internet sites relating to mass incarceration and its effect on mental health were used to examine various perspectives and suggested methods that can alleviate mass incarceration in the Louisiana prison facilities.

Nature of the Study

The nature of this study was qualitative. Qualitative research is beneficial in understanding the need to improve the prison overcrowding issues as well as its impact on psychiatric care and rehabilitation services in the Louisiana correctional institutions. Interviews were a pertinent methodology used in this qualitative research for observation

and elaborateness. To maintain the focus on mass incarceration and its impact on the mental health incarcerated male inmates, I obtained qualitative data (e.g., semi structured face-to-face interviews, data analysis, participant observation) from formerly incarcerated male inmates in the state of Louisiana.

This analysis was beneficial in helping to identify significant issues to determine essential modifications and/or alterations required to deter mass incarceration, and recidivism, and to create sanitary environments, effective psychiatric treatment, and rehabilitative services to incarcerated people. Approximately 20 participants were interviewed. I was able to recruit research participants from a nonprofit prison reform organization who is dedicated to restoring the full human and civil rights of formerly and currently incarcerated people.

Definitions

The following terms were used in this research study.

Carceral setting: A jail or prison setting (National Institute of Justice, 2023).

Community sanctions: Sentences that are based in a community setting rather than in a prison (U.S. Department of Justice Office of Justice Programs, 2022).

Diversion programs: Programs that move people away from the criminal justice system, offering an alternative arrest, prosecution, and life behind (Vera Institute of Justice, 2022).

Formerly incarcerated people (FIP): Anyone who has been in a carceral setting and is now released. Prison, immigration detention centers, local jails, and juvenile detention centers are included under this umbrella term (Berkeley Underground Scholars,

2019). *Incarcerated people*: Anyone who is currently in a carceral setting (Berkeley Underground Scholars, 2019).

Parole: The release of a prisoner to supervision in the community after they completed a part of their sentence in a correctional institution (U.S. Department of Justice, 2023).

Probation: Alternative to sending an individual to prison, the court releases the incarcerated person to the community and orders them to complete a period of supervision monitored by a U.S. probation officer and to adhere to certain conditions (Justia, 2023).

Reentry: Exercises of correctional programs and procedures used at the beginning of incarceration to prepare the offender for release from prison (Stacer et al., 2023).

Reentry programs: Educational, occupational, mental health, and religious courses that prepare incarcerated people for release from prison (Stacer et al., 2023).

Assumptions

The philosophical assumptions used in this study included ontology, epistemology, and axiology. Ontological assumptions discover conceptions of insight from the selected participants in this experiment. The first assumption was that a qualitative research method was the top preference for detailing the lived experiences and authenticities of formerly incarcerated individuals. The second assumption, epistemology, describes the participants' point of view regarding experiences with mass incarceration in Louisiana prisons and its impact on the mental health of incarcerated individuals. The second assumption was that the research participants would be truthful and honest when sharing their experiences.

The third philosophical assumption that assisted with this research approach was axiology. The axiology assumption in this research focused on my values that played a role in the lines of social perception that influence the methods and/or methodology of this study. My final assumption was that 45 minutes would be enough time to conduct in-depth interviews in this qualitative research regarding mass incarceration in Louisiana and its impact on the mental health of incarcerated men.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this qualitative study was to interview 20 African American male participants who served a minimum of 10 years in a Louisiana prison and were released between 2018 and 2022. According to Simon (2013), “The scope of a study details the extent to which research area will be explored in the work and specifies the parameters within the study will be operating (pp. 199-201).”

Delimitations are defined as the outlines that the researchers place in a conducted study. For example, the researcher decides what to include and exclude in a study. This guides the researcher to narrow down the study and make it more feasible to obtain the study’s goal (Coker, 2022). In this qualitative research study, I experienced a few constraints. One of the delimitations for this study was the geographical boundaries. The geographical areas of the research were southwestern and southeastern Louisiana where there is a large formerly and currently incarcerated population consisting of mostly African American males.

In this study, I identified the role that mass incarceration had on the mental health of formerly incarcerated men. Additionally, I identified a myriad of barriers that FIPs

face to successfully reenter society. For example, they do not have the right to vote, have little access to education, and job opportunities, and are ineligible to receive public assistance such as housing. Prison reforms in the state of Louisiana can help deter mass incarceration, protect the mental health of those who are currently incarcerated, and contribute to the successful reentry of FIPs post their release. This qualitative research study may be applicable for future studies on mass incarceration and its impact on the mental health of incarcerated individuals. Future research might focus on exploring other demographics, locations, and/or geographical areas to help bring awareness to the issue and implement more transitional programs to help incarcerated individuals transition into the community.

Limitations

The research study was limited to Louisiana prisons rather than collecting data from Louisiana state and local jails. The data collected from this study aimed towards explaining significant causes of mass incarceration and how it impacted the mental health of incarcerated men in Louisiana prisons. Additionally, I aimed to reveal how Louisiana's criminal justice system can significantly deter prison overcrowding, unsanitary conditions, the spread of infectious diseases, prison violence, self-harm, as well as reduce prison costs. The limitations, challenges, and/or barriers the researcher may encounter when conducting a qualitative study include limited sample size, sampling bias, and/or the selection of participants, and unconsciously influencing the participants' behavior.

Unlike quantitative research, qualitative research requires a smaller sample size (Ravitch et al., 2018). For example, the sample size can manipulate the reliability of the

survey results due to an elevated variability. On the other hand, sampling bias or the selection of participants may create challenges as it relates to the results. For example, in this study, I only focused on formerly incarcerated male inmates and their experiences in the Louisiana prison facilities. Moreover, self-selection participants had a higher chance of biased data because the research participants did not represent the whole Louisiana prison population.

An additional limitation and/or barrier to the research included observation of the participants' behavior and/or performance (i.e., Hawthorne effect and Pygmalion effect). For example, research participants may modify their conduct when they know they are being studied. In this research study, I used a factual checking procedure to help eliminate the possibility of misrepresentation of the data. For example, I used analytical memos both before and during the research process. All interview questions were examined to determine if the questions contained biases. Additionally, I reviewed the participants' responses during the interviewing process to confirm the answers were recorded accurately. These measures prevented biases that could have negatively affected the outcome.

Significance

This study is significant as it related to the understanding of mass incarceration in the state of Louisiana and its impact on the mental health of incarcerated men. This study emphasized the possible reasons for the state's mass incarceration and precisely how it affects the mental and physical health of incarcerated individuals. I explored the significant methods needed to develop a plan to successfully deter the issues in the future.

The outcome of this study addresses present gaps in the criminal justice scholarly literature regarding the possible causes of mass incarceration and its impact on the mental health of incarcerated men as well as preventative measures that can be used to help combat the stated issues. The significance of addressing these gaps is crucial to bring awareness to the public and policymakers as it relates to the importance of reducing the prison overcrowding issues, the need to enhance and/or create effective prison alternatives, and reform existing tough on crime statutes in addition to current mental health and rehabilitation policies, and to promote social change (see Bynum, 2018).

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to explore mass incarceration in Louisiana and its impact on the mental health of incarcerated men. In this research study, I uncovered statutes intended to create longer and harsher sentencing that are fueling the mass incarceration population in Louisiana. Included in the statutes are mandatory minimum sentencing that only result in an increased percentage of inmates, leading to in prison overcrowding. As a result of the “tough on crime” legislations, mass incarceration percentages are more than double in Louisiana correctional institutions. This qualitative research study revealed that men, specifically African Americans, are likely to receive life sentences without the possibility of parole in the state of Louisiana. How this issue impacts the mental health of incarcerated men was thoroughly explored. The research in the following chapter initiates the issues of mass incarceration in Louisiana prisons in addition to its contributing factors. The chapter also addresses how

mass incarceration impacts the mental health of incarcerated individuals, especially African American men.

In Chapter 1, I provided a brief introduction to the issue regarding mass incarceration in Louisiana prisons and its contributing factors. I also stated the methodologies that are used to obtain data in this section. In Chapter 2, I include historical information about mass incarceration in Louisiana attained by surveying published work. Research from various scholars was collected to finalize this chapter. The secondary data used in this section includes textbooks, peer-reviewed journals, articles, and scholastic websites.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Mass incarceration in the state of Louisiana prisons numbers is triple the average prisons in the United States (Gottlieb et al., 2018) There are numerous reasons why mass incarceration occurs in Louisiana prisons. For example, despite that Louisiana's penal system persists to demonstrate that there is no correlation of mass incarceration reducing and/or deterring crime, it is believed that mass incarceration does play a vital role in reducing and/or deterring crime (Miller et al., 2017). One of the main reasons why mass incarceration in the state of Louisiana outnumbers the mass incarceration rate in any other state is due to the "tough on crime" policies (American Civil Liberties Union Louisiana, 2020b).

Although Louisiana Governor John Bel Edwards endorsed into law the most extensive criminal justice reform that focuses on steering nonviolent, nonsex offenders, and less serious offenders away from prison, Louisiana presently remains one of the states with high incarceration rates (American Civil Liberties Union Louisiana, 2020b). In this research study, I examined the perceptions of formerly incarcerated African American men in the state of Louisiana regarding mass incarceration and its impact on the mental health of incarcerated African American men.

Literature Search Strategy

To find scholastic textbooks, journals, and articles, I explored various criminal justice databases such as The World Prison Brief, Oxford Handbook Online, Nexi Uni, Criminal Justice Abstracts, and Sage Journals. These databases were used to obtain data from the years 2018 to 2019. Keywords such as *prisons*, *mass incarceration*, *prison*

overcrowding, mental health, legislation, African American males, self-harm, public health, suicide, and prison violence was used. Additionally, abstracts were used to determine whether the key findings were relevant to the RQs and hypotheses.

Theoretical Framework

The grounded theory was used as the theoretical framework because it collects data that in return allows the hypothesis to be formed from the collected data. I investigated the observation of Louisiana's formerly incarcerated African American male participants. This theory has been previously used in criminal investigations and policymaking. The grounded theory is beneficial as it relates to the contributing factors of mass incarceration in addition to other issues (i.e., the spread of infectious diseases) that may impact the mental health of incarcerated male inmates, specifically individuals with existing mental health issues (Soitrov et al., 2019). In this research study, I also uncovered effective methods to deter mass incarceration. Furthermore, I generated a new theory grounded in the research participants' shared experiences.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts

In 2017, Justice Reinvestment Package began to work toward reducing the prison overcrowding crisis in the state of Louisiana (American Civil Liberties Union, 2021a). Although the package has been established, more work must be done to decrease mass incarceration in the state (American Civil Liberties Union, 2021b). Ending mass incarceration in the state of Louisiana requires public awareness, wide-ranging reforms, eliminating mandatory minimum sentences, and investing in effective diversion and programs. Additionally, ending the overcrowding prison population requires a reform

pertaining to Louisiana's reliance on pretrial incarceration (American Civil Liberties Union, 2021b). According to an annual report by (American Civil Liberties Union, 2021b), "Louisiana's pretrial incarceration rate is now three times the national average and the highest of any state on record since 1970." Most incarcerated individuals lack the funds to pay bail. Therefore, more reforms are required to reduce mass incarceration and save hundreds of thousands of non convicted people from jail (American Civil Liberties Union, 2021b).

