

2-27-2024

## Church Leaders' Perception of their Role in the Deterrence of Juvenile Reincarceration

Sherine Sandrea Brown-Thomas  
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# Walden University

College of Psychology and Community Services

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Sherine Brown-Thomas

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Walden University  
2024

Abstract

Church Leaders' Perceptions of their Role in the Deterrence of Juvenile Reincarceration

by

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MA, Anna Maria College, 2013

MPhil, Walden University, 2020

BS, Northern Caribbean University, 2008

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Human Services

Walden University

March 2024

## Abstract

In 2019, U.S. law enforcement officers detained almost 700,000 juveniles under the age of 18. The U.S. Department of Justice Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention stated that 55% of juveniles were rearrested within a year, and after that, 24% of juveniles were reincarcerated within a year. The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore church leaders' perceptions of their role, experiences, and activities in contributing to reducing the risk of reincarceration of juvenile offenders, and to create a model for other community leaders. The conceptual framework for the study was Shaw and McKay's social disorganization theory. Nine church leaders participated in semistructured interviews and provided their perceptions and experiences in deterring juvenile reincarceration. Data from interviews were analyzed using thematic content analysis, resulting in six themes: (a) church leaders' focus on meaningful connections and relations with juveniles, (b) the negative impact of family conflict on reintegration, (c) the positive impact of church programming on reintegration (d) mentoring programs for juveniles in the church are the key to success, (e) challenges of juveniles returning to disorganized neighborhoods, and (f) challenges of negative peer pressure on returning juveniles. This study contributes to positive social change by influencing expanded research in this field and informing church leaders and other social service providers about the potential to impact youth through organized faith-based programs, deterring juvenile reincarceration.

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## Dedication

To my heavenly father, thank you for bestowing me the strength I need to make it through this doctoral journey. In memory of my grandmother, Ennis Jackson, I dedicate this dissertation to you. I can clearly remember the days when I felt discouraged, and you uttered a word of encouragement that gave me the courage to move on. I know you are smiling down at me and feel proud of my doctoral accomplishment. The morning, I received the news that you passed, I had an interview for my research study, and instead of rescheduling, I interviewed the participant because I knew you would have told me to carry on and do what you must do; you have been on this journey for a long time. Grandma, I remember the days you would say, you were always doing paper. Grandma, I love you dearly! Thank you from the depths of my heart for believing in me!

## Acknowledgments

I want to thank God for giving me the mental fortitude and determination to take on the task of completing this dissertation study. I wish to extend special thanks to my parents, for giving me the encouragement to pursue my goals. My grandfather, Ezekiel Jackson, who played a vital role in ensuring that I stayed the course, I was challenged never to give up no matter what. I want to thank my committee members, Dr. Veronica Carey, and Dr. Richard Rogers, for their steadfast commitment and support. To Dr. Barbara Benoliel, my chairperson: You are a patient and dedicated individual; I would not have made it this far without your guidance and continuous support. Finally, I would like to thank the participants of this study for their cooperation.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

The United States has the highest per capita rate of incarceration in the world (Gramlich, 2021). In 2019, U.S. law enforcement officers detained 696,620 juveniles under the age of 18 (U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice, and Delinquency Prevention [OJJDP], 2019). In the same year, Juveniles comprised 1 in 14 arrests for aggravated assault, 1 in 12 murders, and 1 in 5 arrests for arson and robbery (OJJDP, 2019).

According to Cavanagh and Cauffman (2017), the outcomes of juveniles in conflict with the law have negatively impacted the individuals involved as well as their families and communities in diverse ways. For example, individuals and families needed help locating the funds to pay for court fees and finding transportation to court, resulting in delays and defaults in adjudication. Jacobs et al. (2020a) reported that over half of juveniles released from the justice system have experienced reincarceration. Juveniles in conflict with the law tend to have several risk factors that affected their likelihood of engaging in criminal activity or the frequency with which they offend or reoffend (Wojciechowski, 2021). Wojciechowski (2021) stated that risk factors that can lead to juveniles conflicting with the law included substance abuse and peers involved in deviant behaviors. Similarly, Caso et al. (2021) found that individual risk factors that lead to a juvenile offending include biological, cognitive, and emotional aspects, while systemic risk factors, including family, peers, schools, and neighborhoods, can influence criminal activities as well as social risk factors from economic inequality, racism, media depictions of violence, and substance abuse. Furthermore, Roth and Pierce (2019)

indicated that juvenile offenders tend to be more impulsive and are greater risk takers than other juveniles, which may account for their conflicts with the law.

In this chapter, I present the background, problem statement, purpose of the study, and research question that guided the study. The conceptual framework and nature of the study are described, and definitions of important terms and assumptions are provided. I also discuss the scope and delimitations, limitations of the study, and the study's significance as well as introduce the methodology used, which is further detailed in Chapter 3.

### **Background**

The U.S. Department of Justice (2019), also known as the National Institute of Justice, defined recidivism as criminal behavior resulting in arrest, reconviction, and return to prison for the same or a different offense. The community can play a role in successful juvenile reentry postincarceration by providing socially positive activities for youth. Youth who participated in recreation, sports, and arts programs in disadvantaged, high-crime neighborhoods are diverted off the streets, their unsupervised free time is reduced, and they are occupied with constructive developmental activities (Berdychevsky et al., 2022).

Recidivism is a prevalent issue within the United States, and Konkel (2019) suggested that faith-based organizations can play an essential role in community integration through various programs and activities. Furthermore, Konkel found that the faith-based community-focused functions may extend their programs and activities to community members. As an entity made up of leadership and members, the church can



help provide support and mentoring that will help ex-offenders add meaning and structure to their lives (Stacer et al., 2018). Former juvenile offenders can be provided with life skills to help equip them with the necessary tools to function successfully in their community upon reentry.

The current study fills a gap in understanding what churches and church leaders do to add structure to juvenile offenders' lives. This study can inform church leaders and leaders of other religious institutions regarding strategies that were used to contribute to reducing juvenile reincarceration. The findings from this study provided insight into how church leaders can implement programs and activities that help to deter juveniles from getting into conflict with the law.

### **Problem Statement**

Juvenile criminal reincarceration is a repeat of the initial criminal behavior or a new offense (Ozkan, 2016). Mowen and Fisher (2019) stated that 55% of youth faced reincarceration within a year after discharge. Some factors that may lead to reincarceration are conflict with peers, family members, and the community (Mowen & Fisher, 2019). The long-term challenge of returning to the community can be addressed with positive support from local community organizations and help finding the juvenile employment after release (Visher et al., 2017). However, there is a lack of organized and structured community support for youth. Churches or other religious congregations are local community organizations that might provide support for juvenile reintegration (Mowen et al., 2018). Hence, more information is needed to understand how community

church leaders respond to the issues that returning juveniles encounter in their transition back into their communities after incarceration.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore a select group of church leaders' perceptions of their role, experiences, and activities and to create a model for other community leaders in contributing to reducing the risk of reincarceration of juvenile offenders.

### **Research Question**

The research question that guided this study was: What are church leaders' perceptions, experiences, and activities where churches contribute to reducing risk of youth reincarceration?

### **Conceptual Framework**

I used Shaw and McKay's (1942) social disorganization theory as a lens to guide this study. In social disorganization theory, the emphasis was shifted away from the pathology of individuals to the pathology of places. Shaw and McKay indicated that, as opposed to happening randomly throughout cities, juvenile delinquency was concentrated in impoverished neighborhoods close to or adjacent to areas of industry or commerce (Wickes et al., 2017). Additional details of the theory will be discussed in Chapter 2. Using the social disorganization theory as a guiding lens for this study helped to answer the research question. The theory also guides the interview process by helping me formulate questions concerning the effectiveness of youth programs offered by churches for juveniles who have been in conflict with the law.

### **Nature of the Study**

I used a multiple case study design to address the research question in this qualitative study. Qualitative research is used to analyze information through words and experiences (Levitt et al., 2018). The qualitative research approach includes different methods (i.e., interviews, observations, and personal experiences) to define the meanings of individuals' lives (Johnson et al., 2020).

I employed a qualitative multiple case study approach to describe the perceptions of church leaders about their programs and planned activities for former juvenile offenders (see Yin, 2018). A case study design allows for an in-depth analysis of the experiences of individuals or organizations using various approaches (Schoch et al., 2020). Conducting a qualitative multiple case study allowed me to explore the participants' perceptions, thoughts, and actions regarding how juvenile offenders' connection with the church can deter juvenile reincarceration.

The study procedures included in-depth, semistructured interviews with church leaders, along with the analysis of artifacts or additional connections with other church members in the same environment to create a bounded case. Qualitative interviews are focused on gathering information for the study (Cypress, 2018). I designed the interview questions to be open ended with additional probes used as necessary to obtain adequate participant responses about the study topic.

## Definitions

*Authoritative behaviors:* Forceful or controlled behavior, which describes actions taken by a police officer in an effort to maintain control over a circumstance or specific people (Skaggs et al., 2017, p. 3).

*Church:* A building for the public that is used for Christian worship. A body or organization of religious believers, as the whole body of Christians (Merriam-Webster's Dictionary and Thesaurus, 2023).

*Church leaders:* Individuals recognized by Christian institutions as having authority within those organizations, such as pastors, youth leaders, family life leaders, community services ministry leaders, and prison ministry (Addai-Duah, 2020; Spina, 2016).

*Community resilience:* A community's ability to utilize its current resources to adapt to an adversity or sudden disturbance (Rapaport et al., 2018).

*Disadvantaged neighborhoods:* Communities typically characterized by high poverty levels, physical dilapidation, a disproportionate number of female-headed households, high unemployment, and high crime rates (Christie-Mizell, 2022).

*Disorganized neighborhoods:* Communities characterized as less prepared to control deviant behavior due to the inability to exercise social control over the community members (Antunes & Manasse, 2021).

*Ex-offender:* Individuals with criminal histories; however, some ex-offenders are categorized differently based on specific aspects of their crime or health (Yelderman, 2018).

*Juvenile*: An individual legally able to commit a criminal offense due to being over the legal minimum age of criminal responsibility (Young et al., 2017).

*Juvenile delinquency*: An adolescent who has committed a crime, though the exact meaning can differ depending on the local jurisdiction (Young et al., 2017).

*Juvenile in conflict with the law*: Individuals below the age of 18 who have encounters with the justice system (Ashwill, 2019).

*Juvenile reincarceration*: When juveniles previously incarcerated are placed in prisons for committing new crimes (Welch et al., 2019).

*Mentor*: A person who gives advice to another in a one-to-one, nonjudgmental relationship. An individual (i.e., mentor) who gives time to support and encourage another (i.e., mentee; Wong et al., 2021).

*Mentoring*: A voluntary, mutually rewarding, and purposeful relationship where one person devotes time to helping another person make changes in their life. (Dominey et al., 2017).

*Recidivism*: A conviction for one or more new crimes at any time following the sentencing date associated with the charge(s) that led to the referral of the youth for assessment (Vitopoulos, 2019) as well as a relapse in behavior and a return to criminal offending (Sawyer et al., 2019).

*Reentry*: Issues related to the transition of offenders from prison to community supervision (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2017).

### **Assumptions**

In this study, I presumed the participants gave truthful responses and shared their perceptions of how they participated in deterring juvenile reincarceration. Another assumption was that the participants, including church pastors, prison ministers, youth leaders, and family life directors, were a suitable purposeful sample of church leaders (see Campbell et al.,2020).

### **Scope and Delimitations**

The scope of the study was to select a purposeful sample of cases and focus on church leaders' perceptions, experiences, and activities with former juvenile offenders. I recruited only church leaders from churches that were currently engaged in programs for youth or youth who have been in conflict with the law. I asked the church leaders to share the programs and activities their church currently had in place or implemented to help deter former juvenile offenders from getting in conflict with the law and discuss the church leaders' mentoring of juveniles or former juvenile offenders. The study only included church leaders from various Christian denominations, such as Baptist, Seventh Day Adventist, Pentecostal, and other faith-based ministries providing programs for youth in conflict in the northeastern region of the United States. This study did not include other non-church-related youth programs or programs connected to other religious denominations.

### **Limitations**

A potential barrier to conducting this study was the access to participants due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, which affected the data collection process. I mitigated

this barrier by conducting virtual interviews to maintain the safety protocols in place at the time. Access to church leaders willing to participate in the research may have also been a barrier. Another potential barrier was participants' access to technology and those who could not use conferencing portals like Zoom.

Bias also factored into the study. Yin (2018) indicated that bias could be limited by asking direct questions and choosing participants equally to avoid excluding any group. Developing an awareness of my own biases helped to eliminate bias during the research process.

### **Significance**

This study is significant in that it fills the gap in understanding and modeling what churches can do to add structure to juvenile offenders' lives. The data collected from the church leaders in this study can inform other religious institution leaders of strategies that are used to contribute to reducing the reincarceration of juveniles. The findings of this study can also help church leaders understand how programs and activities add structure to the lives of former juvenile offenders. Additionally, this study could influence leaders of various denominations to foster conversations with each other about the role they can play to help former juvenile offenders engage in activities that can lead to positive outcomes and add structure and meaning to their lives. The results of this study can be used to inform social workers and probation officers about programs and resources to provide or recommend for juvenile offenders. This study can be used to enhance the services and programs offered to young adults involved in the justice system and aid in the development of policies that foster positive social change among this population.

