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Understanding the Stressors of Mothers Who Have Transitioned out of Prison

Latoya Cain
Walden University

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Walden University

College of Psychology and Community Services

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Latoya Cain

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Walden University
2024

Abstract

Understanding the Stressors of Mothers Who Have Transitioned out of Prison

By

Latoya Cain

MA, Case Western Reserve University, 2018

BS, Northern Caribbean University, 2003

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Forensic Psychology

Walden University

November 2024

Abstract

This study was conducted to explore the experiences and perceptions of eight mental health clinicians on the stressors that mothers transitioning from prison face as they try to integrate into the community. The participant sample for this study consisted of eight mental health clinicians who have experience working with mothers who are transitioning out of incarceration. Participants were between 30 and 50 years of age. All eight participants were actively employed as mental health professionals and had experience working with women/mothers that were incarcerated and were reintegrating back into the community. All eight participants had 1-11 years' experience working with women/mothers that have been incarcerated and are transitioning back into their community. This study employed a qualitative research method to gather data through in-depth interviews with mental health clinicians to understand their perceptions of stressors and resources for mothers who have transitioned from prison. The findings indicated that resources should include mental health treatment, substance abuse treatment, coping strategies, employment, reunification with children, and parenting. The recommendations from this study may increase positive social change by informing policy and program development that support mothers during the transition and improve their overall well-being. The study adds to the existing literature on the topic and provides valuable insights into the challenges mothers face transitioning from prison into their communities.

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Dedication

This is dedicated to my family, especially my mother; Ann Cain that has pushed me to begin and complete this journey. You have been my first friend, best friend and forever friend. Thank you for your words of encouragement, and physical, mental, and spiritual support. Reaching this far in completing this Ph.D. I sometimes feel like I am not only doing it for me but for us because you have been fully invested in this journey, I appreciate you in so many ways. Mummy, thank you for being my anchor in this stormy sea called life. I dedicate this journey also to my children; Skyler, Amlackai, Kai-Heme, and Bellann; you four are what keep me focused and continue to be my motivator. Skyler my peace, my sunshine; Amlackai my strong guy, my anchor my strength; Kai-Heme my love, my sensitive child and Bellann; my heart in human form.

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Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study.....	1
Introduction.....	1
Problem Statement	2
Purpose of the study.....	3
Significance of the study.....	4
Background of the study.....	7
Theoretical Framework	11
Conceptual Framework	13
Research Question.....	16
Nature of the Study	16
Operational Definition Terms	18
Research Methodology Rationale	19
Possible Types and Sources of Data.....	21
Proposed Analytical Strategies	23
Assumptions.....	24
Limitations	26
Delimitation	28
Implications for Positive Social Change	29
Chapter 2: Literature Review	32
Introduction.....	32
Terms and Theories Used for Search.....	33

Theoretical framework	34
Maternal Identity.....	37
The Prosocial Identity of Motherhood.....	42
Motherhood and Incarcerated Historical Context.....	43
The Influence of Relational Support on Motherhood Identify	47
The Pragmatic Obligation of Motherhood	48
Mothers and Multiple Incarcerations	51
Stigma and Social Pressure from Having a Criminal Background	55
Development of Gender and Moral Conscience	61
Psychological and Social Adjustments	66
Motherhood and Parenting.....	72
Relationships between Mother and Child after Incarceration.....	78
Rebuilding the Bond: Challenges and Hurdles.....	81
The Role of External Factors	82
Promising Interventions	84
Recidivism Rates and Their Impact on Family Reintegration	85
The Role of Community and Support Programs.....	91
The Bigger Picture: Societal Impact	92
Reintegration and associated social impacts	93
Housing and Community	95
Summary	98
Chapter 3: Research Method.....	100

Introduction.....	100
Research Design & Research Rationale.....	100
Research Design.....	100
Rationale.....	101
Research Question.....	102
Conceptual Framework.....	103
Research Methodology and Instrumentation.....	106
Sampling.....	106
Data Collection.....	106
Data Analysis.....	107
Ethical Concerns.....	108
Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection.....	108
Recruitment.....	108
Participation.....	109
Data Collection.....	111
Population.....	111
Sampling.....	112
Data analysis plan & Issues of trustworthiness.....	115
Data storage & ethical considerations.....	117
Summary.....	118
Chapter 4: Findings.....	119
Introduction.....	119

Setting	120
Participant Demographics	120
Data Collection	123
Data Analysis	125
Data Preparation.....	125
Creating a Codebook.....	125
Evidence of Trustworthiness.....	126
Transparency and Interpretive Validity	126
Results and Thematic Findings	127
Mental health and substance abuse	128
Criminal Background	130
Summary	137
Chapter 5: Findings.....	139
Introduction.....	139
Interpretation of the Findings.....	139
Limitations of the Study.....	142
Recommendations for Future Research	142
Implications.....	143
Social Change	143
Methodological and Theoretical Implications	144
Conclusion	145
References.....	146

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

Mothers who are ex-offenders receive little to no support when transitioning from prison, especially in cases where they come from disadvantaged neighborhoods and are plagued with a lack of employment and housing, among other challenges. Previous research indicates that these stressors affecting young mothers transitioning from the prison system are linked to high chances of recidivism among newly released mothers. Motherhood is a demanding responsibility, and the challenges resulting from economic inequalities, minimal social support, and unrealistic expectations pose significant social issues to mothers transitioning into society. This study examines the perceptions of mental health clinicians who work with mothers transitioning into the community from prison about what are the predominant stressors these mothers face during this transition.