Alternatives to Incarceration

As the jail and prison populations continue to rise in the United States, courts and lawmakers have supported alternatives to incarceration. According to research, developing alternative programs for incarceration is an effective method to decrease crime and to also reduce the overcrowding prison population (The Marshall Project, 2021). Alternatives to jail and prison can include fines, restitution, community service, probation, house arrest, inpatient drug/alcohol rehabilitation, inpatient psychiatric treatment, and work release. Additionally, developing alternative programs can reduce taxpayers' dollars. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics (2021), "Prison costs taxpayers \$80 billion (about \$250 per person in the US) a year to house 2.3 million people (about twice the population of New Hampshire) behind bars."

Numerous experts have declared that \$80 billion per year is a gross underestimate because it does not calculate hidden costs as it pertains to the overwhelming financial burden it puts on the prisoners and their loved ones. For example, these costs increase during the holiday season due to the prisoners' relatives making more visits, calling more

often, and sending more care packages (The Marshall Project, 2021). According to a survey that was conducted by The Marshall Project (2021), many families spent hundreds of dollars per month to feed, clothe, and remain in contact with their loved one behind bars, paying for healthcare, personal hygiene products, phone calls, and other forms of communication. Furthermore, in many of the Louisiana correctional institutions, incarcerated individuals do not have the amount of space that is recommended by international standards. In some cases, incarcerated individuals spend close to 24 hours in overcrowded cells (The Marshall Project, 2021).

The ongoing overcrowding at the Louisiana prisons has also further increased pressure on dozens of parish jails as they have been relied on to house thousands of the state incarcerated individuals, resulting in overflowing jails from New Orleans to Lake Charles. According to research, “Overcrowding can be so severe that prisoners sleep in shifts, on top of each other, share beds or tie themselves to window bars so that they can sleep while standing (Penal Reform International, 2020).” Prison overcrowding, in addition to numerous related issues such as a lack of privacy, can result in mental health issues, and can increase rates of violence, self-harm, and suicide (The Marshall Project, 2021).

Overcrowded prisons can lead to unsanitary conditions that are harmful to the physical and mental well-being of prisoners (DeCooman et al., 2022). According to a survey of more than 700 incarcerated people in Louisiana, there are inhumane conditions in solitary confinement (Hobbs, 2018). Over 75% of the research participants reported being held in solitary confinement for more than a year (DeCooman et al., 2022).

Participants described being compelled to clean lavatories with their bare hands, and to sleep on pest-infested floors and in other inhumane conditions (DeCooman et al., 2022). In addition, employees in overcrowded correctional institutions are at risk in various ways. They face greater potential violence from the prisoners, threat of infection, and increased stress and mental health issues (DeCooman et al., 2022).

Mental Illness and Incarceration

Across the United States, thousands of correctional institutions are housing inmates accused of crimes and serving time while suffering from mental health disorders (e.g., from depression to schizophrenia). The shift in Louisiana correctional institutions is a result of the reduced numbers housed in psychiatric inpatient treatment centers (Flares et al., 2020). How prison overcrowding affects the mental health of incarcerated inmates has been explored by researchers. According to research, overcrowded prisons can produce intensified health outcomes, decreased psychological well-being, and increased risk of suicide (Quandt et al., 2021).

One report found that there is a high number of prisoners with mental health disorders perpetuated by overcrowded prisons (Quandt et al., 2021). The reason is due to mandated sentences and a lack of monetary resources to construct more facilities, resulting in states using correctional institutions over their ranked dimensions. Research has also shown that incarceration among individuals with mental illness has been linked to mood disorders, including major depressive disorder, anxiety, and bipolar disorder (Quandt et al., 2021). Furthermore, appalling conditions such as overcrowding, solitary confinement, and daily exposure to violence can have negative effects on mental health

(Quandt et al., 2021). Quandt et al., (2021) even hypothesized that prison overcrowding can lead to “post incarceration syndrome” - a mental health disorder that is like “post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).”

Researchers have used the case study methodology and have analyzed the stated conditions' impact on the mental health of African American prisoners within Louisiana in comparison with the size and the population within a prison. Other studies have revealed that African American women are incarcerated far less than African American men but experience mental health issues at rates significantly higher than incarcerated African American men (Women's Mass Incarceration: The Whole Pie 2018). A study conducted on prison overcrowding in comparison with mental health revealed that African American men living in the south are especially likely to be imprisoned in comparison to other races (Pew Research Center, 2021). According to this study, mass incarceration, including pretrial detention, is the leading cause of critical physical and psychological distress and trauma (Pew Research Center, 2021). For example, mass incarceration directly affects inmates' mental and physical health by increasing the level of uncertainty in which they regularly must cope (Haney, 2018).

Incarcerated individuals with mental illnesses are incarcerated annually. Augustin (2019) claimed, “People with mental illness in the criminal justice system are incarcerated because they present criminal risks that are like incarcerated individuals who are not mentally ill.” Prison overcrowding can lead to violent behavior when inmates feel clustered (Franklin & Pratt, 2021). Additionally, prison overcrowding increases frustration levels within correctional institutions by reducing the resources available to

the inmates confined in them (Haney, 2018). According to Franklin et al., (2021), prisoners do not always have access to appropriate mental health treatment and care. In fact, they revealed that about three in five people with a history of mental illness do not receive mental health treatment during incarceration in state and federal prisons (Franklin et al., 2021). In the state of Louisiana, the limited treatment options are directly reflected in the immense ratio of disciplinary issues, rule violations, and physical assaults among those who have mental health disorders (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2018).

Individuals with serious mental disorders (e.g., schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, or major depression) are in correctional institutions more now than ever. According to the U.S. Department of Justice (2021), “Mentally ill individuals in federal and state correctional institutions were convicted of violent offenses (i.e., homicides) and spend excessive time in prison than other inmates.” The rest of the mentally ill population is serving short sentences for minor offenses. Instead of incarcerating mentally ill individuals, policymakers should focus on crisis intervention programs to help evaluate the individual as well as their necessities. Diversion programs for these individuals are required to reduce prison overcrowding, prison costs, self-harm, prison violence, mental distress on other prisoners and staff, re-offending and/or recidivism. Without these programs and access to mental health services and support, many individuals end up homeless, hospitalized and re-incarcerated. Therefore, creating effective policies is needed for these individuals to receive proper treatment and to reduce the overcrowding crisis in correctional institutions.

There are many benefits to responding to and/or addressing mental health issues in Louisiana correctional institutions. According to Haney (2018), many incarcerated individuals do not receive mental health treatment during incarceration. Without treatment, conditions become worse. As a result, incarcerated individuals can become a great threat to themselves and to others during and post incarceration (Haney, 2018). Addressing mental health needs in the state's correctional institutions can improve the inmates' health and the whole prison population (Haney, 2018). It can also decrease incidents of re-offending and help divert individuals with mental disorders away from correctional institutions into treatment and rehabilitation (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2018). Additionally, encouraging a substantial understanding of the issues endured by prisoners with mental illness as it relates to prison overcrowding may reduce stigma and discrimination (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2018).

People who are treated for mental illness while incarcerated can better reenter society, which may, in turn, decrease the probability that they will be re-incarcerated (Haney, 2018). Therefore, providing prisoners with access to appropriate resources is crucial as it relates to prisoners receiving adequate mental health treatment and care during incarceration and after the inmates' release. On the other hand, studies conducted by the Southern Poverty Law (2018) showed the correlation between mass incarceration and individuals who already had mental disorders prior to incarceration. However, both studies failed to show the correlation between mass incarceration among offenders who did not have a history of mental disorders prior to incarceration.

Racial Disparities in Louisiana Prisons

Racial disparities in law enforcement stops have also fueled mass incarceration in the state of Louisiana. Studies have shown that law enforcement officials are more likely to stop, search, and arrest more African American men than women (Hinton, 2018).

African Americans have been perceived to be more susceptible to criminal behaviors in comparison to other racial and ethnic groups. According to McNair Scholars Journal (2018), “The mass incarceration of African Americans has been rationalized by the assumption that it is an indispensable means of sustaining the well-being of American society.” Another study was conducted to confirm the interrelationship between mass incarceration and African Americans. This study unveiled that U.S. criminal justice system is unjust as it relates to its incarceration practices (e.g., laws, and targeted communities). Most significantly, stereotypes and negative implications are constantly used to justify the escalation of African Americans in unpleasant cells (McNair Scholars Journal, 2018).

Hinton (2018) found that when law enforcement officials were asked, “What do criminals look like?” and were shown numerous photos, they often chose African American men, stereotyped with features - such as a broad nose, full lips, and dark skin. However, stopping an individual for “driving while Black” also known as “racial profiling” is a violation of the U.S. and Louisiana constitutions (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2018). Racial profiling creates major issues regarding public safety. For example, it undermines productive law enforcement performance by destroying trust in law enforcement officials (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2018).

Going to prison is a major life-changing experience that results in dilemmas as it relates to building a stable life in the community, such as obtaining employment and finding stable and safe shelter post release. Additionally, incarceration decreases lifetime income and adversely affects life outcomes amid offspring of incarcerated parents (Philips, 2020). These are classified as individual-level consequences of incarceration. However, there are societal level consequences that can result in imprisonment in communities where crimes rates are higher and neighborhoods are deteriorated (Philips, 2020).

A possible solution to deterring racial disparities in law enforcement stops is tracking who the officer stops and what occurs after the individual is stopped. For example, law enforcement in several parishes in the state of Louisiana are required to wear body cameras (Louisiana Commission on Law Enforcement, 2019). However, there are several other parishes that do not require law enforcement officials to wear body cameras (Louisiana Commission on Law Enforcement, 2019). Requiring law enforcement officers to wear body cameras may be an effective method to deter racial disparities. In addition, it may send a strong signal to the community at large and law enforcement officials that racial disparities are unacceptable and are looked down upon (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2018).

Wrongful Convictions

Mistaken identifications are the leading factor in wrongful convictions which also result in mass incarceration. In the state of Louisiana, there have been several exoneration cases involving African American males being imprisoned for crimes they did not

commit. Studies have found that cross-racial key witnesses' identifications were likely unreliable in comparison to identifications within racial groups (Innocence Project New Orleans, 2021). According to the Innocence Project New Orleans (2021), the key witnesses were not truthful during trial although the prosecutors had thorough knowledge and information as to why the jury should have questioned their witnesses' testimony. However, the prosecutors did not disclose the lawfully required information to the defense (Innocence Project New Orleans, 2021).

African American male prisoners who are convicted of murder are more likely to be innocent than other convicted murderers. According to research (Innocence Project New Orleans, 2021), the convictions that led to murder exoneration with black defendants were more likely to involve misconduct by law enforcement officials in comparison to Caucasian defendants. Unfortunately, numerous wrongful convictions among African American male prisoners are never determined. The reason why these wrongful convictions are never determined is due to the lack of accurate quantity of all convicted defendants (Innocence Project New Orleans, 2021). However, researchers suggest that the unknown quantity outweighs those they are aware of (Innocent Project New Orleans, 2021).

Unlawful actions by law enforcement officials, including witness doctoring, violent interrogations and altering evidence, account for most of the misconduct that led to wrongful convictions. According to the National Registry of Exonerations (2021), researchers reviewed numerous convictions involving defendants who were later exonerated over a thirty-year-period and found that more than half of these cases

involved misconduct by law enforcement officials or prosecutors. As previously stated, misconduct that leads to wrongful convictions isn't often revealed. Researchers found that misconduct by law enforcement and prosecutors is one of the leading causes of false convictions of African American defendants especially males (Phillips, 2020). In some cases, law enforcement officials maliciously claimed they were victims of assaults by defendants. According to research (Phillips, 2020), videos showed that law enforcement officers attacked the defendants without provocation. As a result, police officers were rarely disciplined or convicted of crimes regarding exonerations (Phillips, 2020).