## **Summary**

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore church leaders' perceptions of their role in deterring juvenile reincarceration. In Chapter 1, I described the background, problem under study, purpose of the study, research questions, nature of the study, definitions, scope, assumptions, limitations, and significance of the study. In Chapter 2, I will review the relevant literature on the role of the church in deterring juvenile reincarceration and discuss the social disorganization theory, neighborhood disorganization, disorganization, policing and juvenile offenders, reintegration, mentoring, and the role of the church and program for former juvenile offenders.



## Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this qualitative case study, I explored church leaders' perceptions and their role in deterring juvenile reincarceration. The findings add to the existing literature as well as help leaders offer better resources and determine what programs and activities, they can implement to help former juvenile offenders add structure and meaning to their lives. The OJJDP (2019) reported that 1 in 12 arrests for murders, 1 in 14 arrests for aggravated assaults involved juveniles, and 1 in 5 robberies and arson involved were committed by juveniles. The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore church leaders' perceptions of their role in contributing to social organizations for former juvenile offenders transitioning back to the community from incarceration. This study was an opportunity to address the existing gap around the need for church leaders to offer support and provide information about how to help reduce juvenile reincarceration risks. In this chapter, I discuss the conceptual framework and detail the origin of the social disorganization theory. That is followed by a review of the literature on faith-based organizations, their leadership, and their roles in the community to help deter juvenile reincarceration.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

I searched various databases to explore the extant literature on juvenile reincarceration and the role of church leaders in implementing activities that may deter juvenile reincarceration. Articles were retrieved from the following databases and search engines: ProQuest Central and Criminal Justice, Human Service database, Google Scholar, Academic Search Premier, and SAGE Premier. I also searched the website for

the *Journal of Juvenile Justice*. The following keyword search terms were used: *reoffending, juvenile recidivism, juvenile delinquency and recidivism, neighborhood and recidivism, social skills, life skills and reoffending, aggression, mentors, juveniles, church leaders, and recidivism.*

## **Conceptual Framework**

### **The Background of Social Disorganization Theory**

Shaw and McKay (1942) developed social disorganization theory, positing that communities and neighborhoods are forms of organized entities and that neighborhood structures can influence the neighborhood's organization or disorganization. Social disorganization theory focused on neighborhood structures and crime. In their research in the city of Chicago, Shaw and McKay found that certain neighborhood characteristics were associated with a higher risk of delinquency and that the social structures of the community as a whole contributed to a level of social disorganization that propagated crime. Chicago at that time was beset by poor communities that were always in flux, with residents unable to form the necessary bonds to combat crime. Shaw and McKay postulated that neighborhoods with lower socioeconomic status and higher unemployment rates gave rise to criminal behavior. According to social disorganization theory, informal control can be achieved by improving residents' capacities and controlling neighborhood behavior (Antunes & Manasse, 2022; Shaw & McKay, 1942). Shaw and McKay also uncovered that crime is more prevalent in areas with large populations of low-income, working-class people who cannot move due to economic hardship. Residential instability weakens the social connections and support networks

needed to maintain informal social controls, which in turn contributes to neighborhood social disorganization (Kubrin & Wo, 2015; Opoku-Ware et al., 2022). Moreover, neighborhood stability is included as a key concept in social disorganization theory because community solidarity promotes social organization and helps deter crime (Jones et al., 2019).

### **Current Researchers' Use of Social Disorganization Theory**

Communities characterized as being resilient can function in adverse situations. Rapaport et al. (2018) stated that there are three fundamental components of community resilience that are frequently mentioned in the various definitions of the term: the community's resources, capacity for adaptation, and ability to withstand disturbance. Rapaport et al. reported that resources are built into the community and are continuously created, replicated, and increased through interactions between organizations and community members. These resources are structured and gathered via collective activity to become the community capacity that allows for their sustainability and growth. This finding is supported by Shaw and McKay's (1942) social disorganization theory that defined *social disorganization* as the lack of local communities' ability to find shared values among members to address issues and reduce crime in the area.

A significant focus of Shaw and McKay's (1942) social disorganization theory was on factors contributing to the participation of young males displaying delinquent behaviors in Chicago. Additionally, in the social disorganization theory, they proposed that neighborhood disorganization is caused by unfavorable circumstances, such as poverty and residential instability.

I used the concepts of the social disorganization theory as a guide to explore church leaders' role in enhancing social organization for juveniles in their community. In the remainder of the literature review, I explore several social influences that may contribute to juvenile behavior to better understand the environment of the cases included in the current study.

### **Literature Review Related to Key Concepts**

#### **Peers Influences on Juvenile Behavior**

Peer influence is a way to maintain and enhance similarities among friends and associates (Laursen, 2017). The influence of peers can be both positive and negative on the behavior of youth (Laursen & Veenstra, 2021; Walters, 2020). Many previous studies have focused on positive peer influence (Andrews et al., 2021, Huijsman et al., 2021; Pfeifer et al., 2021). Youth who had a poor level of peer acceptance in their neighborhoods were more prone to being influenced (DeLay et al., 2022). Furthermore, it was noted that peer affiliates are more likely to give in to demands from peers who have more friendship options if there are less alternatives accessible to them. Hence, it is crucial to focus on the ways in which peers affect other youth behaviors and provide them with support to deter them from engaging in juvenile delinquent behaviors (Powell et al., 2021).

#### **Negative Peer Influence**

Negative peer influence can push individuals to indulge in delinquent acts that they would not have committed without the influence of their peers (Kennedy, 2019; Mowen & Boman, 2019; Wojciechowski et al., 2018). Juveniles are likely to negatively

influence their peers if they lack strong, correctly guided views (Levy et al., 2019). Furthermore, people who devote much of their time and efforts to delinquent activities are likely to form relationships with others sharing similar interests (Powell et al:2021). Adolescents spend much time with associates instead of family members in their quest for independence; subsequently, adolescents' resort to delinquency if parents do not exercise the requisite level of guidance to acknowledge the adolescents' need for autonomy (Huijsmans et al., 2021).

Furthermore, Huijsmans et al. (2021) indicated that mid phase adolescence is normally the time when more time and effort are allocated to friends than family. At the same time, the late phase of adolescence can be marked by having fewer friends and a move toward their partners. Peers value one another due to similarity, resulting in interpersonal affinities and intragroup harmony (Laursen et al., 2021). Peer rejection occurs when an individual is excluded by their peer group (Beeson et al., 2020). Peer rejection during the adolescent stage can pose a threat to the emotional and developmental well-being of peers. Juveniles who exhibit elevated sensitivity to the negative impacts of social rejection are willing to take legal and health risks when around their peers (Andrews et al., 2021). On the other hand, Pfeifer et al. (2021) found that close friendships can provide social support and provide their peers with a feeling of self-acceptance and reduce the effects of peer rejection.

### **Positive Peer Influence**

On the other hand, peers can positively influence behavior by providing social support. Walters (2018) indicated that positive peer interactions are substantial factors

that may deter juvenile offending and reincarceration. Moreover, Walters (2019b) found that children could be taught how to cope with peer pressure by teaching them the necessary skills to interact with positive peers and engage in positive activities as well as by showing parents how to supervise the children's behaviors. The church can help to deter juveniles from engaging in delinquent activities by implementing structured activities (Walters, 2018).

Peer groups can improve the attributes of their peers by engaging in prosocial activities; therefore, the increased positive behaviors among peers can lower antisocial behaviors and decrease reincarceration (Intravia et al;2017). Caso et al.'s (2021) findings indicated that juvenile behavior could positively and negatively influence peers and families.

### **Family Influences on Juvenile Behaviors**

Family can play a role in influencing juvenile offenses and incarceration (Hoffmann et al., 2018). Family structure may determine recidivism and other antisocial behaviors, and individuals released into families plagued by violence are highly likely to recidivate (Stansfield et al., 2020). Stansfield et al. (2020) also noted that while it might not be the case for those who were incarcerated for other offenses, youth from violent family structures are at risk of exhibiting violence in the family even after their release.

Juveniles who experienced insufficient parental supervision, inconsistent discipline, lack of parental connections, and a high level of interparental conflict were more prone to engage in delinquent acts (Kurtz & Zavala, 2017; Stewart & Rapp, 2017). The structure of a family can affect delinquent involvement in different ways depending

on factors, such as the child's age, the criminality of the biological parents and stepparents, and the nature of the sibling relationship (Boccio et al., 2019). Boccio et al. (2019) indicated that there was a connection between family structure and juvenile criminality, implying that parental divorce influences juvenile justice practices.

Furthermore, parental divorce was linked to several detrimental outcomes, such as mental health issues, behavioral issues, poor academic performance, and an increase in juvenile crime (Boccio et al., 2019). Juveniles who display antisocial behaviors tend to reveal little information to their parents and are more likely to engage in unstructured activities that are hard to supervise by their parents or other adults (Daspe et al., 2019). Hence, meaningful parental supervision is helpful for the juvenile to communicate with their parents, which may help to dissuade the risk of juvenile reincarceration (Flanagan et al., 2019).

### **Family Conflict**

Juveniles who reintegrate into society after incarceration face difficulties, including strained family ties, a lack of social connections, limited employment opportunities due to a lack of qualifications and stigma, and psychological stress while incarcerated (Craw et al., 2020). Both the youth who have been incarcerated and their family members may experience stress when the youth are reintegrating into the household (Liu et al., 2019). Family members may find adjusting to life after the reunion difficult because reentering youth face difficulties (Liu et al., 2021). As a result, conflict will arise as youth who have been incarcerated and their families adjust to these shifts in their lives (Mowen et al., 2019).

Family conflict has been known to have negative effects beyond delinquency, including depression, violence, and antisocial behavior (Mowen & Bowman, 2018; Mowen & Fisher, 2021). Depression is a widespread condition identified as the primary contributor to impairment in young people aged 10 to 24 years old worldwide, and family dynamics have contributed to the early onset of depression (Alaie et al., 2020). Families can exert pressure on juveniles causing them to experience stress, which may enhance their propensity to use violence, which could result from tense interpersonal interactions, financial difficulties, or even the criminal activity of other family members (Mowen et al., 2021).

### **Positive Family Relationships**

On the other hand, positive parenting can act as a protective barrier to future delinquency (Walters, 2020). Strong family arrangements can help make appropriate peer support, resources, and education available to increase parents' skills and connections and strengthen the family's voice (Dunkley et al., 2020). Thus, positive parenting factors foster respect, equality, and accountability in the young offender's life and ultimately result in positive outcomes. Dunkley et al. (2020) further indicated that parental acceptance and involvement were pivotal in the diversion from crime by juvenile offenders. When youths are supported, respected, and included in decision making, the family's voice is strengthened, especially when supported by the requisite resources and knowledge (Dunkley et al., 2020). Positive home backgrounds may contribute to a lower recidivism rate (Sinclair et al., 2021). Dunkley et al. also found that to establish positive relationships, adults and adolescents must develop effective communication skills that



make it easier to maintain stronger bonds, handle conflicts, and gain self-sufficiency. Children will be better able to interact in pro-social connections and will be less likely to develop antisocial behaviors if parents can develop strong, loving bonds with them and spend time talking with them (Hoffmann & Dufur, 2018).

Lei et al. (2020) utilized the social disorganization theory as a model to determine whether families can play a role in moderating neighborhood disadvantage and further help to reduce juvenile delinquency. The researchers discovered that effective parental communication skills could reduce youth's exposure to parental conflict and buffer the effects of neighborhood disadvantage on youth's delinquent behaviors. Their results also indicated that although living in a disadvantaged neighborhood may negatively impact youth's well-being, this buffering mechanism shows that the family, as a meso-level setting, provided a significant source of control and support, preventing youth from developing delinquent conduct. Juveniles who have strong familial ties and a sense of belonging may be able to manage the difficult challenges that come with adolescence and the transition to adulthood (King & Boyd, 2018). Strong family ties can also help the youth to gain positive outcomes while residing in a disorganized social environment outside of the family (Lei et al., 2020).

### **Disorganized Neighborhoods**

Disorganized neighborhoods may influence juvenile delinquency. Antunes and Manasse (2021) found that disorganized communities are characterized as less prepared to control deviant behavior due to the inability to exercise social control over the community members. Antunes and Manasse found that exposure to criminal activities is

another problem experienced by members of disorganized neighborhoods, this exposure can also lead to psychological stress which can give rise to criminal behaviors. In similarity, Lee et al. (2017) also found that disorganized neighborhoods suffer disproportionately from a lack of resources and from reduced community connections that hinder unity, trust, and informal social control. In similarity Kubrin et al. (2021) found that consistently disorganized neighborhoods can fuel negative behaviors by creating an environment in which juveniles may engage in delinquent activities due to the lack of resources and the structure present in their environment. Kubrin et al. indicated that higher levels of poverty, instability, and heterogeneity lead to increased crime levels in communities.

Delinquency can disorganize neighbors. Jagers and Church (2016) found that disorganized neighborhoods gave rise to delinquent activities and incidences of family separation and lack of monitoring of criminal activities are common in these areas. Additionally, D'Amato et al. (2021) found that juveniles involved in the justice system who returns to socially disorganized communities may have difficulty gaining access to prosocial opportunities, such as finding a job, housing, rehabilitative programs, and social contacts, rehabilitative programs and making them less likely to make behavioral changes that prevent them from engaging in activities that lead to reincarceration. On the other hand, Anderson (2018) argued that one factor that may limit juveniles' access to activities in a disorganized neighborhood such as parental supervision; parents may do this to protect them from further negative circumstances. Thus, according to Drawve et al. (2021) stated that eliminating one or more essential organizational necessities from the

space of ex-offenders, such as food and housing emergency assistance, employment, and education has demonstrated to induce an intensification in recidivism.