Previously incarcerated mothers experience decreased parental rights, lower functioning levels, poor self-esteem, and increased levels of guilt, making the integration process challenging. Moreover, mothers who have had a run-in with the justice system struggle when reintegrating into the community regarding resolving their relationships with their children, other family members, employers, and other necessary social support structures, making the process even harder. Therefore, this study presents evidence to justify that a smooth entry into the community following incarceration is highly dependent on the social support received in the form of housing, treatment for probable

substance dependence, financial assistance, and mental health care, all of which lower the chances of recidivism in newly released mothers.

In this chapter, I dive deeper into the basics of this study, the problem statement, and the research questions driving this research. This introduction is structured to give a detailed view of the issues previously incarcerated mothers faced based on previous research.

Problem Statement

The societal issue addressed in this research involves the challenges and stressors experienced by previously incarcerated mothers during the society reentry process. Society must reconsider, restructure, and improve interventions that have shortcomings in assisting transitioning mothers. There are emotional and behavioral repercussions of separating a mother and her children, which create a need for interventions such as social and emotional counseling to ease the reconnection once the mother is released from prison. The lack of emotional, financial, and physical support for mothers transitioning into society often results in repeat criminal offenses, which may potentially result in more jail time. Previous research regarding this issue indicates that recidivism is more likely to occur when an ex-offender comes from an impoverished family that lacks the necessary family resources such as social capital and inheritance, thus undermining the family's ability to support the ex-offender. Moreover, during reintegration into society, some community services and assistance programs meant to help mothers may be inefficient, resulting in poor management and less consideration for unique cases that may require

new interventions. For example, community shelters that are meant to provide housing may be influenced by class, race, sexuality, and gender-based stereotypes, which affect their provision of services to mothers who are ex-offenders. This is a classic example demonstrating how the provision of social services may significantly impact the experience of previously incarcerated mothers reintegrating into society.

Purpose of the study

This qualitative study aims to understand the perceptions of mental health clinicians who work with mothers transitioning out of prison and the challenges they face. The study will focus on evaluating hands-on intervention programs that provide support during crisis moments, preventing emotional turmoil. The research will also provide an in-depth understanding through interviewing mental health clinicians about their perceptions of stressors and resources that affect mothers who have transitioned out of prison. The goal is to tackle this social problem on a global level and improve the lives of mothers transitioning from the prison system. The findings of this study will contribute to developing more effective and efficient programs to support mothers during their transition out of Prison. The research will shed light on the unique challenges mothers face and help create a better understanding of their needs. By examining the impact of hands-on intervention programs, the study will provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of current support systems. The data collected through interviews with mothers will be analyzed to identify common themes and patterns, which can inform future policies and initiatives aimed at improving the lives of these individuals.

Significance of the study

The significance of this study is based on the fact that mothers transitioning from Prison face numerous challenges, including discrimination, difficulty reuniting with family members, the lack of resources and support, and the lack of affordable housing. These problems make reentry challenging regarding rebuilding their lives and providing for their families. One of the challenges most mothers experience when transitioning from Prison is the discrimination and stigma they face, considering that most people perceive the criminal justice system as punishment and extend this perception to those serving prison. The stigma makes it difficult for mothers transitioning from prison to seek employment, find housing, and access other necessary resources. Regarding work, an employer would prefer to hire employees without a criminal record, making it hard to get stable jobs. This, in turn, makes it hard for transitioning mothers to provide for their families, which ultimately results in financial instability and poverty.

Mothers transitioning from prison lack the necessary support and resources to ease the transition. This ranges across various helpful resources, including access to vocational and educational training and limited support for mothers struggling with substance abuse and mental health issues (Jonson-Reid et al., 2018). Considering these mothers are transitioning from the correctional system, such resources would be instrumental in ensuring a successful transition into society. At the same time, limited access, or lack thereof, is detrimental to the reentry process. Therefore, this study aims to understand how resources in the form of job training and any relevant education would be

essential in helping transitioning mothers secure stable and well-compensated employment. Moreover, there is a need for research on how mental health and substance abuse treatment can help former inmates address underlying issues that may have contributed to their criminal behavior.

Mothers transitioning from prison deal with much emotional baggage when reuniting with their children, especially in cases where their children have been under the care of others or if they lost contact during imprisonment (Crawford, 2020). This emotional baggage involves shame and guilt regarding their past behavior and its impact on their children. In extreme cases, mothers undergoing the reentry process also face legal and financial barriers that make it hard to regain custody of their children through child custody proceedings, pending child support payments, and other expenses involved in the reunifying process. It is, therefore, necessary to conduct relevant research and studies on how this emotional and financial stress can be alleviated in the case of transitioning mothers, which would ease the process and lower the chances of potential recidivism.

The lack of housing options is another recurring issue among mothers as they transition back into society from Prison, as they find it hard to find stable and safe housing for themselves and their children in some cases. The main contributor to this challenge is the high cost of housing and very few affordable options, which frustrates mothers in reentry. The lack of housing makes it challenging for them to make other forms of progress essential to creating a stable life for themselves and their family.

Previously convicted mothers are, therefore, more likely to rely on temporary housing options, including shelters and transitional housing, which pose some risks, especially in cases where they have children to look after (Bullock et al., 2020). Research on the housing options available for newly released mothers is needed to understand how their quality of life can be improved during the transition process, which involves providing proper housing, considering that it is a basic need.

Research on the struggles experienced by mothers transitioning from Prison is therefore crucial as the findings are instrumental in improving the reentry process. This study on mothers' challenges can form the foundation in the policy-making process for interventions to redesign and improve the reentry programs and policies available to address these unique needs. For example, job training programs and those meant to help newly released mothers regain custody of their children can be refined based on the findings of this research, making them more effective in reintegrating mothers into their families and the community in general. Moreover, this research identifies unique mental health struggles affecting transitioning mothers. It informs effective strategies and interventions that can address these issues, thus improving the mental wellness of newly released mothers and ultimately easing the entry process.

