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Criminal Justice Employees' Perspectives on Barriers to Successful Prosecution of Sex Crimes Against Women: A Qualitative Descriptive Study

Stephen Dahnkwii Paye
Walden University

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Walden University

Ph.D in Criminal Justice

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Stephen Dahnkwi Paye

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Review Committee

Dr. John Walker, Committee Chairperson,
Criminal Justice Faculty

Dr. Tiffany McLaurin, Committee Member,
Criminal Justice Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost
Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University
10/28/2023

Abstract

Criminal Justice Employees' Perspectives on Barriers to Successful Prosecution of Sex Crimes

Against Women: A Qualitative Descriptive Study

by

Stephen Dahnkwii Paye

MA, Keiser University, 2018

BS, Strayer University, 2015

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Criminal Justice

Walden University

[January 20th of term you graduate] 2024

Abstract

Postwar Liberia remains particularly challenged in prosecuting sexual crimes against women. As a result, women remain vulnerable to sexual assault against their person. This qualitative descriptive study aimed to explore how individuals working in the formal and informal criminal justice systems in postwar Liberia describe the barriers to successful prosecution of sex crimes against women and how such obstacles can be overcome. The theoretical framework for this research study was Almond and Powell's structural functionalism theory which assumes that society operates as a complex system comprised of different structures that work together as a whole. This descriptive qualitative study answered a two-part research question: What are the challenges in prosecuting sexual crimes against women in the formal and informal channels of postwar Liberia's criminal justice system? The research question was answered using a qualitative descriptive research design with snowball sampling to analyze 40 participants' data. Two instruments were used to gather data: an open-ended questionnaire and a focus group question guide. NVivo 12 software was employed to code inductively to discover emerging themes. Several conclusions can be drawn from Liberia's criminal justice system. The prosecution of sex crimes against women in a formal setting faces several challenges, including the lack of well-trained criminal justice practitioners, low wages, a lack of resources, poor logistics, and overcrowding of prisons. There are also findings related to corruption, threats to victims, refusals by victims to testify, and an ineffective judicial system enforcing the law. The study will inform stakeholders about barriers to justice for women sexual violence victims. Advocacy groups could use the data to advocate for needed changes. If the barriers to justice are addressed, the public's faith in the justice system will be restored, and sexual violence against women will be prosecuted and cause a reduction in sexual offenses.

Criminal Justice System Employees' Perspectives on Barriers to successful Prosecution of Sex
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Dedication

I am thankful for the sacrifices and love of my mother, Teakpa Dahnseleah Paye, and my late father John Yeeseh Paye. Because of their sacrifices, I can honor their names.

My sons Kerper Sayemizie Paye, and Stephen Dahnkwii Paye, Jr., and my daughters Ms. Tehtee Kou Paye and Barbara Ann Paye. I'm thankful for their support and care: They motivated me to be my best as their parent.

Mr. Alex Meka Barto, you have been one of my best friends who have been there for me from the time I arrived in America in June of 1986. You hosted me and made sure I found a job for more than six months until I could find my own apartment in the City of New York, and I'm forever grateful for your support and friendship.

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Table of Contents

List of Tables	iv
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
Background	1
Problem Statement	3
Purpose of the Study	4
Research Questions	5
Theoretical Framework	5
Nature of the Study	6
Definitions.....	8
Assumptions	9
Scope and Delimitations.....	10
Limitations	10
Significance	11
Summary	12
Chapter 2: Literature Review	13
Introduction.....	13
Literature Search Strategy	14
Theoretical Framework	15
Literature Review Related to Key Variables and/or Concepts	20
Criminal Justice System	20
Reorganization of Criminal Justice System in Post-Conflict Contexts.....	23
Summary and Conclusions.....	42

Chapter 3: Methods.....	45
Research Design and Rationale.....	45
Role of the Researcher	46
Methodology	47
Participant Selection Logic	47
Instruments	48
Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection.....	50
Data Analysis Plan.....	51
Issues of Trustworthiness	53
Credibility	54
Transferability.....	54
Dependability.....	55
Confirmability.....	55
Ethical Procedures.....	55
Summary	57
Chapter 4: Results.....	59
Introduction.....	59
Setting.....	60
Demographics.....	60
Data Collection.....	62
Data Analysis	63
Trustworthiness of Data	64
Credibility	64

Transferability.....	65
Dependability.....	66
Confirmability.....	68
Results.....	68
Research Question 1	69
Research Question 2	75
Summary	78
Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations.....	79
Introduction.....	79
Interpretation of the Findings.....	80
Limitations of the Study.....	84
Implications.....	84
Positive Social Change	85
Theoretical Implications	85
Empirical Implications.....	86
Recommendations.....	86
Conclusion.....	87
References.....	89
Appendix A: Open-Ended Survey	107
Appendix B: Focus Group Discussion Guide.....	109

List of Tables

Table 1. Participant Demographics	61
Table 2. Research Questions and their Corresponding Themes	68
Table 3. Research Question 1 Themes	69
Table 4. Research Question 2 Themes	76

Chapter 1: Introduction

The criminal justice system in Liberia has transitioned to a more decentralized system after the postwar reconstruction of the country (Krawczyk & Muhula, 2018; Quah, 2018). This decentralized system can be characterized as a hybrid system that combines both formal and informal channels for handling and prosecuting crimes (M'Cormack, 2018). The institution of community-based informal channels in the criminal justice system of postwar Liberia was intended to address the problems of the formal systems, including the lack of funding and the high number of cases that were being processed (Wilson, 2021). However, this decentralized hybrid system of criminal justice in postwar Liberia remains ineffective despite efforts to facilitate justice to victims of crimes because of corruption, inefficiency, and other institutional factors (M'Cormack, 2018).

This chapter includes an introduction of the proposed research study on the exploration of how individuals working in the formal and informal systems of criminal justice in postwar Liberia have described the barriers to the successful prosecution of sex crimes against women and how such challenges may be overcome. The following sections are included in this chapter: (a) background, (b) problem statement, (c) purpose of the study, (d) research questions, (e) theoretical framework, (f) nature of the study, (g) definitions, (h) assumptions, (i) scope and delimitations, (j) limitations, and (k) significance of the study. The chapter concludes with a summary of the most important and relevant information about this research study.

Background

The three units of criminal justice system are the courts or the judiciary, the prison system, and law enforcement (Backes et al., 2020; Patterson & Graham, 2018; Rofiq et al., 2019). Collectively, these three units of the criminal justice system are responsible for the

process of giving justice to victims of crimes and offenses (Patterson & Graham, 2018; Rofiq et al., 2019). Before the reconstruction of Liberia after the war, the system of government in the country could be characterized as having high levels of centralization for more than a century (Krawczyk & Muhula, 2018). In the prewar governance system in Liberia, the criminal justice system was highly concentrated in formal channels in the national government.

Postwar Liberia has transitioned to the decentralization of the government, which has corresponding implications in the decentralization of the criminal justice system of the country (Krawczyk & Muhula, 2018; Quah, 2018). For instance, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was created in 2005 to investigate various violations of the humanitarian decree, including sexual offenses that were committed from 1979 to 2003 (Afolabi et al., 2019; Bright & Jay, 2020; Gallo-Cruz & Remsberg, 2021). TRC became an important aspect of the rebuilding and restructuring process in Liberia after the civil conflict (Abdulai, 2021; Cooper et al., 2021; Islam, 2021; Turner, 2020).

In particular, the prosecution of sex crimes against women in postwar Liberia continues to have poor accountability (Wilson, 2021). Sex crimes against women continues to be prevalent in postwar Liberia (M'Cormack, 2018). According to Wilson (2021), the continued lack of accountability in postwar Liberia regarding sex crimes can be attributed to the rampant sexual violence during the war and the poor infrastructure of the criminal justice system of postwar Liberia

Informal channels of the criminal justice system have been instituted in postwar Liberia to address some of the lingering issues involving various crimes committed in the country, including sex crimes against women. Supported by the TRC, a community-centered truth-telling system called Peace Huts was initiated in Palava, Liberia in 2013 as part of the country's court

system (Gorpuolo, 2019). The approach of the Palava huts is that within a discussion held in native regions, individuals can find resolutions to crimes, which have been committed within the community (Gorpuolo, 2019; Hartman et al., 2021). Since its inception in 2013, the Palava Hut program has been adapted and implemented all over the country as a way for peacebuilding and reconciliation (Gorpuolo, 2019).

Based on the summary of the literature highlighted in this section, the gap in knowledge addressed in this study is the lack of understanding of the barriers to the successful prosecution of sex crimes against women and how such challenges may be overcome in the postwar criminal justice system of Liberia. Previous research has not focused on how existing formal and informal systems within postwar Liberia contribute to the problem of unsuccessful prosecution of sex crimes against women. This research is needed because regardless of the type of government and system, accountability is an important goal of any transitional government such as postconflict Liberia (Quah, 2018). However, the reconstruction efforts in Liberia remain tenuous and rife with uncertainty (Kaufman & Williams, 2017). The current research study could provide new insights into these formal and informal barriers to the prosecution of sex crimes, which could be instrumental in facilitating positive social change in terms of policies and leadership.

Problem Statement

An aspect of the criminal justice system that remains particularly problematic in postwar Liberia is the failure to successfully prosecute sex crimes against women (Lawson & Flomo, 2020; Wilson, 2021). The increase in rape in postwar Liberia has been attributed to the lack of accountability for sexual violence during the war, which has spilled over during postwar wherein many prosecutions have been unsuccessful because of the lack of forensic evidence (Wilson, 2021). The infrastructural shortcomings of the criminal justice system in postwar Liberia are also

reflected in the establishments of Peace Huts by Liberian women after the war as a transitional form of justice within their communities (Lawson & Flomo, 2020). The hybrid system of criminal justice system remains ineffective in handling sexual crimes against women, wherein formal channels are under-resourced and community-based informal channels are susceptible to corruption and being curtailed by the state (M'Cormack, 2018).

The problem is that it is not known how the formal and informal criminal justice department workers perceive the challenges of a decentralized criminal justice system in Liberia in terms of prosecuting sex crimes against women and the strategies that can be adopted to overcome these challenges. Since the decentralization of the government when formal and informal channels became available for prosecuting sex crimes against women, Liberia has been undergoing a reorganization of its criminal justice system and has utilized several interventions in the system and its practices (Boazak et al., 2020). However, challenges and barriers to improving the criminal justice system remain in the reorganization and decentralization in postconflict environments, as experienced in prewar Liberia, particularly in terms of successfully prosecuting sex crimes against women (Krawczyk & Muhula, 2018; Sesay, 2019; Stambøl & Solhjell, 2021).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study was to explore how individuals working in the formal and informal systems of criminal justice in postwar Liberia describe the barriers to the successful prosecution of sex crimes against women and how such challenges may be overcome. The theoretical significance of the study is that Almond and Powell's (1978) structural functionalism theory was expanded into the specific context of the criminal justice system in Liberia within the context of prosecuting sex crimes against women. The findings

could have implications in the theoretical application of structural functionalism in generating hypotheses about the interventions needed to address the problems in the criminal justice system in Liberia. The practical significance of the study is that solutions to the continued problems regarding the prosecution of sex crimes against women in postwar Liberia were proposed based on the findings. The results of this research study can be instrumental in helping leaders and officials of Liberia develop an appropriate intervention for successfully prosecuting sex crimes against women.

Research Questions

This qualitative descriptive study seeks to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the challenges in the prosecution of sex crimes against women in the formal channels of postwar Liberia's criminal justice system?

RQ2: What are the challenges in the prosecution of sex crimes against women in the informal channels of postwar Liberia's criminal justice system?

Theoretical Framework

Almond and Powell's (1978) structural functionalism served as the theoretical framework for this research study. Structural functionalism operates under the assumption that society works under a complex system wherein different structures form a cohesive unit (Almond & Powell, 1978). The structural functionalism theory was used in this research study as framework for understanding the challenges and the solutions to the problems encountered in the reorganization of the criminal justice system in Liberia.

The main tenet of structural functionalism is that structures in institutions and their respective functions need to be understood together. To understand these structures and their respective functions, the historical context also needs to be considered (Almond & Powell,

1978). Hence, the structural functionalism theory highlights the role of historical context in framing the structures and functions that exist within a particular political case.

Almond and Powell's (1978) structural functionalism theory moves away from the more mechanistic views of political systems from previous perspectives wherein unique characteristics are often ignored in favor of universality. The structural functionalism theory is more expansive and context-based, taking into consideration the unique characteristics of a particular system. The structural functionalism theory also recognizes the existence of multiple functions within a political system, which means that different functions can coexist within larger structures within a system.

The specific structure that served as the focus of this study was the criminal justice system in Liberia. The structure of the criminal justice system is characterized by multiple actors who interact with each other within interrelated structures (Denney, 2014). Within the criminal justice system, structural functionalism theories are applicable because the behaviors and decisions of people are placed within the social forces of the existing structures, which either constrain or facilitate these behaviors (Erdoğan & Erkan, 2021). The structural functionalism theory was used in this study as the theoretical basis for understanding the challenges that are being experienced in the reconstruction efforts in Liberia and the necessary changes that need to be made to overcome these challenges.

Nature of the Study

The qualitative approach was the research method adopted in this study. Qualitative research is based on the underlying premise that there is no universal truth to be discovered. Instead, qualitative research operates under the assumption that subjective realities are multiple due to the unique experiences of individuals (Silverman, 2020). Qualitative research was

appropriate for this study because the unique and individual perceptions of criminal justice employees in Liberia were the source of data for this study.

A descriptive research design was used in this study. A qualitative descriptive design is a straightforward but comprehensive method for summarization of an event based on the description of the experiences or perceptions of individuals (Lambert & Lambert, 2012). The qualitative descriptive design was the appropriate design for this study because the summarized description of the perceptions of the participants were instrumental in understanding the research problem that was identified in Liberia (Magilvy & Thomas, 2009).

The population included individuals who work in the formal and informal structures of the criminal justice system in Liberia. The sample was 20 individuals for the open-ended questionnaire and 20 individuals for the focus groups, resulting in a total sample size of 40 participants. In total, four focus groups containing five participants each were conducted. The sample size of 20 participants for each data source was informed by data saturation, which is based on the assumption that all of the unique aspects of the phenomenon can be uncovered with this sample size (Guest et al., 2006).

The researcher recruited individuals from personal networks within the criminal justice system through the convenience sampling technique. In this technique, individuals who are the easiest to access are recruited to participate in a study (Coyne, 1997). Snowball sampling was also used to identify additional participants. Snowball sampling is characterized by the use of the initial group of participants to recruit more eligible individuals based on their own personal contacts (Ghaljaie et al., 2017). Minimal monetary incentives were provided to the study participants.

Two instruments were used as sources of data: open-ended questionnaire and focus group question guide. The open-ended questionnaire contained several questions about the barriers to the reorganization of Liberia's criminal justice system and how such challenges may be overcome. The focus group question guide had the same questions but written in a discussion and group format. Follow-up and clarifying questions were included to take into consideration the format of the focus group discussion.

Data were collected using open-ended questionnaire and focus groups. For the open-ended questionnaire, participants were directed to an online survey containing all the questions that needed to be answered. The open-ended questionnaire could be completed in less than an hour. For the focus groups, five participants for each focus group were asked to be part of a Zoom discussion. The focus groups discussion was password-protected and recorded. Each focus group lasted approximately 60 minutes.

NVivo software was used to organize and store the data that were collected from the participants. The data were based on the collated open-ended questionnaire responses and the focus group transcripts. Data from the open-ended questionnaire and focus groups were triangulated to ensure consistency in the findings. The specific analytical technique used to analyze the data was thematic analysis (Braun et al., 2019).

Definitions

The definitions for the key terms used in this study are as listed below:

Criminal Justice System. Criminal justice system refers to the different units and departments that are responsible for ensuring that justice is provided to victims of crimes and offenses (Patterson & Graham, 2018; Rofiq et al., 2019).

Decentralized Systems. Decentralized systems refer to a setup or framework wherein both formal and informal channels are present, indicating that power is distributed as opposed to being centralized in one single unit (M'Cormack, 2018).