Due to the lack of social control in neighborhoods, the disorganization is less controlled. Antunes and Manasse (2021) posited that disorganized neighborhoods are less prepared to control deviant behavior because they are less able to exercise social control over residents. Furthermore, Jacobs et al. (2020), in his study on environmental factors, concluded that disorganized neighborhoods resulting from an intersection of poor economic conditions with high turnover in residents' demographic and family composition undergo high rates of juvenile delinquencies. While Chamberlain and Wallace (2016) found that juveniles who returned to disorganized neighborhoods tend to have a greater chance of being reincarcerated. Disorganized neighborhoods tend to lead to more individuals being incarcerated (Merrin et al., 2020). Juveniles from neighborhoods with high poverty rates had exhibited higher levels of problematic behaviors (Nieuwenhuis et al., 2017). In addition, neighborhoods with limited resources, less structured activities and exposure to gang activities are factors that influence juveniles to become gang members—(Higginson et al., 2018).

Consequently, recidivism is attributable to neighborhood features such as concentrated disadvantages, instability in the housing subtleties, and racial differences. Ex-offenders are more inclined to migrate to impoverish communities that heighten the likelihood of recidivism and a decreased chance of employment, these factors do not influence the probability of success (Lee & Morenoff, 2017). Furthermore, ex-offender communities were locked into a post-prison mentality and there were not any available or

sufficient levels of socio-economic amenities, most importantly jobs that can be attractive to ex-offenders and could be served to dissuade ex-offenders from deprived communities and their ills.

Communities with a high ex-offender population may see more ex-offenders' return (Rade et al., 2018). Ex-offenders returning to disorganized communities with an already high influx of ex-offenders may encounter more challenges due to inadequate resources while ex-offenders who return to more organized communities may encounter less challenges (Chamber et al., 2016). Hence, individuals living in communities with organized inequalities focused on destroying the components required to foster social growth and development normally succumb to criminal networks (Tillyer et al., 2021).

### **Disorganization, Policing, and Juvenile Offending**

Juvenile offenders' first point of contact with the justice system is often with the police. (OJJDP, 2018). Juveniles' personal or peers' experience(s) with the police can influence how they subsequently obey the law (Ferdik & Evans, 2019). Juveniles' negative encounters with law enforcement may influence their level of response (Walsh et al., 2019). Walsh et al. (2019) interviewed adolescents involved in the justice system. The study results indicated that juveniles' positive experiences with the police were associated with a lower rate of delinquency.

Also, Zapolski et al. (2018) indicated that juveniles' propensity to participate in criminal behavior may be explained by their diminished moral regard for law enforcement as a result of bad police behavior. However, Chenane et al. (2021) highlighted that there are many neighborhood characteristics that can contribute to crime

and delinquency and that support police intervention, i.e., arresting criminals and stopping them from committing more crimes. Chenane et al., the tense interactions between the public and the police in disorganized neighborhoods have attracted a lot of unfavorable police attention, which elevates legal disparagement to the level of police displeasure. Thus, Geller and Fagan (2019) found that such type of police behaviors does serve to veer off crime, however in less fortunate communities which many times are over-policed, this type of policing proves to be futile for community members.

There may be tense relationships between citizens and the police in disorganized communities and a heavy negative police presence that results in an elevated level of their need to obey police (Doane & Cumberland, 2018; Weisburd et al., 2021). Police officers tend to use more forceful actions in socially disorganized neighborhoods and less privileged neighborhoods than in socially organized and more privileged neighborhoods (Skaggs et al., 2017). Similarly, Kochel et al. (2020) indicated that police tend to make more arrests in less privileged neighborhoods and may utilize more force. These communities, however, recognized that they experience significantly more negative police behaviors, namely, searches, stops, and arrest, which is consistent with Wong et al. (2017), who implied that police officers are more likely to conduct arrests in poor and ethnically mixed neighborhoods. Martin et al. (2021) found that police encounters in neighborhoods with high concentrations of poverty and immigration are more likely to result in arrests. Similarly, Lautenschlager and Omori (2018) indicated that the indicators of social disorganization can serve to determine instances of police overused of force, for

example during citizen stops, and rationally it can be concluded that social disorganization serve as a significant predictor of police excessive use of force.

Some control of juveniles may lead to lower police tolerance for juveniles. Brunson et al. (2021) noted that the conditions that lead to lower police tolerance for juvenile, include some of which are in the control of the juvenile, and some are not. For example, conditions that can be controlled such as the use of ill-mannered gestures and erratic behaviors and conditions that cannot be controlled, such as age, ethnicity, or community of origin. Furthermore, Brunson et al. indicated that situations often result in detention, and juveniles who have previously been involved in the justice system are more likely to engage in delinquent behaviors. Like Brunson et al., Chenane et al. (2021) echoed that there were cases where youths were stopped but were not apprehended, and those who were apprehended had more complex issues. Hence, disorganization with juveniles can be influenced by their encounter with the police (Aalsma & Tu, 2018)

There may be a negative correlation between crime and police. Reisig et al. (2021) found a negative link between crime and policing. Further indicating that it was clear that poorer neighborhoods had higher levels of crime, disorder, and victimization than more affluent communities and were burdened by forceful enforcement at the locations where criminal activity was the highest. Insolence remarks to police are typically met with more severe replies from the officers, such as their arrest and other unfavorable consequences (Brunson & Pergram, 2018). This confirms the “theory of deference exchange in police-civilian encounters” by Sykes and Clark (1975), who stated that officers tend to be use more force to citizens when they do not display proper

conduct. Furthermore, Zapolski et al. (2018) found that there was a strong link between negative policing and the loss of regard for law enforcement amid adolescents, this is coupled with hostility on both sides, and linked to an increase in illegal activities.

Moreover, Walters (2019) indicated that some policies and programs could help shape juveniles' attitudes towards the police, and a proper perspective may help deter juveniles' likelihood of engaging in delinquent acts. Walters (2018) further indicated that community activities and other crime prevention activities are considered better strategies to helping youthful offenders.

### **Environmental Factors That Lead to Positive Outcomes**

Structured community involvement equips juveniles with opportunities and rewards that may help to reduce chances for offending or reincarceration (Walters et al., 2019). Liu (2020) found that crime rates are lower in communities with strong community bonds and residents who feel their neighbors are willing to take action to prevent problems.

Additionally, Liu et al. indicated that ex-offenders returning to organized communities are often inclined to engage in more community activities and are more likely to build relationships with the members of the community, which consequently provide the necessary support to deter them from participating in delinquent activities. Similarly, Wilkinson and D'Angelo (2019) found that juveniles who have a sense of mutual trust and a high level of neighborhood connection normally reflect positive values and attitudes, and subsequently lead to more productive individuals. These juveniles are less likely to participate or display aggressive behaviors during adolescence (Chenane et

al., 2021). On the other hand, Chenane et al. (2021) also suggested that neighborhoods lacking social organization lack the resources to influence communication, cooperation, and the development of social ties among neighbors. Chenane et al. indicated that these neighborhoods lacked substantial institutional funds and assets that could lower crime or criminal conduct rates. Anderson et al. (2018) posited that various neighborhood factors, such as neighborhood socioeconomic and educational levels can either increase or decrease the likelihood of youth participation in organized activities. Also, Anderson et al. indicated that organized communities could provide a safe refuge for youth, and that a structured neighborhood offers more progressive engagements for juveniles to devote their time as against less structured neighborhoods which otherwise possess numerous unstructured activities in those neighborhoods. Furthermore, it was clear that organized activities in low-income neighborhoods prevented exposure to neighborhood crimes.

### **Bio-Psychosocial Conditions of Juvenile Offenders**

Mental health can influence juvenile offenders negatively and positively (Kim et al., 2019; Ungar et al., 2020). Wojciechowski (2021) found that mental disorders have been shown to be an ongoing problem for many juveniles in the justice system.

Wojciechowski indicated that when ADHD continues into adulthood, a situation described as impulsive, it is normally implicated as a major contributor to a higher tendency for violent crime. Roth and Pierce (2019) findings show that Juvenile offending many times were influenced by mental illness or the lack of proper mental healthcare.

They further reported that an estimated one in five juvenile offenders suffers from severe



mental health problems. Additionally, Kendall et al. (2018) implied that substance abuse and mental illnesses have been identified as major contributors to crime and reentry.

While Yelderian et al. (2018) found that ex-offenders experiencing mental or physical illness stand to gain more from this type of interaction by helping to reshape or to restore their conditions thus decreasing recidivism. Yelderian et al. interviewed 466 western university students. This study involves 61.3 females with an age range of 21.9. The participants were a diverse group: White American, Asian American, African American, and Native American. The group represents various religious beliefs (Muslim, Mormon, Atheist, Buddhist, Christianity, Hindu, and Catholic). The results of the study indicated that religious beliefs and legal attitudes influence people's readiness to contact people with criminal or mental health backgrounds. In addition, Yelderian et al. stated that the studies' findings supported the claim that church-based reintegration programs assisted ex-offenders, particularly parolees. Yelderian et al. concluded that based on the findings replicated across different demographic groups favorable attitudes successfully raised support and strengthen reintegration efforts, and that religious-based reentry programs may have more lasting effects than other programs.

Young et al. (2017) found that adolescents who have had prior involvement with the justice system have shown greater incidence of mental health issues as against adolescence who have not, for example, in the United States almost 75% of male juvenile offenders are diagnosed with at least one psychiatric disorder. There are factors that may influence ADHD. Román-Ithier et al. (2017) noted that there were other factors that influence delinquency such as Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), this had

been demonstrated as a strong predictor of delinquency in adolescence and beyond. ADHD may persist in adulthood and consist of factors such as impulsivity. Hence, Portillo et al. (2017) indicated that offenders with mental illness may likely to reenter the justice system due to having disproportionate socioeconomic needs and wants, which is fueled by their mental status and limited financial assistance and personal support and the lack of other necessities in those underserved communities.

### **Juvenile Offenders and Detention**

Reentry into their community may be beneficial for juveniles to avoid a relapse into incarceration (Kjellstrand et al., 2021). Juveniles who participated in exceptional educational programs while in detention and those who achieved better levels of academic success may be more likely to enroll in school again and be less likely to reincarcerate. (Strassfield et al., 2021). While Duwe et al. (2017) indicated that prison education programs can help reduce recidivism, it provides offenders with the background and knowledge that can help return to their communities.

### **Juvenile Post Detention Release and Reintegration**

The reintegration of former offenders into their communities can pose a challenge (Buck et al., 2020). Gill and Wilson (2017) found that the adjustment process involves restoring social bonds with familial and community institutions, dealing with the risk factors such as peer pressures, confronting health, and educational limitations, and confronting with legal and practical challenges, as well as the ramifications of a criminal conviction. Cannonier et al. (2021) indicated that the smooth transition of ex-offenders into society is often hampered by the lack of support system or adequate living

arrangements upon their reentry; these serve as obstacles to meaningful reintegration into the community. Ex-offenders' reintegration into family can be difficult. Liu et al. (2021) found that family members may also find it difficult to adjust to life after the reentering inmates face difficulties. As a result of the challenges experience. Liu et al. further concluded that tension and conflict may arise as family members adjusted to the changes in life and freed inmates.

Furthermore, Buck et al. (2020) found that this perspective increases when former offenders return to society with insufficient resources, limited ability to generate income, few supports, a general lack of work and life skills, experiences, and knowledge of the current societal expectations. Moreover, Gill and Wilson (2017) indicated that former offenders returning to their community have needs such food, shelter, clothing, financial assistance, and transportation within the first few days following their release.

Former offenders face stereotypes upon being released from prison. Peled-Laskov et al. (2019) found that ex-offenders who have been released from jail are frequently stereotyped as having little drive and poor organizational abilities. Formon et al. (2018) indicated that it was also discovered that having a criminal record impacted future pay and job security, as well as Cherney and Fitzgerald (2016) concluded that a former prisoner's ability to find and keep a job in the community over time is strongly influenced by social support and job search assistance. Additionally, Ramakers et al. (2016) found that ex-offenders' capacity to deal with stigma, have a great support system, secure jobs before incarceration, and link with employers prior to release have all been identified as factors that produce positive outcomes of ex-offenders getting and retaining employment.

Furthermore, ex-offenders encountered various challenges throughout their reintegration, but negative public perceptions, stigma, and discrimination are among the most widespread, and the public routinely expressed negative feelings about ex-offenders.

Also, Rade et al. (2018) indicated the result showed that beliefs, stigma, and discriminatory behaviors, and other areas were crucial to effective community reintegration. In addition, Daquin et al. (2016) stated that offenders who have been diagnosed with a mental disorder have a hard time transitioning to life outside of prison, therefore, ex-offenders with mental illnesses may be less able to cope with the consequences of observing victimization. Furthermore, screening for mental health should be conducted to connect ex-offenders to help match them to suitable resources such as community-based therapy. While Tyler and Brockmann (2017) found that formerly incarcerated individuals experienced stigmas associated with health conditions that coexist with stigmas associated with having a criminal history, as well as stigmas associated with high rates of poverty and unemployment, unstable housing, and homelessness all leads to difficulties with reentry. Yelderman et al. (2018) stated that to boost reentry efforts, improve mental and physical health, and reduce recidivism, was necessary to engage those who are more welcoming to ex-offenders and people with mental illnesses and who are ready to reintegrate them.

Tyler and Brockmann (2017) indicated that among the other factors that posed a challenge for ex-offenders to reintegrate is substance abuse. Thus, health challenges, educational deficiencies, familial separation, a lack of peer support, and housing issues (caused by a lack of financial means and credit) have been demonstrated to impede

successful reintegration. Connolly et al. (2017) indicated that ex-offenders also faced difficulties such as violence, discrimination, sexual assault, and hyper-policing when seeking to reintegrate following incarceration.