War on Drugs

The war on drugs remains a major challenge in the United States as it relates to an increase in incarceration. It has utilized trillions of American taxpayer dollars, inflicted an untold number of lives, threatened people's futures (specifically African Americans, Latino, and Native Americans), equipped American law enforcement agencies (federal, state, and local), and focused the exertion on the country's most diverse and poorest communities (Booker, 2021). In 1970, President Richard Nixon established the war on drugs. A decade later, President Ronald Reagan enhanced the endeavor. As a result, the stricter war on drug policies led to a major increase in incarceration (Booker, 2021). Presently, the overall incarcerated population has increased drastically (Equal Justice Initiative, 2021). However, it's difficult to determine precisely how much of the increase is attributed to the war on drug policies.

Excessive punishment for non-violent offenses such as incarcerating individuals for drug offenses due to the beliefs that incarcerating these individuals will reduce drug

use or deaths involving overdose adds to the prison overcrowding issue. According to research (Equal Justice Initiative, 2021), mandatory minimum sentencing for drugs and other offenders have very little, if any, deterrent effects. Drug addiction and/or abuse is not a criminal justice issue (Equal Justice Initiative, 2021). It is indeed a mental health issue that should be managed by medical professionals (Equal Justice Initiative, 2021). In addition to incarcerating non-violent drug offenders, individuals who are unable to pay restitution drives mass incarceration in the U.S. criminal justice system.

The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights has observed that African Americans, the poor, and people with disabilities are disproportionately impacted by the inability to pay court-imposed costs, fines, and fees associated with misdemeanors and low-level offenses. Numerous incarcerated individuals have been repeatedly incarcerated because they were incapable of paying court costs, fines, and fees (Augustin, 2019). As a result, these individuals face numerous collateral consequences such as loss of employment, homelessness, freedom, and custody of their minor dependents. Additionally, thousands of incarcerated individuals have had their driver's licenses revoked, even though the offenses had absolutely nothing to do with driving (Augustin, 2019).

An additional study revealed that war on drugs has significantly affected incarcerated African Americans in the United States as it relates to longer prison sentences. As such, Louisiana is the global leader in imprisonment (The Prison Policy Initiative, 2020). According to Rothwell (2017), a significant amount of Caucasian people is more likely to sell drugs and are likely to consume them. On the other hand, African Americans are more likely to be arrested for selling drugs, drug possession, and

serve extra time in jails and/or prison (Rothwell, 2017). Drug offenders who are unable to pay restitution drives mass incarceration in the Louisiana criminal justice system.

According to The Prison Policy Initiative (2020), studies found that incarcerated people in Louisiana had low income prior to incarceration. This confirms that the state's incarcerated population is disproportionately poor.

Truth-in-sentencing (TIS) and "Three-strikes" laws have gained a great deal of political and public support throughout the United States. Three-strikes laws require long sentences for habitual offenders. "Three Strikes" sentencing laws (18 U.S.C. § 3559(c)) significantly increased the prison sentences of incarcerated individuals convicted of serious violent felony offenses who have previously been convicted of two or more violent crimes. The statute defines a serious violent felony to include imprisonment is usually 25 years to life for third-time violent offenders. To be considered for release, the offender must serve a minimum of 85 percent of their sentence (Chen, 2018). Over time, Louisiana lawmakers extended the amount and classification of crimes that carry mandatory minimum prison sentences and have made reforms to others. However, Louisiana still carries some of the harshest mandatory minimum sentences for nonviolent offenders (Prison Policy Initiative, 2021).

Supporters of the "Three Strikes" laws declare that the policies will have a deterrent effect on violent offenses. However, the "Three Strikes" laws will not deter criminals from committing violent criminal activities (Stanford University, 2020). One of the main reasons why the laws will not aid in deterring criminals from committing violent crimes is because crimes are not premeditated (Stanford University, 2020). Crimes are

typically committed in anger, in the heat of passion or under the influence of substances (i.e., illicit drugs and alcohol). States such as Louisiana and California that adopted habitual offender statutes impose stiff penalties, up to and including a life sentence, on repeat offenders.

Racial Profiling in Louisiana

Racial profiling is a well-established and concerning matter regardless of claims that the United States has encompassed a “post-racial era.” Unfortunately, racial profiling occurs daily across the country (Hinton, 2018). According to research (Hinton, 2018), people of color are targeted more than other races. Issues regarding searches without evidence of criminal activity, frightening and humiliating detentions based on an individual’s race, ethnicity, national origin, or religion. According to the U.S. Constitution (The New Jim Crow, 2020), racial profiling is considered illegal and violates the U.S. Constitution’s pledge to provide equal protection to all and freedom from unreasonable searches and seizures. Additionally, it obstructs community policing endeavors, and provokes law enforcement to lose authenticity and trust among the people they declared to protect and serve (Hilton, 2018). American citizens rely on law enforcement officials to protect them from harm and enforce justice within their communities. However, racial profiling has caused many citizens, especially minorities, to live in fear because of their physical features, where they originated from, or what religion they are affiliated with (Hilton, 2018).

More people, especially African Americans, are incarcerated for drug offenses per year than violent or property crimes and serve longer prison sentences than those who

have committed violent crimes. According to research (The New Jim Crow, 2020), the War on Drugs policy has contributed to the mass incarceration rate at a high percentage. African Americans experience discrimination and are more likely than any other race to be stopped, searched, incarcerated, and receive harsher sentences. According to research (Drug Policy Alliance, 2020), African Americans make up a high percentage of the United States population and are frequently recorded by government officials to abuse substances at equivalent percentages to individuals of other origins.

A greater number of studies have also revealed that African American men who were convicted of drug offenses were more likely to be prosecuted, held in pretrial detention, and to receive other harsh treatment (Hinton, 2018). For example, historically, African American defendants have been more likely to be jailed before trial in comparison to Caucasian defendants. A recent study shows that while some reforms have aided in reducing pretrial detention, there is little to no impact as it relates to reducing racial disparities (Prison Policy Initiative, 2021). To help end mass incarceration and racial disparities, racial bias in decisions regarding who is detained and who is released must be eliminated. Therefore, bringing national attention to the stated issues is required to have effective reforms passed (Prison Policy Initiative, 2021).

Numerous reforms are required to reduce overcrowding in the U.S. correctional institutions especially pertaining to the War on Drugs policy. In other terms, current drug policies have proven to be ineffective and have increased drug use and a massive black market that promotes violence and corruption (Blumstein, 2020). Instead of lawmakers utilizing harsh drug policies proved to be ineffective, a drug policy reform that treats drug

abuse as a public health issue is required and has proven to be effective in other countries. For example, in Portugal and Switzerland, public health approaches have been utilized to successfully decrease the harms correlated with drug use for numerous decades. The decriminalization has reduced the overdose death percentages and has helped reduced the stigma of drug use and substituted a judicial system evaluation with a public health foundation (Blumstein, 2020). Embracing this new vision as it relates to drug policy reform can reduce the negative outcomes of drug use.

Diversion Programs to Reduce Overcrowding

Expanding alternative programs to help deter mass incarceration is the best method to reduce prison overcrowding, prison violence, self-harm, suicide, mental health disorders, burnout among staff, prison costs, and billions of dollars to taxpayers. According to United States legislator's, enforcing maximum incarceration is hazardous and will not make American citizens safer (Williams, 2019). This is because the expansion of incarceration means that larger ratios of nonviolent offenders are imprisoned (Prison Policy Initiative, 2021). Studies consistently reveal that higher incarceration ratios are not linked to lower violent crime rates (Prison Policy Initiative, 2021). Therefore, eliminating mandatory sentences for all crimes to reduce sentencing lengths and time served in prison and enforcing alternative programs is crucial to reduce mass incarceration, prison violence, suicide, prison costs, and taxpayers' dollars.

Encouraging alternatives to incarceration will be more beneficial because it can repair harms suffered by victims, strengthen the community, rehabilitate offenders, drug and/or substance abusers, treat mental illness, and reduce prison costs. Additionally,

enforcing alternative programs will reduce excessive incarceration and give courts more sentencing options (Williams, 2019). For example, every crime and every offender are different. If courts have a variety of options, they can give a cost-effective sentence that suits the offender as well as the offense. Remedies for reducing mass incarceration requires early release programs, jailing or sanction of parole violators, sanctions for low-risk criminal offenders, expansion of community rehabilitation programs, implementation of the Affordable Care Act, housing mental health offenders in mental health facilities, reexamine sentencing laws, and downsizing prisons.

Like the rest of the United States, Louisiana experienced a whooping imprisonment increase in the quarter of the 20th century. Although Louisiana has been working to implement methods to effectively combat its mass incarceration rate, it remains the highest in the nation per capita (Louisiana Department of Safety and Corrections, 2021). Half of the people serving prison sentences are assigned to state correctional institutions, while the other half are assigned to local-level jails and transitional work programs (Louisiana Department of Safety and Corrections, 2021). Incarcerated individuals experience challenges finding housing, employment, and having access to essential services and programs post their release. These basic requirements are crucial to successfully help incarcerated individuals reenter society (Louisiana Department of Safety and Corrections, 2021). Without these services, people who are released from prison will reoffend.

To combat the overcrowding issues in Louisiana correctional institutions, effective programming opportunities should be offered to all incarcerated individuals.

The programs will be beneficial to incarcerated individuals because they will learn basic work readiness skills in addition to other life skills prior to their release (Louisiana Department of Safety and Corrections, 2021). To discover what programs are beneficial, evidence-based and standardized testing should be performed. Incarcerated individuals should be provided with the opportunity to participate in a variety of evidence-based programs to address their needs (Louisiana Department of Safety and Corrections, 2021). These programs will also assist with improving public safety, prison costs, recidivism, etc. Using incentives for incarcerated individuals to partake in will allow the individuals to receive credit towards early release (Louisiana Department of Safety and Corrections, 2021). As a result, this can help reduce mass incarceration.

Adopting Community-Based Sanction Policies

Adopting graduated and community-based sanctions policies as it relates to parole violators are effective methods to reduce mass incarceration in Louisiana correctional institutions. According to recent studies (Wodahl et al., 2018), graduate and community-based sanctions policies have shown positive results in deterring prison overcrowding. Graduated sanctions policies refer to rapid and proportionate punishment for offenders who violate their probation or parole (Wodahl et al., 2018). Without these policies, offenders who violate the conditions of community supervision will often result in long-term imprisonment. Additionally, research suggests that graduate and community-based sanctions policies may be effective methods as it relates to the offenders' compliance (Wodahl et al., 2018).

In Louisiana correctional institutions, certain offenders who are classified as “low-risk criminals” based on standardized assessment tools may still have delinquencies that require attention should be addressed to diminish the risk of reoffending. Policies that utilize effective interventions that involve family integration and enhance social reinforcement should be implemented (Crites et al., 2019). Also, low-risk offenders should be diverted to focus on employment and placed in programs that do not involve heavy sanctions (Lowenkamp et al., 2018). According to research (Andrews et al., 2017), various technologies have emerged to enhance problem-solving skills and manage offenders. Therefore, probation and/or parole supervision strategies should utilize technologies for problem-solving skills and effective technology as it relates to managing offenders who are classified as “low risk.”