Formal Systems. For the current study, formal systems refer to the main channels of the government that are responsible for handling the resolution and adjudication of crimes (M'Cormack, 2018).

Informal Systems. For this study, informal systems refer to community-based channels that are not part of the centralized system of the criminal justice system (M'Cormack, 2018).

Peace Huts. Peace huts refer to community-based channels that facilitate conflict resolution and mediation to community members who are in a dispute with each other (Lawson & Flomo, 2020).

Postwar Liberia. Postwar Liberia refers to a time period after the Civil War in the country in 2003 (Krawczyk & Muhula, 2018; Quah, 2018).

Sex Crimes. Sex crimes is a broad term used to describe any type of sexual offense, ranging from rape to sexual assault and harassment (Wilson, 2021).

Assumptions

Assumptions are factors within a study that are assumed to be true (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). One assumption of this study was that all participants were honest with their responses to the questions from the open-ended questionnaire and the focus group discussion. Another assumption of this study was that participants were aware of the current criminal justice system in postwar Liberia wherein a hybrid of formal and informal channels are utilized to handle and prosecute sex-related crimes against women (M'Cormack, 2018; Wilson, 2021). Finally, it was assumed that the findings presented in this study are a current reflection of the

hybrid/decentralized criminal justice system in postwar Liberia, based on the perceptions and experiences of workers within this hybrid system.

Scope and Delimitations

Scope and delimitations pertain to the boundaries that define what is included in a study and the corresponding rationale for making such decisions (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). The study was only confined to the criminal justice system barriers within the context of prosecuting sex crimes against women. The rationale for this study was informed by the literature indicating that sex crimes committed against women continue to be prevalent in postwar Liberia and accountability continues to be low (M'Cormack, 2018; Wilson, 2021). The study was also confined to exploring the formal and informal channels of the criminal justice system in postwar Liberia. The rationale for this decision is based on the current hybrid system of postwar Liberia wherein peace huts are in place to assist victims at the community level (Lawson & Flomo, 2020; M'Cormack, 2018). Finally, the scope of this study was confined to collecting data using open-ended questionnaires and focus groups. The rationale for delimiting the data sources to open-ended questionnaires and focus groups is that both were expected to be sufficient in uncovering rich perceptions from the participants. The use of two sources of data was also informed by the need to conduct data triangulation to strengthen the credibility of the findings (Jentoft & Olsen, 2019). This approach provided the researcher an opportunity to cross-verify data using different sources.

Limitations

Limitations are factors within a study that can be considered as potential weaknesses or flaws (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). In terms of access to participants and access to data, a limitation of this study is the reliance on the personal contacts of the researcher. Some of the

personal contacts could be inadvertently coerced to be part of the study because of the nature of the personal relationship with the researcher. However, the researcher emphasized the voluntary nature of the study and that no negative consequence would result from refusing to be part of the study.

Regarding the requirements for storing data, another potential limitation is that all data were electronic in nature. As a result, the storage of data was confined to the personal computer of the researcher with standard passwords. Access to the data was restricted, but the possibility of being hacked could not be completely discounted. This slim possibility was addressed by not including any personal information such as participant names or address in the data collected.

In terms of separation of roles between the researcher and personal connections with the participants, researcher bias presented a limitation that could interfere with the credibility of the study. The initial pool of participants was from the personal contacts of the researcher. However, the researcher remained grounded on the raw data to prevent bias in the interpretation of the findings.

Significance

This study's significance lies in its contributions to theory, practice, and positive social change. The theoretical significance of the study is that Almond and Powell's (1978) structural functionalism theory was expanded into the specific context of the criminal justice system in Liberia. The findings could have implications in the theoretical application of structural functionalism in generating hypotheses about the interventions needed to address the problems in the criminal justice system in Liberia. The practical significance of the study is that solutions to the continued problems regarding the criminal justice system in Liberia were proposed based on the findings. The results of this research study can be instrumental in helping leaders and

officials of Liberia develop appropriate interventions for addressing the problems in the country's criminal justice system.

Summary

Liberia has shifted from a centralized criminal justice system to a more decentralized system after the war wherein hybrid channels have the authority to prosecute sex crimes against women (Lawson & Flomo, 2020). However, both the formal and informal channels of the criminal justice system in postwar Liberia remain ineffective in successfully prosecuting sex crimes against women (M'Cormack, 2018). The problem is that it is not known how the formal and informal criminal justice department workers perceive the challenges of a decentralized criminal justice system in Liberia in terms of prosecuting sex crimes against women and the strategies that can be adopted to overcome these challenges. The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study was to explore how individuals working in the formal and informal systems of criminal justice in postwar Liberia describe the barriers to the successful prosecution of sex crimes against women and how such challenges may be overcome. The theoretical significance of the study is that Almond and Powell's (1978) structural functionalism theory was expanded to the specific context of the criminal justice system in Liberia within the context of prosecuting sex crimes against women. The next chapter includes a detailed presentation of the literature review.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The problem at the core of this inquiry is that it is not known how criminal justice department workers perceive the challenges of a decentralized criminal justice system in Liberia and the strategies that can be adopted to overcome these challenges. Liberia has been undergoing a reorganization of its criminal justice system and has implemented several interventions in its governance system and practices (Boazak et al., 2020). However, there remain challenges and barriers to improving the criminal justice system in the reorganization and decentralization in postconflict environments, as experienced in Liberia (Krawczyk & Muhula, 2018; Quah, 2018; Sesay, 2019; Stambøl & Solhjell, 2021). There is further a lack of understanding and exploration of the reorganization that is needed to facilitate decentralization in Liberia and increase accountability and transparency within the criminal justice system (Krawczyk & Muhula, 2018; Lee-Jones, 2019; Quah, 2018; Wilson, 2021). The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study was to explore how individuals working in the formal and informal systems of criminal justice in postwar Liberia describe the barriers to the successful prosecution of sex crimes against women and how such challenges may be overcome.

Chapter 2 includes a comprehensive review of literature based on the identified research problem, developed research questions, the selected theoretical framework, and concepts aligned with the current study. The literature review is based on the structural functionalism theory, which forms the basis for the understanding of the challenges and the solutions to the problems encountered in the reorganization of the criminal justice system in Liberia. The configuration of the literature review is by subject matter and contents. The review includes varying outlooks to build a broad, all-inclusive and nonbiased topic view. The key sections of this chapter include

the literature search strategy, theoretical framework, a review of literature based on the current study's concepts, problem, and questions, as well as a summary and conclusion.

Literature Search Strategy

A literature search was conducted through an iterative process with four stages: (a) developing the review question, (b) structuring the search approach, (c) validating the search approach, and (d) conducting the literature search using the validated strategy. In the first stage, a review question was developed based on the research problem and the purpose of the study. An eligibility criterion for answering the review question was also developed in this stage. In the second stage, a search strategy was developed by composing a search query. In the third stage, the search strategy was validated by determining the effectiveness of the search query. Several parallel queries were composed resulting in the formation of a multithreaded search query. Lastly, the strategy developed in stage two was adopted through a process that entailed the screening and selection of scholarly sources based on the established eligibility criteria. In cases where the search results included little current research, various queries consisting of several combinations of concepts were run in parallel to ensure optimal retrieval of credible sources.

The sources included in this literature review were drawn from the Walden University Library and the Internet. The specific databases from which the sources were drawn include Taylor & Francis Online, Academic Search Complete, Complementary Index, Google Scholar, International Security & Counter Terrorism Reference Center, Social Sciences Citation Index, SAGE Journals, GreenFILE, SocINDEX, and Political Science Complete. The search words that were applied distinctively and in combination included "post-conflict transition," "post-war transition," "the criminal justice system," "law enforcement," "the judicial system," "the prison system," "judicial challenges," "judicial reforms," "structural functionalism," and "Liberia." In

total, 96 scholarly articles were reviewed, 85% being those published in the last 5 years and the remaining 15% comprising sources older than 5 years.

Theoretical Framework

The theory that grounded the current study is Almond and Powell's (1978) structural functionalism theory. The structural functionalism theory was introduced in 1978 by political scientists Bingham Powell and Gabriel Almond as a framework for likening political systems. During this time, the structural functionalism theory characterized an immense upgrading over the then-prevailing systematic models of David Eaton and others derived mainly from global affiliations (Candea, 2018; Ihemeje, 2018; Umanailo, 2019). Almond and Powell's vivid modernization were to outline a technique of comprehending political systems, which took into consideration the systems' structural elements as well as their roles within each complete system (Moradi et al., 2019; Ormerod, 2020). Before the development of structural functionalism, researchers and practitioners had no approach to methodically relating diverse political systems beyond a basic, and usually unconvincing, evaluation of their institutions.

The main tenet of structural functionalism is that structures in institutions and their respective functions need to be understood together (Almond & Powell, 1978). To understand these structures and their respective functions, the historical context also needs to be considered (Almond & Powell, 1978). Hence, the structural functionalism theory highlights the role of historical context in framing the structures and functions that exist within a particular political cause. Almond and Powell's (1978) structural functionalism theory moves away from the more mechanistic views of political systems from previous perspectives wherein unique characteristics are often ignored in favor of universality. The structural functionalism theory is more expansive and context-based, taking into consideration the unique characteristics of a particular system.

The structural functionalism theory also recognizes the existence of multiple functions within a political system, which means that different functions can co-exist within the larger structures within a system (Almond & Powell, 1978). The key assumptions underlying the structural functionalism theory are that the social system is the previous causal reality and the system components are functionally interconnected (Ihemeje, 2018; Izadi et al., 2020). The structural functionalism theory was utilized in the current study as the basis for the understanding of the challenges and the solutions to the problems encountered in the reorganization of the criminal justice system in Liberia. The theory was considered appropriate for the current study because the criminal justice system is composed of three key components, namely, law enforcement, the judicial system, and the prison system. These components have exclusive functions to play to keep the entire criminal justice system active (Moradi et al., 2019; Rutar, 2021). Where one of the components fails to play its role effectively, the criminal justice system becomes dysfunctional and its goal can be overpowered, especially when counteractive methods are not implemented timeously.

Almond and Powell's (1978) structural functionalism theory have been applied previously in studying and understanding the reorganization of systems and their components. Karki and Gartoulla (2017) employed the structural functionalism theory to assess the interdependency and interrelationship between the individual and entire social systems, which impact human immune deficiency virus (HIV) transmission in the period of social changes and revolution. The phenomenological research design was utilized to examine the experiences of risk behavior of HIV transmission among workers in health, transport, and factor sectors. The results of this study revealed that functional component of society, including educational factors, political aspects, economic factors, and socio-cultural factors, impact the risk of HIV

transmission in the entire societal structure (Karki & Gartoulla, 2017). In a related study, Agbaji and Ejemot-Nwadiaro (2019) utilized the structural functionalism theory to evaluate the impact of the Calabar Urban Development Authority on the disposal and control of waste in Calabar, Nigeria from 2008 to 2017. The findings showed that the waste system in Calabar failed because of various problems, including vegetable and paper wastes in markets and residential spaces, open spaces, open drains, and dumping of waste by the roadsides (Agbaji & Ejemot-Nwadiaro, 2019). Studies by Karki and Gartoulla and Agbaji and Ejemot-Nwadiaro indicate that the structural functionalism theory is applicable in exploring the effectiveness of structures other than the political ones.

Equally, Shabu (2022) employed the structural functionalism theory and the quantitative research methodology to assess the effect of kidnapping on socio-economic activities in a local government region of Benue State. Data on the causes and impacts of kidnapping were gathered from 397 respondents utilizing self-reported questionnaires. The composed data were summarized and analyzed using frequency distribution tables, mean, and standard deviation. The findings revealed that the main causes of kidnapping are the proliferation of firearms, quest to get wealthy quickly without work, abandonment of political thugs, moral decadence over time, and youth unemployment. The findings further indicated that a decrease in monthly earning levels of the residents, property loss, coerced relocation, and loss of hard-earned money through ransom payment are the key effects of kidnapping in the examined region. Other effects of kidnapping were found to be a reduction in marketing and trading, a decrease in agricultural practices as well as shutting down of small enterprises and social gatherings. Shabu's study demonstrates how the functional structuralism theory can be employed to show the cause-and-effect relationship between variables. It is instrumental to the exploration of systems via

functional structuralism because it reveals that there should be an alliance between communities, the government, and other actors in tackling the issue of kidnapping in the region. According to Shabu, kidnapping in the assessed region can persist if one of the involved units is dysfunctional.

Structural functionalism is nonetheless characteristically applied in political contexts and systems. IHEMEJE (2018) applied structural functionalism theory to assess Nigeria's local government for policy direction as well as to reflect on the 1976 local government reforms and the goals of decentralization in Nigeria. The findings from this study indicated that service delivery is strongly provided at the state and federal governments, whereas, in most scenarios, the local administrations are marginalized and treated as mere toys or appendages for both federal and state administrations (IHEMEJE, 2018). Nevertheless, IHEMEJE determined that service provision has an incremental impact when policies focus on felt-needs of the locals via local administrations leading to popular participation, enhanced human service growth and wellbeing, rapid reduction in rural-urban migration and crime rates, effective decision making, political stability, less dependence on imported products and foreign aids, market expansion, as well as accelerative productivity and revenue generation.

Aligning with the current study, some previous scholars have employed the structural functionalism theory to evaluate the success or failure of system reforms. In a study linked to economic matters, Nwagwu et al. (2020) used the structural functionalism theory to explore security problems and road safety management reforms in the Southeastern part of Nigeria. The specific goal of Nwagwu et al.'s study was to assess whether the implementation of road safety education failed to undergird the road users and to examine if the absence of institutional capacity of the police impacted the achievement of the road safety standardization program. The challenges to the realization of the road safety standardization program were found to be poor

execution of road safety education and the absolute absence of institutional capability among law enforcers (Nwagwu et al., 2020). Likewise, Nnamchi and Nnamani (2020) adopted Almond and Powell's (1978) structural functionalism theory to explore the level of interior democratic philosophies absorbed by political parties and the strength of the electoral legal structure in facilitating dependable polls in Nigeria. Secondary sources of data were used, encompassing periodicals, textbooks, journal articles, and other pertinent resources. The findings showed that Nigeria's electoral framework is devoid of reliable electoral results mainly because of inferior institutional systems like robust electoral law and inner-party democracy (Nnamchi & Nnamani, 2020). Based on these findings, Nnamchi and Nnamani recommended a restructuring and review of the whole electoral framework to entrench a firm statutory and institutional structure. The two studies by Nwagwu et al. and Nnamchi and Nnamani demonstrate that failure of one or several components in a structure can lead to the failure of the entire structure.

Correspondingly, Gomez (2022) applied the structural-functionalism framework to explore the means via which conflict victims can adopt their social agency to assess mechanisms of reparation beyond trials, tribunals, and truth commissions. From a structural-functionalism perspective, Gomez argued that social solidarity is a significant aspect and a novel outlook from which to establish transitional justice procedures from victims' insights in postwar countries. The significance of Gomez's study rested in the notion that Columbian victims' groups from Eastern Antioquia consider social solidarity as an important component of transitional justice in formulating the initiative *Cartography and Identification of Mass Graves*. Through a participative action study approach, Gomez determined that social solidarity is a substantial instrument to claim justice, recognition, reparation, and warranties of non-recurrence from an unofficial point of view. Based on these findings, Gomez concluded that understanding social

solidarity as an essential dimension of transitional justice emphasizes the significance of war victims' social agency to undertake joint actions to support inclusive procedures of demobilization, restoration, and decommissioning beyond formal narratives and programs. Gomez's study is a good example of the adoption of structural functionalism in illustrating the importance of social units in restoring justice systems after a conflict.