Therefore, this study serves a vital purpose in raising awareness regarding the effects of mass incarceration on families and communities by highlighting the unique challenges resulting from the same. Considering that the findings of this research create awareness and inform the concerned parties, this research plays a significant role in

mobilizing public support for policies and related programs that champion successful reentry and proper family reunification among newly released mothers.

Background of the study

The incarceration of female offenders in the United States has steadily increased over time compared to male offenders. The only difference is that women often serve lesser sentences in most cases. In the past four decades, there has been an increase in 800,000 state and federal prison parolees, with female parolees increasing by seven times from 1990 to 2013 (Carson, 2013). This indicates that the population of previously incarcerated women transitioning back into society has increased. There is an increased need for employment, housing, and community support to support the reentry of these women. Still, the lack of the required resources severely impacts transitioning women and their families. Ultimately, the lack of these resources and the much-needed support results in reoffending and incarcerating these women.

Imprisonment is proven to be isolating, which creates a challenge when newly released prisoners enter and reestablish connections with the free society. The reentry process is even more challenging when the released prisoners move back into different communities with different conditions than they were used to before (Cooper-Sadlo et al., 2019). Therefore, leaving Prison may not necessarily mean resuming one's former life but instead transitioning from Prison to the community, considering it is a whole new experience. The community reentry process significantly impacts the relationship between communities and the penal system, especially since most penal populations

come from poor communities. To understand the community reintegration process following prison release, it is essential to focus on the complexity of the moment of release. Research and survey data indicate that program intervention works best during the earlier period of returning to the community. The long-term effects of incarceration on society depend highly on the individuals' experiences during the first months of release.

With the increase in prison release rates, there is minimal research on the process of society reentry following incarceration, while most research focuses on the effects of imprisonment. The weak attachment to stable households and the uneven involvement in mainstream social roles make it hard to involve former convicts in research, leaving little knowledge about reentry. The stressors experienced by newly released women result from the anxiety associated with adjusting to socializing in a free society under the limitations posed by material deprivation (Cooper-Sadlo et al., 2019). These stressors often affect the mental health of previously incarcerated mothers, increasing their chances of relapse and undermining reentry into society. There is a need for a framework that studies the social integration of formerly incarcerated women immediately after they are released and conducts an empirical analysis of the initial months of community reintegration. Social integration following release from Prison also depends on personal characteristics, isolation from social settings in the first weeks of release, and criminal justice supervision.

Becoming a member of society after release from Prison involves more than living in a community. Instead, integration into society involves developing family connections and relationships, finding a permanent shelter, and maintaining a constant means of subsistence. Reconnecting with family, having a residence, and earning income lay the foundation for meaningful connections to a state and community, which are the basic definitions of citizenship in the United States of America. Therefore, despite the challenges experienced, mothers transitioning from Prison are expected to establish community belonging and material security to fulfill the valued roles of citizen, kin, or worker. The significant challenges, including lack of housing, disconnect with family, and income poverty, are the critical barriers to opportunities and mainstream social roles for newly released mothers, which limit community participation. In this case, social integration goes past minimizing recidivism rates since a successful transition is characterized by basic financial stability and social well-being, allowing one to become an active and valuable community member.

Families have a significant role in easing the reentry process by providing financial support and housing and creating a social connection with newly released mothers. Researchers focusing on criminal resistance found that stable and robust relationships influence behavior among newly released prisoners and can be a turning point in criminal careers (Visher et al., 2004). More recent studies expound on criminal desistance research by focusing on family life which shows that good relationships between mothers and their children or partners minimize chances of recidivism and

promote societal integration. However, romantic relationships may also threaten social reintegration and stability in cases where partners are criminal offenders or abuse drugs, which increases recidivism. Therefore, immediate families, including children, parents, siblings, and grandparents, form a better material and emotional support system for newly released mothers.

Despite the fundamental role of stable housing in social integration, there is limited research on the effects of poor housing security and the subsequent homelessness experienced by formerly incarcerated women (Leverentz, 2011). Homelessness after living in homeless shelters is often a result of poor living conditions or insecurity in some homeless shelters. According to Carson (2013), about 4% to 11% of released prisoners in Philadelphia and New York City relied on homeless shelters for up to two years following their release. Additionally, about 10% of prisoners from the state of Massachusetts went directly to homeless shelters after their release (Carson, 2013). Moreover, the current research on housing security concerning people in the reentry process only focuses on homeless shelter settlement, which leaves a gap in research on single-room dwellings, transitional housing, or living with family as alternatives during the reintegration process.

A regular income is necessary during the reentry process as it allows newly released mothers to afford various needs. Employment is, therefore, vital in the immediate period after release for prime-age mothers, especially since they have children to provide for. Being employed is essential in building pride, gaining social status, and

establishing a daily routine which is recommended to prevent recidivism (Harding et al., 2014). However, formerly incarcerated employees receive low average earnings while others struggle with unemployment due to social stigma towards former prisoners (Pettit, 2007). According to research by the Prison Policy Institute, the unemployment rate of formerly incarcerated people is at 27 percent and constantly increasing compared to the unemployment rate of the general population (Harding et al., 2014). The lack of employment is also fueled by the lack of documentation assistance and other transition services inmates must receive before their release. Therefore, newly released mothers are often forced to rely on social welfare programs as a source of income due to the high unemployment rate and low wages.