Affordable Healthcare

Implementation of the 2022 Affordable Care Act (ACA) plans is needed to offer low-cost healthcare to offenders in Louisiana. The ACA provides Americans -including those with mental health disorders and chronic health issues such as HIV- greater access to health care coverage and more health insurance options (The Affordable Care Act, 2022). Unfortunately, Medicaid will not cover medical care for incarcerated individuals. As a result, released offenders may not be able to get essential health care more rapidly. Although Medicaid will not cover health care for incarcerated individuals, enrolling in Medicaid while incarcerated may be beneficial as it relates to getting essential care more quickly post incarceration (National Alliance on Mental Illness, 2022).

Chronic health issues in correctional institutions among the incarcerated population is a major concern. The Louisiana prison population consists of individuals from poor communities who suffer with health issues. According to research (Louisiana Department of Safety and Corrections, 2021), health issues become worse during incarceration mostly due to the incarcerated individuals serving longer sentences. Most of the population comprise of offenders with mental illness and substance abuse disorders in addition to increased rates of infectious diseases (e.g., HIV/AIDS, hepatitis C, tuberculosis, etc.) than the general population (Louisiana Department of Safety and Corrections, 2021).

The spread of infectious disease within Louisiana correctional institutions is a minor concern compared to the results of releasing offenders into society without access to health care services and treatment. Preventing health care services as soon as individuals are released is a failure to protect the public health and perpetuates inequality in impoverished communities (Louisiana Department of Safety and Corrections, 2021). According to research (Louisiana Department of Safety and Corrections, 2021), infectious diseases spread disproportionately among the incarcerated African American population, especially men. Therefore, an approach to infectious diseases in Louisiana correctional institutions must involve reform and strong advocacy.

Politicians are debating whether certain states should downsize correctional institutions by modifying existing policies such as drug offenses. According to research (Haney, 2018), expanding alternatives to institutions would reduce prison costs and taxpayers' dollars. On the other hand, some politicians, mostly Republicans, argue that

reducing sentences would harm society and would cost correctional institutions more money to incarcerate new offenders (Haney, 2020). Advocates for prison reforms support the idea of downsizing correctional institutions as it relates to diverting low-risk offenders and building supporters of alternative to prisons. Advocates also asserted that low-risk offenders could be released into well monitored alternative programs without posing risk to society (Haney, 2018).

Alternatives to incarceration is needed to help deter mass incarceration in the U.S. Oftentimes, punishments other than prison or jail time place critical challenges on incarcerated individuals and administer them with rigorous court and community supervision (Haney, 2020). Although alternatives do not include prison and/or jail time it does not necessarily mean it is “soft on crime” or “a slap on the wrist.” Alternatives to incarceration can be beneficial in the Louisiana’s correctional institutions because it can reduce the incarceration population, mend injuries endured by victims, administer amenities to the community, medicate the drug-addicted or mentally ill, reform offenders, protect the public by reducing crime, reduce prison costs, and save taxpayers money (Haney, 2020). As previously stated, there are numerous benefits to enforcing alternatives to incarceration, however abolishing mandatory minimums and enabling courts the capacity to use-cost effective, recidivism-reducing sentencing options is most crucial to deter mass incarceration in the state of Louisiana.

Mentally ill offenders orchestrate a considerable percentage of jail and/or prison inmates, even though incarcerating mentally ill offenders can and often will intensify their mental illness. As a result, various diversion programs for mentally ill incarcerated

individuals in the U.S. are needed to reduce recidivism, treat mentally ill offenders, and implement discharge procedures that include sufficient follow-up care. According to research (Prison Policy Initiative, 2020), U.S. prison and jails sentence an unreasonable number of individuals who have a present or past mental health disorder, and facilities are not fulfilling the necessity for remedy. Unfortunately, diversion programs for mentally ill offenders lack funding to establish, evaluate, and maintain them. According to research (Prison Policy Initiative, 2020), existing diversion programs productively alter incarcerated individuals with mental disorders from the criminal justice system and have revealed to be effective in the deterrence of preventable detentions for individuals who suffer with a mental disorder.

Prison and/or jail diversion programs give second chances to incarcerated individuals with mental disorders. According to research (Muller, 2018), because of the resource scarcity for offenders with mental illness, mass incarceration among individuals with mental disorders continues to be an ongoing issue in the United States. In the past decade, advocates have successfully diverted thousands of individuals from the criminal justice system into treatment (Muller, 2018). Enforcing programs to divert low-risk offenders in mental-health catastrophes to treatment instead of sending them to a detention environment that magnifies their symptoms is crucial. Adopting diversion programs that allow non-violent offenders who suffer with mental health disorders the freedom to work alongside a trained mental-health professional so they can receive adequate treatment and effectively divert individuals with mental disorders from the criminal justice system will be beneficial.

Prison Violence Impact on Mental Health

Being incarcerated can take a tremendous toll on an individual's mental health. Trauma can occur from experiencing and/or witnessing violence in correctional institutions and may trigger new conditions and worsen pre-existing conditions (Muller, 2018). For example, people often experience physical assaults, verbal abuse, and dehumanization at the hands of correctional officials. A study revealed that prison violence was linked to aggressive and antisocial behavior as well as emotional distress (Morin, 2021). Presently, there is a perturbing number of people with mental health disorders detained in the U.S correctional institutions. Unfortunately, minimum consideration is fixated on the ways in which incarceration alone sustains this matter by constructing and intensifying patterns of mental illness.

Incarcerated individuals with mental disorders have limited ways to relieve stress. According to research (Morin, 2021), the prison environment takes a toll on correctional officials. Due to the high turnover rate of prison staff, incarcerated individuals don't get out of their confinements regularly. As a result, this can create more stress and may give them a loss of purpose. Unfortunately, mental disorders go unrecognized by incarcerated individuals and correctional officials. According to research (Morin, 2021), mass incarceration is associated with mood disorders including major depressive disorder and bipolar disorder. Exposure to prison violence can trigger existing mental health disorders or even lead to post-traumatic stress symptoms (e.g., depression, anxiety, suicide, and isolation). Other symptoms may include disbelieving others, difficulty maintaining relationships, and problems making decisions. Incarceration can provoke and regress

symptoms of mental illness. Many individuals with mental disorders are released back into the community without ever receiving any type of treatment (Muller, 2018).

Unfortunately, those effects can linger long after post incarceration.

The U.S correctional system continues to struggle to meet the vast needs of the increasing number of inmates with mental health disorders. Incarcerating people with mental illness is not an effective method to deter criminal activities (Stringer, 2019).

Because individuals with mental illnesses are being incarcerated, the U.S prisons and jails have become treatment centers. For example, a recent study conducted by Haney (2021) revealed that correctional officials are more like social workers who have developed personal relationships with inmates to get acquainted with them and try to comprehend what cause unacceptable behavior rather than enforce punishments. In most correctional institutions, mental health professionals do not regularly monitor the mental health condition of incarcerated individuals with mental disorders. As a result, correctional officials find themselves assessing the offenders' behavior or conduct and make decisions regarding immediate mental health intervention (Haney, 2021).

The excessive high rate of mental disorders in correctional institutions is related to various determinants: the broad misconception that all individuals with mental disorders are a hazard to the public; the general bias of many societies to challenging or perturbing conduct; the failure to enhance treatment, care and rehabilitation, and, above all, the deficiency of, or deprived access to, mental health services. Many of these disorders may occur before incarceration and may be further increased by the stress of incarceration (Miller, 2021). Conversely, mental disorders may also progress during

incarceration alone because of current conditions and feasibly due to torment or other human rights violations. Focusing on keeping people with mental health disorders out of correctional institutions and linking them to mental health professionals is critical. For example, effectively addressing the mental health needs of incarcerated individuals in the U.S is a necessity because it can deter mass incarceration, re-offending, recidivism, and aid in diverting individuals with mental disorders away from correctional institutions and into treatment and rehabilitation facilities (Haney, 2021). Additionally, it will reduce prison costs and taxpayers' dollars (Stringer, 2019).

Summary and Conclusions

Across the nation, incarcerated individuals with severe mental illness are more likely to be sentenced to jail or prison instead of being housed in mental health facilities. Prisons and local state jails have insufficient funding to meet the growing demand. Due to a lack of funding, many of the individuals were released into the community without proper treatment. On the other hand, many individuals remain in correctional institutions because of their symptoms (American Psychiatric Association, 2018). In *Estelle vs. Gamble* (1976), the Supreme Court ruled that the Eight Amendment mandates correctional officials to provide adequate health-care services, not excluding mental health, to mentally ill offenders. Developing effective health-care strategies is crucial in jail and prison environments and post the offenders' release. Managing mental illness and classifying it as a serious health issue can result in establishing effective and methodical policies. Also, reexamining sentencing laws as it relates to incarcerating mentally

offenders can help reduce mass incarceration (Louisiana Department of Safety and Corrections, 2021).

Louisiana correctional institutions have become mental health facilities for offenders with severe mental disorders (Louisiana Department of Safety and Corrections, 2021). Among the Louisiana incarcerated population are individuals with serious mental illness who are in cells with offenders who do not have a history of mental illness. How this issue impacts the psyche of offenders who do not have mental disorders has yet to be explored. In addition to creating effective strategies for offenders with mental illness, effective strategies are needed to help inmates with substance abuse disorders during their incarceration and post their incarceration (Haney, 2018). As previously stated, exploring alternatives to incarceration and passing reforms for low-level offenses (e.g., drug offenses) by implementing alternatives to prison will help decrease mass incarceration, reduce prison costs, taxpayers' dollars, self-harm, prison violence, mental & physical distress, burnout among prison staff, and will help make reentry successful.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this study was to explore mass incarceration in Louisiana and its impact on the mental health of incarcerated men. The reason I narrowed down my study to focus on incarcerated African American men is because previous research has investigated the psychological effects of prison overcrowding in the state of Louisiana and its impact on the mental health of incarcerated women (see Louisiana Women's Incarceration Task Force: Final Report and Recommendation, 2020). In this section, I will describe the methodology of the present study. Included in this section are the following: (a) the RQs that were analyzed, (b) the sample and population used in this study, (c) a description of the data file used in this study, (d) a description of the data examination executed in this study, and (e) a summary of the chapter.

The ratio of offenders with mental health disorders who are housed in correctional institutions as an alternative to mental health facilities and/or community health programs has continued to increase over the past years (Bradley-Engen et al., 2019; Morrissey et al., 2019, Western, 2018). According to Hutchins et al. (2020), Lamb et al. (2019), and Rich et al. (2018), the reason why the numbers have increased over the years is due to release from prison and modifications in state laws that have made it difficult to be admitted and continue to be admitted Brandt, (2020); Lurigio et al., 2019). How to oversee mentally ill offenders in the state of Louisiana is a challenge for city bureaucracies and has regenerated an established contestation between the sheriffs' offices, the state, and activists over the development of modern correctional facilities (Prison Policy Initiative, 2022). Although the court mandates for rights to adequate health care in correctional

facilities, inmate access to health and mental health care has been periodic. As a result, incarcerated individuals with mental illness have limited options.

The elevated ratio of Louisiana's incarcerated individuals with mental disorders induces distress for both the state's correctional institutions and inmates. For example, the elevation induces a crisis on the correctional institutions because they will have to adjust to not only being a setting for redemption but also a place that can oversee and administer inmates who have consequential mental illnesses (Prison Policy Initiative, 2022). Some of the concerns for prison overcrowding in the state of Louisiana include the impact it has on the mental health of incarcerated individuals (including individuals who had existing mental health issues prior to incarceration) and how greater stressors can escalate their mental health symptoms. For example, exposure to prison and jail violence can complicate prevailing mental health dysfunctions or even result in the development of PTSD, anxiety, depression, suicide, avoidance, and emotional distress.