It may be possible to focus on the root causes of recidivism through community-based programs. Daquin et al. (2016) indicated that a community-based reentry program's effectiveness may be determined by focusing on the root causes of recidivism and the impact of positive and negative experiences the returning citizen had while incarcerated. Moreover, U.S. Office of Justice Programs (2018) noted that the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) stated that there was no one-size-fits-all model for effective reentry. Also, the Second Chance Act and the Serious and Violent Offender Reentry Initiative evaluations, both of which seek to improve reentry outcomes, are also among the most crucial reentry investments made by the NIJ.

Juvenile offenders may get involved in activities like skills and training. Young et al. (2017), in a qualitative investigation, compared a vocational and employment training program (CRAFT) with a provisional education program for juvenile offenders in the United States found that when juvenile offenders are involved in activities such as skills and education training, they tend to show improvements in areas such as self-confidence and values that are important to attaining education and connecting with family members, which may serve as a deterrent against future criminal activity. While Jonas-van Dijk et al. (2020) highlighted the fact that restorative justice initiatives have been effective in addressing some issues related to juvenile reincarceration. Thus, Mohammad and Azman et al. (2018) found that offenders who engaged in restorative justice programs have had a

lower rate of reoffending. Additionally, the victim and offender had the chance to discuss how to make amends and avoid further damage through the victim-offender mediation component of the restorative justice program. As a result, juvenile offenders who participate in victim mediation have a reduced risk of reoffending than offenders who do not participate in mediation (Jonas-van Dijk et al.,2020).

### **Church as an Institution in Community Organization**

Churches as institutions may be considered socialization communities. Churches were considered exceptionally important to socialization in a community (Konkel, 2020). Also, Konkel (2020) found that in addition to meeting spiritual needs, churches also engaged in outreach and community service initiatives. Furthermore, Konkel stated that faith-based organizations can play a crucial role in the process of reintegrating ex-offenders by instilling personal responsibility through informal supervision, and that the role of faith-based institutions in community life goes far beyond what caregivers provide for instance, it is reported that congregations involving in social welfare work accounts for 90% and 75% of congregations provide aid to the poor. Likewise, Jang (2018) indicated that religious programs and activities can help to create a positive social connection, which helps to reduce delinquency and subsequent reincarceration.

Decamp and Smith (2019) found that religious affiliation positively impacted juvenile delinquency, even among juveniles, with circumstances that put them at a reduced risk for delinquency compared to those who are not religious.

In addition, religious activities may involve a wide variety of activities that may be beneficial for former juvenile offenders. Warner and Konkel (2019) found that

religious activities like worship and religious education, like churches get involved in a wide variety of other activities that benefited the congregation as well as the community in which they are located. While Khan (2020) indicated that faith-based organizations can aid in providing programs and activities that can help instill positive behavior, which can subsequently help deter re-incarceration.

Some religious institutions have entrenched in various programs mechanisms that are structured to foster and develop communities (Stansfield et al., p. 115, 2017a) implied that religious institutions had various program mechanisms that were structured to foster social bonds that serve as the foundational framework for community institution that helps to provide well-organized communities. Consistently with this, Headley (2017) noted that churches can use a variety of activities to improve cross-cultural links, broaden social impact, and dissuade juveniles from engaging in delinquent activities. Religious organizations can offer social and spiritual assistance that can have a favorable effect on recidivism rates and prevent offenders from developing a criminal identity.

Providing religious programs to ex-offenders reentering society can reduce their likelihood of engaging in undesirable behaviors. Religious programs provided to ex-offenders reentering their communities can reduce their propensity to participate in negative behaviors (Yelderman et al., 2018). Likewise, many religions have ideals and beliefs that encouraged healthy habits like abstaining from alcohol and tobacco. Nguyen (2020) found that those interested in religion, particularly at the organizational level, are part of a community that shares similar values and beliefs. As a result of social influence,

participation in various church related activities can promote and reinforce these good behaviors.

Various groups in the community can play a role in social organization. Warner and Konkel (2019) found that 93.2% of the congregations in his study on neighborhood churches and their connection to community initiatives and crime prevention engaged in at least one social or community service activity, such as HIV/AIDS programs, 12-step programs, Boy Scouts, food pantries, and tutoring services. Furthermore, Warner and Konkel indicated that previous studies with more extensive samples indicated slightly lower percentages of churches engaged in social or community service, the numbers active in this form of work remain significant. In addition, from the perspective of social disorganization theory, the provision of these services may be seen as an addition to providing necessary means and resources to conventional aims, thereby further connecting recipients to conventional value systems.

As a result of religion, ex-offenders have been able to redirect their life trajectory, leading them to successful lifestyles. Stansfield et al. (2017) found that religion had given ex-offenders the necessary direction to help them alter their life trajectories and adopt exemplary lifestyles. Furthermore, Stansfield(2017b) suggests that religion allows people to feel fulfilled and gives them a sense of purpose in life. In addition, early religious exposure can assist offenders in making changes to their lives during or after incarceration.

The prosocial outcomes may help those adolescents who are more engaged in religious activities. Stewart and Rapp (2017) found that adolescents who were more



involved in religious activities had greater prosocial outcome, the church has a significant role in criminals' lives, as seen by the fact that religious volunteers work in both prisons and community settings. Stansfield et al. (2017b) indicated that Churches invest long hours betrothed in attempts to support offenders to reestablish relationships, find gainful employment, and acquire requisite training to lead successful lifestyles in communities. Likewise, Mowen et al. (2018) found that faith-based organizations are prepared to meet their basic requirements. This is primarily demonstrated by the areas of employment and the re-establishment of relational bonds. Mowen et al. (2018) concluded that ex-offenders' basic requirements are momentarily supplied as a result of the church's extensive and indulgent approach. Yelderman et al. (2018) pointed out that there has not been much research on programs for ex-offenders after they are released from prison and the likelihood that members and leaders of faith-based churches will be able to join and provide support.

### **Role of the Church in Reducing Recidivism**

Religious participation, involvement, and religiosity (religiousness) have significant effects on criminal behaviors and mental health, such as lowering drug and alcohol usage, lowering fighting and theft among young people, and enhancing social interactions (Adamczyk et al., 2017; Jones et al., 2018). Conversely, Konkel (2020) noted that in Philadelphia, among Mainline Protestant and Catholic Churches, no evidence supports that such organizations have an impact on recidivism. Ex-offenders who are exposed to religion are not influenced to accept religion, which is strongly supported by the high-level accomplishments reported by numerous studies (Stansfield et al., 2017a).

This is broadly demonstrated in the lives of ex-offenders who have moved on to very fulfilling lifestyles. Similarly, Mowen (2019a) suggests that the exposure to religious values in one's past can serve as a force that motivates ex-offenders and those in prison to return to a life deeply committed to religious values.

Religious organizations were believed to offer varying levels of connection versus bonding social capital. (Harris et al., 2015). As a result, the relationship between religious practice and crime may vary among different religious groups. Mainline Protestants and Catholics, for instance, have been found to be particularly adept at fostering bridging capital, whereas the presence of conservative evangelical Protestants, such as Baptists and Pentecostals, is thought to lead to a greater bonding capital (Harris et al., 2015).

It is noteworthy that in this study, Stansfield et al. (2017) and Yelderman et al. (2018) referenced many studies showing that religion has reduced the chances of offending over extended periods. On the contrary, Stansfield et al. (2017b) cited previous studies that had been unable to prove a connection between religion and recidivism. Religious outreach activities are identified in this study to be transitory and sustainable. He expressed a wish for additional practical investigations to be done to assess the churches' impact on ex-offenders' success in the community in light of this clear gap. Additionally, Stansfield (2017a) stated the collection of data from studies that are not limited to institutions like faith-based groups or other relevant institutional organizations would produce data that can give a more holistic perspective of the impact of religion on the chance of committing a re-offense. However, people with a great degree of religious

interaction have expressed a reduction in the chance of recidivism, and this holds for both individuals with prior religious interactions and those with none.

It is usual for individuals to mirror and express the values and practices of their society. The social interaction of ex-offenders with persons in religious settings and reentry programs can be beneficial to the ex-offender (Stacer & Roberts, 2018). Cannonier et al. (2021) found that this type of contact allows former offenders to positively transform their lives, increasing their acceptability and the desire to reintegrate into society. Furthermore, Cannonier found an evaluation done on a faith-based aftercare program operating in Tennessee that aims to reduce reincarceration. The findings indicated that the program positively reduced reincarceration rates, and the effects differed across race and age groups. Hence, faith-based programs can help to reduce juvenile re-incarceration.

Like religious programs that may not be sustainable, this may be the case for other programs due to numerous factors. Formon et al. (2018) concluded that prison-based vocational rehabilitation programs may lower recidivism and enhance ex-offenders' outcomes. However, funding restrictions and staffing issues frequently obstruct implementation and limit their efficacy. Similarly, Gill and Wilson (2017) indicated that offenders who participated in prison-based vocational training were more likely to obtain employment after their release and were less likely to commit crimes.

Hence, Liu et al. (2021) found that numerous factors can affect different outcomes related to services and programs, including gender, age, marital status, criminal history, mental health, drug usage, and treatment options. In addition, the focus in developing

programs for offenders is on employment, housing, social skills training, addiction, and mental health recovery. Kenemore et al. (2020) reported that engagement in these programs does not substantially reduce recidivism rates over time. However, restorative justice programs have been successful in addressing some aspects of youth reoffending. Restorative justice practices and programs can lower recidivism by holding adolescents accountable, fostering stronger ties within the community, and bolstering informal social control (Kimbrell et al., 2022).

### **Church Leaders' Roles in Community Organization**

Church leaders can play a role of influencing people. Heward-Mills et al. (2018) found that the socio-ecological model suggests that church leaders can impact people's attitudes and beliefs and the social and environmental factors that motivate behavior. Furthermore, Heward-Mills et al. concluded that faith leaders might affect behavior change at numerous levels in this way, with a higher chance of success.

Golman et al. (2021) concluded that church leaders will be better able to promote youth development and adolescent health by fostering these relationships and connecting with teens to locate available community resources. In Golman et al.'s study, church leaders from specific zip codes with identified birth rates of 95% or higher participated in a focus group. The study explored how church leaders perceive teen pregnancy in their communities. The study's findings indicated that collaborating with faith-based organizations when implementing community prevention programs is vital. Nche (2020) indicated that church leaders not only exert influence within their churches, but they also play a significant role in Nigeria's socioeconomic and political affairs.

Churches have been instrumental in promoting health and illness prevention. congregations strive to provide health promotion and illness prevention programs (Schoenberger & Samson, 2017). Many ministers with active health ministries participated in these initiatives. Rather than a lack of enthusiasm, churches without such a ministry point to a lack of resources (Schoenberg & Samson., 2017).

### **Youth Programming in Churches**

Church programs for youth may help to deter delinquent acts. Jang (2018) in similarity with I. Henry (personal communication, October 11, 2021), who discussed his experience facilitating various juvenile programs with which the church is affiliated. However, this denomination has not established any programs aimed exclusively at juvenile ex-offenders. Furthermore, the church had several youth programs that were held weekly at the church, recreational parks camp sites, or other areas. The weekly youth program aimed to help youths stay engaged in activities and programs offered by the church. Moreover, the youth programs addressed social issues, provided spiritual upliftment, fostered interaction with others, and provided mentoring from adult leaders and participants in attendance.

It was mentioned that other programs in the church provided youth ministry outreach activities, basketball tournaments, and camping, which helped juveniles learn and develop the necessary life skills, such as youth community projects that were geared toward other activities that focused on a holistic approach. Also, it was mentioned that the goal was to move forward to implement and expand existing programs to meet the needs of ex-offenders in the community and neighboring areas within the county. This

goal of implementing programs would be helpful to help youth returning from prisons back to their communities. Yelderman et al. (2018) stated that few research studies focus on programs outside of prisons and inside churches. Thus, this research will help answer the questions about existing church programs.

### **Mentoring Juvenile Offenders**

Mentoring programs have been used for centuries within community settings (McDaniel et al., 2016). The first mentoring programs in the United States were developed in response to the need to help children from underserved communities impacted by the economic crisis of industrialized America and the deterioration of their environments (Preston & Rhodes, 2019). In the United States, adult mentors tend to come from faith-based organizations (Matthew et al., 2020). According to Stacer and Roberts (2018), mentoring is a partnership in which a person with considerable experience and knowledge counsels, educates, guides, and helps others grow personally and professionally. Additionally, mentoring programs are designed with the idea that moral principles will be transmitted through the mentoring relationship, which makes mentoring for juveniles helpful (Stacer & Roberts, 2018). Stacer and Roberts concluded that mentorship programs in faith-based reentry programs can enhance reentry and reduce reincarceration. However, Stacer and Roberts also found that offenders who engaged in church-based mentorship programs while incarcerated and met with mentors in the community were less likely to commit delinquent activities than those who met with a mentor while incarcerated. Mentoring programs may increase the likelihood of successful community reintegration for young offenders (Hanham & Tracey, 2017). Therefore,

Dutton et al. (2018) indicated that juveniles developing high-quality relationships will increase the chances of positive youth outcomes, such as better adult relationships.

Though traditional mentoring is encouraged and has been deemed to be successful. Matthew et al. (2020) and Portillo et al. (2017) both found that some reentry organizations implement peer support, which involves facilitating connections between ex-offenders to their communities with former offenders who have successfully reintegrated into society and live prosocial lifestyles expand. However, Matthew et al. further indicated that in some cases ex-offenders have been discouraged from interacting with other formerly incarcerated individuals out of fear of promoting recidivism.