Theoretical Framework

The stressors of released mothers from Prison are an essential area of research in understanding the challenges incarcerated mothers face after their release. These challenges range from finding housing and work, navigating the criminal justice system, and rebuilding relationships with family members. This research aims to contribute to the reintegration of newly released mothers transitioning into society by examining the role of self-efficacy theory in understanding the stressors faced by mothers released from Prison. It is proposed to be influenced by four main factors: experience of control, experience of substitution, social persuasion, and physiological/emotional state.

Self-efficacy theory provides a helpful theoretical framework for understanding how mothers who have transitioned out of Prison cope with their challenges. According

to Garrido (2020), self-efficacy theory pertains to a person's judgment of their ability to cope with a given situation based on their skills and circumstances. According to the idea, individuals with a strong sense of self-efficacy are more likely to face challenges competently and make choices that will result in positive outcomes.

Applying self-efficacy theory to mothers released from Prison, mothers with strong self-efficacy may be better equipped to deal with their stressors. For example, mothers with high self-efficacy are more likely to get jobs, navigate the criminal justice system successfully, and rebuild family relationships. Conversely, mothers with low self-efficacy may struggle with these challenges, leading to adverse outcomes such as unemployment, recidivism, and strained family relationships (Maddux, 2013). These women exhibited low self-efficacy due to their incarceration experience, including loss of autonomy, limited opportunities to learn and practice new skills, and negative feedback from others. There is a possibility that, as a result, adjusting to life outside of Prison, such as rebuilding relationships with children and finding work can be difficult.

By using self-efficacy theory as a theoretical framework, this research contributes to the existing literature on Stressors of Mothers who have transitioned out of Prison by examining the role of self-efficacy in shaping the experiences of these mothers. Through qualitative interviews with mental health clinicians, the study will gain insight into how mothers' sense of self-efficacy affects their ability to cope with their challenges.

Therefore, this research provides insights into how interventions and support programs

can be designed to promote the self-efficacy of mothers who have transitioned out of Prison and improve their outcomes.

Therefore, the self-efficacy theory is a critical component of my theoretical framework as it provides a lens through which to view the challenges faced by mothers who have transitioned out of Prison. By exploring the impact of self-efficacy on their ability to cope with stressors, this study contributes to the current scholarship on this topic. Ultimately, I aim to use the insights gained from this research to inform interventions to help these mothers successfully transition back into their communities and improve their overall well-being.

Conceptual Framework

The incarceration experience can significantly impact mothers who have transitioned out of Prison and their ability to reintegrate into society successfully. Examining the theoretical framework of stress and coping helps understand the challenges these mothers face and how to support them in their transition. This framework posits that individuals face stressors in their lives, and various coping strategies and resources influence how they respond to those stressors. One theory within the stress and coping framework is the conservation of resources theory (COR) (Hobfoll, 2016). This theory suggests that individuals strive to obtain, retain, and protect resources essential to their well-being, including social support, economic resources, and personal skills. The loss of resources or inability to obtain them can result in stress, and

individuals may use coping strategies to try to manage the stress and protect their resources.

Applying COR to the context of mothers released from Prison shows that these women face significant resource scarcity. They may lack the financial resources, social support, and personal skills necessary for successful reintegration (Hobfoll, 2016). It can be challenging to find a job, which can lead to financial stress. They may also face strained relationships with family members and a lack of social support, leading to isolation and loneliness. The stigma associated with incarceration can exacerbate the absence of these resources. And can make it difficult for these women to access the resources needed.

Another stress and coping framework theory is the transactional model of stress and management (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). This model suggests that individuals engage in a cognitive appraisal process to determine a stressor's meaning and ability to cope with it. This appraisal process involves two stages: primary appraisal and secondary appraisal. In the preliminary appraisal stage, the individual determines whether a situation is a threat or a challenge. In the secondary appraisal stage, the individual evaluates their resources and coping strategies and determines whether they are sufficient to cope with the stressor.

Applying the transactional model of stress and coping to mothers released from Prison, we find that cognitive appraisals of the mother's condition can be influenced by factors such as incarceration experience, social support, and self-esteem. Increase, for

example, suppose a mother perceives her situation as threatening and does not have the necessary resources to deal with the stressor. In that case, she will experience high stress levels and have difficulty adjusting to life outside Prison. On the other hand, there is a possibility that if the mother perceives her situation as challenging and has the resources to deal with it, she may be less stressed and have a more successful reintegration.

Aligning this study with semi-structured interviews is essential in establishing a logical connection between the presented framework and the nature of the research. By directly deriving the research questions from the participants' thoughts and perceptions, the study gains more meaning and insight, enhancing its validity. The stress and coping framework provides a helpful lens through which to examine the challenges faced by mothers who have transitioned out of Prison. The conservation of resources theory and the transactional model of stress and coping offer theoretical perspectives that can be used to understand how these women experience anxiety and cope with the challenges they face. Using these frameworks in research generates insight into how to support mothers who have transitioned out of Prison by providing economic resources, social support, and opportunities to build personal skills. Ultimately, this research aims to improve these women's well-being and promote their successful reintegration into society.

Research Question

Mothers transitioning from Prison to society face many stressors due to the lack of social support. This research follows a qualitative approach to understanding the experiences of newly released mothers.