Research Design and Rationale

For this qualitative research study, I used the general qualitative research approach. General qualitative research was the best approach because the purpose of this study was to explore mass incarceration in the state of Louisiana and how it impacts the mental health of incarcerated men. The RQ was as follows: What are the participants' perceptions regarding the existing psychiatric services within Louisiana correctional institutions?

General qualitative research helps the researcher to develop concepts to better understand the collected data through open ended questions. The participants were

encouraged to provide in-depth information regarding the subject and could express their personal experiences, thoughts, and feelings without limitations. Additionally, general qualitative research methods allow researchers to ask follow-up questions on answers given by participants instantaneously.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher's role in this qualitative research study was to interview formerly incarcerated men who served a minimum of 10 years in a Louisiana prison and were released between 2018 and 2022. The purpose of this study was to explore mass incarceration and its effect on the mental health of incarcerated men in Louisiana prison facilities. I interviewed formerly incarcerated males who were not considered vulnerable populations. I used member checking to ensure that all participants were able to review the study's transcript and to make modifications before it was completed.

Methodology

For this qualitative research study, I used purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling is broadly used in qualitative research for the identification and selection of information cases connected to the occurrence of interest (Proctor et al., 2012). Participants are able to provide the interviewer with detailed information about the examined subjects. The selected participants were 20 African American men, 18 and older, who served a minimum of 10 years in a Louisiana carceral setting and were released between 2018 and 2022. All participants were recruited from a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization who is dedicated to restoring the full human and civil rights of those most impacted by Louisiana's criminal justice system. Flyers to recruit participants

were posted on the organization's social media platforms and given to potential participants who met the criteria in-person. The selected participants provided a large collection of information to support a claim or argument when the interviewed addressed the RQ: How does mass incarceration impact the mental health of incarcerated African American males in Louisiana prisons?

Instrumentation

For this research study, instruments were used to record data from the interview process. Face-to-face interviews were the primary source of data used. The main purpose of face-to-face interviews is to acquire essential information to conduct research. To ensure the quality of the interviews, I asked relevant open-ended questions that allowed me to receive greater feedback. According to Hatch (2018), it is vital for researchers to certify that data are not modified. The credibility and consistency of the interview is based on the integrity of interviewees. I believe that all research participants in this study provided honest answers to my questions.

Because historical research provides instruments to investigate, understand, and describe problems in the past, archived data were used as a secondary primary source to collect historical information regarding mass incarceration and were attained by surveying published work. Historical data can help governing bodies and/or community leaders make rational decisions that influence society, culture, and the economy.

For Published Data Collection Instruments

The archived data sources in this qualitative study included the World Prison Brief, Oxford Handbook Online, Nexi Uni, Criminal Justice Abstracts, and Sage

Journals. The data retrieved from the stated sources were published between 2008 and 2019. The sources were previously used in qualitative research as a guide to data sources for advocates seeking reform of the criminal legal system in the United States. An additional instrument used in this study was an audio recorder. The purpose of the instrument was to record and transcribe data. As a backup, I used an observation sheet to record notes.

Researcher-Developed Instrumentation

The qualitative research interview questions are consistent with the areas presented in the conceptual framework. I developed 9 qualitative research interview questions based on propositions that emerged from the literature review. The interview questions are stated below:

1. What are structures that individuals believe influence the high levels of incarceration of African American men?
2. What role do individuals believe they or others have in contributing to this problem?
3. How does mass incarceration impact the increasing mentally ill population?
4. How difficult is it to provide mental health treatment inside a prison?
5. How well do mentally ill inmates respond to psychiatric medication and/or treatment?
6. How well does the medication and/or treatment help deter prison violence?
7. What are communities doing to combat the issue of the mentally ill being incarcerated?

8. What can I, as a social change agent, do to improve mass incarceration in Louisiana prison facilities?
9. What can I, as a social change agent, do to improve mental health and rehabilitation services in Louisiana prison facilities?

Procedures for Pilot Studies (as Appropriate)

The purpose for the pilot study was to develop insight into how the interviewing sessions would be conducted and to confirm that the open-ended qualitative RQs were equivalent. Additionally, I conducted mock interviews with my immediate family members. The purpose of the mock interviews was to evaluate my interviewing performance. Note taking during the mock interviewing sessions was used as an instrument to ensure the data were properly recorded.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

The selected participants for this study were formerly incarcerated individuals in Louisiana correctional institutions. The components in this population were formerly incarcerated individuals in the state of Louisiana who have served a minimum sentence of 10 years and were released between 2018 and 2022. The sample used in this research study was the complete sample. The sample size includes 20 adults aged 18 and older. All participants were recruited from a nonprofit organization who is dedicated to restoring the full human and civil rights of FIP and CIP. If recruitment had resulted in too few participants, my follow-up plan was to request approval from Walden's IRB to include participants from a Louisiana prison reform organization who are partners with the organization selected for this study. The ages of all participants were verified in two

forms of identification, including state photo identifications or any other photo identifications that show the individual's date of birth. All participants in this research study were formerly incarcerated African American males. By selecting the participants, I was able to determine the possible reasons for mass incarceration in Louisiana correctional institutions and its impact on the mental health of incarcerated men.

Selecting an adequate sample size is crucial in qualitative research (Mason, 2019). I selected a small sample size for this study to gain a better understanding of the possible reasons for mass incarceration in Louisiana correctional institutions. Interviews with formerly incarcerated individuals were held in a private conference room for face-to-face interviews. Individual video conference calls via Skype or Zoom were used for participants who preferred virtual interviews. The interviews were held on weekdays between 8 a.m. until 5:00 p.m. To ensure privacy and confidentiality, the location of the interviews was provided to the selected voluntary participants only. During the interview(s), an occupied sign was used on the outside door to inform others. Additionally, I ensure that no one was aware of the reason why the participants were meeting there.

To find potential research participants, I informed the organization's administrator about my doctoral research study. Upon approval of my proposal, the organization's administrators gave permission for me to seek potential voluntary participants by posting flyers in the organization's building and on the company's social media platforms. Prior to selecting potential research participants, the participants' ages were verified by using two forms of identification, including photo identifications, birth certificates, driver's

license, and passports. After the interview was concluded, each research participant received a Visa gift card in the amount of \$20. Prior to setting up meetings with potential research participants, I spoke directly to the organization's administrator to receive authorization to meet with the participants and determine whether they meet the requirements to participate in the study.

For this research study, interviews were the primary source of data used. Secondary data included Louisiana public records, World Prison Brief database, peer-reviewed journals and articles, and existing literature. The main purpose of face-to-face interviews was to acquire essential information to conduct research. To ensure the quality of the interviews, I asked relevant open-ended questions that allowed me to receive greater feedback. According to Hatch (2018), it is vital for researchers to certify the data are not modified. Therefore, the credibility and consistency of the interview are based on the integrity of interviewees. I believe that all research participants in this study provided honest answers to my questions.

A fundamental element that affected my purpose to interview formerly incarcerated men in the state of Louisiana was because of their first-hand experience of being chambered in the state's correctional institutions. Additional contributing factors as they related to my purpose to interview formerly incarcerated men in the state of Louisiana was the present issue pertaining to the mass incarceration rate for African American men and the mentally ill population in the state's correctional institutions (see Patton, 2019).

Data Analysis Plan

The qualitative research methodology is a central technique used in this interview process. This technique was beneficial to help inform me about modern concepts, theories, and acquiring accurate data. Data analysis was used to analyze and categorize the themes and patterns. This process made it convenient for me to bracket and evaluate the participants' responses. Each recording was listened to for accuracy. All recorded transcripts were securely saved in a MS Word document on my personal computer. A protected password was created to ensure confidentiality. The RQ was as follows: What is the participant's perception regarding the existing psychiatric services within Louisiana prison facilities? Data were obtained and coded based on the participants' responses. Themes and sub themes were recognized from the semi structured interviews. Data were collected from face-to-face interviews and virtual Zoom conferences.

The NVivo software was applied to evaluate the evidence and illustrate it in concepts and perceptions. Data were collected from formerly incarcerated African American men in the state of Louisiana. For data management tools, used video and audio recordings, note taking, and software programs designed for qualitative research. To ensure ethical research, I followed informed consent rules and respected participants' confidentiality and privacy.

Data Collection Plan

Data was collected in person and a Zoom call for the participants who preferred the virtual option. Prior to conducting interviews, each participant signed a consent form giving me permission to interview them. During the interviewing process, I debriefed the

participants on the study being conducted and the interview questions being asked (to eliminate any confusion). During the interviewing session, the participants' identities remained confidential. Audio and video recorders were used to conduct interviews with the participants. The data collection also included a follow-up interview via Zoom. The participants' personal information was not used for anything outside of this research study. I ensured the data were safely secured by creating a challenging password. The video and audio recordings were properly transcribed and protected by a password.

Data Coding

In this qualitative research study, data coding was used to categorize the collected information into groups and assign numerical codes to the groups. Data were analyzed by observing patterns, linkages, and similarities to consolidate meaning and develop an explanation (see Saldana, 2015).

Organizing Codes and Themes

To ensure the confidentiality of the participants' responses, I generated codes for each participant. For example, the abbreviation FIRP = formerly incarcerated research participant followed by the numbers 1 to 20 were issued to each participant. The abbreviation and numbers were assigned to the participants in the order of the interviews. For example, the first participant was assigned FIRP1. I recorded the participants' responses and followed-up with each participant to ensure data were accurately recorded.

The NVivo qualitative data analysis software was very beneficial because it guided me in identifying themes and relationships. I initially encountered a few challenges having to reread the data to ensure accuracy of the data and/or description.

Some of the themes were substituted with themes that were more descriptive to corroborate the findings from this study. In Chapter 5, I will transcribe the data that were analyzed. Additionally, a summary is included to detail the findings.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Qualitative researchers are obligated to set forth evidence of four key criteria to guarantee the legitimacy of the study's results. The four key criteria are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Department of Education, 2020). These principles serve as the structure to corroborate the aspects of qualitative research to ensure data accuracy, research bias, and inaccurate data analysis (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

Credibility

In this qualitative research study, the researcher utilized numerous strategies to ensure the research is free from biases. Member checking was used during and after the data collection process. The researcher asked questions and follow-up questions in addition to summarizing the participants responses during the interview process. The stated approaches were utilized to confirm there were no inconsistencies in this study. Additionally, the triangulation procedure was used to guarantee trustworthiness. The strategies included audio and video recordings, note taking, and participants observation. This method allowed conclusions to be drawn from numerous sources. To enhance the credibility of this study, the researcher utilized field notes that were documented in addition to transcripts that were taken from the interviews.

Transferability

This qualitative study can be used to conduct future research and be a resource for policymakers, government officials (on the state and federal levels), prison reform advocates, politicians, nonprofit prison reform organizations, and community awareness. The goal of this study is to encourage Louisiana's policymakers and/or lawmakers to reform policies that fuels mass incarceration, provide mental health screenings and adequate healthcare services to incarcerated people, create effective programs that will help incarcerated people successfully reenter society and deter recidivism. In addition, this study can help the families and friends of formerly and currently incarcerated people get a better view of the challenges they endure during their incarceration period and post their release.