Mentors can assist former juvenile offenders in obtaining employment, educational opportunities, and participation in sports once they are released into society. (Hanham & Tracey, 2017). Similarly, Duron et al. (2020) found that mentoring initiatives focusing on at-risk youth exposed to aggression, delinquency, and substance use coupled with low academic success have revealed low achievement. Duron et al. also discussed mentoring experiences that obstruct mentoring relationships, including interpersonal shortfalls that prevent or end mentoring relationships abruptly, as well as factors such as speaking in a way that is difficult to comprehend, having unrealistic goals, or ignoring cultural differences.

While Dominey and Lowson (2017) indicated that mentors were vital to the successful reintegration of young ex-offenders. In addition, they directed them to reconnect with schools or advance their education, find jobs, or be involved in sporting activities. Likewise, mentors associated with faith-based organizations play a more

meaningful role in having young ex-offenders reintegrate into the communities.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

In summary, this chapter includes an examination of factors of Juvenile offending, disorganization with the police, role of the church and rehabilitation, and reintegration and theoretical framework used to explore and provide an understanding of how juvenile offenders' involvement in church program activities can deter reincarceration. The literature review provided details of prior research and gave ideas of how this problem can be solved. The social selection process, a scenario in which adolescents organized themselves into peer groups that shared similarities, illustrated that values and behaviors were a major contributing factor in either encouraging or deterring juveniles from engaging in criminal activities (Huijsmans et al., 2021). Peer influence is a way to maintain and enhance similarities among friends and associates (Laursen, 2017). On the other hand, peers can positively influence behavior by providing social support. Walters (2018) indicated that positive peer interactions are substantial factors that may deter juvenile offending and reincarceration. Family can play a role in influencing juvenile offenses and incarceration (Hoffmann et al., 2018). Youths who have been incarcerated and reintegrated into society faced obstacles such as strained family relationships, limited social bonds, fewer job prospects due to inadequate qualifications and stigma in the labor force, and psychological stress during prison (Craw et al., 2020). Disorganized communities are characterized as being less prepared to control deviant behavior due to the inability to exercise social control over the community members (Antunes & Manasse, 2021).



This study seeks to examine church leaders' perception of their role in the deterrence of juvenile reincarceration. Shaw and McKay's (1942) social disorganization theory serve as the theoretical foundation to guide the study to explore and understand the role that church leaders' play in helping former juvenile offenders participate in programs and activities that can help deter engagement in activities that leads to reincarceration. Overall, the literature review reveals that numerous factors can influence how juvenile offenders conflict with the law. Throughout the literature review, it was clear that further research is needed on youth programs in church for juvenile offenders. After reading the literature on the role of church in different areas. Faith-based organizations are reputable organizations that already have the infrastructure to spread health information and activities (Dunn et al., 2020) Hence, faith-based organizations can provide an avenue for individuals to connect with community services, thus potentially increasing their success rate, improving their relationships, and fostering hope for a better future (Stansfield et al., 2018).

Chapter 3 will consist of the methodology for this qualitative case study research. The research will include the method, research design, selection of participants, role of the researcher, data collection methods, analysis of data, and ethical considerations and trustworthiness. Therefore, I will include a discussion of the research method, research questions, research design and rationale of the study, the researcher's role, ethical considerations, methodology, participant selection, instrumentation, data analysis plan, and trustworthiness.

### Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore church leaders' perceptions of their role, experiences, and activities in contributing to more social organization for former juvenile offenders specifically in terms of (a) finding out what existing programs and activities faith-based organized offer to help deter juvenile reincarceration, (b) programs and activities associated with reducing reincarceration, and (c) faith-based organization program outcomes that different religious organization offer to deter reincarceration. In this chapter, I discuss the research design and methodology, role of the researcher, data collection and analysis processes, and ethical concerns.

#### **Research Design and Rationale**

The study procedures included in-depth, semistructured interviews with church leaders from various churches. Qualitative interviews help gather information for a study (Cypress, 2018). I designed the interview questions to be open ended to obtain adequate responses for the study. The use of the multiple case design enabled me to gather data from the interview participants to develop an understanding from multiple sources (see Yin, 2018). There are several skills required for case study research including asking good questions, being a good listener, being adaptive and flexible, and being unbiased by preconceived notions (Yin, 2018). I did not choose a phenomenological design because this design is used when seeking to explore the essence of participants' encounters with the phenomenon under study (see Moser & Korstjens 2018). I chose a case study approach because this design is suitable for studying in-depth individual experiences,

answering “how” and “why” questions, and employing multiple sources of evidence (see Yin, 2018).

### **Role of the Researcher**

In qualitative research, the researcher analyzes and collects data (Roger et al., 2018). It is important for the researcher to be aware of biases during the interviews. I mitigated potential researcher bias by practicing reflective inquiry, which involved developing an understanding of how I prepared for the subject (see Karagiozis, 2018). I practiced reflexivity by completing a diary/journal during the research process. I also used bracketing to mitigate the potential barrier of research bias. Bracketing enables the researcher to deliberately set aside preconceived notions about the phenomenon both before and during the study (Baksh, 2018). Developing an awareness of my own biases helped eliminate bias during the study. I also ensured that there were no conflicts of interest and that I did not have any previous relationship or current connection with the participants or their organizations.

### **Methodology**

In this qualitative study, I employed a multiple case study approach following a design outlined by Yin (2018). Conducting a qualitative case study provides the researcher with a chance to collect various kinds of data, such as interviews, observations, and artifacts, to get an in-depth view of the individuals being studied.

The aim of using the multiple case approach is to identify the various themes that will be presented in a cross-case comparison of cases (Yin, 2018). In previous multiple

case studies, it was stated that three or four distinct cases were more manageable (Schoch, 2020).

### **Participant Selection Strategy**

The participants for this study comprised leaders from various churches, including Baptist, Pentecostal, Seventh Day Adventist, Methodist, and other Christian denominations, in the northeastern regions of the United States. I used the purposeful selection strategy to recruit nine participants who were pastors, family life directors, youth leaders, and prison ministry leaders. The purposeful sampling method requires participants who have experienced the phenomenon (Palinkas et al., 2015). This type of selection of participants yields rich data and the accountability of the findings minimizes bias (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). The purposeful sampling method was helpful for this case study because it made it possible to have variations in the sample because determining the sample size for a qualitative case study can be challenging. When the researcher's data collection reaches a point of decreasing returns or when no new data are being contributed, data saturation has occurred, suggesting that the calculation of sample size in a qualitative case study is a direct function of data saturation (Aguboshim, 2021). The participants were emailed to determine their interest in participating in the study. The data for this study was collected through interviews and artifacts. I conducted the interviews over Zoom.

The multiple case study design involves an in-depth analysis of multiple cases. According to Yin (2018), evidence from multiple case study designs is more convincing than evidence from single case designs because there is a chance of direct replication,

which could lead to strong analytical findings. The researcher duplicates the research procedure for each instance separately when using a multiple case study design. Additionally, multiple case studies enable comparative analysis, which allows the researcher to explore variations between individual cases (Yin, 2018).

### **Instrumentation, Recruitment, and Data Collection**

In this study, I used an interview protocol (see Appendix C) and reviewed artifacts, such as program descriptions, pamphlets, posters, flyers, church announcements, and interview questions (see Appendices B–D), to generate additional questions on juvenile reincarceration. The participants were purposefully selected groups of church leaders, including pastoral staff, deacons, church elders, and youth outreach committees, who met the inclusion criteria of being engaged in youth programming or ministry for youth in conflict with the law. I posted flyers on Facebook and send physical invitations to various Christian denominations, such as Baptist, Seventh Day Adventist, and Pentecostal, and other faith-based ministries providing programs for youth in conflict in the northeastern region of the United States. When the participants responded to the invitation to participate in the interview, I provided them with information about the study and a consent form to review. The participants then provided their consent by replying to my email with the words, “I consent.” I then scheduled an appointment for the interview at a location suitable for the participant.

The interview protocol guided the semistructured, one-on-one participant interviews. I did not conduct any interviews until I received approval from the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB), the study number is 08-04-23-0422991

and this expires on August, 3<sup>rd</sup> 2024. I used an audio recorder to capture the participants' spoken words during the interviews (see Yin, 2018). I also used a reflective journal throughout the process. To create triangulation of the data to ensure credibility and validate the data collected, I compared the recordings and field notes taken in my reflective journal. The interview lasted between 40 and 60 minutes.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

I developed and categorized the interview questions to obtain detailed responses to help answer the research question. According to Yin (2018), the data analysis phase of the study should start with questions in the case study. In the next phase, the researcher should identify the evidence that addresses the question, which enables them to locate the data that corresponds to the research question, enabling the researcher to develop a conclusion.

The data analysis process began by reviewing participants' interview responses. Then I read and re-read the transcripts to evaluate and interpret the information gathered from the interviews. Next, I checked the participants' wording and used a deductive analysis process to identify codes within the data (see Yin, 2018). for common codes. I used the NVivo software to code the data and help identify repeating words and patterns from which to form categories and themes. Patterns or themes appear repeatedly across the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Coding is a procedure where researchers organize interviews into categories of questions that provide organization to develop meaning (Busetto et al., 2020; Williams & Moser, 2019). Coding is the first step in analyzing and interpreting data (Saldaña, 2016).

## **Issues of Trustworthiness**

In qualitative research, there are four criteria used to determine trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Stahl & King, 2020).

### **Credibility**

The credibility of the current study was established through triangulation. Triangulation is achieved by using various information to develop a pattern (Stahl et al., 2020). In qualitative research, credibility is related to the researcher's methods, data, and design (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Credibility provides a way for researchers to confirm if the data collection and analysis methods were utilized (Haven & Van Grootel, 2019). To help prevent bias, I assured that all the information received from participants was accurate and appropriately recorded by using member checking to ensure triangulation of the data from my field notes and the interview transcripts. Member checking is done by providing the data collected and the researcher's interpretations of it to the participants so they can verify its trustworthiness. I completed member checking by giving the participants their transcripts and my interpretations for their feedback (see Fitzpatrick, 2019).

### **Transferability**

Transferability refers to how the research can be transferred to other studies or context (Adler, 2022). The more detail given, such as the design, procedures, and data analysis process, provides transferability that enables other readers of the research to decide whether this study can be applied in another situation. I ensured transferability by

providing a rich description of the participants' stories and a detailed description of the setting of the interviews.

Transferability continues if significant conclusions from the data emerge while considering participant language (Peterson, 2019). I verified the data provided by participants to ensure that it corresponds to what was said during the interview about church leaders' perceptions of their role, experiences, and activities in contributing to more social organization for former juvenile offenders.

### **Dependability**

The next criterion of trustworthiness is dependability, which is another tool to ensure that the study can be replicated. Dependability focuses on showing that the study's results are replicable (Stenfors et al., 2020). I used open-ended, semistructured interviews to eliminate researcher bias. The interviews served as the primary source of data collected in this research, and additional supporting data gathered from notes and artifacts enhanced the research and ensured that the data could be triangulated and that all the findings of the study could be supported by quotes from the qualitative data to confirm that the information shared was directly from the participants. I also used reflexivity to reflect back on the information collected, how the participants answered the interview questions, and possible researcher bias.

### **Confirmability**

The next criterion is confirmability, which is the way that the research study is confirmed (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). In a qualitative case study, confirmability may be realized through reflexivity and audit trails (Aguboshim, 2021). Confirmability can be



achieved by providing the facts and findings in a way that allows others to verify their accuracy of confirmability. I established confirmability by outlining the data collected from the results. I also kept an audit trail to provide documentation and an explanation for the actions made during the data coding and analysis processes (see Nassaji, 2020)

To avoid bias, I considered the participants' responses and checked to ensure that their responses were accurate. I also constantly reviewed and compared the data. Reflexivity was used throughout the research process to stay aware of my role in collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data to avoid biases (see Korstjens & Moser, 2018). I also examined emerging themes to prevent interviewer bias. Memo writing was employed to explore my personal biases and any ambiguous bias effect during the data analysis (see Marshall, 2019; Nowell et al., 2017).

### **Ethical Procedures**

After receiving Walden University IRB approval to conduct the semi-structured interviews and gather data, I submitted a letter of participation to the church conferences and pastors of various churches. The letter provided information about the study and requested the participation of church leaders, such as pastors, youth leaders, family life directors, and prison ministry leaders. The letter also informed the participants about the potential benefits and risks of engaging in the study. Prior to collecting any data, all participants confirmed that they had read and understood the informed consent form and provided their consent to participate via email. I maintained the respect and confidentiality of all participants in the data collection process by allowing them to answer the interview questions without bias. I tried to control any personal bias(es) by

following the established plan in the interview protocol. No information was revealed about the other participants involved in the study. I also completed the Summary.

In this chapter, I focused on the rationale for using a qualitative design to explore church leaders' perceptions of their role in the deterrence of juvenile reincarceration. The methodology, data analysis process, and ethical considerations were also described in this chapter. The results of the study will be discussed in Chapter 4.

## Chapter 4: Results

The primary purpose of this study was to develop an understanding of the perceptions of church leaders about their role in deterring juvenile reincarceration. In this chapter, I describe how I conducted semistructured interviews with nine church leaders who were engaged with programs for juveniles who were incarcerated in the northeastern region of the United States. The setting, participant demographics, data collection process, data analysis methods, trustworthiness, and the findings of the study are discussed. The research question that guided this study was: What are church leaders' perceptions, experiences, and activities where churches contribute to reducing risk of youth reincarceration?