Research Question: How do mothers who have transitioned out of the prison system deal with stressors associated with decreased social support, and what type of assistance or programs would help manage these stressors

Nature of the Study

Reentering society after incarceration can lead to significant stressors for mothers, including financial instability, social isolation, and discrimination. Such stressors may impede mothers' ability to reestablish family relationships, secure stable employment, and maintain sobriety. Understanding the nature and extent of these stressors is essential to developing effective support programs and policies for mothers transitioning out of Prison. This dissertation explores the stressors experienced by mothers who have transitioned out of Prison and their impact on their ability to reintegrate into society. This study will use a qualitative research approach, precisely, narrative. Since the study seeks to gain insights from mental health clinicians about the population of mothers who have transitioned from Prison, a lot of research data will need to come from the interpretation of stories given by the mothers. While the study may require using the detailed experiences of the participants, the nature of collecting data is from the performance from a third party's perspective, making the nature of this study narrative research. Creswell

(2013) defines narrative analysis as interpreting people's experiences and perceptions. In this study, the study population is mental health clinicians who will be interviewed to provide their perceptions about the mothers who have transitioned from prisons. The perceptions will lead to interpretation to get specific data to be analyzed for the research. Data will be collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 8-10 mental health clinicians' perceptions of stressors and resources that mothers face that have been released from Prison.

Participants will be recruited through a purposive sampling strategy. Inclusion criteria will include mental health clinicians willing to share their perceptions on mothers who have been released from Prison within the past year, with at least one child under the age of 18 whom they have met. Participants must also be recruited through community-based organizations serving incarcerated individuals, such as reentry programs and community centers formerly. The data will be analyzed using a thematic analysis approach. Thematic analysis is a qualitative data analysis method that involves identifying patterns and themes in the data. In this study, the data will be analyzed inductively, meaning that themes will be derived from the data rather than imposed on the data. The analysis will involve coding the data for themes related to the stressors experienced by mothers during the reintegration process and their impact on their ability to reintegrate into society.

Operational Definition Terms

Stressors: External factors that create a significant emotional, psychological, or physiological response in mothers who have transitioned out of Prison. Examples of stressors may include financial instability, social isolation, discrimination, or stigma.

Mothers: Women who have given birth to at least one child and have recently been released from Prison. These women may have primary custody of their children or have shared custody arrangements.

Transitioning out of prison: The process of reentering society after being released from Prison. This may include finding housing, securing employment, reconnecting with family and friends, and adjusting to life outside of Prison.

Reintegration: The process of adjusting to life outside of Prison and becoming a functioning member of society. This includes establishing stable housing, finding employment, and rebuilding relationships with family and friends.

Support programs: Any formal or informal programs designed to assist mothers who have transitioned out of Prison. Examples of support programs may include job training programs, substance abuse treatment programs, or parenting classes.

Policies: Laws, regulations, or guidelines that govern the treatment of individuals who have been incarcerated and their reentry into society. Examples of policies may include laws prohibiting discrimination against individuals with criminal records or guidelines for the provision of reentry services.

Financial instability: The lack of financial resources to meet basic needs, such as food, housing, and healthcare. This may be a significant stressor for mothers recently released from Prison, as they may have limited job prospects and face discrimination due to their criminal record.

Social isolation: The lack of social support and connections. Mothers recently released from Prison may experience social isolation due to stigma and discrimination associated with their criminal record.

Recidivism: The reoffending or re-incarceration of individuals released from Prison. In this study, recidivism may be considered a negative outcome of the reintegration process, as it may indicate a lack of successful reintegration into society and an increased likelihood of future involvement with the criminal justice system.

Discrimination: The unfair or unequal treatment based on a particular characteristic, such as race, gender, or criminal history. Mothers recently released from Prison may face discrimination in housing, employment, and social relationships, contributing to stress and hindering their reintegration into society.

Stigma: Negative attitudes about women who have been incarcerated. Mothers recently released from Prison may experience stigma from others, contributing to social isolation and hindering their reintegration into society.

Research Methodology Rationale

This study follows a narrative research approach, a qualitative research methodology that seeks the interpretation of personal stories and experiences of

individuals. It involves collecting data through interviews, focus groups, and other means and analyzing the data for patterns and themes based on the stories shared in the discussions (Creswell, 2013). In the case of researching the stressors of mothers who have transitioned out of Prison, narrative research is a particularly effective methodology for several reasons. Narrative research provides a platform for mental health clinicians to share stories from the mothers they have met in the health centers.

Narrative research delves into individuals' stories and experiences to gain insight into their lives. In the case of studying mothers who have transitioned from their time in Prison, it is evident that their stories encompass numerous aspects and are highly complex. Undertaking a narrative approach allows the investigation to unveil the profound and multifaceted experiences these mothers went through as mental health professionals recount the narratives of mothers they have worked with. This strategy offers a stage for clinicians to convey their observations and impressions qualitatively, enhancing the understanding of the challenges and resources these mothers encountered.

Additionally, narrative research enables a comprehensive examination of the mothers' self-efficacy perception and its influence on coping mechanisms in stressful situations. Self-efficacy pertains to an individual's confidence in their ability to succeed in specific scenarios (Creswell, 2013). Utilizing qualitative interviews, mental health professionals can shed light on how these mothers' faith in their abilities impacts their capacity to manage stress after being released from Prison. The narrative methodology permits researchers to delve into the subtleties of the mothers' experiences,

comprehending how their self-efficacy is shaped, tested, and potentially fortified or impeded.

Furthermore, narrative research offers a versatile and accommodating structure for examining mental health professionals' assorted viewpoints and voices. Every clinician might have interacted with different mothers who faced diverse backgrounds, situations, and challenges. By conducting interviews and focus groups, researchers can gather various narratives that comprehensively cover this unique population's challenges and resources (Andrews et al., 2004). The qualitative essence of the narrative approach allows researchers to spot shared themes, patterns, and extraordinary individual experiences, resulting in a detailed portrayal of these mothers' obstacles.