Dependability

The researcher retained field notes and transcripts for each research participant. All participants were treated with respect. The researcher gained the respondents' trust by ensuring that all collected data will be stored safely, and their identities will remain confidential. All participants had an opportunity to review their responses and guarantee there are no biases in this study (i.e., member checking). Follow-up interviews were conducted to ensure reliability which included step-by-step details of the interview process. For the interviewing process, I used the same interviewing tool, data collection, and data analysis that is disclosed in this study.

Confirmability

Field notes were used to record the researchers' personal thoughts and emotions during the interviews and data collection process (Korstjens et al., 2017). After carefully analyzing the research data (the responses to the interview questions and field notes), there was solid evidence that the data was unbiased.

Ethical Procedures

In this qualitative research study, the researcher followed all ethical standards in accordance with Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines to ensure that participants are protected during the interviewing process. Prior to conducting research, the researcher sent drafts of the consent forms that were approved by Walden University IRB. As stated on both consent forms (in-person and electronic consent forms), all participants were informed that this study is voluntary and can be stopped at any time. Participants received a copy of the signed consent forms prior to the interview sessions. Participants were also informed about the risk and minor discomfort they may experience from recalling traumatic events during the sessions.

Summary

Chapter 3 outlined the research approach, design, sampling method, participants, sample size, data collection procedures, data analysis & interpretation, and data management techniques that will be utilized in this study. The stated diverse methods are applicable to obtain qualitative research data. For example, the researcher used qualitative research methodologies to obtain adequate evidence for the analysis. The qualitative research methodology is a central technique that would be utilized in this

interview process. This technique will be beneficial to help inform the researcher about modern concepts, theories, and acquiring accurate data.

The secondary data was collected from Louisiana public records, World Prison Brief database, textbooks, peer-reviewed journals, and articles. The NVivo software was applied to evaluate the evidence and illustrate it in concepts and perceptions. Data was collected from formerly incarcerated African American men in the state of Louisiana. For data management tools, the researcher selected to utilize video and audio recordings, note taking, and software programs designed for qualitative research. To ensure ethical research, the researcher followed informed-consent rules and respected participants' confidentiality and privacy.

Chapter 4 includes the introduction, setting, demographics, data collection, data analysis, evidence of trustworthiness, results, and summary.

Chapter 4: Results

In this chapter, I reveal the findings of this research study. The purpose of this qualitative research study was to determine whether prison overcrowding negatively impacts the mental health of incarcerated African American men in Louisiana prisons. Therefore, the interview questions were as follows:

Interview Question #1: What are structures that incarcerated people believe influence the elevated levels of incarceration among African American men?

Interview Question #2: What role do individuals believe influence the high levels of incarceration of African American men?

Interview Question #3: How does mass incarceration impact the increasing mentally ill population?

The interviews for this study consisted of 20 male research participants all of whom resided in and were formerly incarcerated in Louisiana prisons and released between 2018 and 2022. Each research participant was asked a total of 9 questions over a period of 45 to 55 minutes. In this chapter, I describe the setting and/or ambiance where the research was conducted, the demographics participating in the study, and the type of equipment used during the interviewing process. At the end of the interview, each participant reviewed their responses to confirm that their responses were recorded accurately.

Setting

The study took place in a private conference room for face-to-face interviews. Individual video conference calls via Skype or Zoom were used for participants who

preferred virtual interviews. In both settings, I provided a quiet and secure atmosphere to collect accurate data, protect the participants identities, and ensure confidentiality. As a result, the participants comfortably provided insight into their experiences of being detained in Louisiana prisons.

Demographics

The participants were selected only if they met the criteria. The criteria included 20 volunteers who were African American males, 18 and over at the time of their release, and served a minimum of 10 years in a Louisiana prison. The reason I narrowed the study to focus primarily on African American males is because they ranked the highest among the mass incarceration population in Louisiana prisons. In the state of Louisiana, African American men have a 1 in 3 chance of being incarcerated in comparison to White men (The Sentencing Project, 2020). All participants were recruited by the organization who agreed to participate in the study. Participants were in the Southwest and Southeast regions of Louisiana.

Data Collection

The sample size included 20 research participants. The data collection for this study included structured interviews consisting of open-ended questions for detailed responses. Additionally, a digital voice recorder and audio editor, video recorder, and note taking were key strategies used to collect data. I also used a quiet and secure conference room to collect data. I performed a data analysis after the completion of the interviews. In addition, I collected data from the Louisiana Public Records, The Bureau of Justice Statistics, World Prison Brief database, The Marshall Project, The Innocence

Project, and the Louisiana Parole Project to elaborate more on mass incarceration in the state of Louisiana and the negative impact on incarcerated people.

Data Analysis

I used the NVivo qualitative software program and Microsoft Word to retain all transcribed data. The audio recordings for each participant were transferred to my personal computer and transcribed manually. To guarantee that the data would not be lost, the data were backed up onto a Microsoft Word document. The notes taken during the interviews were carefully read to ensure that the information was accurate and interpreted in the same manner. The remainder of the data analysis was coded independently. Data collected from each research participant were encrypted, analyzed, combined, and finally composed to authenticate the accuracy and conformity of the data analysis.

Eleven open-ended questions were included in this study. The initial question was regarding the existing psychiatric and rehabilitative treatment services within Louisiana prison facilities. All 20 participants provided answers to each question. To protect the participants' identity, each participant was given a code to remove their names permitting me to still be able to easily access the collected data. The data were coded by using the topics pertaining to the study. Codes and subcodes were assigned a specific color, which allowed me to be able to access the questions and clearly see which questions received more information than others. The following RQs were all approved by the IRB and were designed to answer the question: What are the participants' perceptions regarding the

existing psychiatric services within Louisiana prison facilities? The data in the following sections answers the following questions:

1. What are structures that individuals believe influence the high levels of incarceration of African American men?
2. What role do individuals believe they or others have in contributing to this problem?
3. How does mass incarceration impact the increasingly mentally ill population?
4. How difficult is it to provide mental health treatment inside a prison?
5. How well do mentally ill inmates respond to psychiatric medication and/or treatment?
6. How well does the medication and/or treatment help deter prison violence?
7. What are communities doing to combat the issue of the mentally ill being incarcerated?
8. What can I, as a social change agent, do to improve mass incarceration in Louisiana prison facilities?
9. What can I, as a social change agent, do to improve mental health and rehabilitation services in Louisiana prison facilities?

Interview Questions 1 to 9 were answered by all 20 participants. All questions involved the honest opinion of FIP who had served time behind bars in a Louisiana prison facility.

All responses are summarized in this chapter and again in Chapter 5.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

As I stated in Chapter 3, qualitative researchers are obligated to set forth evidence of four key criteria to guarantee the legitimacy of the study's results. The four key criteria are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Department of Education, 2020). During the data collection process, I used research methods to ensure trustworthiness in this qualitative study. The stated research methods served as structures to corroborate the aspects of qualitative research to ensure data accuracy, research bias, and inaccurate data analysis (see Lincoln et al. 1985).

Credibility

In this qualitative research study, I used numerous strategies to ensure the research was free from biases. Member checking was used during and after the data collection process. I asked questions and follow-up questions in addition to summarizing the participants' responses during the interview process. The stated approaches were used to confirm there were no inconsistencies in this study. Additionally, the triangulation procedure was used to guarantee trustworthiness. The strategies included audio and video recordings, note taking, and participant observation. This method allowed me to draw conclusions from numerous sources. To enhance the credibility of this study, I used documented field notes in addition to transcripts taken from the interviews.

Transferability

This qualitative study can be used to conduct future research and be a resource for policymakers, government officials (on the state and federal levels), prison reform advocates, politicians, nonprofit prison reform organizations, and community awareness.

The goal of this study is to encourage Louisiana's policymakers and/or lawmakers to reform policies that fuel mass incarceration, provide mental health screenings and adequate healthcare services to incarcerated people, and create effective programs that can help incarcerated people successfully reenter society and deter recidivism. In addition, this study can help the families and friends of formerly and currently incarcerated people obtain a better view of the challenges they endure during their incarceration period and post their release.

Dependability

I retained field notes and transcripts for each research participant. All participants were treated with respect. I gained the respondents' trust by ensuring that all collected data were stored safely, and their identities remained confidential. All participants had an opportunity to review their responses and guarantee there are no biases in this study (i.e., member checking). Follow-up interviews were conducted to ensure reliability, which included step-by-step details of the interview process. For the interviewing process, I used the same interviewing tool, data collection, and data analysis disclosed in this study.

Confirmability

Field notes were used to record my personal thoughts and emotions during the interviews and data collection process (see Korstjens et al., 2017). After carefully analyzing the research data (the responses to the interview questions and field notes), there was solid evidence that the data were unbiased.

Results

The significant data collected during the interviews with 20 research participants were enclosed in transcripts that I prepared following the interviews. A summarization of the results is presented in the order of the RQs, restating from the subject of the interviews where relevant.

Interview Question 1

Interview Question 1 asked the participants perceptions of the structures that influence the high levels of incarceration of African American men and what is the influence.

FIRP7 said, “I believe family upbringing influence the high levels of incarceration of African American men in Louisiana. Most black males are being raised in a single parent home (no males or father figures). Most people believe it is the environment, but I disagree because many people grew up in my environment and are very successful people today. They were raised in single parent homes. It begins at home.”

FIRP3 responded, “The lack of resources. Because of the lack of resources, African American males are going to the streets where there are resources, drug activities, armed robberies, burglaries, etc. When there are not any resources, they will go to other resources such as illegal activities because there is always some type of resource. More resources should be provided. Minimum wages in Louisiana start at \$7.25 and are not enough to sustain anyone. Keep in mind that it is before taxes. Once taxes are applied, it is less than \$1,000 per month. Who could survive on that? When you don’t have enough to support yourself and your family, you look to other sources.” FIRP2

response was very brief when asked the same question. His response was, “Systematic racism and a lack of education.” The researcher observed the participant’s body language and noticed he became a little tense and teary-eyed shortly after he gave his response.

FIRP4 responded to the same question, “Harsh prison sentences, lack of resources, counseling, and drug rehabilitation. African American males will serve 5-10 years for a small amount of marijuana.” FIRP5 response was very similar, “A black man will serve a longer prison sentence for the same crime that a white man committed. Blacks outnumber whites in Angola.”

Interview Question 2

Interview Question 2 asked the participants what role do they or others have in contributing to mass incarceration.

FIRP7 said, “The elected officials view on getting tough on crimes in Louisiana. No one is trying to improve the education system and promote better employment opportunities. Sure, there are jobs, but there are limited chances that (FIPs) will have to get a job. Sweeping and mopping up floors are easy tasks, but it’s the red tape that FIPs must go through to get the job.”

FIRP1 responded, “Everyone must take accountability for their actions especially when it comes to innocent people being convicted. There is data, over 40% people are being exonerated in Louisiana prisons are African American males who are wrongfully convicted. If you are exonerated, you are not accountable for anything.” FIRP3 said, “Most guys incarcerated do not think they play a role in their incarceration. Most feel like they had no other choice but to commit a crime because of the system. They could not

find a job with higher pay because of their prior record. They committed a crime because they had no other choice.” FIRP4 said, “Some (not all) develop a victim mentality. Meaning, they do not think about their role.”

FIRP5 responded, “It stems from the district attorney’s office. I can only speak about Orleans Parish because it is the only parish that I have ever lived in. Evidence is being withheld from the court and jury to get a conviction. This leads to mass incarceration especially with African American men.” FIRP6 said, “Not having a father figure, being influenced by the streets, needing more money, and not enough well-paying jobs influence mass incarceration in Louisiana prison facilities.”