### **Setting**

I visited churches in the northeastern region of the United States to recruit church leaders who had programs for juveniles who have been incarcerated. Flyers were dropped off or given to the church leaders or church secretaries. I asked the church secretaries to send email flyers to the church leaders who could contact me directly by email if they met the inclusion criteria for the study. Once I received a response, the potential participants were sent the consent form and asked to review the form and provide their consent by replying "I consent." I then sent them back an email with possible dates for the interview. Eight out of nine participants opted to complete the interview via Zoom. The research study was conducted after restrictions for COVID-19 ended; hence, there was one participant who completed the interview in person and there were no restrictions or discomfort.

### **Demographics**

All nine participants were pastors/para church leaders who had experience working with juveniles who were in conflict with the law. The participants were a mixture of both male and female leaders (see Table 1). Additional demographics details were not collected or used for this study to protect the confidentiality of participants. I identified participants based on roles and number. The number is based on the participant order for the interview.

**Table 1***Participant Demographics*

Participant code	Gender	Role
P1	Female	Pastor
P2	Male	Pastor
P3	Male	Pastor
P4	Male	Pastor
P5	Female	Pastor
P6	Male	Pastor
P7	Female	Pastor
P8	Female	Pastor
P9	Female	Leader

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**Data Collection**

I gained approval from the Walden University IRB to initiate the process of data collection. Upon hearing from church leaders who expressed interest in participating in the study, I scheduled times convenient to them for the interviews. Prior to the interviews, I contacted the participants to review the inform consent form and ask whether they had any questions. The data collection plan was followed in each interview by asking 11 open-ended questions. The interviews lasted between 30 and 40 minutes each. The participants were all in a private room to ensure their confidentiality and

comfort during the interview. I took notes during the interviews to capture key points and terminology.

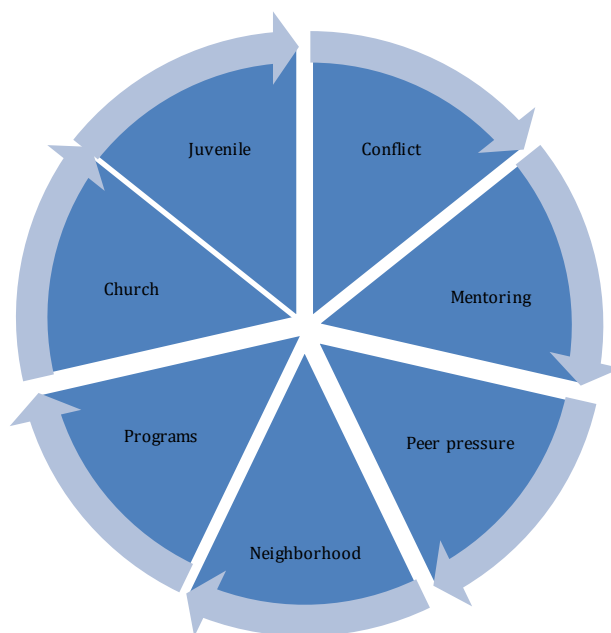
The Zoom platform had a feature that allowed me to audio record the interviews. The audio recordings were transcribed to written text and used for the data analysis aspect of the study. Overall, it took 8 weeks to gather the data from the, and I began coding and categorizing themes from the data once they were collected.

### **Data Analysis**

The interviews were recorded, transcribed using Otter.ai, and hand coded using a matrix (see Saldana, 2016). I then checked the participants' wording for common codes. As I recorded common codes on the matrix, I used clusters of related codes and patterns to create categories and themes. Each participant was coded using an identified label: Pastor 1 = P1, Pastor 2 = P2, Pastor 3 = P3, Pastor 4 = P4, Pastor 5 = P5, Pastor 6 = P6, Pastor 7 = P7, Pastor 8 = P8, and Leader = P9. The codes I derived were as follows: juvenile, mentoring, church, child, prison, programs, girls, neighborhood, conflict, family, kind, meet, experience, pastor, family, kinds, youth, peer pressure, society, fatherless, role, change, community, discipline, change, juveniles, incarceration, social disorganization, devastating, consequences, role, teach, life, social service programs, devastating, consequences, trauma, detect, behavioral issues, academically, wise choices, lives, and positive. Throughout the interview only one participant mentioned the word trauma. Table 2 displays a list of the codes and themes identified, and Figure provides a visual representation of frequently identified codes.

**Table 2***Examples of Codes and Themes*

Codes	Themes
Youth, church, juveniles talking, social, led, happening, connection, teach, detention center.	Theme 1: Church leaders focus on meaningful connections and relations with juveniles
Church, juveniles, mentoring, conflict, family	Theme 2: The negative impact of family conflict on reintegration
Juvenile incarceration, church, program, kids, family, social disorganization, kinds, devastating community, issue, service	Theme 3: The positive impact of church programming on reintegration
Church, neighborhood, youth, mentoring, people, juvenile, ministry, life, programs	Theme 4: Mentoring programs for juveniles in the church are key to success
Church, juveniles, child, behavior, neighborhood, challenges, understand	Theme 5: Challenges of returning to disorganized neighborhoods
Relationships, organization, juveniles, incarceration, peer pressure, mentoring program.	Theme 6: Challenges of negative peer pressure on returning juvenile

**Figure 1***Frequently Identified Codes*

Upon creating the matrix, the following six themes relating to the research question emerged:

- Theme 1: Church leaders working with juveniles.
- Theme 2: Conflicts juveniles experience upon reentry in their communities.
- Theme 3: Church programs that assist incarcerated families within the community.
- Theme 4: Mentoring programs for juveniles in the church are the key to success.
- Theme 5: Challenges of returning to disorganized neighborhood.
- Theme 6: Challenges of negative peer pressure on returning juvenile.

### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

In qualitative research, there are four criteria used to determine trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Stahl & King., 2020). To ensure the current study was trustworthy, I provided a clear outline of the recruitment and selection process. I also used reflexivity by conducting a self-assessment to reduce any biases in the research (see Dodgson, 2019).

### **Credibility**

In this study, credibility was established through triangulation. I ensured that all the data collected were accurate and appropriately recorded. The field notes and transcripts were also reviewed to ensure their accuracy to help prevent bias. The collected data was also reviewed by my committee chair.



**Transferability**

I ensured transferability by providing detailed information about the study's design, procedures, and data analysis processes to enable readers to decide whether this study can be applied in another situation. I also ensured transferability by providing a rich description of the participants' stories and the setting of the interviews. The data provided by participants were verified again by listening to the audio recordings of the interviews.

**Dependability**

I established dependability by double checking all data collected for accuracy. Open-ended semistructured interviews were used to eliminate researcher bias. The interviews served as the primary source of data collected in this research, and additional supporting data were gathered from notes, as outlined in Chapter 3. I had my chair supervise the data collection and analysis processes. I also used reflexivity to reflect back on the data collection process, how the participants answered the interview questions, and possible researcher bias.

**Confirmability**

I established confirmability throughout the research by outlining how the data collected for this study (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Confirmability was established throughout this qualitative case study through the use of audit trails and reflexivity (see Aguboshim, 2021). I used an audit trail to provide an explanation for the actions made regarding the data coding and analysis (see Nassaji, 2020). Confirmability was also achieved by providing the facts and findings in a way that allows others to verify their accuracy. I examined emerging themes to prevent interviewer bias and used memo

writing to explore my personal biases and any ambiguous bias effect during the data analysis (see Marshall, 2019; Nowell et al., 2017).

## **Results**

Data analysis resulted in six main themes that addressed the research question:

- Theme 1: Church leaders focus on meaningful connections and relations with juveniles.
- Theme 2: The negative impact of family conflict on reintegration.
- Theme 3: The positive impact of family church programming on reintegration.
- Theme 4: Mentoring programs for juveniles in the church are the key to success.
- Theme 5: Challenges of returning to disorganized neighborhood.
- Theme 6: Challenges of negative peer pressure on returning juveniles.

### **Theme 1: Church Leaders' Focus on Meaningful Connections and Relations with Juvenile**

The first emergent theme focuses on church leaders' experience working with juveniles who were in conflict with the law. Many of the participants revealed that building meaningful relationships is important when working with juveniles inside and outside of the church. Participants shared descriptions of their experiences working with juveniles. Participant 1 stated, "That she had an issue with a young man who was disruptive during a conversation with other juveniles." The participant shared that it took developing a connection with the juvenile: "you can make a connection." It turns the whole negative vibe around. And then I was able to talk with him knowing I can get the

point across.” Similarly, Participant 3 stated, “I intentionally create an environment where they will be able to have much more interaction with them and get closer to them. So that they see you as their friend, rather than the pastor being there.” In addition, participants shared that connecting with juveniles in different activities helps to bridge the gap. Participants shared that as leaders it is important to form meaningful connections to obtain success when working with juveniles.

### **Theme 2: The Negative Impact of Family Conflict on Reintegration**

The second theme focuses on conflicts that juvenile experience upon reentry. The participants shared their responses about the value of communication and the influence that family conflict has on juvenile reincarceration. Many of the participants reflected on the fact that it is challenging to be confronted with so many other challenges, then return to face conflict in the home. All participants shared that it is an important role for families to participate in the reintegration process for juveniles. Participant 8 stated,

Conflict always often comes because parents do not make clear what their rules and expectations of the child or the child’s left to their own devices as to how to navigate this world. So, there must be constant open communication between the child and the parent in terms of what expectations are being sought within that family unit.

But Participant 1 stated that, “that they feel that there is no hope. When there’s conflict on the inside, internal conflict, a house divided amongst itself will not stand. Internal conflict will really tear anyone apart.” Participant 4 stated that, “I think family conflicts play a very significant role. Because like I said, to me, in my experience, a number of

these existed at home. When there's no love at home, there's no nurturing happening at home." Furthermore, Participant 3 shared,

Conflict needs to be needed to find a better resolution to the conflict rather than to allow it to escalate to the point where the impact of it to be even greater. Thus, when families are in conflict, there is no stability, or no consistency.

### **Theme 3: The Positive Impact of Church Programming on Reintegration**

The third emerging theme was church programs available for juveniles after incarceration. In this theme, the participants described programs available in their churches for juveniles as well as identified ideas and made suggestions for other programs and activities. Participant 1 stated, "that a program that would be beneficial is a life skills program." Consistent with this, Participant 8 also responded that a life skills program would be beneficial, saying, "Sometimes we have had situations where we help them find a place of shelter, where they can stay for a few weeks."

Other participants shared information on church programs that were helpful in assisting incarcerated families within the community, Participant 4 said that, "It starts with counseling, because the idea of counseling is to help them realize that this is not the end of your life." Participant 5 replied, "Really doing a lot of kinds of intensive casework with them, really developing a very solid relationship with the individual. I think that is definitely one positive thing that churches can do." Likewise, Participant 9 shared that the strength of relationship is the foundation of working with a young person."

Participant 5 added the importance of a “program, which is specifically geared towards juvenile offenders, which provides the support to juveniles by mentoring them and helping them to make better choices where they don’t reoffend, re-institutionalized or reincarcerated.”

Three of the participants shared their input about church programs that assisted incarcerated families within the community and gave many details regarding this approach. Participant 8 stated,

Well, I think there needs to be a stronger bond between the church and the community. There was a time when we would, we had a what we call a prison ministry where we would go to the local prison here in the city and talk with the young people and older adults as well. Just to have them have someone listen to whatever their concerns were, so that we might know what they were they were facing from their understanding, we can advise them to make wiser decisions for their lives.

Similarly, Participant 3 reported that,

Something that personally I have taken up with my leadership team, that as a church, we need to open up, because we are doing various community programs, and we are expecting that people are going to come in and with all kinds of stuff. And after going through prison and all that experience that they have been through. You don’t expect them to come in overnight and behave the same way. So, some of the programs that we can, and I have been trying to do is to help them

to understand that they can turn their story to be positive, their experience to be positive, and they can even serve as mentors to others.

Participant 9 shared, “Well, I think, you know, a lot of times, young people even when they’re released, if they’re on some kind of probationary status, it’s really difficult for them to move forward.”

#### **Theme 4: Mentoring Programs for Juveniles in the Church are The Key to Success**

The participants discussed their experiences with mentoring juveniles. Many of the participants shared that they had successful outcomes with mentoring juveniles. Many of the participants shared that mentoring is helpful to develop a connection and provide guidance to the individual. The importance of developing relationships was also an important factor highlighted by many of the participants. Participant 6 stated,

I have one-on-one interaction with that particular student. And, of course, as I would see what their progress was like with their weekends, what did you do over the weekend, establish rapport with that particular person. And, you know, try to motivate them to be positive in a negative environment.

#### **Theme 5: Challenges of Returning to Disorganized Neighborhood**

This theme highlights the challenges that juveniles encounter upon return to their neighborhood. Many participants shared similar challenges that juveniles encounter in their neighborhood. The participants shared that these challenges have an impact and influence juvenile reincarceration. Participant 6 stated, “In neighborhood gangs have a strong influence. Drugs has a stronghold which is a better word in our neighborhoods, all

of these external forces that creep into our neighborhoods, which become part of neighborhood characteristics.”

### **Theme 6: Challenges of Negative Peer Pressure on Returning Juvenile**

In this emerging theme, participants discussed that peer pressure can have both a positive and negative outcome. Participant 8 stated,

Peer pressure it's a big part because people, all people, young people, older people, even adults, peer pressure you we will we want to believe that our activities, our actions, our speech, impacts other people in ways that we hope will be positive but are not always positive. Sometimes what we say what we do, how we look at a person in certainly how we interact with them is going to is going to determine how we respond to them and how they respond to us.