Using Liberia's context, Opoku-Agyakwa (2020) employed the structural functionalism theory in combination with the realism model to explore and determine the techniques utilized in decentralizing services offered by the criminal justice system, establish if these techniques were appropriate for Liberia's distinctive setting, and determine the breadth and extent of the process of decentralization. Structural functionalism was found to be suitable for assessing the decentralization of the criminal justice system and its impact on the system's functionality, as the criminal justice system is composed of several parts that have distinctive functions to play to keep it active (Opoku-Agyakwa, 2020). Opoku-Agyakwa's study affirmed the key principle of structural functionalism that when any of the criminal justice system parts fails to efficiently play its distinctive function, the system becomes dysfunctional and its mandate fails, especially when successful remedial strategies are not undertaken.

Literature Review Related to Key Variables and/or Concepts

Criminal Justice System

The criminal justice system is defined as a network of government and private agencies focused on managing indicted and convicted offenders. As described by Mueller-Smith and Schnepel (2021), the criminal justice system is developed to provide justice to all, implying that it should safeguard the innocent, convict perpetrators, and deliver a fair justice process to help maintain law and order in society. The criminal justice system is composed of many interrelated

pillars, encompassing law enforcement, the judiciary, corrections, academia, and forensic services (Dunlea & Heiphetz, 2020; Mayeux, 2018; Patterson & Graham, 2018). Specifically, as described by Rofiq et al. (2019), the criminal justice system in many jurisdictions across the world comprises of the courts or judiciary, the law enforcement or the police, and the corrections also referred to as the prison system. These components are designed to support the principles of legal justice (Backes et al., 2020; Rofiq et al., 2019). Patterson and Graham (2018) described legal justice as the outcome of forging the rights of people with the government's conforming role to certify and safeguard those rights. The three branches of the criminal justice system are nonetheless fashioned to perform some specific duties. The police comprises the law enforcement unit mandated to enforce rules and civic order. The judiciary is a system with the authority to make decisions regarding criminal cases based on the law (de Vel-Palumbo & Berryessa, 2022; Hetey & Eberhardt, 2018). The corrections system, also referred to as the prison system, is the component tasked with supervising persons who have been captured, indicted, and sentenced for criminal acts (Smith & Simon, 2020; Turney & Wakefield, 2019). Mutually, the criminal justice system is mandated to address the costs of criminal conduct in society and has the goal of safeguarding people's right to security and the gratification of human privileges.

Liberia's Criminal Justice System

According to Lawson and Flomo (2020), Liberia gained its independence from the United States in 1847 and the settlement of freed slaves from the United States in Liberia started in 1922. From 1847 to 1980, Liberia was ruled by a small minority of African American colonizers and their descendants, referred to as Americo-Liberians, with the law repudiating the vote to native Liberians (Lawson & Flomo, 2020; McGill, 2021). Minor empowerment of native

people only happened in 1964 but political overpowering continued (Lawson & Flomo, 2020). A study by Vorrath (2018) revealed that social injustices between Americo-Liberians and native Liberians have resulted in much of the social and political conflict in the nation, as leadership transitioned aggressively among tyrants signifying rivalry groups. The most critical conflict occurred between 1989 and 2003, resulting in the death of approximately 250,000 Liberians (Gobewole, 2021; Vorrath, 2018). Liberian researchers provide an array of interpretations for the 14 years of civil violence, comprising economic disparities, a corrupt political system, predatory elites who abused authority, and ethnic divisions (Bellepea, 2020; Carter et al., 2021; Opoku-Agyakwa, 2020). In the postconflict era, Liberian leaders and nationals have placed significant efforts in creating a firm criminal justice system that can help prevent internal conflicts and violence. Wilson (2021) highlighted that coming from a prolonged civil conflict has triggered Liberian leaders and people to make significant efforts to restructure their public institutions and structures such as the criminal justice system.

As described by Sesay (2019), Liberia's legal structure is a dual one of traditional law founded on unwritten customary practices for the native Liberians and statutory law centered on Anglo American common rule for the contemporary sector. Just like many other structures globally, Liberia's criminal justice system comprises the police, the judiciary, and the prison system (M'Cormack, 2018). The Liberian National Police (LNP) is the forefront agency of internal security in the combat of delinquencies, maintenance of order and rule of law, and protection of life and property, as stipulated by the law (Lawson & Flomo, 2020; Sevcik, 2021). Within the judiciary, Liberia applies the adversarial criminal system, where a cause is presented by a prosecutor to a jury against a first and effective defense that is vital in ensuring due process (Sesay, 2019). Liberia's prison system is referred to as the Bureau of Corrections and

Rehabilitation (BCR) and it was formed in 1969 through the constitution (Bellepea, 2020; Maiko & Kollie, 2021). As directed by the criminal procedure statute, BCR comprises three administrative subdivisions called Bureau of Probation, the Board of Parole, and Bureau of Correctional Institutions that are under the Ministry of Justice (Lawson & Flomo, 2020; Steiner et al., 2021). These three divisions are tasked with addressing the impacts of criminal conduct in Liberia and have the common goal of safeguarding residents' rights to protection as well as the enjoyment of human rights.

Reorganization of Criminal Justice System in Post-Conflict Contexts

The general reason for reorganizing any criminal justice system, as revealed in the existing literature, is to correct errors such as modifying minimum sentencing laws, changing the drug sentencing law about the war on drugs, minimizing harsh prison sentences, and decriminalizing precise decrees such as drug laws (Blair, 2019; Dinnen & Watson, 2021; Heyer, 2021; McGill, 2017). Security and justice sector reorganization have become typical and part of the external aid especially in postwar contexts. In this case, a postwar context is conceptualized as the intermediate time bounded by previous conflict and future peace, a duration characterized by various novel problems (Cunningham, 2017; Pastor & Santamaria, 2021). As noted by Schroeder and Chappuis (2014), security and justice sector reorganization take different approaches such as professionalizing the diverse agencies of the sector and reinforcing oversight of the sector. These needs have made the security and justice sector and the criminal justice system, among the foremost concerns to be addressed in postwar contexts (Opoku-Agyakwa, 2020; Schroeder & Chappuis, 2014). Nyei (2014) added that reorganization is essential in postwar contexts because the failure of the criminal justice system to impartially discharge its function leads to the breakdown of order and law, which, in some scenarios, degenerates into

full-blown conflicts. According to Nyei and Schroeder and Chappuis, restructuring of the criminal justice system is perceived as a tool for stabilization in postconflict settings. Another motive for reorganizing the criminal justice system, as observed by Schroeder and Chappuis, is to offer a foundation for statehood as an approach to formulating public-oriented security. These studies disclose that the reorganization of the criminal justice system is of particular significance in postwar environments.

Researchers reveal that a common feature in reorganizing criminal justice systems of post-conflict environments is the presence of and support provided by the international institutions. In a critical review paper, Anastasi (2018) determined that even though every Western Balkan nation has its distinct justice reorganization procedures, the presence of aid offered by the global community is a mutual aspect. Countries comprising the Western Balkan block include Kosovo, Serbia, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Albania, and they are all postconflict environments (Fenko & Stahl, 2019). Anastasi further reported that the function of the global factor is treated as a guarantee in two stages: during the drafting of the reform stage and in the process of its adoption. Despite being dedicated to the European Union, the judicial systems of Western Balkan countries were found to be associated with integrity and non-independence crises (Anastasi, 2018). Compatibly, both Nyei (2014) and Schroeder and Chappuis (2014) determined that security and justice reforms in African postconflict settings are linked to external support. Further according to Opoku-Agyakwa (2020), the United Nations was a key factor in peacebuilding activities and justice restructuring in Liberia, one of the postwar settings in Africa.

Reorganization of Liberia's Criminal Justice System

Reorganization of the criminal justice system is common in many countries considering that no such system is exclusively faultless (Ikpe et al., 2021). Criminal justice system reorganization is aimed at fixing specific errors such as altering minimum sentencing laws, changing the drug sentencing law about the war on drugs, minimizing harsh prison sentences, and decriminalizing laws like drug laws (Blair, 2019; Ikpe et al., 2021; Pastor & Santamaria, 2021; Uchida, 2021). Hartzell and Hoddie (2019) indicated that a commitment to the justice system aids in stabilizing peace in nations emerging from civil conflict. An example of such commitment entails solidification of the justice system to deter these nations from sliding back into internal violence (Gallo-Cruz & Remsberg, 2021; Hartzell & Hoddie, 2019). The United Nations peace initiatives in Liberia are prominent examples of postwar interventions, which largely focused on justice sector reorganizations (Ambos & Heinze, 2018; Leib & Ruppel, 2021; Sempijja & Eyita-Okon, 2021). The criminal justice system that President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf inherited after getting into power in 2006 was in tatters, especially in rural regions where magistrates and law enforcement officers were generally uncontrolled and unpaid and were mainly operating in their distinct interests (Flomoku & Reeves, 2012). The police force for instance required massive reorganization because, by the end of the civil violence, Liberia had 15 diverse security agencies with overlapping mandates and roles (Bacon, 2015; Guematcha, 2018; Vioque, 2021). A substantial peace-building concern for Liberia has been to develop its nationals' trust in the justice system by convincing them that it serves in the public interests (Ayodele, 2018; Flomoku & Reeves, 2012; Nyei, 2021; Schotter & Kramer, 2020; Szablewska & Hawksley, 2021). Flomoku and Reeves (2012) added that much work and global support has been focused on enhancing the formal justice system through reorganizations such as regularizing compensations, renovating court infrastructures as well as training prosecutors,

magistrates, judges, and public defenders. However, as demonstrated by Flomoku and Reeves, the benefits of these restructurings and reorganizations have been slow to trickle down to common citizens, particularly those residing beyond Liberia's capital, Monrovia.

More current empirical evidence shows that several restructuring and reorganizations have been made to Liberia's criminal justice system in the postwar era in all its three components, including in the police, judiciary, and BCR. The reorganization of Liberia's law enforcement started immediately after the civil conflict in 2003 (Karim & Beardsley, 2017). The 2003 peace agreement authorized in Accra, Ghana, designated the United Nations (UN) as the lead entity in reorganizing and restoring Liberia's noncombatant police capability (Friedman & MacAulay, 2011). Being mandated to maintain the nation's security, the UN developed the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) adhering to the UN Security Resolution 1509 (Friedman & MacAulay, 2011). UNMIL together with the United Nations Police (UNPOL) and Liberia's administration disbanded the existing law enforcement officers, many of whom were implicated in human rights violations and corruption and trained a new local police unit (Friedman & MacAulay, 2011). Boazak et al. (2020) added that every fifth trainee during this recruitment was female and there was a focus on community policing. UNMIL was tasked with reorganizing Liberia's security sector, especially the police, as well as consolidating its statutory framework coupled with the restructuring of correctional and judicial organizations (Karim, 2019). Another objective of UNMIL, according to Friedman and MacAulay (2011), was to train 3,500 law enforcement officers by 2007. As demonstrated by Friedman and MacAulay and Karim (2019), UNMIL's chief, Mark Kroeker led the vetting and recruitment of 400 former law enforcers to operate as provisional local policing force.

According to Boazak et al. (2020), Liberia has been undergoing a reorganization of its criminal justice system and has utilized several interventions in the system and its practices. Boazak et al. (2020) examined the implementation of the crisis intervention team (CIT) framework in Liberia in aligning law enforcement objectives with those of mental wellbeing advocates and service users. Liberia became the first low-income nation where CIT has been adopted. A CIT training of trainers (ToT) was formulated by CIT professionals from the United States entities and targeted Liberian mental health personnel and law enforcers. After the training, the trainees raised numerous concerns, calling for the determination of a need for a CIT association in Liberia. Boazak et al. (2020) further realized that the progress in Liberia shows that the native law enforcement entities have an interest in equipping their officers with mental wellbeing-associated knowledge and skills. A study by Crisanti et al. (2019) revealed that since its initiation, CIT has exemplified multiple benefits such as increased deviation of service users from the judicial system to the healthcare program, reduced response periods by law enforcers to mental wellbeing calls, decreased stigma toward individuals with mental conditions, as well as enhanced safety among service users, civilians, and law enforcement officers.

In a follow-up study, Boazak et al. (2020) explored the immediate and 9-month results of CIT training on trainee attitudes and knowledge. The study involved 22 CIT trainees, including eight mental health practitioners and 14 law enforcement officers. An assessment of participants' attitudes and knowledge was conducted before the training, immediately after the training, and 9 months after the CIT training. The findings depicted that the CIT training generated improvements both immediately and 9 months after the training in attitudes and knowledge, indicating that CIT can benefit law enforcers even in exceedingly low-resource contexts with inadequate specified mental wellbeing care infrastructure. Boazak et al. concluded that these

results support further assessment of the significance of CIT in other contexts. These findings are also congruent to an earlier study by Kohrt et al. (2015) that was aimed at developing a curriculum and collaboration framework for mental wellbeing services and law enforcement officers in Liberia. The study data were gathered using interviews with Liberia's mental health practitioners, mental wellbeing service users, and law enforcers. Mental wellbeing service users reported previous violent interactions with law enforcers. Mental health practitioners and law enforcement officers recognized confinement and law of treatment of mental wellbeing users as major issues, and they combined designed a program based on CIT modified for Liberia. Kohrt et al. concluded that partnerships between mental health practitioners and law enforcement officers can benefit many aspects of public wellbeing, as illustrated by collaborations to enhance reactions during the Ebola pandemic.

Studies, particularly those conducted by feminist scholars, disclose that reforms have been implemented in Liberia's police system in the postconflict period to include more female law enforcement officers (Bacon, 2015; Karim et al., 2018). Bacon (2015), for instance, assessed the Liberia National Police's (LNP) inventive efforts from 2003 to 2013 to recruit more female law enforcers as well as to train a specialized unit to deal with sexual- and sex-based violence (SGBV). The assessment was centered on two main objectives of the LNP, including representation via the education support program and responsiveness via the women and children's protection part. The findings showed that the LNP reform can be regarded as a qualified success because the percentage of female law enforcement officers increased from 2 to 17% and the police force enhanced its response to SGNV cases (Bacon, 2015). Success factors for the LNP reform comprised local ownership, foreign development aid, context, and timing. Nevertheless, Bacon noted that the sustainability and general influence of the LNP

reorganizations were critically hindered by a weak rule of law and low technical capacity. Similarly, Karim et al. (2018) explored the gender balancing reorganizations in LNP during the postconflict era. Using theoretical priors, Karim et al. suggested that gender balancing can impact unit cohesion, operational efficiency regarding SGBV, and institutional gender customs. Karim et al. then assessed these suggestions utilizing laboratory experiments with LNP officers. The scholars randomly assigned the proportions of males and females into 102 groups of six LNP officers to assess their group choices and deliberative procedures. The experiment's findings indicated that adding more female law enforcers improved unit cohesion, but no evidence was found to suggest that adding more female officers would enhance group sensitivity to SGBV. Experiments further disclosed that despite an increase in female officers' participation and influence, male beliefs regarding female function in policing did not improve with female inclusion (Karim et al., 2018). The outcomes in Karim et al.'s study are indications that LNP reform to recruit more female law enforcement officers has not been effective and faces significant challenges.

The court system and prisons have likewise received significant reforms since Liberia's civil war. For instance, a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was created in 2005 to investigate answerability for violations of the humanitarian decree, encompassing economic and sexual offenses, from 1979 to 2003 (Afolabi et al., 2019; Bright & Jay, 2020; Gallo-Cruz & Remsberg, 2021). TRC became a significant component of the process of rebuilding and restoring Liberia after the civil conflict (Abdulai, 2021; Cooper et al., 2021; Islam, 2021; Turner, 2020). According to Gorpudolo (2019), a community-centered truth-telling system was initiated in Palava, Liberia in 2013 as part of the country's court system. Typically referred to as the Palava Hut pilot project, the community-centered truth-telling program emerged from Liberia's

Truth and Reconciliation Commission's major outcomes and suggestions in 2013. The approach of Palava Hut is that within a native discussion region, individuals can go to find resolutions to crimes, which have been committed within the community (Gorpudolo, 2019; Hartman et al., 2021). Gorpudolo added that since its inception in 2013, the Palava Hut program has been adapted for nationwide intentions for peacebuilding and reconciliation. Another key reorganization, as demonstrated by Myers (2017), is the establishment of anti-corruption agencies and anti-graft reform institutions to address corruption cases within the three units of Liberia's criminal justice system, namely the prison system, court system, and law enforcement. Lee-Jones (2019) similarly disclosed that Liberia has developed various formal integrity institutions, including the Liberia Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, the Public Procurement and Concession Commission, the Liberia Anti-Corruption Commission, and the General Auditing Commission, to reorganize and strengthen the country's justice system. Although reorganizations and reforms have been implemented in Liberia's criminal justice system, challenges and barriers remain endemic within the system.