Interview Question 3

Interview Question 3 asked the participants how mass incarceration impacts the increasing mentally ill population in Louisiana prisons.

FIRP1 said, “Mass incarceration negatively impacts the mentally ill population in Louisiana prisons because more mental health hospitals are needed in the state. Mentally ill people are being housed in Louisiana prisons where there is inadequate care and/or treatment. There is one psychiatric hospital in the state, which is in Jackson, LA. The detention centers are going back to private partnerships. Therefore, people who are clearly mentally ill are incarcerated because they do not have a place or space for them. The state needs to build more hospitals to successfully treat mentally ill people.”

FIRP3 responded, “In Angola, most inmates who are severely ill are in cells 3 hours a day, left to their own thoughts. Other inmates feared for their lives. If they felt the severely mentally ill inmates' condition was advancing, they felt like, ‘let me do

something to him before he does something to me.’ When a person has a mental illness, they do not know how another inmate may respond to their episode. The guys who did not suffer from mental illness was always watching the guys who suffered with mental illness to make sure their lives were not at risk.”

FIRP7 responded, “Mass incarceration impacts the mentally ill population in Angola terribly. You are in an area where it is overcrowded. The law in Louisiana ordered the prison administration to have 60 beds in the dormitories and now it is doubled to 86 beds. Even when they took the bund beds down it was over 70 beds. As a result, there was a spread of infectious diseases and viruses such as the coronavirus (Covid-19) because there is no space to social distance. Besides Covid-19, there are other infections such as HIV, TB, and Hep C. People with HIV are in the same population as other inmates. Yes, mass incarceration strongly impacts the mentally ill population in Angola. The more politicians and lawmakers issue harsh sentences such as “Life Without Parole” and the “Three-Strikes Crime” it significantly impacts the already overcrowded prison population in Louisiana. It does not work to deter mass incarceration and cause more harm to the mentally ill incarcerated people.” FIRP4 said, “Some severely mentally ill people are incarcerated in Angola. They have a childlike mind. They were abused and mistreated by other inmates and prison guards.” The researcher felt empathy as the participant displayed emotion and concern about the abuse.

FIRP5 response to the same question was, “Some people come in without mental illness. You must be mentally strong to endure mass incarceration. A lot of people come in normal but end up with mental illness because of their surroundings. People are packed

in a dormitory that is designed to hold only 60 people and now holds over 80 people. Everybody cannot endure being confined to one space that is overpopulated.”

Moreover, FIRP1 was transferred to Elayn Hunt where there was a flu-outbreak. FIRP1 explained,

“The whole compound was locked down for about two weeks. Inmates were not allowed to go outside or interact with each other in their dorms. The nurse would come to take temperatures. It was tough for me not being able to go outside because I loved the fresh air. However, there were a lot of inmates who were not mentally strong to be kept in their dorms or locked down due to mental breakdowns.”

According to FIRP5, “The spread of infectious diseases in Angola was scary because men would become infected with diseases and don’t know how they became infected.” FIRP5 further elaborated,

“I got scabies without using drugs or having sexual contact with other inmates. If it was not for my wife (who was my fiancée at the time) constantly calling Angola, they would not have known what it was even though I went to the hospital three times and was given medication for treatment that did not help the infection. The emergency medical technician (EMT) told me we did everything that we could do for you. The doctor and nurse had no idea what was wrong until the third hospital visit. In Angola, you were often given the wrong diagnosis and treatment.

Along the same lines, FIRP6 said, “TB tests were taken between 90 days (about 3 months), or 6 months and the results were checked in 2 days. However, Hep C was found

in the water. I tested positive for Hep C during my incarceration and believe I contracted it from contaminated water.”

Interview Questions 4 & 5

Both Interview Questions 4 and 5 asked the participants about the challenges of providing mental health treatments to inmates and their response to medication and treatment.

FIRP1 said, “It is difficult to provide mental health treatment to incarcerated people in Hunt. For example, if there is a lockdown, or someone is in a block for disciplinary action, they cannot call out to see someone unlike people who are not on lockdown. There is a shortage of staff in HSU (the severely mentally ill unit). The prison officials make a distinction between mentally ill and severely mentally ill people. Mentally ill incarcerated people are medicated and kept on medication. They are integrated but a lot of times it does not work out well which causes chaos because it is hard for them to be around other people.”

FIRP2, who served time in Angola, responded, “The prison officials make it difficult to treat mentally ill incarcerated people because they know more mental health services are needed in prisons.” FIRP3 said, “No resources, not enough mental health professionals, sporadic visitation, lack of resources to pay for personnel and mental health treatment, and the need for more social workers to adequately address the mental health issues among incarcerated people remains a problem in Angola. FIRP1 said, “The mentally ill incarcerated people’s response to medication and/or treatment is on a case-by-case basis. Some do well when they remain on medication while some people react

negatively to the medicine. Some are quiet or like zombies if they are over medicated. It is noticeable when they are off their medication. However, if they remain consistent with the medication, most will do fine. Unfortunately, some sell the medication to get money for commissary (e.g., personal hygiene products, food, etc.).”

FIRP4 responded, “It is hard providing mental health services to incarcerated people in Angola because the environment is working against your mental health. The incarcerated men who were diagnosed with mental disorders are overmedicated to mask the problem. They do not receive any type of counseling.” FIRP5 said, “Social workers are sent to evaluate incarcerated people with mental illnesses, but it seems like it is all about the paperwork. Meaning, it’s like the employees do not care about the services. They are only concerned about showing proof that they are treating the inmates. Most of the inmates are walking zombies because they are overmedicated and not receiving adequate treatment. They should not be locked in cells because they cannot receive the proper treatment they need.”

Interview Question 6

In Interview Question 6, participants were asked about the medication and/or treatment services for mentally ill inmates and if it helps deter prison violence in Louisiana prisons.

FIRP3 responded, “The medication keeps those who suffer from mental illnesses balanced. The inmates who do not take the medicine will be imbalanced. They are usually shouting, dancing, and displaying disruptive behavior to other inmates. This behavior is abnormal. However, most inmates who take medication and are administered

the correct dosage function well.” FIRP4 response was very brief, “Medication help with some of the prison violence if heavily medicated.” FIRP5 said, “The prison medication and/or treatment services do nothing to combat prison violence. The inmates are in cells where they will be evaluated. If an inmate is “mild mannered”, they may test them to see how well they do with other inmates, but the chances are slim to none.” FIRP6 said, “Unless the inmates are highly sedated in a prison cell, they are not violent. Most inmates who I saw were walking time bombs. Only a certain person or people would be able to calm them down.”

Interview Question 7

Interview Question 7 asked the participants about the communities in Louisiana and what are they doing to combat the issues of the mentally ill population being incarcerated.

FIRP1 responded, “Nonprofit organizations are trying to go to the State Capitol in Baton Rouge to create policies that will help combat the issue. I am not certain what the communities are doing, however.” FIRP2 response was very brief, “Not enough.” FIRP4 said, “Louisiana communities are not doing anything because most of the citizens are unaware of the problem.” FIRP3 and FIRP5 responses were, “I don’t know what the communities are doing about the issue.”

Interview Question 8

Interview Question 8 asked the participants for any suggestions and/or recommendations that the researcher can personally do to improve mass incarceration in Louisiana prison facilities.

FIRP1 responded, “Continue the work that you are currently doing. Be an advocate, change legislations, policies, and continue to fight for change.” FIRP2 said, “Keep fighting for funding.” FIRP3 responded, “Petition politicians about increasing and providing minimum wages, provide resources, educational skills for incarcerated people to advance beyond vocational training, focus more on STEM programs to advance education in the state of Louisiana.” FIRP4 said, “Change laws beginning with the legislators. Challenge them to put an end to open records because open records prevent FIP from being employed.” FIRP6 responded, “Partner with more organizations to end mass incarceration by creating and changing existing policies. Become a notary to access court records.”

Interview Question 9

Interview Question 9 asked the participants for any suggestions and/or recommendations that the researcher can personally do to improve mental health and rehabilitation services in Louisiana prison facilities.

FIRP1 responded, “Get Louisiana’s Department of Corrections (LDOC) on board to support bills created to improve mental health services in prisons. I feel this can be accomplished by putting more pressure on the LDOC. FIRP2 said, “Advocate for more mental health professionals and funding for mental health services in Louisiana prisons.” FIRP3 responded, “There are not enough mental health professionals in the state’s prisons. Get people interested in becoming a mental health professional inside prisons.” FIRP4 responded, “Changes laws and raise awareness to the public. Do not stop until the laws are changed.” FIRP5 said, “Get more African Americans to vote by holding voters

registration events, work to change legislation, fight to put an end to Jim Crow laws, and continue to advocate.” FIRP6 response was very brief, “Continue to do more research.”

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to explore how mass incarceration in the state of Louisiana impacts the mental health of incarcerated men. The RQ was: What are the participants perception regarding the existing psychiatric services within Louisiana prison facilities? The research participants answered the stated questions based on their lived experience being in a prison setting in Louisiana. Data collected from the selected research participants confirmed that prison reforms are needed to help reduce the overcrowding prison population in the state of Louisiana. This qualitative research study also confirmed that adequate health care services are needed to effectively treat mental illnesses in the state’s prisons.

Research data collected from formerly incarcerated individuals corroborate that effective reentry programs are needed to deter mass incarceration and help incarcerated people reenter society once they are released. More vocational training or career technical programs in Louisiana prisons are also required to teach incarcerated people about general skills that are required for certain jobs.

The findings in Chapter 4 will be discussed again in Chapter 5 in addition to conclusions drawn from them and recommendations for further research. Chapter 5 will be organized as demonstrated: introduction, interpretation of the findings, limitations of study, recommendations, implications, and conclusion.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

In this qualitative study, I used the interview questions designed to investigate mass incarceration in the state of Louisiana and its impact on the mental health of incarcerated men. A total of 20 participants volunteered to partake in this qualitative research study. I ensured that all participants' identities were protected for their safety and/or privacy. The data retrieved from this study are safely preserved into a NVivo software program and Microsoft Word document. The NVivo software and MS Word document were used to analyze the participants' responses, themes, and characteristics. Additionally, codes were used to assist me with the participants' responses to the interview questions. The results for this qualitative research study are stated in this chapter. The interview questions used in this study are in the appendix.

Interpretations of the Findings

The purpose of this study was to explore mass incarceration in Louisiana and its impact on the mental health of incarcerated men. I conducted a thorough literature review revealing that prison overcrowding has a negative impact on the mental health of incarcerated African American males. The literature confirmed that Louisiana had the highest incarceration rates in the country over the last decade. The state's population is roughly 62% White and 33% Black, but those numbers nearly flip behind bars, where 34% of incarcerated people are White and 64% are Black - almost double Black people's representation in the general population (Kanu, 2023). Additional research has confirmed that Black males' recidivism rates are higher than White males (Alper et al., 2018).

Louisiana's criminal justice system and its impact on the mental health of incarcerated African American men has not been explored in previous studies. Therefore, the participants in this study were 20 African American men who served a minimum of 10 years in a Louisiana prison and were released between 2018 and 2022. The findings of my study were compared to reports on Louisiana's criminal justice system and literature that focused on the overpopulated incarceration rate. The review of literature identified several factors that fuel mass incarceration in Louisiana prisons. Additionally, the review of literature displayed several factors that put FIP at risk for reoffending, such as mental health disorders, substance abuse, gender, race, age, unemployment, low poverty neighborhoods, lack of affordable housing, education, and societal stigma (Alper et al., 2018).