### **Summary**

This research was focused on gaining church leaders' perceptions of their role in deterring juvenile reincarceration. The participants for this study were nine church leaders from churches located in the northeastern region of the United States. The findings of the study highlight some of the barriers to churches being able to able implement programs for juveniles. However, Participant 3 revealed that, he does address questions, and all the questions young people were struggling with such as relationships and other stuff that entails dressing and behavior in general. Then each time we meet, I pick up one topic that needs to be addressed and if they have any general questions, they can bring it. We were meeting on Tuesdays but because of COVID, things have not been the same again. The findings of the study revealed that various

churches in the northeastern region of the United States offers a wide range of programs for juvenile at the church and a few programs extended to juveniles upon return their community.

In Chapter 5, I will interpret the emerging themes of the findings, compare them with what I have found in the literature that depicted Chapter 2. I will also give further recommendations and conclusions. Also, I will discuss social determinant to health as related to the topic.



## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusion, and Recommendation

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore church leaders' perceptions of their role in deterring juvenile reincarceration. Nine church leaders took part in semistructured, open-ended interviews. This study was conducted to help fill the gap in understanding what churches can do to add structure to the lives of juveniles who have been in conflict with the law. Six themes emerged from data analysis: (a) church leaders working with juveniles who were incarcerated, (b) conflicts juveniles experience upon reentry in their communities, (c) church programs that assist incarcerated families within the community, (d) mentoring programs for juveniles in the church, (e) challenges juveniles encounter in their neighborhood, and (f) juvenile incarceration associated with peer pressure.

In this chapter, I provide my interpretations of the findings and my recommendations and discuss the implications of this study related to the social determinants of health. I also describe how the data were collected and analyzed to gain a better understanding of the perceptions of church leaders in the northeastern region of the United States and their role in assisting juvenile who were incarcerated.

### **Interpretation of Findings**

In this section, I describe the ways that the current study findings confirm previous research regarding church leaders' role in deterring juvenile reincarceration. Konkel (2020) stated that by meeting spiritual needs, churches can engage in outreach and community service initiatives and that faith-based organizations can play a crucial role in the process of reintegrating ex-offenders by instilling personal responsibility

through informal supervision. Two lenses were used to analyze and interpret the findings: the conceptual framework and the literature review. In the following subsections, the six emergent themes are discussed in light of the conceptual framework and the peer-reviewed literature.

### **Theme 1: Church Leaders' Experience Working With Juveniles Who Were Incarcerated**

The first emerging theme related to church leaders' experience working with juveniles who were incarcerated. The participants found that it was important to build meaningful relationships while working with juveniles who had been in conflict with the law. For example, Participant 4 shared that he found himself involved with the incarcerated juveniles' population and he had to nurture and counsel them to help protect them so that they have better opportunities based on knowledge that is critical for their well-being and their success.

#### ***Theme 1: Interpretation of the Findings in Light of the Literature Review***

The findings of this study revealed that church leaders shared similar experiences while collaborating with juveniles both inside and outside of the church and that forming relationships when working with juveniles is important. Dunkley et al. (2020) found that churches leaders discussed several factors that contributed to juvenile reincarceration and that the factors contributing to juveniles engaging in delinquent acts that subsequently lead to reincarceration were their neighborhood and their relationship with parental involvement. The findings suggest that a potentially successful way of helping to deter juvenile reincarceration is by churches and other organizations offering programs and

activities to help deter reincarceration or working to help families to understanding the importance of forming meaningful relationships with juveniles who have been in conflicts against the law.

***Theme 1: Interpretations of the Findings in Light of the Conceptual Framework***

Overall, the participants indicated that church leaders play a crucial role in the lives of incarcerated juveniles and that positive relationships can be developed to assist them in reconnecting to society. Opoku-Ware et al. (2022) and Kubrin and Wo (2015) found that support networks are needed to maintain informal social controls. In the social disorganization theory, Shaw and McKay (1942) stated that neighborhoods can be forms of organized entities and structures that can influence the neighborhood's organization. Therefore, the role of church leaders can be a positive connection for juveniles. Participants shared that creating an environment where they will be able to have much more interaction can benefit juveniles who were incarcerated.

**Theme 2: The Negative Impact of Family Conflict on Reintegration**

The findings suggest that conflict can have an impact on juveniles. Participants further explained the impact of family conflict on juveniles. For example, Participant 6 stated that in a relationship, when the environment is hostile, there will be a lot of anger, there will be a lot of yelling, and all kinds of negative behavior in front of the child that may have a huge impact on those juveniles that end up in the criminal justice system. Participant 4 shared that he thought family conflicts play a very significant role, saying, "when there's no love at home, there's no nurturing happening at home."

Furthermore, Participant 3 stated that conflicts needed to come to a better resolution rather than to allow it to escalate to the point where the impact of it is even greater. When families are in conflict, there is no stability or consistency. Participant 6 explained that “every family going to have a little bit of conflict or a lot of conflict, but to still have a loving environment for that particular child will deter that child from turning into other things.” Participant 8 explained that family conflict played a role that influenced juvenile incarceration and the family is the unit that develops a child’s behavior as well as suggested that there must always be open communication between the child and the parent.

### ***Theme 2: Interpretation of the Findings in Light of the Literature Review***

Family conflict has an impact on juvenile delinquency (Garduno, 2022). Juveniles who have a strong relationship with their parents are more likely to care about their parents’ standards, which discourages them from engaging in delinquent acts (Aazami, 2023). Many of the current study participants’ responses indicated that relationships, family environment, and conflict were all factors that influence juveniles to engage in delinquent activities. According to Rade et al. (2018), communities with a high ex-offender population may see more ex-offenders return. Ex-offenders returning to disorganized communities with an already high influx of ex-offenders may encounter more challenges due to inadequate resources. However, Konkel (2020) found that communities can be socialized; therefore, churches can be exceptionally important to socialization in a community.

Stansfield et al. (2017) found that religion has given ex-offenders the necessary direction to help them alter their life trajectories and adopt exemplary and successful lifestyles. Yelderman et al. (2018) stated that to boost reentry efforts, improve mental and physical health, and reduce recidivism, it was necessary to engage individuals who were more welcoming to ex-offenders and people with mental illnesses and who were ready to reintegrate. Overall, current study participants agreed that juveniles do experience conflicts upon reentry into the communities, but the church leaders and the community can play a vital role in reducing these conflicts.

### ***Theme 2: Interpretation of the Findings in Light of the Conceptual Framework***

Many of the participants reflected on Shaw and McKay (1942) who found that certain neighborhood characteristics were associated with a higher risk of delinquency and the social structures. Some participants shared that reentry could pose some challenges, so there needs to be a better resolution to the conflict rather than to allow it to escalate to the point where the impact of it is even greater and that in the neighborhoods in which juveniles live, other households fall victim to or are prey or are part of the problem from some of the issues in the communities.

One participant shared that reentry could create a feeling of no hope, saying, When there's conflict on the inside, internal conflict, a house divided amongst itself will not stand. Internal conflict will really tear anyone apart. There is a fighting occurring within their world, and whatever they face in their world, if these youths are coming home in this conflict, that's really a major dilemma.

As Shaw and McKay indicated, resources can be structured and gathered via collective activity to increase sustainability and growth.

### **Theme 3: The Positive Impact of Church Programming on Reintegration**

The participants' responses revealed that neighborhood characteristics do have an influence on juvenile engaging in delinquent acts. For example, Participant 6 stated, "You know, you go into a neighborhood, regardless of the crime, you know, neighborhoods are very closely knitted."

### ***Theme 3: Interpretation of the Findings in Light of the Literature Review***

Jang (2018) indicated that religious programs and activities can help in creating a positive social connection. For example, religious activities may involve a wide variety of activities that may be beneficial for former juvenile offenders. Likewise, Warner and Konkel (2019) found that religious activities, like worship and religious education, and churches could get involved in a wide variety of other activities that benefited the congregation and the community in which they are located. Khan (2020) indicated that faith-based organizations can aid in providing programs and activities that can help instill positive behavior among juveniles, which can subsequently help deter reincarceration.

Families can benefit from the social interaction of ex-offenders with persons in religious settings and reentry programs that can be beneficial to the ex-offender (Stacer & Roberts, 2018). Thus, mentoring programs may increase the likelihood of successful community reintegration for young offenders (Hanham & Tracey, 2017). Dutton et al. (2018) indicated that juveniles developing high-quality relationships will increase the chances of positive youth outcomes, such as better adult relationships for them and their

families. Some participants in the current shared that incorporating counseling programs will be vital for incarcerated families within the community.

***Theme 3: Interpretation of the findings in Light of the Conceptual Framework***

The findings of the current study supported the social disorganization theory in that structural disadvantages were the basis of neighborhood crime issues (see, Liu, 2020; Shaw & McKay, 1942). Participant 6 stated, “because of the ills and negativity that exists throughout the neighborhoods. In our city, neighborhood, the gangs have a strong influence.” The findings of the study showed that programs and activities for juveniles influence the juveniles’ choice of activities and thereby reduce the likelihood of them engaging in delinquent activities. Participant 4 stated,

Often, we have had situations where we bring together secondhand goods, secondhand clothing, and being able to give them what they need. often time we also find ourselves helping them fill out applications, looking for a job, giving them, for example, a suit, coaching them towards how to pass an interview so that they can have a chance at understanding.

These concepts align with Shaw and McKay (1942) who stated that structuring disorganized communities must be achieved because there is a link between social disorganization and delinquency. However, there is also a need to create church programs to assist incarcerated families within the communities. Participant 6 shared that,

There was an importance of incorporating counseling programs that have social workers, so we would pull from them to help work with our youth and meet the need of whatever it is. That was needed at the time, whether it was counseling, the

church that included activities, to, again, and add wholeness of their lives the importance of having a counseling program or outside resources. For example, Boy Scouts, and field trips, youth camps, which would allow traveling.

**Theme 4: Mentoring Programs for Juveniles in the Church are the Key to Success**

Many of the participants shared that they had experience in their role as church leaders with mentoring juveniles. These participants highlighted the importance of forming a relationship during mentoring. Participant 8 shared that oftentimes young people just needed encouragement. They needed to be praised for what they could do, but they also need to be challenged on things that were unfamiliar with or that were difficult or hard. That was the most important thing is to listen to what the concerns are, and then try to address them from a more of an adult's perspective as to what was felt or what they needed to know to help make wise and better decisions for their lives. It was important to recognize that through mentoring juveniles' parents' involvement can also be helpful.

Participant 8 also reflected on juveniles having emotional issues and challenges that they were dealing with, and the importance engaged them and their parents in one-on-one talks. Participant 1 stated that,

What they've learned their behavior that they were willing to learn so when another perspective was presented to them that gave them an opportunity to change, and then the change might not come about, it may not be an immediate change. But over the course of time, and through observation, they can change.



#### ***Theme 4: Interpretation of the Findings in Light of the Literature Review***

Hopper et al. (2017) noted that mentors are good role models with whom young people have ongoing, meaningful relationships. Hence, mentors can play pivotal role in being a positive presence in the lives of juveniles who are considered at risk or engaged in delinquent acts (Hopper et al., 2019).

This theme is similar to the findings of McDaniel et al. (2016). Mentoring programs have been used for centuries within community settings. Also, findings showed that churches have been instrumental in promoting health and illness prevention. The congregations strived to provide health promotion and illness prevention programs (Schoenberger & Samson, 2017). Kenemore et al. (2020) reported that engagement in these programs does not substantially reduce recidivism rates over time. However, Restorative justice programs have been successful in addressing some aspects of youth reoffending. For example, Participant 1 shared that “when mentoring juveniles, I find them to be very receptive, sometimes there is some pushback from them until relationship is everything, once you establish the relationship, then you have the rapport.” And once the rapport is there, then you can get positive performance.” While Participant 3 stated,

When I see that a young person is in the church, coming from a single-family home, and somebody needs to step in to be there for them, I intentionally take them on board, sometimes I will take them out for lunch, sit down with them with permission from the parent or the mother, sit down with them. And then we talked. Sometimes I take some of the boys out, we play games, we go bowling, and I go out bowling with them, and then interact with them. In mentoring

juveniles' participants have also observed the importance of relationships and instilling discipline.

#### ***Theme 4: Interpretation of the Findings in Light of the Conceptual Framework***

Participants agreed that juveniles should come to the programs regularly. Shaw and McKay (1942) indicated that to rebuild these disorganized communities many factors would allow applying social pass ability groups through spatial grid of the city. Mentoring programs for juvenile in the churches can be one outlet that can enhance such outcomes.

Also, in the study participants agreed that the social disorganization theory by Shaw and McKay (1942) posited that communities and neighborhoods are forms of organized entities and that neighborhood structures can influence the neighborhood's organization or disorganization. One participant shared that he created a need for safety to share ideas in these programs within the church.

#### **Theme 5: Challenges of Negative Peer Pressure on Returning Juveniles**

The emerging theme focuses on challenges that juveniles encounter upon return to their neighborhood. Many of the participants shared those challenges can vary based on the neighborhood. However, the participants shared those challenges can range from peer pressure, influence of gangs, lack of resources, health care needs, unemployment. For example, Participant 6 shared that "poverty was a stronghold which created other issues amongst neighborhoods that were struggling to have basic needs, welfare, sickness, all of these characteristics that had a strong influence on the youths and juveniles being incarcerated." The participants shared many other factors that contribute to the challenges

that juveniles may encounter, such as peer pressure and lack of acceptance from people in the communities.