Barriers to the Reorganization of Liberia's Criminal Justice System

Comparable to other postconflict contexts, the reorganization of Liberia's criminal justice system has been characterized by various challenges and obstacles. Challenges and barriers have been identified to improving the criminal justice system in the reorganization and decentralization in postconflict environments, as experienced in Liberia (Krawczyk & Muhula, 2018; Onwaniban, 2021; Quah, 2018; Sesay, 2019; Stambøl & Solhjell, 2021). A report by the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights (UNOHCHR, 2016) showed that the lack of a forensic system is among the major barriers to dealing with rape cases in Liberia. The report indicated that the lack of forensic resources is a critical obstacle to establishing rape

accountability in Liberia (UNOHCHR, 2016). In a study based on comprehensive academic literature and a review of primary sources, Wilson (2021) determined that whereas barriers to accountability are numerous in Liberia, the gap, which has been recognized as beneficial to all stakeholders of the Liberian criminal justice system, is the necessity for a forensic system.

Wilson noted that notwithstanding a robust approach adopted to establish accountability for rape, Liberia requires a system of gathering and processing forensic data to improve the success rate of prosecutions, which presently fail because of meager non-forensic evidence.

Research shows that Liberia's judicial system is critically dysfunctional, which in turn adversely affects the effectiveness of the entire criminal justice system. Bamidele (2017), for instance, conducted a study to scrutinize sexual justice in postconflict Bahn and Nimba County, Liberia. Bamidele's study was also focused on exploring the wider implications through raising questions regarding the significance of the organization of justice on the Bahn and Nimba County victims and the offender and drawing lessons from this encounter. Multiple sources were utilized to draw pertinent evidence and data. The extensive framework of transitional justice, including all its concepts and issues, was gathered from peer-reviewed journals, truth discussions, different case studies, and International Center for Transitional Justice publications, and through desk research referring to literature on transitional justice. To establish a strong image of the Bahn and Nimba County background, a series of interviews were held with local and global activists, agents of civil society institutions, members of the Liberia Assembly, and government officials. Other sources of data were reports of human rights entities and local newspapers. The findings revealed that the systemically dysfunctional judicial process cannot remedy criminal justice and that Liberia lacked the ability to deliver justice to victims of sex crimes, which resulted in loss of public confidence in the criminal justice institutions. The study

further showed that the Liberia national law, which is an outcome of the patriarchy in nearly all communities, is alarmingly ineffectual in dealing with gender-based and sexual violence in the country. Bamidele's study aligns with Almond and Powell's (1978) structural functionalism theory, which signifies that if one or a few components of a system are dysfunctional, the whole system becomes dysfunctional.

Correspondingly, M'Cormack (2018) explored the barriers and opportunities presented by the Liberian hybrid justice system relative to dealing with SGBV. The concept of hybridity was described in this study as one in which both formal and customary or traditional entities are evident but the boundaries between them are indistinct. The research data were gathered through structured and unstructured interviews with various stakeholders of the criminal justice system and participant observation. The stakeholders included United Nations employees, local and international NGO personnel, local and national women's civil society association representatives, affiliates of civilian policing mechanisms, traditional authorities such as elders and chiefs, government ministry agents, members of the judiciary, and law enforcers. The interviews highlighted a widespread outlook among Liberian communities that the formal justice system is unfair because it advocates for offenders. Other key barriers of the formal justice system based on this study are inaccessibility due to limited transport, the lack of communications, high implementation costs, and corruption. Various opportunities for the Liberian hybrid justice system emerged from this study. The NGO agents reported that they frequently organized joint workshops and promoted engagement between the formal and customary sectors as part of their strategies. Law enforcers noted that they usually involved traditional female groups such as the Sande Society to support SGBV survivors. Based on these

findings, M'Cormack concluded that the formal and customary justice systems are complementary, and they should be improved by addressing their shortcomings.

A study by Sesay (2019) revealed specific weaknesses of Liberia's judiciary and the entire criminal justice system by categorizing them into cost, structural, and social barriers. Sesay's study was opposed to the idea that reorganizing the rule of law for war-torn nations disproportionately favors stakeholders who have been historically advantaged by unjust socio-legal and economic systems at the expense of individuals who lack resources to utilize the law system. A comparison was performed between United States-financed justice system reorganizations in Liberia and the United Kingdom-supported rule of law restructuring program in Sierra Leone. Data and evidence for this study were gathered from the socio-legal literature to differentiate social, structural, and cost-associated barriers to justice that have been strengthened by the reorganization of rule of law in war-torn states. The findings revealed for war-torn nations of Liberia and Sierra Leone, the promotion of transnational rule of law reinforced social, structural, and cost-connected barriers to justice. In Liberia, structural barriers emerged from the law of an Americo-Liberian country, which traditionally conserved the interest of Westernized leaders while subordinating the traditional practices and customs of native Liberians. Regarding cost-associated barriers, this review disclosed that Liberia has very few attorneys and those practicing laws are mainly settled in urban regions and focused on private law practice. The focus on judicial rule in sparsely situated and poorly resourced courts was found to have cost consequences in Liberia, encompassing costs for most poor Liberians residing in remote regions away from urban centers. The social barrier was that most Liberians perceived that resolving cases via the formal legal system destabilizes interpersonal associations and creates hostility which can impact long-term coexistence, especially in homogenous communities. Sesay's study

further showed that because of the negative outcomes of reorganizing the rule of law in both Liberia and Sierra Leone, most citizens have turned to nonstate customary dispute resolution approaches for redress, irrespective of substantial technical and monetary resources directed into the formal justice system by international institutions and donor affiliates. Sesay's study also provided evidence that the transnational criminal justice system is not suitable for war-torn nations such as Liberia.

Likewise, Stambøl and Solhjell (2021) undertook an assessment to determine how principles and practices of transnational criminal justice (TCJ) are informed by and productive of precise Global North notions of statehood. The study drew on two practical studies of encounters between TCJ and local criminal justice in Liberia and Mali to demonstrate how TCJ enactments indirectly exemplify efforts to transfer Global North notions of statehood within asymmetrical power associations. By assessing encounters between TCJ and local criminal justice in the framework of global nation-building in Liberia and Mali, the researchers noted the frictions in which international hierarchies and statehood discrepancies become seeming. For Liberia, Stambøl and Solhjell's review demonstrated how performances of penal aid to combat gender-based violence obliquely epitomize Global North ideas of statehood. The findings revealed that the divergence between TCJ and Liberian criminal justice norms spread via postcolonial associations. Social truths in the Global South were found to be the sources of frictions and contestations and at times outright confrontation between TCJ and Liberian criminal justice (Stambøl & Solhjell, 2021).

There is empirical evidence that the decentralization process of Liberia's criminal justice system is largely ineffective. Using a qualitative methodology and a case study research design and grounding the study on structural functionalism, Opoku-Agyakwa (2020) assessed

techniques utilized in decentralizing services offered by Liberia's criminal justice system to establish if these techniques were appropriate for Liberia's distinctive setting and how broad and national the process of decentralization was. The research data were gathered from 20 experts through interviews. The composed interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis in NVivo 12.0. Institutional, infrastructure, legal reform, and policy development were identified as the strategies that were implemented to decentralize the Liberian criminal justice system. The interview findings revealed that a top-down globally centered method with minimal engagement of domestic communities and the disregard of the traditional justice system characterized the decentralization process. The findings further showed that due to decentralization, the Liberian criminal justice system demonstrates basic signs of functionality, a scenario that has led to Liberia's peace and stability (Opoku-Agyakwa, 2020). Nevertheless, the experts assessed in Opoku-Agyakwa study recommended a wide-ranging, nationwide-led strategy, which blends the traditional and formal justice systems, an overhaul of the criminal justice system, and modifications in the techniques and outlooks of the involved players in reorganizing Liberian criminal justice system.

Scholars have further identified the lack of local ownership of reforms as a key barrier to the effective reorganization of Liberia's criminal justice system. Wonnawon and Simons (2021) conducted a comparative evaluation of Sierra Leone and Liberia's security reforms to comprehend the association and bridge the research gap by explaining the link between democratic governance and local ownership of security sector reforms. Sierra Leone and Liberia were compared because they have mutual backgrounds and encountered close-knit violence. To undertake the comparison, Wonnawon and Simons assessed foreign-supported programs to the reorganization of the security sectors in both nations after the civil war. The reorganizations

regarded Liberia as an example demonstrating insufficient local ownership, whereas more wide-ranging ownership was viewed in Sierra Leone. From these findings, Wonnawon and Simons suggested that security sector reorganizations should not be developed on dismissal of local ownership realities because it results in a nonconsultative technique to reform. Using a feminist model for sustainable peace to address the visible and invisible violence in postwar Liberia, Gallo-Cruz and Remsberg (2021) affirmed that reorganizations of Liberia's criminal justice system lack adequate local ownership because they were conducted predominantly by the United Nations and United States institutions such as the National Democratic Institute and the Carter Center. In support of this literature, Islam (2021) determined that the reorganized Liberia National Police (LNP) is widely criticized because of a lack of local ownership and citizen oversight, poor democratic control, and gender inequality. Nevertheless, Islam reported that beyond these challenges, LNP reorganizations have attained some success due to the prevailing peace, security, and stability in Liberia. Opoku-Agyakwa (2020) also found out that the decentralization of Liberia's criminal justice system was characterized by a top-down globally led strategy with the neglect of the customary system and minimal involvement of local communities.

Liberia's criminal justice system and its linked reforms are largely influenced adversely by corruption as indicated in various studies. Myers (2017) undertook a cursory look at corruption precisely, within the judiciary and executive arms of the Liberian administration and its impacts on the socio-economic development of the postwar nation. The assessment showed various instances and scenarios of corruption implicating executive and judiciary arms of government. Foreign investors and multinational organizations, for instance, reported that they had to pay fees to agencies, which were not stipulated in investment contracts and when new

concessions were signed and authorized (Myers, 2017). The press regularly reported corruption accusations incriminating both the executive and judiciary branches of Liberia's government (Myers, 2017). In addition to corruption, Myers' study revealed the lack of accountability as a key barrier hindering Liberia's judiciary system's effectiveness as well as to the efficiency of the country's anti-corruption agencies. Myers further found that the lack of independence from the executive, political interference, insufficient financing, the lack of policies to address modern concerns, poor cash-flow management, weak management, poor infrastructure, and the lack of competent personnel adversely impacted Liberia's judiciary. These barriers, as Myers illustrated, are consequences of the widespread corruption in Liberia. Lee-Jones (2019), based on a comprehensive academic and professional literature review, found that corruption is still endemic in Liberia's justice system institutions such as public integrity agencies during the current presidency of George Weah. Aligning with Myers' findings, Lee-Jones likewise determined that widespread corruption in Liberia has resulted in a weak and dependent judicial system as well as limited moral and monetary support to public integrity agencies.

The review by Lee-Jones (2019) further indicated that corruption among juries and judges forms a significant barrier to just and transparent trials within Liberia's judicial system. According to Lee-Jones, corruption within Liberia's judiciary is attributed to factors such as the prevalent corruption nature in the country as well as perpetual delays of judges and other benefits. Lee-Jones' study revealed that corruption is also endemic within Liberia's police system. The most common type of police corruption was found to be a solicitation of "on the spot" penalties at roadblocks for traffic violations (Lee-Jones, 2019). Citizens also accused LNP officers of extortion and bribery as well as paying their supervisors to acquire desirable posts, promotions, and other privileges or to avert undesirable assignments (Lee-Jones, 2019). Based

on the review, Lee-Jones recommended that further exploration and understanding of the reorganization is needed to facilitate decentralization in Liberia and increase accountability and transparency within the criminal justice system. Other researchers also made similar recommendations (Krawczyk & Muhula, 2018; Quah, 2018; Wilson, 2021). In a peer-reviewed book chapter, Uesugi (2022) reported that corruption from security and justice stakeholders such as judicial and penal organizations, civil defense forces, vigilante units, intelligence institutions, law enforcement officers, and military personnel adversely impacts the development and reorganization of Liberia's security sector.

The extant literature reveals that the consequences of civil conflicts has hindered Liberia National Police's (LNP) reorganization. The reorganization of Liberia's law enforcement unit was largely and adversely affected by the two civil conflicts, which occurred from 1989 to 2003 (Friedman & MacAulay, 2011). As illustrated in Karim's (2019) study, most police stations after the civil war had been abandoned, shattered, or under the control of insurgent forces. The law enforcement stations that still operated lacked basic equipment, communication systems, fuel, and vehicles (Friedman & MacAulay, 2011; Karim, 2019). Many law enforcers fled Liberia after the civil war and the few who remained resorted to bribe taking and petty corruption due to the lack of steady compensations (Friedman & MacAulay, 2011). Friedman and MacAulay (2011) further indicated that during the initial rebuilding and restoration of Liberia's police, there was an explosion of security entities with overlapping roles and obligations, an integration of authentic groups like the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization and the Drug Enforcement Agency, dismissal of intelligence supports, and conversion of units into private forces of different Liberia leaders. Combined, these challenges made it problematic and slow for UNMIL

and its affiliates to effectively reorganize the law enforcement unit of Liberia's criminal justice system.

Based on some empirical studies, several distinctive challenges delayed LNP's reorganization to recruit more female law enforcement. According to Bacon (2015), another significant barrier to recruiting more female police officers in LNP is that after the civil conflict, there was little institutional memory as an officer was deactivated in the security segment restoration. Bacon also reported that low technical capacity and poor infrastructure were perpetual limitations throughout postwar police reorganizations in Liberia. The second challenge, as revealed by Zimano (2018), is that the LNP had tarnished its image after the conflict, making the agency unattractive to women. For instance, the LNP did a poor job in addressing SGBV cases such as sexual assaults, child abuse, and domestic violence (Antwi-Boateng & Braimah, 2021; Zimano, 2018). The third cause of the poor recruitment of females in the police force, as reported by various scholars, was Liberia's history and culture (Brosig & Sempijja, 2018; de Almagro, 2021; McMullin, 2022; Medie & Walsh, 2021). According to de Almagro (2021), Liberia's history of violence against women and male dominance kept females from public service roles such as policing. Males have primarily dominated the security services throughout Liberia's history, a trend typical to security services in other parts of the world (Brosig & Sempijja, 2018; de Almagro, 2021). Such historical trends and cultures have made it problematic to recruit females to LNP. Another major challenge, as reported by Bacon, was that the donor presence in postconflict Liberia offered support and resources, but also posed threats. Bacon determined that there was a threat in postconflict Liberia that supports entities could prioritize local initiatives, progress without a comprehensive understanding of the nation's context, or develop restructures untenable in donor's absence. Of specific concern, according to Schia and

de Carvalho (2009), was that foreigners' resolutions could fail to take into consideration Liberia's preexistent informal, traditional, and customary systems.

Drawing on more than 80 interviews with different stakeholders and nine focus groups with youth, educators, and market women, Zanker (2015), in a brief, congruently outlined various problems and insights associated with law enforcement reorganization in Liberia. The brief revealed three key sets of challenges hinder the reorganization and reform of Liberia's law enforcement. First, Zanker determined that corruption, lack of resources, and problems in the vetting process hinder the police reform process in Liberia. Zanker stressed that the financial constraints were particularly challenging for law enforcement officers recruited and posted in Monrovia, as they had to pay for their transportation and accommodation expenditures. Other scholars such as Bacon (2015) and Karim et al. (2018) also identified the lack of adequate resources as a challenge. Corruption also emerged as a major challenge within Liberia's criminal justice systems in Myers (2017) and Lee-Jones' (2019) studies. The second set of challenges was linked to many agencies being engaged in security sector reform and limited organizational learning amongst key global supporters such as the United Nations (Zanker, 2015). The last set of challenges related to a wider outlook of insecurity, which is usually the consequence of ad hoc incidents associated with economic crimes and political conflict (Zanker, 2015). Based on these challenges, Zanker suggested that the Liberia law enforcement agency and the entire criminal justice system should establish improved communication and transparency that are profoundly required for enhanced interactive communication networks between the police reform actors and the general population. Zanker further recommended that security institutions and agencies should better coordinate their functions and that police training should focus on consolidation as opposed to expansion, targeting improved programs rather than increased recruitment.