Lastly, the narrative research method highlights the value of context and interpretive understanding. It acknowledges that people create narratives based on their distinct contexts and interpretations of life experiences. Investigating clinicians' shared reports helps identify socio-cultural, psychological, and environmental factors influencing these mothers' challenges and resources. Recognizing these contextual elements is crucial for devising tailored interventions and support systems suited to this demographic are needs.

Possible Types and Sources of Data

In understanding the Stressors of Mothers who have transitioned out of Prison, each of these sources of data has unique potential for exploring the experiences of these mothers and the challenges they face:

- Interviews: Conducting interviews with mental health clinicians helps provide their perceptions about mothers who have transitioned out of Prison. The method is an effective way to collect rich and detailed data about their experiences. This can be achieved using structured or semi-structured interviews to explore specific themes, such as challenges finding employment, reconnecting with family, or dealing with the stigma associated with a criminal record (Barnet et al., 2014). Interviews can help clinicians share what they have noted through interacting with the ex-prisoners they have encountered.
- Focus groups: For understanding shared experiences and perspectives. This involves bringing together groups of mental health clinicians 'perceptions about mothers who have transitioned out of Prison to discuss specific topics or issues related to their experiences. This is essential in identifying common themes, challenges, and differences in opinion and experience.
- Written accounts: Collecting written statements, such as letters or diaries, from mothers who have transitioned out of Prison while in the health centers can provide a unique insight into their experiences. This approach can allow participants to share their thoughts and feelings in a comfortable format. It can provide rich and detailed data that can help researchers understand the complexity of their experiences.
- Artifacts: Collecting artifacts, such as photographs or videos from the hospitals on the experiences of the ex-prisoned mothers, can provide a visual representation.

That is, watching over the transition from how they entered for mental health treatment, the stress status, and how happy they might have appeared after the treatment may provide some visual interpretation and perceptions that can be quantified to make sense in the current study. This allows the participants to share their experiences in a way that is meaningful to them and can provide a unique insight into their lives after Prison.

Proposed Analytical Strategies

The thematic analysis involves identifying patterns and themes in the data, which can provide insights into the key issues and concerns that emerge from the narratives. In the research on the stressors of mothers who have transitioned out of Prison, thematic analysis involves identifying themes related to employment, housing, and family relationships. These themes can help shed light on the challenges these mothers face and the factors that contribute to their stress.

Content analysis by systematically categorizing and coding the content of narratives to identify recurring patterns and themes (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). For example, analyzing the transcripts of interviews with mental health clinicians about mothers who have transitioned out of Prison helps identify common phrases or terms used to describe their experiences. This can provide insights into the language these mental health clinicians use about mothers' experiences in ways that make sense of what they face transitioning out of Prison.

Discourse analysis examines the language and communication styles used by the participants in the narratives and the broader cultural and social context in which the narratives are situated. This entails analyzing the language mental health clinicians use to describe mothers' experiences in the context of broader discourses around criminal justice and rehabilitation. This analysis can provide insights into how these mothers understand and navigate their experiences within general cultural and social frameworks. Narrative research examines the structure and content of the narratives themselves, including how they are constructed and the meanings they convey (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Analyzing the records of mental health clinicians about mothers who have transitioned out of Prison helps identify the critical elements of their stories, such as the plot, characters, and themes. This can provide insights into how these mothers construct and communicate their experiences, as well as the meanings that they attach to their experiences.

Assumptions

The insights and accounts shared by mental health professionals accurately reflect the real-life challenges and tribulations encountered by mothers who have reintegrated into society after prison. It is presumed that these experts have established significant interaction with this group, enabling them to offer crucial information about the stress factors they face and the coping methods they employ. This supposition is founded on the conviction that mental health therapists who work closely with previously incarcerated mothers have gained a profound comprehension of their circumstances. It is assumed that such clinicians foster a trusting relationship and engage in candid dialogues with their

clients, allowing them to collect genuine and trustworthy narratives (Treloar et al., 2021). With this assumption in place, the investigation aims to understand the obstacles these mothers confront thoroughly.

Another assumption is that mental health providers collaborating with mothers reentering society from Prison boast an array of experiences reflecting the wider population. It is presumed that these professionals' storytelling will encompass various viewpoints and offer an exhaustive grasp of the challenges these mothers face. This presumption acknowledges the variance among therapists while recognizing their differing backgrounds, education, and expertise (Baldwin, 2018). By assuming their accounts to be indicative of a broader spectrum of mental health professionals assisting formerly incarcerated mothers, the research hopes to encompass diverse outlooks. This supposition seeks to guarantee that the conclusions are not restricted to a particular group of therapists but portray the aggregate experiences and wisdom of the professional realm.

Furthermore, the study assumes that self-efficacy theory and stress-coping framework concepts apply to mothers who have left prison life behind. It is believed that these theoretical structures present helpful angles to comprehend the stressors, coping tactics, and available resources for this demographic. This notion is founded on the trust that theories such as self-efficacy and stress-coping frameworks can be relevant in understanding mothers' experiences reintegrating after incarceration. Assuming these schemas' main principles and ideas are suited for this specific population, applying them can offer insights into how these women gauge their capacity for dealing with stress and

harnessing resources at their disposal (Reviere et al., 2019). This assumption infers that these theories are instrumental in comprehending the reentry process while identifying factors that contribute to favorable outcomes.

Underlying assumptions form the bedrock of any research endeavor, steering investigators' anticipations and deciphering the amassed data. These pivotal facets mold both the analysis strategy and methodology, not to mention the interpretation of results. Nonetheless, it is crucial to recognize that such assumptions might be burdened with constraints and warrant a thorough examination because of the distinct context and attributes of the targeted demographic.