***Theme 5: Interpretations of the Findings in Light of the Literature Review***

Studies like Bondoc and Barnert (2021), showed that juveniles and families encounter a surmountable number of stressors upon their communities. Juveniles return to communities where they are exposed to risky behaviors (Barnert et al., 2020). On communities Rapaport (2018) stated that there are three fundamental components of community resilience, frequently mentioned in the various definitions of the term: the community's resources, capacity for adaptation, and ability to withstand disturbance. The challenges juveniles encounter in their neighborhood can be positive or negative. Antunes and Manasse (2021) found that disorganized communities are characterized as less prepared to control deviant behavior due to the inability to exercise social control over the community members. In similarity, Lee et al. (2017) also found that disorganized neighborhoods suffer disproportionately from a lack of resources and from reduced community connections that hinder unity, trust, and informal social control.

However, all participants agreed that there are challenges, but church leaders can play a pivotal role encountering the challenges juveniles who were incarcerated can have a way to escape. For example, Participant 3 shared that as a church, we need to find a way to help our young people to understand that even if your social background was not that great. Crime does not pay, and you need to stay out of crime, but that message needs

to be communicated for people to understand whatever are their ethnicity or social status.

***Theme 5: Interpretations of the Findings in Light of the Conceptual Framework***

Shaw and McKay (1942) postulated that neighborhoods with lower socioeconomic status, higher unemployment rates, and residence in low-income neighborhood gave rise to criminal behavior. Participants shared that peer pressure was very important. It was affecting many young people to the point that sometimes when you hear them, and they tell you of the experience it is very difficult to even understand. Thus, according to Shaw and McKay, poor communities are in flux with residents unable to form the necessary bonds to combat crime. Additionally, participants agreed with Shaw and McKay that poverty is a contributing factor to crime.

***Theme 6: Challenges of Negative Peer Pressure on Returning Juveniles***

Theme 6 reflected the thoughts of many of the participants concerning issues of incarceration. Participant 3 explained that peer pressure is very important. It was affecting most of our young people to the point that sometimes when you hear them, and they tell you of the experience, it was very difficult to understand.

***Theme 6: Interpretations of the Findings in Light of the Literature Review***

Juveniles are likely to negatively influence their peers if they lack strong, correctly guided views (Levy et al., 2019). One participant shared that, “as a parent of my daughter, my son told me, [*Sic*]..., you don't get it, you don't understand what we're talking about and the pressure we encounter in society.” Huijsmans et al. (2021) indicated that mid phase adolescence is normally the time when more time and effort are allocated to friends than family.

Therefore, Participant 2 stated that before peer pressure, just used to be in school. But now peer pressure is social media, music, videos, movies, and things like that peer pressure is at an all-time high. As these authors depicted peer value one another due to similarity, resulting in interpersonal affinities and intragroup harmony (Laursen et al., 2021). Peer rejection occurs when an individual is excluded by his or her peer group (Beeson et al., 2020). But rejection can also be a contributing factor. As Participant 5 highlighted how peer pressure can have an impact and shared how juveniles often seek a sense of community. Another participant shared that, “these people are getting involved with gangs.” As indicated by Andrews et al. (2021), negativity can have a great influence on youths that can lead to peer pressure. However, there can be positive peer influence, with Walters (2018) indicating that positive peer interactions are substantial factors that may deter juvenile offending and reincarceration. Children could be taught how to cope with peer pressure by teaching them the necessary skills to interact with positive peers and engage in positive activities and by showing parents how to supervise their behaviors. Participants agreed that positive family relationships can have a solid foundation on peers.

***Theme 6: Interpretations of the Findings in Light of the Conceptual Framework***

Participants agreed with Shaw and McKay (1942) that poor communities create social disorganization, but addressing the causes through faith-based organizations can enhance the lives of juvenile who were incarcerated when they return to their neighborhoods. But as Participant 8 shared addressing peer pressure, family conflict plays a role that influences juvenile incarceration, the family is the unit that develops a

child's behavior. So that when they are communicating with siblings or parents, if that communication is not positive, then they can build up resentment, even hate within a child, but if the objective is for the family, to grow their child in a meaningful and a trusting and a positive light than children get the wrong sort of the wrong reaction to their behavior. As stated by Shaw and McKay, communities must focus on rebuilding and leaders have to take control of communities. Also, leaders can create programs that can lead to positive outcomes for youth who have been incarcerated to decrease negative peer pressure.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The limitation of the study was that the churches led by the church leaders were required to have programs and activities for juveniles in conflict with the law. In addition, the church leaders were selected from the northeastern region of the United States. This study was done a year after the COVID-19 pandemic was declared to have ended. Hence, the COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact in that some of the church leaders shared that they could not start or continue with programs and activities for juveniles in conflict with the law due to the pandemic.

### **Recommendations**

The findings of the study were that of a qualitative nature of the church programs and activities offered by churches in the northeastern region. Quantitative research would provide empirical values on the correlation of programs and activities and the rate of juvenile reincarceration. The findings of the study showed that further research is needed:

- To explore the program and activities for juveniles who have been in conflict with the law in other regions of the United States.
- Further research could focus on one state in the northeastern region of the United States.
- Additional research is also needed to understand how to extend programs to families and rural neighborhoods impacted by juvenile reincarceration.
- Further research to explore the effectiveness of faith-based mentoring for juveniles in conflict with the law,
- Further research could explore how social media can be used as a tool to provide programs for juveniles in conflict with law in different neighborhoods.

These are areas that can be explored because many of the participants indicated that they were thankful that this research is being done. Some of the participants described actions steps they are willing to take such as implementing program and activities in addition to connecting more with the research population and other organization. Many of the participants shared stories supporting findings in previous research. Dunkley et al. (2020) indicated to have positive relationships of some of these programs they can be implemented.

These recommendations are also supported by other researchers. The findings of the study further support the idea that mentoring and other programs can help to build lasting connections and provide the juveniles with a sense of belonging. For example, Dutton et al. (2018) also echoed that the likelihood of favorable youth outcomes

improves adult relationships, and this can create high-quality interactions. Faith based mentoring for juvenile offenders can help to add meaning and hope (Stacer et al., 2018). Some of the participants shared that COVID-19 pandemic impacted programs and activities that could be extended to juveniles outside of the church (Miller & Blumstein, 2020). The social media platform could be explored as a possible option to reach more juveniles located in different areas of the northeastern region of the United States (Plaisime et al., 2020).

### **Implications**

The implication of positive social change is revealed in the findings of this qualitative case study research. The purpose of this study was to explore church leaders' perception of their role in deterring juvenile reincarceration. Many of the participants shared that this study can be helpful in assisting the church and other organizations to address the existing need in certain neighborhoods and provide programs and activities that are also extended to juveniles who have been in conflict with the law. The church leaders also shared different factors that contributed to juvenile reincarceration. The factors included neighborhood characteristics, trauma, poverty, lack of positive interaction with others, and family support. The church leaders attributed the successful return of juveniles to their community based on direct experience to having support, forming strong bonds with others, and learning new skills. The findings of the study have implications for positive social change on the family, individual, organizational, societal and policy levels on the individual level. On the individual level the focus could be on viewing how neighborhood influences juvenile reincarceration (Thompson-Dyck, 2022).



Many participants shared viewpoints that neighborhood characteristics can influence juvenile delinquency.

On the family level participants shared about the roles that families should play in helping juveniles to reintegrate in their neighborhood. In addition, family relationships are also beneficial in deterring juvenile delinquency and subsequent juvenile reincarceration. (Hoffmann & Dufur, 2018) found that when parents can build close, loving relationships with their children and spend quality time talking to them, their chances of developing antisocial behaviors will be reduced and they will be better equipped to engage in pro-social interactions.

The findings of the study indicated that reintegrating into society after incarceration presents challenges for juvenile offenders, familial ties, few job prospects because of stigma and ineligibility, and psychological distress during their incarceration. (Craw et al., 2020). Additionally, on the program level Stacer and Roberts (2018) found that offenders who participated in community-based mentorship programs through their churches had lower rates of delinquent behavior than those who interacted with mentors while incarcerated. On the policy level, change can be created by church leaders collaborating with criminal justice policy makers to develop existing programs to help juveniles in conflict with the law (Johnson et al., 2020). On an organizational level, the church can offer support to juveniles. Walters (2018) noted that the church can help to deter juveniles from engaging in delinquent activities by implementing structured activities.

### **A Model for Church Leaders**

Therefore, a model can be created to assist church leaders who assists juveniles who have been in conflict with the law, such as (a) intake to meet one-to-one with juveniles, (b) one-on-one coaching or mentoring, (c) weekly meetings with the juvenile; (d) family intake of parents or caregivers of juvenile reincarcerated youths; and (e) to assimilate back into society, church leaders can connect with the community through various sports, etc. As Participants 4 and 8 stated, there needs to be community activities for juveniles who have been in conflict with the law. Participant 8 stated that in terms of social development, they needed to understand that individuals have to learn how to interact and relate to each other in a positive light. Similarly, Participant 3 stated that I have been trying to help them to understand, that they can turn their story to be positive, their experience to be positive, and they can even serve as mentors to others. Participant 4 stated that it started with counseling, because the idea of counseling is to help them realize that this is not the end of your life. Likewise, Participant 5 stated that mentoring and helping them to make better choices where they don't reoffend. Similarly, Participant 8 stated that helping them to learn how to make sound decisions that would positively impact their lives was of critical importance to me and to them, oftentimes young people just needed encouragement.

Collaborating with family during the intake can provide more information. Participant 6 stated, "I'm the pastor, but I am not a long-term counselor, I can be short-term counseling and if that child or family needed more mental health help, I would easily refer that child or that family to outside resources." Participant 8 stated, "this

church has the full-size gymnasium. So, we would encourage the young people to keep physically fit and so that took the form of basketball teams.” Furthermore, Participant 4 stated that, “we build programs that helps in developing skills that this person will be able to find a good job.” Participant 1 also shared that, “I think they need life skills.”

**Table 3**

*Model for Church Leaders*

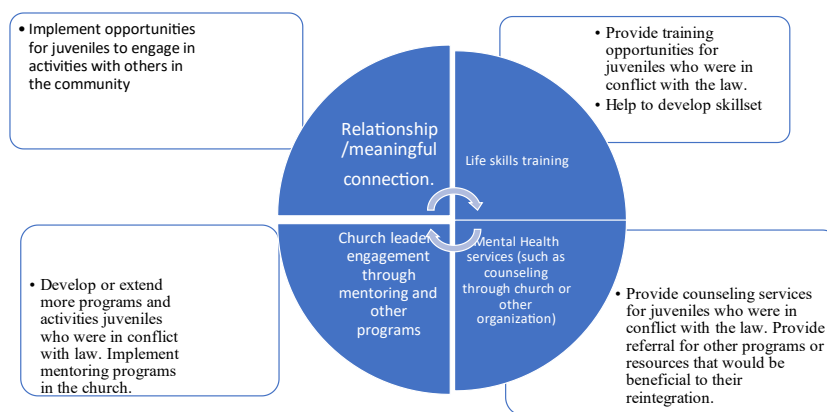
Steps	Model for church leaders
Step 1	Intake to meet one to one with juveniles.
Step 2	One-to-one coaching or mentoring.
Step 3	Weekly meeting with juveniles’ family intake of parents or caregivers of juvenile.
Step 4	Family intake of parents or caregivers of juvenile reincarcerated youths.
Step 5	Juveniles assimilate back into the community.

I hope this study can create positive social change that can generate an awareness for church leaders and other organization leaders to possibly collaborate and develop strategies that are used to reduce juvenile reincarceration. The results of this study will contribute to the development of policies that can improve the services and programs offered to juveniles in conflict with the law. In addition, exploring the topic juvenile reincarceration identifies several determinants of health.

The social determinant of health related to juvenile reincarceration involves physical and mental health (Abrahams et al., 2020; Fix & Thompson, 2022). Unemployment, unstable housing, inadequate access to health care, and food insecurity are examples of social determinants that are known to increase the risk of behavioral disorders and influence engagement with the criminal justice system (Rotter & Compton, 2022). This research also provided meaningful insights into church leaders’ perceptions and the role they can play in helping to address the social determinants of health.

## Figure 2

### *Participant Recommendations*



## Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore church leaders' role in deterring juvenile reincarceration. This study provided church leaders with an understanding of potential programs they can implement to help add structure to the lives of youth in conflict returning to their communities. The findings of the study can also help to identify the gap in understanding how programs and activities can help to possible deter juvenile reincarceration in the northeastern region of the United States. This study can give church leaders meaningful insights of steps the church can take to help to create change. Church leaders shared various positive experiences working with juveniles. Through this experience church leaders can recognize the needs that exist and collaborate with other organizations as well

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## Appendix: Interview Protocol

RQ1: What are church leaders' perceptions and experiences of how churches contribute to reducing juvenile reincarceration?

- 1) Please tell me about your role in the church?
- 2) What has been your experience working with juveniles both within and outside of the church?
- 3) What types of programs does your church offer for juveniles?
- 4) What are your experiences with providing mentoring to juveniles?
- 5) Can you share without naming any names an experience you had with mentoring juveniles?
- 6) How do you believe juvenile reincarceration has impacted communities in this region?
- 7) What programs can the church offer to help former juveniles in conflict with the law?
- 8) The social disorganization theory states that crime in neighborhood is as a result of weakening social bonds and neighborhood characteristics. How much do you think that this theory applies to juvenile reincarceration in your neighborhood?
- 9) What do you think contributes to juvenile reincarceration?
- 10) What role do you think peer-pressure plays in juvenile reincarceration?
- 11) What role do you think family conflict plays with influencing juvenile reincarceration?
- 12) Is there anything else you want to add that I have not asked about?