Improving the Reorganization of Liberia's Criminal Justice System

Various scholars have explored the challenges regarding restructurings and reorganizations of Liberia's criminal justice system and made recommendations for improvement. In a qualitative case study involving justice system experts, Opoku-Agyakwa (2020) found out that the decentralization of Liberia's criminal justice system was characterized by a top-down globally led strategy with the neglect of the traditional system and minimal involvement of local communities. The experts recommended that these challenges can be addressed by developing an all-encompassing, nationwide method, which integrates traditional and formal justice systems, a restoration of the criminal justice system, and transformation in the techniques and attitudes of actors engaged in decentralizing (Opoku-Agyakwa, 2020). In an earlier study, Wojkowska (2006) supported this recommendation by indicating that engaging with informal justice systems is essential for improving access to justice for the poor and disadvantaged in post-conflict countries such as Liberia. Bamidele (2017) similarly found that the harmonization of Liberia's formal and customary justice systems is an essential strategy to improving access to justice, especially for females. In a comprehensive literature review, McGill (2017) determined that postwar reorganization, peacebuilding procedures, and transitional justice focus on alleviating the effects or averting a reoccurrence of direct conflict. Based on these findings, McGill recommended that postwar nations should implement an optional transformative justice strategy that emphasizes historical and socioeconomic foundations of armed violence and critically evaluates the prevalent power associations and social structures on which it is grounded. However, McGill did not focus on any specific postwar country or context. Zanker (2015) recommended increased coordination as well as improved communication and transparency between criminal justice reorganization actors and the general population. There is

a need to assess further how the reorganization of Liberia's criminal justice system can be improved. This research is feasible, as the key challenges and barriers affecting this reorganization can be identified. The objective of the current study was to explore how individuals in the criminal justice system describe the barriers to the reorganization of Liberia's criminal justice system and how such challenges may be addressed.

Summary and Conclusions

The main reason for reorganizing any criminal justice system revealed in the existing literature is to correct errors such as modifying minimum sentencing laws, changing the drug sentencing law about the war on drugs, minimizing harsh prison sentences, and decriminalizing precise decrees such as drug laws (Blair, 2019; Dinnen & Watson, 2021; Heyer, 2021; McGill, 2017). Liberia has been undergoing a reorganization of its criminal justice system and has utilized several interventions in its governance system and practices (Boazak et al., 2020). The crisis intervention team (CIT) framework has been implemented in Liberia as a reorganization of aligning law enforcement objectives with those of mental wellbeing advocates and service users (Boazak et al., 2020). Studies, predominantly those piloted by feminist scholars, disclose that reforms have been implemented in Liberia's police system in the postconflict period to include more female law enforcement officers (Bacon, 2015; Karim et al., 2018). A crucial reform that has been adopted in Liberia include TRC, a significant component of the process of rebuilding and restoring Liberia after the civil conflict (Abdulai, 2021; Cooper et al., 2021; Islam, 2021; Turner, 2020). Other reforms the Palava Hut pilot project, a community-centered truth-telling program emerged from Liberia's TRC (Gorpudolo, 2019; Hartman et al., 2021), and integrity institutions (Lee-Jones, 2019; Myers, 2017). The reorganizations and reforms have been instrumental in Liberia's criminal justice system in the postwar era in all its three components,

including in the police, judiciary, and BCR. However, several studies have revealed that there is a lack of understanding and exploration of the reorganization is needed to facilitate decentralization in Liberia and increase accountability and transparency within the criminal justice system (Krawczyk & Muhula, 2018; Lee-Jones, 2019; Quah, 2018; Wilson, 2021).

Furthermore, there are challenges and barriers to improving the criminal justice system in reorganization and decentralization in postconflict environments, as experienced in Liberia (Krawczyk & Muhula, 2018; Quah, 2018; Sesay, 2019; Stambøl & Solhjell, 2021). A United Nations High Commission for Human Rights (UNOHCHR, 2016) report showed that the lack of a forensic system is among the major barriers to dealing with rape cases in Liberia. Research discloses that Liberia's judicial system is critically dysfunctional, which in turn adversely affects the effectiveness of the entire criminal justice system (Bamidele, 2017; M'Cormack, 2018). Sesay's (2019) study uncovered specific weaknesses of Liberia's judiciary and the entire criminal justice system by categorizing them into cost, structural, and social barriers. The lack of local ownership of reforms has been identified as a key barrier to the effective reorganization of Liberia's criminal justice system (Gallo-Cruz & Remsberg, 2021; Islam, 2021; Opoku-Agyakwa, 2020; Wonnawon & Simons, 2021). Corruption in the criminal justice system, particularly in the judiciary and police system, is also a significant barrier to just and transparent trials within Liberia's judicial system (Lee-Jones, 2019; Uesugi, 2022). Only a few researchers have explored the challenges affecting the restructuring and reorganization of Liberia's criminal justice system, providing various recommendations for improvement (Bamidele, 2017; McGill, 2017; Opoku-Agyakwa, 2020; Wojkowska, 2006). There is a research gap in assessing challenges experienced in reorganizing Liberia's criminal justice system and ways of addressing these challenges to increase accountability and transparency. The existing studies have also not focused mainly on

the challenges in reorganizing Liberia's criminal justice system based on perspectives of workers in the three units of criminal justice system, namely, the courts, the prison system, and law enforcement and from a structural functionalism view. Chapter 3 includes a description of the methodology that was used to address the identified research gap and problem as well as to answer the developed research questions.

Chapter 3: Methods

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study was to explore how individuals working in the formal and informal systems of criminal justice in postwar Liberia describe the barriers to the successful prosecution of sex crimes against women and how such challenges may be overcome. The findings could have implications for generating possible solutions to the continued problems regarding the criminal justice system in Liberia. The results of this research study can be instrumental in helping leaders and officials of Liberia to develop the appropriate intervention to help address the problems of the country's criminal justice system.

This chapter includes a detailed description of the research methods used in this study. The following sections are included in this chapter: (a) research design and rationale, (b) role of the researcher, (c) methodology, (d) issues of trustworthiness, and (e) ethical procedures. The chapter concludes with a summary of the most significant components of the study's methodology.

Research Design and Rationale

To address the research questions in this qualitative study, a qualitative descriptive design was adopted. This design is reflected in the works of Lambert and Lambert (2012) and Magilvy and Thomas (2009), who both provided insights into the methodological characteristics of a qualitative descriptive research. Qualitative descriptive design is the straightforward but comprehensive summarization of an event based on the description of the experiences or perceptions of individuals (Lambert & Lambert, 2012). Qualitative descriptive research design is not bounded by a specific framework or philosophy, which gives researchers the flexibility to explore the perceptions of individuals with as much consideration and reflection as necessary (Lambert & Lambert, 2012; Magilvy & Thomas, 2009).

A qualitative descriptive design was considered appropriate for this study were to understand the research problem identified in the criminal justice system in Liberia based on the summarized description of the perceptions of the participants (Magilvy & Thomas, 2009). Even though less methodological research has been conducted regarding the effectiveness of qualitative descriptive design compared to other qualitative designs (Kim et al., 2017), Lambert and Lambert (2012) contended that the qualitative descriptive design is still acceptable in terms of examining general perceptions and experiences of individuals. The flexibility of qualitative descriptive design is a particular strength that affords less experienced researchers to explore various methodologies to systematically study a phenomenon (Kim et al., 2017).

Other qualitative research designs such as phenomenology, case study, and grounded theory were ruled out after a careful evaluation of the research problem. Phenomenology was ruled out because this design involves the study of the lived experience of individuals, requiring researchers to delve deeper into the psyches of participants to makes sense of a phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Case study is more appropriate in research studies that have a bounded phenomenon that requires intensive and exhaustive approach to data collection and data analysis (Yazan, 2015). Finally, grounded theory was not selected because this design is more applicable in studies that aim to understand the process involved in understanding why a complex phenomenon exists or manifests in its current form (Walker & Myrick, 2006). Given the lack of alignment of these three research designs with the more straightforward goals of the current study, the qualitative descriptive research design was selected.

Role of the Researcher

In qualitative studies, researchers play a central role in facilitating the key phases of the study (Rogers, 2018). For this study, the role of the researcher was confined to that of an

observer, including securing all the requirement permissions and approval documents, recruiting participants, collecting data, and analyzing the interview responses to generating themes. The researcher was also responsible for ensuring that all data were protected and that participants were treated fairly during the course of the study.

The researcher had no personal and professional relationships with any of the participants to minimize potential conflict of interest or bias. However, researcher bias can still interfere with the study if the researcher is not mindful of personal preconceptions and beliefs that are related to the phenomenon being explored (Noble & Smith, 2015). Researcher biases were managed through the process of bracketing, wherein the researcher consciously sets aside personal biases in preparation for the analysis of the data (Tufford & Newman, 2012).

Conducting a study within one's own work environment was an ethical issue that was avoided by recruiting participants outside the workplace of the researcher. No financial incentives were given to the participants. All participants were volunteers who wished to be part of the study on their own volition.

Methodology

Participant Selection Logic

The participants of the study were individuals working in the criminal justice system in Liberia. For this study, the criminal justice system was operationalized based on the three units of the courts, the prison system, and law enforcement. The sample was 20 individuals for the open-ended questionnaire and 20 individuals for the focus groups, resulting in a total sample size of 40 participants. A total of four focus groups containing five participants each served as the sample. The sample size of 20 participants for each data source was informed by data saturation, which operates under the assumption that all the unique aspects of the phenomenon can be

uncovered with this sample size (Guest et al., 2006). Hence, data saturation equips qualitative researchers with the information regarding the sufficiency of the size of the sample.

The researcher recruited individuals from personal networks who work within the criminal justice system through the convenience sampling technique, which is a technique in which individuals who are the easiest to access are recruited (Coyne, 1997). Snowball sampling was also used to identify additional participants. Snowball sampling is characterized by using the initial group of participants to recruit more eligible individuals based on their own personal contacts (Ghaljaie et al., 2017). Minimal monetary incentives were provided to the study participants.

To be eligible to be part of the study, several inclusion and exclusion criteria were defined. The inclusion criteria for this study were as follows: (a) works within the criminal justice system in Liberia, (b) have at least a year of working experience in the criminal justice system in Liberia, and (c) willing to participate in either open-ended survey or focus group discussions. The exclusion criteria were as follows: (a) part-time workers, (b) retired works, and (c) workers with less than 1 year working experience.

Instruments

The researcher is considered the main instrument in qualitative research (Rogers, 2018). Even though the recruitment and collection of data are important responsibilities of qualitative researchers, Rogers (2018) argued that the data analysis phase is particularly important responsibility of the researcher given that the results of the data analysis will serve as the findings of a study. Being the main instrument of the study, the researcher assumed these various tasks with as much preparation as necessary such as reading books and articles about qualitative research.

The specific methods that were utilized to gather data were open-ended surveys and focus groups. The researcher developed the questions that were used for the open-ended surveys and focus groups based on the research questions. The literature and the framework of the study also informed the development of the questions for both the open-ended questionnaire and focus group discussions.

The open-ended questionnaire contained several questions about the barriers to the reorganization of Liberia's criminal justice system and ways such challenges could be successfully overcome. The basis for the questions in the open-ended questionnaire was the literature and the framework, with the intention of eliciting answers for addressing the research questions. However, the questions were open-ended in nature to encourage more detailed responses. The list of questions for the open-ended survey questionnaire can be found in Appendix A.

The focus group question guide contained the same questions but written in a discussion and group format. Like the questions from the open-ended questionnaire, the questions in the focus group were based on the literature and the framework. Follow-up and clarifying questions were included to take into consideration the format of the focus group discussion. The list of questions for the focus groups can be found in Appendix B.

The content validity of the open-ended questionnaire and the focus group guides was established through an expert panel review. Two to three experts in the field of qualitative research were asked to review the quality and adequacy of the instruments. Their comments were assessed and integrated into the finalized questionnaire and focus group guides. The sufficiency of the two instruments was established because enough themes were developed to answer the research questions.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Data collection entailed administering open-ended survey questionnaire and conducting a series of focus group discussions. Both methods were conducted virtually. The researcher assigned participants to the open-ended questionnaire and the focus group based on their stated preference during the recruitment of the study. The specific steps for both the open-ended questionnaire and focus group are discussed in this section.

For the open-ended questionnaire, participants were directed to an online survey containing all the questions about the barriers to the reorganization of Liberia's criminal justice system and ways such challenges may be overcome. The open-ended survey was stored and the participants accessed it through Survey Monkey, a survey provider that allows researchers to give out surveys online and store the responses for future access. The tool that stored in Survey Monkey also included the informed consent. Informed consent was given by clicking the yes button, which then led participants to the main survey. The informed consent process and the open-ended questionnaire could be completed in approximately less than an hour.

For the focus groups, informed consent was sent to the provided emails of the participants. After agreeing with the terms described in the informed consent form, participants gave verbal consent at the beginning of the focus group discussion. Five participants for each focus group were asked to be part of a Zoom discussion to discuss the barriers to the reorganization of Liberia's criminal justice system and how such challenges may be overcome.

The focus group discussion was password-protected and recorded. Each focus group lasted approximately 60 minutes.

Data Analysis Plan

NVivo software was used to organize and store the data that were collected from the participants using two sources: open-ended questionnaire responses and the focus group discussion transcripts. Data from the open-ended questionnaire survey and focus group discussions were triangulated to identify consistencies and inconsistencies in the findings. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the open-ended surveys and focus groups. Thematic analysis is the systematic coding of data with the goal of producing relevant themes supported by the evidence available (Braun et al., 2019). The six steps that were used to facilitate thematic analysis are discussed in the following sub-sections.

Step 1: Data Familiarization

All data were read and reread multiple times to familiarize with the contents of the focus group transcripts and the open-ended questionnaire responses (Braun et al., 2019). The researcher made multiple rounds of reading until a sufficient level of familiarity was established with the entire dataset. The researcher wrote notes highlight specific parts or insights that could play a role in the later stages of the analysis.

Step 2: Coding

The next step of the analysis was the coding of data. Open coding was implemented to assign simple labels to the apparent ideas in the responses of the participants in the open-ended questionnaires and the focus groups (Braun et al., 2019). Open coding entailed segmenting the data from the open-ended survey responses and the focus group transcripts to assign labels (Blair, 2015). This process was repeated until every part of the open-ended survey responses and

focus group transcripts was coded. These codes were documented in the NVivo to lay the groundwork for the later stages of the analysis such as the development of categories and themes.

Step 3: Determination of Themes

Codes were arranged and rearranged in several configurations to form groups of several categories (Braun et al., 2019). From these categories, several relevant themes were created to represent the experiences and perceptions that were most common from the sample. Sub-themes were derived for codes with just enough experiences from several participants but not a more substantial number to warrant a major theme designation.

Step 4: Verification of Themes

Themes were verified by returning to the raw data, the coding sheet from NVivo, the framework, and the literature (Braun et al., 2019). This process also entailed returning to the analytical memos that the researcher made during the research process to gain additional insights that could be critical in the decision-making in the finalization of themes. The intent of reviewing and finalizing the themes was to make sure that the findings have the credibility to withstand independent review. As a result, this process of verification could lead to the deletion, combination, or expansion of themes.

Step 5: Defining the Themes

The finalized themes were succinctly defined and described to have a clear delineation of how each differs from each other (Braun et al., 2019). This step was important to articulate the most unique and significant reason for creating each theme and their relevance to the research questions of the study. These definitions were not lengthy and detailed, but only highlighted certain aspects of the themes that would be most useful in understanding their essence. Each

definition was used as the basis for the subsequent unpacking of its essence within the context of the two main research questions.