Limitations

While this study does have numerous limitations, it is crucial to recognize the value of its findings. One potential limitation is the modest number of mental health clinicians involved, which might hinder the findings' applicability to a larger populace of mental health professionals aiding mothers transitioning from Prison. The primary objective was to delve into these experts' insights and stories rather than achieve broad-based statistical generalization.

The study's emphasis on clinician narratives and viewpoints is another limitation, as this approach may introduce varying biases or subjective interpretations. Although the participating clinicians have firsthand experience assisting mothers post-incarceration, they might not represent every unique experience or challenge faced by such individuals

(Baldwin & Abbott, 2021). Clinicians' backgrounds and beliefs could shape their accounts, which may not encompass the full array of former prisoners' experiences.

Focusing predominantly on post-prison stressors and obstacles presents yet another limitation. While essential, this viewpoint may overlook aspects like resilience-building protective factors or positive experiences contributing to successful reintegration into society (Baldwin, 2021). By concentrating on adversity alone, we risk neglecting a more comprehensive understanding of these mothers' experiences. Despite these constraints, recognizing them establishes a solid foundation for future research into mothers' post-prison lives. This acknowledgment ensures that subsequent studies and interpretations benefit from enhanced clarity and refinement, ultimately improving our understanding of this population's reintegration journey.

This research zeroes in on the specific pressures and obstacles mothers who have transitioned out of Prison face. While it is vital to comprehend the hurdles they confront, this concentration may cause the overlooking of other crucial components of their reintegration journey. The investigation may not thoroughly delve into the part played by safeguarding factors or uplifting encounters that facilitate successful reentry into society. By chiefly emphasizing stressors, a potential void emerges in grasping the all-encompassing range of experiences, encompassing elements that foster resilience, communal backing, and individual development (Abbott & Scott, 2019). Such constraints emphasize the probable limitations and aspects to reflect upon concerning this study. Scholars should remain conscious of these shortcomings when interpreting the outcomes

and contemplate potential research endeavors to fill these voids. By recognizing these constraints, this research can lay the groundwork for additional investigation and enhance the understanding of mothers' post-incarceration reintegration.

Delimitation

This research concentrates on mothers who have left Prison within the past year. It aims to understand the specific challenges these women face during the initial stages of reintegration. Nonetheless, we should acknowledge that mothers released for longer may experience different circumstances. Factors like evolving support systems, job prospects, or personal development might influence their reintegration process. Future research could investigate mothers at diverse stages of post-prison pre-acclimation to obtain a broader view.

The study mainly considers mental health clinicians' viewpoints, while other essential participants like social workers, policymakers, or community members are not directly involved in this investigation. Even though mental health practitioners play a vital role in helping formerly incarcerated mothers with their well-being, incorporating additional stakeholders would contribute to a deeper understanding of the complex issues related to post-prison reintegration (Treloar et al., 2021). Subsequent studies should contemplate including various stakeholders' perspectives to develop a more comprehensive outlook on challenges and potential solutions promoting societal change.

These research limitations stress the specific boundaries and exclusions of this study. Although they emphasize the research scope and elucidate the target population

and data sources, it is crucial to recognize that other contributing factors and outlooks could impact the experiences of mothers reintegrating after leaving Prison.

Implications for Positive Social Change

The study delves into the unique experiences of mothers who have navigated their way out of incarceration and back into society. Encompassing key aspects that support their successful readjustment, it highlights the need for customized programs explicitly catering to their needs. By gaining a more profound comprehension of these mothers' stressors, policymakers and service providers can craft solutions that tackle housing, employment, mental health, and family reintegration challenges.

The investigation unravels obstacles and trials endured by formerly incarcerated mothers, enlightening the formation of specialized support initiatives. Adapting these programs to cater to their distinct requirements will allow policymakers and service providers to demolish barriers hindering effective reintegration. In practice, this could mean providing accessible housing alternatives, vocational training, mental health services, and reunification support, all crucial elements for a seamless transition into the community (Reviere et al., 2019). Also, the study emphasizes the significance of social support in ensuring reintegration success. The research paves the way for community-driven endeavors that foster these mothers' well-being by revealing hindrances to receiving this support and recommending methods to improve it. Recognizing these barriers, e.g., stigmatization or limited community resources, provides valuable input for developing initiatives focusing on more robust social support networks (Gobena et al.,

2022). This might involve establishing neighborhood programs that build connections among previously incarcerated individuals or implementing mentorship opportunities.

By understanding factors contributing to successful reintegration, authorities and experts can develop evidence-based strategies to mitigate recidivism rates for mothers reintegrating post-prison. Tackling obstacles such as lack of education or employment, substance abuse issues, and mental health challenges will help these mothers avoid crime while rebuilding their lives in harmony with society (Baldwin, 2018). This research aims to eradicate stigma and discrimination surrounding mothers formerly involved in the criminal justice system. By shedding light on their plight and endorsing policies advocating equal opportunities and fair treatment, it fosters an inclusive society that embraces empathy over judgment.