In this qualitative research study, the focus was on mass incarceration and its impact on the mental health of incarcerated African American males. The participants' perception of mass incarceration and its impact on the mental health of incarcerated men was the same. All 20 participants stated that mass incarceration in the state of Louisiana negatively affects the mental health of incarcerated men, especially individuals who suffer from mental illness(es). The participants also stated that there is a lack of adequate mental health and rehabilitative treatment services for the incarcerated population who are diagnosed with mental illness(es). Most of the participants expressed their concern about people who remain incarcerated in Louisiana prisons. One participant said he created special bonds with several men who remain incarcerated.

“They are my brothers. When you spend decades or even centuries locked in a dorm, cell or just the prison environment itself, the men become like your family. I don’t visit or write to them because I can’t help them. I wish there was something I can do to help them.”

Prison overcrowding in Louisiana remains a great concern. Most Louisiana prisons’ capacity figure is exceeded, which leads to overpopulated facilities. FIRP19 said, “I can relate to mental distress while serving time in Angola. I was placed into a packed dormitory that was created to house a certain number of men. There was no personal space at all. I have underlying health issues that have compromised my immune system. I became ill every other month, it seemed because I could not distance myself from other people who were ill. I became mentally distressed because I was sick most of the time. The health care services there are a joke. Honestly, I suffered more mental distress being on the outside because it’s hard to return to society if you are an ex-felon, especially a black ex-felon. I cannot count the many times that I have been turned down for jobs, housing, and social services. That alone caused me more mental distress. At times I thought about committing a serious crime or two because I feel like I was better off in prison.”

In this study, I found that all 20 participants had a challenging time reentering society post their release. Although some participants had obtained trade skills during their incarceration, they were still overlooked for better job opportunities. Having the means to provide for their families was a great concern

for most participants. The findings of this qualitative research study suggest that formerly incarcerated African American males who obtain employment post their release transition back into society more easily than those who do not find employment. Formerly incarcerated African American males who obtain well-paying jobs can provide for their families due to the increased cost of living. Increased wages can also help the transition process because they are able to provide for their household.

However, finding higher paying employment is not easy for people with prior convictions. Although in 2021, Louisiana passed House Bill NO. 707, which forbids employers from discriminating on employees with criminal records and making hiring decisions based on the applicant's criminal records, it is extremely difficult for formerly incarcerated individuals to acquire higher paying jobs due to many restrictions, specifically government jobs. Formerly incarcerated individuals who are labeled as felons or ex-offenders is a psychological and social barrier regarding applying for higher paying jobs and background checks in Louisiana. All 20 research participants believed that employers are reluctant to hire them because of their prior criminal records.

Limitations of the Study

In Chapter 1, I discussed the limitations of this qualitative research study. The research study was limited to Louisiana prisons rather than collecting data from Louisiana state and local jails. The data collected from this study helped to explain significant causes of mass incarceration and how it impacts the mental health of

incarcerated men in Louisiana prisons. Additionally, the study revealed how Louisiana's criminal justice system can significantly deter prison overcrowding, unsanitary conditions, the spread of infectious diseases, prison violence, and self-harm, as well as reduce prison costs. Participants in this study were formerly incarcerated individuals who served a minimum of 10 years in a Louisiana correctional institution. All participants were released between 2018 and 2022. Currently incarcerated individuals were excluded from this study as they are viewed as a vulnerable population. Upon receiving Walden's IRB Letter of Approval, I was able to conduct my research. The scope of the study was to explore mass incarceration in the state of Louisiana and its influence on the mental health of incarcerated men. This subject offers opportunities for a much greater scope.

Conceptual Framework

Garland's (2018) definition of mass incarceration served as the conceptual framework for this qualitative research study. Garland (2001) defined mass incarceration as a rate of imprisonment that is markedly above the historical and comparative norm for societies of this type. The research participants in this study supported the definition of mass incarceration. Prior to the end of the interview sessions, the term *mass incarceration* became more logical based on how it pertained to the participants' mental distress during their time of incarceration. FIRP12 said that the term mass incarceration has played a huge role in his life more than they ever considered. FIRP15 validated FIRP12's response regarding mass incarceration playing a tremendous role in their daily life more than they thought. FIRP13 said that the term mass incarceration is an

enlightenment to the deficiencies in Louisiana's prison institutions and the significance of developing strategies to break the cycle at the state level.

While conducting this qualitative study, I noticed the participants used the term *emotional* or *mental distress* frequently. Mendive (2020) defined mental distress as a collection of mental health abnormalities. The symptoms include anxiety, depression, insomnia, fatigue, irritability, difficulty concentrating, and forgetfulness. Studies have shown that there is an increased percentage of incarcerated individuals who have experienced mental health issues in recent years. The American Psychological Association (2023) estimated that between 10% and 25% of incarcerated people in the United States have a "serious mental disorder."

In Louisiana, over one-third of the incarceration population are receiving some level of mental health services in a correctional institution (LSU Health Institute for Public Health and Justice, 2022) In the 2018-2019 fiscal year, Louisiana spent over \$640 million dollars on mental health care for incarcerated adults. It is projected that 20% of men and 44% of women are prescribed medication for mental health disorders. The estimate is 5.5 to 5.9 times greater than in community-based services (LSU Health Institute for Public Health and Justice, 2022).

This qualitative research study was based on the issues regarding mass incarceration in the state of Louisiana and its influence on the mental health of incarcerated individuals (specifically men).

Recommendations

Mass incarceration is an ongoing problem, not just in the state of Louisiana but also globally. The scholarly literature included in this qualitative study has shown the contributing factors to mass incarceration and possible remedies to resolve the issue. As stated in Chapter 2, the possible strategies to deterring mass incarceration include using alternatives to incarceration, adopting community-based sanction policies, reexamining sentencing laws regarding incarcerating mentally ill people, eliminating state incarceration for lower-level crimes, abolishing state cash bail for individuals who are awaiting trial, replacing prisons with drug treatment programs, and putting an end to racial profiling.

Further research in Louisiana is required and could be used to explore effective methods to help deter the overcrowding issue. For example, it could help bring awareness to governing bodies, local elected officials, and people in the community to promote advocacy, recruit prison staff (especially more mental health professionals), reform existing “tough on crime” policies, and enhance housing programs, vocational skills, and employment opportunities to help formerly and currently incarcerated people reenter society.

Implications

The implications for this study indicate the need to improve mass incarceration in and its impact on the mental health of incarcerated people in Louisiana prisons. The potential impact for positive social change is that currently incarcerated people who are diagnosed with mental illness can receive adequate mental health and rehabilitative

services. An additional positive impact for social change is that formerly and currently incarcerated people can obtain the essential skills that are required in America's labor. Improved sanitization policies to help prevent and/or reduce the outbreak of infectious diseases in Louisiana prisons is another impact for positive social change. In this qualitative study, I indicated that adopting policy reforms are a necessity in Louisiana prisons. Changes in Louisiana's criminal justice policies are needed for various reasons. For example, policies can be used to manage prison capacity, extreme sentencing, challenge racial disparity, drug policies, and decarcerating, and promote effective methods to protect the public. Additionally, reforming sentencing laws may help prevent overcrowding, and reduce negative psychological and physiological effects, illnesses, higher death, suicide, and psychiatric treatment rates.

The findings from this study demonstrate how Louisiana prison administrators can take steps to aid in reducing the overcrowded prison population. Additionally, criminal justice scholars can use the findings from this qualitative research study to broaden the investigation about mass incarceration, criminal justice reform, alternatives to incarceration for minor offenses, racial disparities, tough-on-crime policies, and strategies to manage prison capacities in Louisiana. The findings from this study can be used to enhance existing correctional programs, resources, and solutions worldwide. This qualitative research study along with the investigation from criminal justice scholars confirms that policy reform, effective correctional programs and/or service not only help deter mass incarceration in the state of Louisiana and save taxpayers' dollars but it significantly reduce the negative psychological effects of incarcerated individuals.

Conclusion

In this study, a thorough investigation was conducted to explore the lived experiences of formerly incarcerated men who served a minimum of 10 years in a Louisiana prison facility. The purpose of this qualitative study was to uncover mass incarceration in Louisiana and its impact on the mental health of incarcerated men. According to the research (Prison Policy Initiative (2023), Louisiana has an incarceration rate of 1,094 per 100,000 people. The rate includes prisons, jails, juvenile, and immigration detention. An additional study showed the rates of imprisonment have tremendously increased in the past 40 years (Prison Policy Initiative, 2022).

There are numerous factors that contribute to the high level of incarceration in Louisiana. Some of the contributing factors include the incarceration of the mentally ill population, pretrial incarceration rate (people being arrested but not convicted), harsh sentencing for minor offenses, incarcerated people being held past their release date, and racial profiling. In 2017, reforms that focused on reducing sentences and increasing possibilities of parole for nonviolent offenses and, the percentage of incarcerated people serving a life sentence has increased (Prison Policy Initiative, 2022).

Among the overcrowded prison population are people who suffer with mental health disorders. For many communities, law enforcement officials are usually the first responders to people experiencing mental health crises. However, most of the time, people with mental illness are booked into a correctional institution instead of receiving mental health services.

In this qualitative study, I explored the impacts of mass incarceration on the mental health of incarcerated individuals. I focused on participants who were diagnosed prior to incarceration and during incarceration. The results from this study revealed that incarcerated individuals in overcrowded prison settings can develop mental health disorders during their time of incarceration. The results confirmed that sharing living spaces with people who are diagnosed with mental illness, living in unsanitary conditions, being given a lengthy prison sentence, solitary confinement, exposure to violence, racial biases, and lack of healthcare services can have further negative effects. According to Quandt et al. (2021), incarceration can lead to “post incarceration syndrome,” a syndrome like PTSD. The symptoms include anxiety, depression, and suicidal thoughts and behavior.

In addition to exploring Louisiana’s mass incarceration’s impact on mental health, the scope of this qualitative study was to investigate the effectiveness of mental health services within Louisiana prison facilities. According to LSU Health Institute for Public Health Justice (2021), Louisiana spends substantial amounts of taxpayers’ incomes to incarcerate mentally ill individuals. However, those with mental illness are not likely to commit violent crimes (LSU Health Institute for Public Health Justice, 2021). Studies have also shown that community-based programs are likely to treat people with mental illness. Adopting community-based programs could be beneficial to the Louisiana prison system to help deter mass incarceration and reduce emotional distress to the general prison population.

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Appendix Interview Questions

The questions listed below are to explore mass incarceration and its impact on the mental health of incarcerated men. Please do not reveal confidential information regarding incarcerated individuals, medical information, and incarceration records.

1. What are structures that individuals believe influence the high levels of incarceration of African American men?
2. What role do individuals believe they or others have in contributing to this problem?
3. How does mass incarceration impact the increasing mentally ill population?
4. How difficult is it to provide mental health treatment inside a prison?
5. How well does mentally ill inmates respond to psychiatric medication and/or treatment?
6. How well does the medication and/ or treatment help deter prison violence?
7. What are communities doing to combat the issue of the mentally ill being incarcerated?
8. What can I, as a social change agent, do to improve mass incarceration in Louisiana prison facilities?
9. What can I, as a social change agent, do to improve mental health and rehabilitation services in Louisiana prison facilities?