Step 6: Composite Description

The last stage of thematic analysis was the generation of an integrative description of how individuals working in the criminal justice system describe the barriers to the reorganization of Liberia's criminal justice system and how such challenges could be overcome. This integrative description was replete with detailed information, which was interspersed with direct quotations from the participants to enhance the strength of the themes (Braun et al., 2019). The composite description was generated utilizing the individual themes and connected through the careful organization of the researcher's narrative account of the barriers to the reorganization of Liberia's criminal justice system and how such challenges may be overcome.

Handling of Discrepant Cases

Discrepant cases were addressed by integrating important insights from these cases into the overall presentation of the data. These discrepant cases provided counter-perspectives to the prevailing themes that served as the main findings of this study. In instances where a significant discrepancy from the main theme emerged, the researcher included these discrepant cases in the presentation of the results. The researcher took note of disagreements from some participants regarding the main theme to have a more nuanced and balanced presentation of the results.

Issues of Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, trustworthiness is the basis in which the overall quality of a study is assessed. Trustworthiness was gauged based on the establishment of credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability (Houghton et al., 2013). The specific strategies that were used to establish the trustworthiness of the study are discussed in the following subsections.

Credibility

Credibility pertains to the extent to which the research findings are accurately representative of what the participants said and experienced (Guba & Lincoln, 1982). Credibility was enhanced using the strategy of member checking, which simply entails sending the focus group transcripts to gain the approval of the participants regarding their accuracy and overall correctness (Candela, 2019). The researcher analyzed the comments from those who provided any feedback and made the necessary revision to finalize the themes.

Another strategy that was utilized to enhance the credibility of the findings the process of data triangulation. More specifically, data from the open-ended questionnaire and focus groups were triangulated to identify consistencies and inconsistencies in the findings. Consistencies across the two data sources were the focus of the findings, but some instances of divergent findings were noted to further enrich the presentation of the results of the data analysis.

Transferability

Transferability pertains to the applicability of the research findings outside the sample and context where the study was conducted (Guba & Lincoln, 1982). The specific strategy that was utilized to establish the transferability of the current study is through the provision of thick description of the study such as the source of the data and the characteristics of the participants in the sample (Guba & Lincoln, 1982). The researcher was also diligent in providing rich details of the socio-political characteristics that define the current state of Liberia. This thick description could aid other researchers in replicating the results in contexts that have relatively high degree of similarities with the criminal justice system in Liberia. As described earlier, the context of the study was based on the criminal justice system of Liberia. Hence, the transferability of this study

is dependent on this context and should not be used in situations where the contextual differences are pronounced.

Dependability

Dependability pertains to the stability of the findings, which was enhanced by having a thick description of the research context (Guba & Lincoln, 1982). The strategy that was used to enhance the dependability of the study is through the creation of an audit trail. An audit trail is a document that traces the thought process and the decision-making process of the researcher during the course of the study (Wolf, 2003). This document was helpful in verifying the quality of the study by an independent reviewer or the researchers themselves during the verification of the themes.

Triangulation was also used as a strategy to enhance the dependability of the study. The data collected from open-ended survey questionnaire and focus group discussions were triangulated to identify consistencies and discrepancies in the themes. The researcher reported both the main themes and exemplar discrepant cases to enhance the stability of the research findings.

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the extent that the study can be evaluated by others as objective and free from bias (Guba & Lincoln, 1982). Confirmability was established by memo to document the impressions, opinions, biases, and initial analyses of the researcher. Analytical memos give the qualitative researcher the opportunity to be reflective about decisions that could impact the objectivity of the study (Rogers, 2018). These analytical memos can also be useful during the analysis of the data, particularly in the verification of themes.

Ethical Procedures

The ethical credibility of the study was broadly informed by the Belmont Report, which includes the principles of respect for persons, beneficence, and justice (Miracle, 2016). Within the context of a research, respect for person means that participants are treated as autonomous beings who have the right to make decisions for themselves. Beneficence pertains to not harming the participants and maximizing potential benefits that can be gained as a result of participating in the study. Finally, justice means that the research is fair and equal treatment is given to all participants regardless of their background and status.

Several ethical considerations were identified to demonstrate that the researcher adheres to the standards expected from scholarly research. These ethical considerations include gaining the necessary institutional approval, the informed consent procedure, confidentiality, and voluntary participation/withdrawal process. These ethical considerations are discussed in this section.

The approval of the Internal Review Board (IRB) was processed before data collection commenced. The researcher prepared all the required documents to facilitate the application process. Informed consent forms were also provided to the participants to avail all key information about the study, including the risks that are associated with participating in the study. The informed consent for the open-ended survey was attached to the main survey and could be accessed in a single document on Survey Monkey. The informed consent process for the focus group was different, with the forms given to the participants in advance through email and consent given verbally during the start of the virtual focus group discussion.

Another important ethical consideration is the confidentiality of the data and the participants' identities. The real names of the participants and other identifying information such as their home address or specific workplace were not collected. All data such as the transcripts,

open-ended survey responses, and coding sheet from the NVivo software were secured by storing the files in a password-protected folder in the personal computer of the researcher. After a period of 5 years from the date the dissertation is approved, all the data that were retained and stored by the researcher will be permanently deleted and destroyed.

Finally, no one was coerced to participate in the study even though the personal contacts of the researcher served as the initial pool of participants. The researcher emphasized voluntary participation during recruitment by framing the invitation to participate in the study as optional. Data from individuals who initially agreed to be part of the study but decided to withdraw their consent during or after the data had been collected were excluded from the analysis. There was no penalty for those who turned down the invitation to participate in the study or those who prematurely left the study.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study was to explore how individuals working in the formal and informal systems of criminal justice in postwar Liberia have described the barriers to the successful prosecution of sex crimes against women and how such challenges may be overcome. Although the qualitative descriptive design used in this study is comparable to other qualitative design, such as phenomenology in terms of the focus on the experience and perceptions of individuals, it is less constrained by a framework or philosophy (Lambert & Lambert, 2012). The qualitative descriptive design offers novice researchers the opportunity to examine the participant experiences without the methodological complexity of other qualitative designs (Lambert & Lambert, 2012; Magilvy & Thomas, 2009).

The participants of the study were individuals who work in the criminal justice system in Liberia, which includes the courts, the prison system, and the law enforcement agencies.

Convenience and the snowball sampling technique were used to select a sample of 20 eligible individuals for the open-ended questionnaire and 20 individuals for the focus groups, resulting in a total sample size of 40 participants. For the focus group data source, four focus groups containing five participants each, equivalent to the sample for this method of data gathering strategy, were conducted.

Data were collected using open-ended surveys and focus group discussions, both of which were virtually administered and conducted. After processing and transcribing all data, raw data were transferred to the qualitative software NVivo for organization. All the data were analyzed using thematic analysis to generate relevant themes that capture the key patterns from the experiences of individuals working in the criminal justice system of Liberia. In the next chapter, the research findings of this study are presented.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The problem addressed by this study was that it is not known how the formal and informal criminal justice department workers perceive the challenges of a decentralized criminal justice system in Liberia in terms of prosecuting sex crimes against women and the strategies that can be adopted to overcome these challenges. Since the decentralization of the government was initiated, when formal and informal channels are available to prosecute sex crimes against women, Liberia has been undergoing a reorganization of its criminal justice system and has implemented several interventions in its governance system and practices (Boazak et al., 2020). However, there remain challenges and barriers to improving the criminal justice system in reorganization and decentralization in postconflict environments, particularly in terms of successfully prosecuting sex crimes against women (Sesay, 2019; Stambøl & Solhjell, 2021). The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study was to explore how individuals working in the formal and informal systems of criminal justice in postwar Liberia have described the barriers to the successful prosecution of sex crimes against women and how such challenges may be overcome. The study sought to answer the following two research questions (RQs):

RQ1: What are the challenges in the prosecution of sex crimes against women in the formal channels of postwar Liberia's criminal justice system?

RQ2: What are the challenges in the prosecution of sex crimes against women in the informal channels of postwar Liberia's criminal justice system?

This chapter includes a neutral and objective presentation of the findings of the research study. Data are presented with the use of a clear text narrative that is supported by tables.

Chapter 4 covers the following sections: (a) setting, (b) demographics, (c) data collection, (d)

data analysis, (e) trustworthiness of data, (f) results, and lastly (g) summary. The findings are organized by the research questions.

Setting

The study's setting was postwar Liberia's criminal justice system. Participants working in this setting were selected to take part in the study, including those working in the courts, the prison system, and law enforcement. The participants were not influenced by any organizational or personal conditions. Moreover, no such conditions influenced their experience at the time of study because there were no budget cuts, changes of personnel, or other trauma. Therefore, the interpretation of the results of this study was not influenced by organizational or personal conditions.

Demographics

The participants in the current study were 20. They were specifically selected from individuals who work in Liberia's criminal justice system, which is made up of three units, namely, the courts, the prison system, and law enforcement. They were all adults, male, and identified their nationality as Liberian. Regarding the participant characteristics relevant to the current study, it was important that they all work within the criminal system in Liberia. Moreover, they were required to have at least 12 months of experience working in the criminal justice system in Liberia. This criterion was important because only those with this experience could provide the relevant data for this study.

The real names of the participants are known to the researcher. However, because anonymity and confidentiality of participants were paramount in this study, the use of pseudonyms was an important consideration. Therefore, the researcher created pseudonyms for each participant, which were used in place of their real names. The use of pseudonyms is

consistent with a qualitative approach. Overall, assigning a pseudonym to each participant helped protect their identity. Each of the 20 participants stated that they were willing and prepared to engage in the semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions that lasted for a period of 45 to 60 minutes. Regarding age, most participants were in their 40s. The demographic information of the study subjects is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Participant pseudonym	Gender	Age	Ethnicity/ Nationality	Department	Role in criminal justice system	Length of time working
Participant 1	M	50-59	African, Liberian	Bureau of Corrections	Corrections officer	20 years
Participant 2	M	40-49	African, Liberian	Bureau of Corrections	Corrections officer	10 years
Participant 3	M	40-49	African, Liberian	Liberia National Police	Police officer	15 year
Participant 4	M	40-49	African, Liberian	Liberia National Police Force	Police officer	13 years
Participant 5	M	20-29	African, Liberian	Liberia National Police Force	Police officer	15 years
Participant 6	M	30-39	African, Liberian	Liberia National Police Force	Patrolman	12 years
Participant 7	M	30-39	African, Liberian	Liberia National Police Force	Patrolman	8 years
Participant 8	M	20-29	African, Liberian	Bureau of Corrections	Communication Officer	5 years
Participant 9	M	50-59	African, Liberian	Judiciary	Deputy HR director	28 years
Participant 10	M	40-49	African, Liberian	Judiciary	Data analyst	15 years
Participant 11	M	40-49	African, Liberian	Judiciary	Senior Clark	17 years
Participant 12	M	30-39	African, Liberian	Judiciary	Auditor	11 years
Participant 13	M	30-39	African, Liberian	Judiciary	Internal Auditor	10 years
Participant 14	M	40-49	African, Liberian	Judiciary	Magistrate	16 years
Participant 15	M	50-59	African, Liberian	Judiciary	Magistrate	21 years
Participant 16	M	30-39	African, Liberian	Bureau of Corrections	Data base analyst	7 years
Participant 17	M	40-49	African, Liberian	Bureau of Corrections	Assistant Director	13 years
Participant 18	M	40-49	African, Liberian	Liberia National Police Force	Inspector of Police	12 years

Participant 19	M	30-39	African, Liberian	Bureau of Corrections	Prison officer	6 years
Participant 20	M	30-39	African, Liberian	Liberia National Police Force	Police officer	6 years

Data Collection

Data were collected to answer the two research questions from 20 participants. This number of participants was appropriate, as it allowed the researcher to easily conduct in-depth semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. With regard to location, the semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions were conducted online through Zoom and lasted for a period of up to 60 minutes and included both semi-structured and open-ended interview questions. The interview and focus group data were recorded with the use of the default Zoom voice recorder, which allowed the researcher to record the online Zoom meetings. Even so, permission was first obtained from the participants before the recording. For backup, notes were taken in the old-fashioned way with the use of paper and pen in each interview. Notes were important in case something happened to the digital voice recorder and all the digital data gets lost.

There were slight variations in data collection from the plan presented in Chapter 3. Although the plan was to recruit 40 individuals who work in Liberia's criminal justice system as outlined in Chapter 3, ultimately only 20 of them were enlisted. Although this was a smaller sample size than was originally planned, it allowed the researcher to reach data saturation. During the interviews and focus groups, an interview guide was utilized and probing was done by asking follow-up questions. Probing questions were particularly appropriate when the researcher had not fully understood a given response, when the answers were ambiguous or vague, and when the investigator wanted to obtain more detailed or more specific information. No unusual circumstances were encountered when collecting data.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was utilized to move inductively from coded units to larger representations including categories and themes, with the use of NVivo 12 software. The process involved several steps as described by Braun and Clarke (2006). The first step was familiarization with the collected data. This process was achieved by reviewing the transcript from each study subject individually. Phrases, paragraphs, and sentences that were found to be meaningful to the topic were highlighted. The highlighted data were then reviewed afterwards to establish whether or not they could help answer the research questions. Data that had been highlighted but later found to be unrelated to the two research questions were removed and stored in a separate file.

The second step entailed generating initial codes or development of codes. Braun and Clarke (2006) pointed out that after the researcher has familiarized himself or herself with the data, he or she then starts to identify preliminary codes, which are the features of the data that appear meaningful and interesting. The researcher generated initial codes during this phase. He systematically coded interesting features of the data across the whole data set, collating data that were relevant to each code. The codes were a lot more and specific than themes and provided an indication of the context of the conversation. Overall, several codes emerged from the data.

In the third step, themes were developed. Groups were formed from codes that were alike. These groups formed the themes that were used to answer the two research questions. Data that were related or were connected in one way or another were clustered together. Each group was then labeled with the use of a statement or phrase describing every distinct pattern. Revision of themes was the fourth step. As patterns began emerging in the data, data that were related to a particular pattern were identified. The data from the clusters created earlier were placed to make

up relations or patterns. To explain the pattern, direct quotes from the data/transcribed interviews were utilized.

The fifth step involved finalization and definition of themes. The researcher looked for emerging overarching themes in the patterns. Related patterns were combined and clustered into themes. After identifying themes that were more meaningful, a more abstract descriptor was assigned to them. After analyzing all the data, the themes were arranged in a matrix with their corresponding supportive patterns and codes for each data cluster. The data were then synthesized to create a composite synthesis of data gathered to address the research questions. In the final step, a report was generated. There were no discrepant cases.

Trustworthiness of Data

Trustworthiness is understood as the level of confidence in data, interpretation, as well as methods utilized to ensure the quality of a given research study. It also refers to the truthfulness, authenticity, and quality of findings (Morrow, 2005). There are four specific criteria usually used to judge the soundness of qualitative research. They include credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability.

Credibility

Credibility is the internal validity of qualitative studies. It focuses on how congruent the findings are with reality (Amin et al., 2020). It is also a measure of the truth value of qualitative research, or whether the findings are accurate. In the current study, several strategies were utilized to establish this criterion of trustworthiness. One of them was triangulation, which entails the use of different sources of information or procedure from the field to repetitively establish identifiable patterns (Morrow, 2005). Specifically, focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews were used for data collection. Moreover, member checks, also commonly

referred to as respondent or participant validation, were utilized for establishing credibility. After collecting data from the study subjects, the researcher returned the transcripts to corresponding participant to check for accurateness as well as resonance with their experiences. Similarly, the analysis results were returned to them to check for the same. All the 20 participants confirmed that the data gathered from them were accurate, hence, credibility was established.

Another procedure that was employed for the purpose of increasing the study's credibility was deviant case or negative case analysis. This procedure is understood as a technique for ensuring the validity of the interpretation of qualitative data by analyzing outlier data (Johnson et al., 2020). By conducting negative case analysis, the researcher identified elements of the data, which disconfirmed emergent findings. The procedure was done by finding and discussing data, which contradicted the explanations that were emerging from the research. Data analysis was refined whenever a new negative case arose and this revision went on until the study could explain most of the data captured in the research. In essence, this procedure helped to refine all the conclusions reached until they accounted for all the known cases without exception.

Transferability

Transferability is the second major aspect of trustworthiness. It is understood as the generalizability of inquiry. Transferability is only relates to case-to-case transfer in qualitative research (Amin et al., 2020). For this study, this criterion of trustworthiness was established through thick description, which is provided in this section. The respondents in the current study comprised individuals who work in Liberia's criminal justice system. All of them were men and Liberian and each had an experience of at least five years working in the informal and formal systems of criminal justice in postwar Liberia. By collecting data from the participants through one-on-one semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions, the researcher was able to

gain an in-depth understanding of how individuals working in the formal and informal systems of criminal justice in postwar Liberia describe the barriers to the successful prosecution of sex crimes against women and how such challenges may be overcome.

Dependability

Dependability is utilized in demonstrating or measuring the reliability and consistency of the results of the study. This criterion of trustworthiness is mainly focused on whether the same results would be attained if the same study is conducted two times (Morrow, 2005). For this study, dependability was established such that if someone else wanted to replicate it, they would have adequate information from the research report to do so and obtain similar findings as the current study.

The strategies that were used to establish dependability included triangulation and inquiry audit or audit trail. An audit trail, according to Nowell et al. (2017), refers to a transparent description of the steps taken in a research study from the beginning of the project until when the findings were reported. In the current study, eight steps were followed. The first step entailed determining what to research. The researcher sought to explore how individuals working in the formal and informal systems of criminal justice in postwar Liberia describe the barriers to the successful prosecution of sex crimes against women and how such challenges may be overcome. The second step is identifying how to research the identified problem. In the current study, this step involved looking through secondary data and research including research reports and studies carried out previously. The methodology to use was also determined, which was the qualitative descriptive study. This design was best suited for this study to generate the summarized description of the perceptions of the participants that were instrumental in understanding the research problem identified in Liberia. Semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions

with open-ended questions were selected for the collection of data. After determining what will be researched and how the study will be carried out, the third step was about writing up a research plan, which provided more information regarding the timelines, goals of the research, dependencies, and participant scope.

In step four, the research was prepared by selecting the participants, scheduling interviews and focus groups, and preparing Zoom meetings and the necessary equipment. Step five was about executing the research, which was accomplished within a period of roughly 2 weeks. Interviews and focus group discussions were conducted with 20 participants online via Zoom. The data were recorded using the default Zoom voice recorder. Notes were taken using pen and paper for backup. An audit trail of all the notes that were taken in each of the interviews and focus group was kept. Follow-up questions were asked.

The sixth step was about coding and synthesizing the data to find insights. Thematic analysis was the approach used to code the data with the assistance of NVivo 12 software. Themes were found, which provided insight that helped to answer the research questions and achieve the goal of the study. In the seventh step, the research output was created, which was a report outlining major findings from the study in a document format. It encompassed an executive summary, insight themes, as well as supporting evidence. The final step is sharing the findings with key stakeholders. Important records are kept with regard to what the researcher did during the investigation. These include information on how the data collection instruments were developed; all raw data and notes taken during each semi-structured interview and focus group discussion; trustworthiness notes pertaining to confirmability, dependability, credibility, and transferability; and codebook showing a listing of all the codes that were utilized in the data analysis process.

The aforementioned audit trail describes all the steps that were taken to complete this research project successfully from the beginning until when the findings were reported. By following it, other researchers would be able to obtain the same results. Therefore, dependability is established.

Confirmability

The final component of trustworthiness that was established in this study is confirmability. It refers to the degree of neutrality in the findings of a given research study (Amin et al., 2020). Simply put, it denotes that the findings are founded upon the responses of the study subjects and not on the researcher's personal motivations or bias. In the current study, this criterion of trustworthiness was established through an audit trail, which is provided. It highlights each step that was taken during the analysis of data to provide a justification for the decisions made. Specifically, six steps were made when analyzing the data, consistent with the thematic analysis process described by Braun and Clarke (2006).

Results

The purpose of the current study was to explore how individuals working in the formal and informal systems of criminal justice in postwar Liberia describe the barriers to the successful prosecution of sex crimes against women and how such challenges may be overcome. In total, four themes emerged from the data. The results of the data analysis are organized by the research questions. The themes are summarized in Table 2 shown below:

Table 2

Research Questions and their Corresponding Themes

Research Question	Themes used to address the research question
RQ1: What are the challenges in the prosecution of sex crimes against women in the formal channels of	Theme 1: Lack of adequate well-trained personnel including public defendants and low pay Theme 2: Lack of resources including money, equipment, uniforms, and vehicles for logistics and mobility

postwar Liberia's criminal justice system?

RQ2: What are the challenges in the prosecution of sex crimes against women in the informal channels of postwar Liberia's criminal justice system?

Theme 3: Overcrowding in the prison system, huge case load, and judges not fast-tracking cases

Theme 4: Investigations not being conducted properly, other parties who have influence interfering with prosecution, victims being threatened and unwilling to testify against the offender, and court system not effectively enforcing the law

Research Question 1

For this study, the first research question was as follows: What are the challenges in the prosecution of sex crimes against women in the formal channels of postwar Liberia's criminal justice system? Three themes emerged from the data that help to answer this question. These are (a) Theme 1: Lack of adequate well-trained personnel including public defendants and low pay; (b) Theme 2: Lack of resources including money, equipment, uniforms, and vehicles for logistics and mobility; and (c) Theme 3: Overcrowding in the prison system, huge case load, and judges not fast-tracking cases. The number of participants who mentioned each theme is illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3

Research Question 1 Themes

Theme	<i>n</i> of participants contributing to this theme (N=20)	<i>n</i> of references to this theme in the data
Theme 1: Lack of adequate well-trained personnel including public defendants and low pay	15	25
Theme 2: Lack of resources including money, equipment, uniforms, and vehicles for logistics and mobility	13	32
Theme 3: Overcrowding in the prison system, huge case load, and judges not fast-tracking cases	10	22

Theme 1: Lack of Adequate Well-Trained Personnel Including Public Defendants and Low Pay

This theme suggests that according to the participants, a lack of sufficient well-trained manpower, including public defendants for victims who cannot afford a lawyer, as well as low pay, is a challenge faced in the prosecution of sex crimes against women in the formal channels

in Liberia's criminal justice system. This theme was mentioned by 15 participants, 25 times.

Participant 2 talked about the lack of enough officers and issues with pay, stating,

We don't have sufficient manpower at the Monrovia Central Prison. I do have sufficient manpower. Presently, the government does not have money to increase the staff. We are out of staffing. The staff are not much to take care of the number inmates we have now.

And then people, they are unpaid.

Some of the challenges identified by Participant 4 include, "the lack of manpower, and the underpayment." Participant 5 talked about, "necessary training providers so that law enforcement officers, in general, especially people in my own area of investigation, can be trained to manage and handle these kinds of equipment so that the issue of a prosecution can be enhanced." He also spoke about, "extended training for personnel of the bureau units." Participant 6 indicated as follows:

Looking at post-war Liberia now, based on what we have been faced with from the world of present, there are a lot of things that need to be done when it comes to the criminal justice system. Such as training for officers.

Participant 7 emphasized low pay, saying:

To be able to empower officer to do his or job properly, he needs better incentive. All right? Because you can be working for an amount that cannot cater towards you and your family because if your incentive is low, then you get involved into unethical things.

For Participant 8, some of the challenges include, "Salary ... And the manpower", suggesting low pay and lack of enough staff. Participant 13 mentioned, "We don't have adequate training." This participant also spoke about low pay for judges, which he suggested should be raised for them to work effectively. Specifically, he reported that, "compensation of judges or those in the

court arena should be step up to encourage them work expediently and on time.” Participant 14 talked about the lack of public defenders for victims who are not able to afford a lawyer, saying, “Right now, we don't have public defenders all over the country. We got a lot of party litigants that are indigent that are not able to pay for lawyers.” Participant 16 stated, “there are challenges when it comes to adequate training, salary.” Participant 17 talked about, “Challenges ranging from lack of manpower in the system. As we speak, officers are not paid well ... people commute to work on the little income they make.” Speaking of low pay, Participant 19 reported, “We do not have the compensation that we need to have ... low salary.”

Theme 2: Lack of Resources Including Money, Equipment, Uniforms, and Vehicles for Logistics and Mobility

Moreover, the participants indicated that financial challenges, budgetary constraints, insufficient equipment, not having uniforms to identify themselves from the prisoners as officers, and not having vehicles for logistics, were some of the challenges they face in the prosecution of sex crimes against women in the formal channels in Liberia’s criminal justice system. This theme was mentioned by 13 participants, 32 times. Participant 2 reported, “We have some challenges like transportation, even taking them into court, into hospital have been a major challenge ... our vehicle break down to take inmate to court and the hospital as one of the major challenge.” He added, “Lack of uniforms in the correction officer, lack of uniform.”

Furthermore, highlighting transportation challenges, this participant stated, “Police officer ask the complainant to transport them and register the case or pay money and register the cases.”

Regarding this theme, Participant 4 stated as follows:

We don't have patrol car. So if the 10 officers are supposed to go to arrest the situation, as you pay, the company should pay the 10 officers' wage, while vehicles should be

available to carry the 10 officers. Yeah. So, lack of logistic ... the fundings are not really there.

Similarly, Participant 5 reported, "there is always the issue of no funding for transportation." He added that

There is always an issue of, even sometimes during incident, you don't have the logistic terms of camera to do recording. Sometimes you don't have the necessary equipment that can help you build case facts for easy prosecutory [inaudible] role in court.

For Participant 6, the challenges include

Yeah, logistics. Yeah. Supply logistics to enable us to our work. Meaning again, to also be able to cater to the needs of officers when it comes to what they can be able to take them to attend to their family in solving some domestic problems that we can also help to alleviate the stress in the minds of the officer. The police need to be equipped... We work with the limited resources we have.

Participant 7 also spoke about logistics as a challenge, saying, "Next thing is logistic. Uniform, supplies and other thing. Those are basic element that continue to hammer the police function."

Similarly, according to Participant 8, "One of the main issues is the issue of logistics. Like I said, Demayee's in constant transportation." Participant 11 talked about, "Lack of finances. We don't have stable current to run camera system. So as time go by, I, for me, I believe that things will get on course, but for now it's one of our challenges." According to Participant 13, budgetary constraints affect the provision of adequate training for officers. He mentioned, "Adequate training is not really a fruition because of lack of budgetary constraint." Participant 15 spoke about the lack of vehicles making logistics a challenge. He noted as follows:

And another thing is the logistics, because when they are taken for the prison, the court

does not have a vehicle that he can commute. So, sometimes they have to do that on motorbike, sometimes they have to use general passenger transport...then you will have an issue with logistics, those are part of the problem we are having.

Similarly, Participant 16 mentioned, “There are challenges coming to precincts or precincts offices, there are challenges when it comes to uniform, logistics. They are all challenges that we face within our criminal justice system hindering the full functions of our duty.” Participant 17 talked about, “the commuting to work, staff commuting to work. We also need vehicles, as well as also inmate uniforms.” Speaking of challenges, Participant 19 noted the lack of uniforms, stating, “No uniform for both the inmates and officers.” He added,

We realize logistics, there are not a lot of logistics, especially mobility. We do not even have ambulance to take people in all of our counties to take you to hospital, no vehicle to take you to courts, hospitals, and other outside [inaudible]. So these are some of the problem we face with post-war Liberia. No transportation to go to work.

Theme 3: Overcrowding In the Prison System, Huge Case Load, And Judges Not Fast-Tracking Cases

Furthermore, as per the participants, the other challenge they face in the prosecution of sex crimes against women in the formal channels in Liberia’s criminal justice system is overcrowding, huge case load, as well as judges not fast-tracking cases. This theme was mentioned 22 times by 10 participants. Participant 1 talked about overcrowding, saying, “What I see is that, there's a challenge that's in the corrections area, yeah, because we as a correction officer, more especially one would say ... overcrowding. You send a person to prison and then the place is overcrowded.” Participant 2 also spoke about overcrowding in the prison system, stating, “Overcrowded, yeah, overcrowded. And the Monrovia Central Prison, it was built for

374 inmates, but now we have 1000, 1,500-plus in there. So we find it very difficult and very challenging.” Participant 5 talked about the lack of speedy trial, or judges not fast-tracking cases. Specifically, he mentioned that, “When it comes to the court, so many cases on the docket. So, issue of speedy trial also been part of the problem.” He added that:

So, people involved with some of the cases, the longer it takes before the cases are called, they can no longer be available. So, the issue of a speedy trial is also part of the challenges we have as we dispense our own function in the area of criminal justice system.

Participant 8 talked about the issue of overcrowding and its negative impact. He stated that:

Demayee Prison was built to hold 204 persons. For today, we have a population of over 1,500. So as a result, we often face issues when it comes to food, when it comes to water and sanitation, when it comes to accommodation, when it comes to maintenance. And all these are some of the challenges we encounter running a prison.

According to Participant 14, “the correction system cry a lot that the judiciary system is not fast tracking the cases.” He added that:

But what we have nowadays is like police facilitates cases going to court, and the more cases that go to court, the difficult challenges we have. Court must adjudicate these cases... So you're going to have huge number of cases on the court docket that are not trial on time. And as long as the cases are set on the court docket, these party litigants are committed into the correction system. And then it creates a case load of prolonged pre-trial detention.

Participant 16 also talked about judges not fast-tracking cases. He stated, “So fast tracking cases ... cannot have people being behind bar for all three, four years. So the judiciary arms to also

have to be able to do the fast tracking of cases.” He also spoke about overcrowding, saying,

Like take for example, in Montserrado, the [inaudible] precinct, that precinct was built for capacity of 300 to 400, but now you go there, get 1,200 plus precinct. So it's almost times three or times four per the capacity that should be able to hold. So, relocations is one of those things that needs to be done.

Furthermore, Participant 17 mentioned, “overcrowding in the prison system. Most of our prison facilities are overcrowded.” He also noted that, “Well, the court is doing its part, but it needs to do more. Because we have a lot of pre-trial things, languish behind bars, and needs speedier trial. So the judiciary system needs to do more.” Participant 19 noted that it takes long for offenders to be prosecuted. He reported, “The issue of prosecution, they are there for a long time. So I think that they need to be prosecuted, and when they are prosecuted it will serve as a deterrent to who be the committer of such crime.”

Research Question 2

The second research question was as follows: What are the challenges in the prosecution of sex crimes against women in the informal channels of postwar Liberia’s criminal justice system? One theme emerged from the data in response to this question: Theme 4: Investigations not being conducted properly, other parties who have influence interfering with prosecution, victims being threatened and unwilling to testify against the offender, and court system not effectively enforcing the law. The number of participants who mentioned this theme is illustrated in Table 4.

Table 4*Research Question 2 Themes*

Theme	<i>n</i> of participants contributing to this theme (N=20)	<i>n</i> of references to this theme in the data
Theme 4: Investigations not being conducted properly, other parties who have influence interfering with prosecution, victims being threatened and unwilling to testify against the offender, and court system not effectively enforcing the law	10	24

Theme 4: Investigations Not Being Conducted Properly, Other Parties Who Have Influence Interfering With Prosecution, Victims Being Threatened and Unwilling To Testify Against the Offender, and Court System Not Effectively Enforcing the Law

This theme shows that the participants believe that a major challenge in the prosecution of sex crimes against women in the informal channels of the criminal justice system in Liberia is that investigations are not done properly, other influential parties may interfere with prosecution, victims are sometimes threatened and are not willing to testify against the sex offender, and court systems do not enforce the law effectively. This was mentioned 24 times by 10 participants.

Participant 1 stated,

No DNA examination, police tampering with evidence, not using gloves in interviewing or terrorizing the victim. The victim, in which they should be offered a lawyer or to keep the right to silent. So this is just one aspect of the criminal justice system because the cases starts from the crime scene going to the police, coming to the court. So if the case get damaged at the crime scene, obviously that victim will never receive...fair justice.

Participant 4 spoke about how the court system will not effectively enforce the law. He reported that:

Let's say a suspect was apprehended, and he was handled the way police are supposed to handle him professionally and sent to court for prosecution. Out of sight, you will see, the

very suspect, coming out. Even if possible, you the police officer that were on duty, doing your work, have suspect threatening you or taking issue with you personally, or even coming to your face and telling you that you thought I'm not going to be out, or making you to feel that what you did was just a waste of your time.

He added that “They (police officers) are not protected by the judicial system,” and that their life is being threatened by the criminal “Who commit his crimes.” According to Participant 5, “Part of the problem we would normally experience is that even victims are not always willing to provide testimony against people who they accuse.” Participant 7 mentioned, “One basic challenge I have encountered as a police officer is interference of the bosses, my bosses into my business police function.” Participant 13 talked about how being influenced by senior staff in the judiciary affects the delivery of fair justice for the victim. He stated that:

As an internal editor, one of my experience or hindrance here as an internal editor is that we are in the employed of the judiciary. So at times perfect judgment are not done because we are fully employed with the judiciary. So at times independently we do not pass fair or transparent because my type management sometimes influence decisions.

Participant 14 spoke about files going missing. He reported that:

Number two, we also have a situation where, when cases have been crossed over from the magisterial level, which is no more misdemeanor crime and they have been elevated to felonious level and it is sent over to the circuit court, to have these files delivered to the circuit court, the files are missing. So it becomes a very serious challenge to the smooth operation as far as my operation is concerned.

According to Participant 18, influential people can affect the prosecution of offenders. He noted that:

I can say it's influenced. On the blunt note, one of the greatest challenge that law enforcement or the criminal justice system is faced with is influence, it's either political or somewhat of that way. Practically, somebody will have a problem and they will seek redress, legal redress.

He added that:

And at the end of the day, that person will be frustrated because whoever they took to the law ... Will not get effect ... Very well. The person will walk from there, mocking them or telling them that, "I told you. I've been places you don't go. We see things, we have connection." So influence is the greatest challenge to our criminal justice system.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study was to explore how individuals working in the formal and informal systems of criminal justice in postwar Liberia have described the barriers to the successful prosecution of sex crimes against women and how such challenges may be overcome. The researcher sought to address two research questions, which have been answered adequately. Data were analyzed through thematic analysis. Six steps of analysis were followed as described by Braun and Clarke (2006). The six steps are familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and lastly reporting. NVivo 12 software aided in the analysis process. The first research question was as follows: What are the challenges in the prosecution of sex crimes against women in the formal channels of postwar Liberia's criminal justice system? The findings revealed that according to the participants who work in Liberia's criminal justice system, the challenges they face in prosecuting sex crimes against women in the formal channels comprise a lack of adequate well-trained personnel including public defenders and low pay; a lack of resources including

money, equipment, uniforms, and vehicles for logistics and mobility; as well as overcrowding in the prison systems, huge case load, and judges not fast-tracking cases.

The second question was as follows: What are the challenges in the prosecution of sex crimes against women in the informal channels of postwar Liberia's criminal justice system? The answer to this question is that the challenges include investigations not being conducted properly, other parties who have influence interfering with prosecution, victims being threatened and unwilling to testify against the offender, and court system not effectively enforcing the law. Chapter 5 contains the research summary, implications, conclusions, and recommendations of the whole study.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study was to explore how individuals working in the formal and informal systems of criminal justice in postwar Liberia describe the barriers to the successful prosecution of sex crimes against women and how such challenges may be

overcome. The problem addressed in this research was that it is not known how the formal and informal criminal justice department workers perceive the challenges of a decentralized criminal justice system in Liberia regarding prosecuting sex crimes against women and the strategies that can be adopted to overcome these challenges. The theoretical significance of this study is that Almond and Powell's (1978) structural functionalism theory was expanded into the specific context of the criminal justice system in Liberia (i.e., prosecuting sex crimes against women). A qualitative approach was preferred in this study given that aim of qualitative studies is not to identify a universal truth but to understand the different subjective experiences of participants whose accounts help illuminate a given subject matter (Silverman, 2020). The population in this study included individuals who work in the formal and informal structures of the criminal justice system in Liberia. A total of 40 participants were included in the study, including 20 individuals who participated in the open-ended questionnaire and 20 individuals for the focus groups.

Several findings were obtained in this study. The first key finding was that the participants who work in Liberia's criminal justice system face multiple challenges in prosecuting sex crimes against women in the formal channels, including a lack of adequate well-trained personnel including public defenders; low pay; a lack of resources including money, equipment, uniforms, and vehicles for logistics and mobility; and overcrowding in the prison systems, huge case load, and judges not fast-tracking cases. The second dominant finding was related with the challenges in the criminal justice system, including investigations not being conducted properly, other parties who have influence interfering with the prosecution, victims being threatened and unwilling to testify against the offender, and the court system not effectively enforcing the law.

Interpretation of the Findings

Two research questions informed this study. The first research question was as follows: What are the challenges in the prosecution of sex crimes against women in the formal channels of postwar Liberia's criminal justice system? The second question was as follows: What are the challenges in the prosecution of sex crimes against women in the informal channels of postwar Liberia's criminal justice system? This study's findings reflected the general themes in the literature review.

The literature indicated that sex crimes committed against women remained a prevalent challenge in postwar Liberia and accountability continued to be elusive (Krawczyk & Muhula, 2018; McCormack, 2018; Quah, 2018; Sesay, 2019; Stambøl & Solhjell, 2021; Wilson, 2021). This study extended knowledge by establishing that Liberia's justice system faces many barriers to solving sex crimes against women. Specifically, it was found that sex crimes against women are unlikely to reduce in the postcivil Liberia because not enough professionals are available to handle the cases. For instance, forensics would be a vital part of getting evidence to convict criminals but that capacity is not yet available. It appears that the new reforms are addressing the wrong problem given the lack of improvement in the rates of sexual violence against women.

It is likely that not all stakeholders were included when initiating the reforms. For instance, it would have been more practical to find out about the needs the justice system has (e.g., training in forensic science and gathering evidence) before claiming to be improving the efficacy of a system that has barely changed. A report by the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights (UNOHCHR, 2016) revealed that the lack of a forensic system is one of the major barriers to dealing with rape cases in Liberia. In that regard, studies disclosed that Liberia's judicial system is notably dysfunctional, a reality that adversely undermines the effectiveness of the entire criminal justice system. Bamidele (2017) and McCormack (2018) also

expressed similar sentiments. The findings confirm that Liberia's justice system still needs more streamlining and decision-makers need to start addressing the real problems. Besides, the results affirmed the findings from the literature by revealing that there was a need to improve the understanding and explore the reorganization that is needed to enhance decentralization in Liberia and improve accountability and transparency within the criminal justice system (Krawczyk & Muhula, 2018; Lee-Jones, 2019; Quah, 2018; Wilson, 2021).

It is important to note that Liberia has been undergoing a reorganization of its criminal justice system, and, in the process, it has utilized several initiatives in the system and its practices (Boazak et al., 2020). Some of the streamlining needed was to modify minimum sentencing laws, change the drug sentencing law to strengthen the war on drugs, minimize harsh prison sentences, and decriminalize precise decrees such as drug laws (Blair, 2019; Dinnen & Watson, 2021; Heyer, 2021; McGill, 2017). Similarly, Liberia has been undergoing such reorganizations and more interventions were introduced to minimize loopholes in the justice system (Boazak et al., 2020). For instance, the crisis intervention team (CIT) framework was implemented in Liberia to help align law enforcement objectives with those of mental wellbeing of advocates and service users (Boazak et al., 2020). Bacon (2015) and Karim et al. (2018) reported that the newly implemented reforms in Liberia's justice system include more female law enforcement officers. Other crucial reforms worth mentioning are the establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in 2005, which was a vital component of the process of rebuilding and restoring Liberia in the postcivil war era (Abdulai, 2021; Cooper et al., 2021; Islam, 2021; Turner, 2020), the Palava Hut pilot project, a community-centered truth-telling program, which emerged from the TRC (Gorpudolo, 2019; Hartman et al., 2021), and integrity institutions (Lee-Jones, 2019; Myers, 2017). The highlighted new reorganizations and reforms have been

instrumental in improving Liberia's criminal justice system in all its three components, including in the police/law enforcement, judiciary/courts, and the prison system.

The efforts notwithstanding, scholars found that there is still a lack of understanding and exploration of the reorganization that is needed to facilitate decentralization in Liberia and increase accountability and transparency within the criminal justice system (Krawczyk & Muhula, 2018; Lee-Jones, 2019; Quah, 2018; Wilson, 2021). In this study for instance, the participants stated that low pay and the lack of basic resources such as uniforms and vehicles to facilitate logistics and mobility hindered their job performance. That reality is worrying given that any workforce, including employees in the justice system, require job motivation to execute their duties well. It would be impractical to expect professionals to execute their duties efficiently when the basic tools need for the task are not availed. It is probable that officers and personnel in the justice system do not feel empowered to do their mandate in addressing the sex crimes against women challenge, and as such, issues such as poor criminal investigations and judges failing to fast-track cases are inevitable.

So far, it is established that Liberia's judicial system is notably dysfunctional. That situation, as Bamidele (2017) and M'Cormack (2018) reported, adversely undermines the effectiveness of the entire criminal justice system. Corruption also featured as major challenge in the courts and police system, and it presented a significant barrier to enabling just and transparent trials in Liberia (Lee-Jones, 2019; Uesugi, 2022). The participants reported that there are other influential parties who interfere with prosecution, victims get threatened, which makes them unwilling to testify against the offender, and the court system is ineffectively upholding the law. The highlighted challenges are not only the outcomes of corruption but also blatant moves to obstruct justice. It is evident that corruption is ingrained in Liberia's judicial system and that it

would require more effort and team work to guarantee victims of sex crimes against women fair and just proceedings throughout the judicial system.

Limitations of the Study

Arguably, no researcher can consider their study to be perfect or flawless. Limitations are the factors within a study that are deemed to present a potential weakness or flaw (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). As stated in Chapter 1, access to participants in this study significantly relied on the researchers' personal contacts. Some participants might have felt obliged to participate in the study owing to the close relationship with the researcher. A reminder about the voluntary nature of the study might not have sufficed. Accordingly, that aspect might have threatened the genuineness of the input and feedback from the participants.

In retrospect, the earlier identified limitation of handling electronic data remained to be relatively slim. Apart from ensuring participants' anonymity, the researcher minimized the potential of hacking by safeguarding the information using passwords. No unauthorized persons accessed the information, which ensured that the study was not compromised.

Lastly, the close relationship between the researcher and the participants might have posed the threat of biasness. However, the researcher tried to remain objective when handling raw data by ensuring minimal interruptions and sticking to the intended questions that were used during data collection. The researcher upheld objectivity and impartiality when interacting with participants. Accordingly, the trustworthiness of this study is guaranteed and the findings can be used to inform other studies conducted in future.

Implications

Positive Social Change

The study will be instrumental in promoting justice in the country for victims of sexual violence. Apart from women, children, who are most vulnerable to threats like sex crimes, could also benefit from having a functional and less faulty judicial system. When the judicial system offers better services, the public's faith in having just and fair trials will be restored. Arguably, it would even encourage more victims to speak up because they know that they will get justice and the crime perpetrators will be punished for their crimes. Efficacy within the judicial system will also likely cause a reduction in sex crime rate, as criminals will be aware about the high probability of being convicted and imprisoned. Individuals and families will feel safer and valued as citizens whose rights matter.

Theoretical Implications

This study addressed the research gap identified through the literature review. Specifically, this current research contributed to availing the lacking information about how the formal and informal criminal justice department workers perceive the challenges of a decentralized criminal justice system in Liberia in terms of prosecuting sex crimes against women and the strategies that can be adopted to overcome these challenges. The findings in this study contribute to the existing body of knowledge by offering more insights on how workers in Liberia's justice system perceive their role in addressing the prosecution of sexual crimes against women. A grounded theory or case study will be an appropriate approach for future studies to further dissect the challenge of a flawed justice system and establish workable solutions that are backed by research.

Empirical Implications

The findings in this study will influence how workers in the justice system perform their duties and how different stakeholders make decisions. First, policy leaders will push for more resource allocation to empower workers. Second, employees will get inspired to voice their needs for motivation, which will help them perform their role better for the good of the communities they serve. Third, stakeholders will be moved to participate in reassessing the different needs that victims seeking justice require for crimes committed against them.

Recommendations

This study addressed an existing research gap, but several recommendations could inform future research. First, future studies could focus on getting the views of the target victims (i.e., victims of sex crimes against women) on the challenges they face when seeking justice from the judicial system. Getting the victims' perspectives would help decision-makers to make informed decisions and address real issues that will enhance the experiences of the victims. Besides, the reforms are likely to be more effective when the input of all stakeholders are considered when creating reforms.

Second, future researchers can conduct a quantitative study to test the prevalence of the highlighted challenges. The current study only focused on identifying the specific challenges manifested in the new reforms in Liberia's justice system. Now that the particular challenges were identified, the next step should be assessing the prevalence of the identified barriers so that streamlining efforts could be based on priority. It would be important to address challenges based on the significance and magnitude of the most pressing issues.

Third, systemic changes are necessary in the courts. Overcoming the discussed challenges in this context would require speedy handling of cases and prosecuting of offenders,

fast-tracking cases, officers observing objectivity, impartiality, and ethics when doing their job to avoid interference, and building more prisons to reduce overcrowding. There is also need to provide resources by having budgetary allocations that will facilitate enhanced abilities to trace and find suspects.

Fourth, the justice system requires to embrace the idea of recruiting more professional personnel. The goal is having well-trained professionals who are skilled enough to handle the complex dynamics of handling sensitive cases such as sex crimes against women. The current personnel can undergo refresher courses to enhance their skills and make them capable of handling the developments in the criminology discipline. The training will ensure that cases are handled better and victims get justice despite the complicated nature of the cases of interest.

Lastly, the justice system and the government at large need to boost budgetary allocations to address challenges that arise from financial constraints. For example, there is a need to provide an adequate number of uniforms, ensure personnel have good pay, and provide vehicles to support logistics and transportation. Such facilitation will enhance the performance of personnel in the three units of the criminal justice system (i.e., judiciary, prison system, law enforcement).

Conclusion

In conclusion, a country needs to have an efficient judicial system to ensure that crimes do not go unpunished. Liberia is a nation that acknowledges the need to streamline the workings of its criminal justice system, but more deliberate efforts are required to address pertinent underlying issues and challenges. The challenges are significant, and a complete overhaul of the justice systems operations driven by the need to address the identified challenges will be vital in

improving the prosecution of sex crimes against women in postcivil war Liberia. Although this task seems relatively overwhelming to stakeholders, it is possible to turn the situation around.

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Appendix A: Open-Ended Survey

Instructions: Please answer the following questions with as much details as you can.

1. What challenges within Liberia's criminal justice system within law enforcement, the judicial system, and the prison system, have you encountered?

2. What structures within the criminal justice system of Liberia is contributing to these challenges?

3. How can the reorganization of Liberia's criminal justice system be improved?

4. What structures within the Liberia's criminal justice system can be improved?

Appendix B: Focus Group Discussion Guide

1. Can you just briefly share your role in the reorganized criminal justice system of post-conflict Liberia?
2. What are your general thoughts about the criminal justice system of Liberia post-Civil War? What experiences stood out to you?
3. What challenges within Liberia's criminal justice system within law enforcement, the judicial system, and the prison system, have you encountered?
4. What structures within the criminal justice system of Liberia is contributing to these challenges? How do the people who work within these structures contribute to these challenges?
5. How can the reorganization of Liberia's criminal justice system be improved? Can you be more specific?
6. What structures within the Liberia's criminal justice system can be improved? How can the people who work in these structures contribute to these improvements?