In conclusion, the research delves into the comprehensive understanding of the hurdles and obstacles mothers reentering society after incarceration face. Utilizing a qualitative research method, particularly a narrative approach, this study gathers information through thorough interviews with mental health practitioners with significant experience with this demographic. The study is grounded in the self-efficacy theory and the stress-coping framework, offering a perspective to examine the impact of self-efficacy on mothers' capability to manage various stressors during their reintegration journey. Reading the accounts and views of mental health professionals, the research unveils the significance of self-efficacy and how it interconnects with social support, available resources, and coping mechanisms, thus facilitating successful reintegration. By

analyzing these elements, the study aspires to pinpoint crucial areas where aid and interventions can be customized to cater to the distinct requirements of mothers exiting Prison.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

This section delves into the available literature supporting the research topic of understanding the stressors of mothers who have transitioned from prison to society. To effectively scrutinize the challenges faced by mothers reentering society after prison, relevant literature was categorized into sub-topics such as self-efficacy and reintegration, implications of imprisonment on motherhood identity, the significance of social support, and various socio-economic factors affecting the reentry process. These subtopics underwent thorough examination, with key insights presented in the following sections of this chapter notably, the literature review adopts an iterative approach, constantly revisiting available resources and aligning them with the study's progressively emerging themes. This ensures that the review remains pertinent to the developing direction of the research. A diverse range of sources, including academic articles, book chapters, reports, dissertations, conference material, and organization-produced records, contribute to a multifaceted understanding of the issues these mothers face upon release from prison.

Critical assessments are undertaken during the review process to achieve an impartial analysis. Each source is rigorously evaluated for relevance and quality based on established criteria like clear objectives, methodological integrity, validity of outcomes, and applicability to current research contexts. Moreover, identifying gaps in existing knowledge played a crucial role in forming the foundation for this study. These gaps could arise from limitations in studied populations; methodologies employed,

overlooked aspects of transition and reintegration. Finally, while most reviewed literature has been published within the last 15 years, significant pre-existing works and theories were not disregarded due to their foundational contributions to understanding self-efficacy and maternal identity. This broader timescale allowed for an examination of the evolution of theories and changes in societal and systemic factors influencing mothers' post-prison transitions, ultimately providing a richer context for this research.

Terms and Theories Used for Search

At the heart of the studies in this field lies the theory of 'self-efficacy' and 'maternal identity,' which consistently emerge within motherhood-related research, particularly on women transitioning from prison. Self-efficacy, a key element of Bandura's social cognitive theory (1997), refers to an individual's belief in their aptitude to complete specific tasks successfully. This concept goes beyond mere skill possession; it captures the confidence in one's ability to apply those skills toward achieving desired outcomes (Saxena et al., 2016). Self-efficacy has been extensively employed across several domains, such as health, education, and criminology (Poehlmann et al., 2010). A pivotal factor impacting self-efficacy is how individuals interpret past experiences: triumphs boost self-efficacy beliefs while setbacks diminish them. Self-efficacy denotes a mother's assurance in her capability to reintegrate into society, navigate life's challenges, surmount obstacles, and deal with social expectations post-prison release (Roberts, 2011). Determining how effectively these mothers adapt, progress, and prevent recidivism is critical.

Conversely, maternal identity entails a woman's transformation as she embraces her identity as a mother, an idea at the crossroads of psychological and sociological perspectives. Mercer (2004) explains that this metamorphosis initiates during pregnancy and extends several months postpartum while a woman redefines her sense of self and incorporates the 'mother' role into her persona. This transition is significantly shaped by the woman's social environment, which includes relationships, societal norms, and expectations about motherhood.

Imprisonment may impede this process, hampering the formation of a healthy maternal identity (Easterling et al., 2019). Existing research posits that maternal identity profoundly affects a woman's reentry experience. A strong maternal identity can be a driving force for conforming to societal standards, seeking stability, and caring for her children. However, social stigma and logistical challenges, e.g., securing a home and job, can undermine her maternal identity, intensifying the strains related to reintegration (Burgess & Flynn, 2013). Therefore, examining the interaction between maternal identity and the reentry process is vital to developing effective interventions.

Theoretical framework

Bandura unveiled his revolutionary self-efficacy theory in 1977, which has since emerged as a fundamental concept in comprehending human motivation, disposition, and actions in demanding situations (Allen & Bradley, 2015). Essentially, "self-efficacy" denotes an individual's certainty in their capability to accomplish tasks necessary for specific results (Saxena et al., 2016). This conviction system immensely impacts a

person's thinking, emotions, motives, and behaviors, directing their interpretation of obstacles and shaping their responses. For mothers reentering society after imprisonment, self-efficacy takes center stage in their journey toward reintegration. Their self-efficacy beliefs strongly influence their perceived capability to overcome the demanding process of reentry into society (Stringer & Barnes, 2012). Mothers with elevated self-efficacy generally possess a more optimistic mindset when confronted with the diverse challenges of reintegration, securing and maintaining stable employment, embracing sobriety, rebuilding, strengthening family bonds, and coping with the social stigma linked to past incarceration.

It is vital to acknowledge that each mother's path toward societal reintegration is unique. An individual's self-efficacy beliefs are subjective and shaped by various factors such as personal experiences, socio-economic conditions, mental health status, support networks, and the specifics of their incarceration period (Brezina & Topalli, 2012). Consequently, mothers may experience fluctuations in self-efficacy levels as they confront different challenges during reentry.

Conversely, mothers with diminished self-efficacy might experience increased vulnerability to harmful emotional states like feelings of inadequacy or hopelessness. This vulnerability could further escalate recidivism risk. Research has consistently supported the significance of self-efficacy in managing reintegration-related stressors (Hannah-Moffat 2005; Opsal 2012), underlining the importance of fostering and bolstering self-efficacy in transitioning mothers. Such efforts can optimize their chances

for successful reintegration. Therefore, it is crucial to implement interventions that enhance self-efficacy, for example, cognitive-behavioral programs or peer mentorship, to support mothers during their reentry process effectively. Understanding self-efficacy's role in this context is instrumental in devising strategies promoting successful reintegration and mitigating recidivism.

Contrastingly, low self-confidence in mothers can make them feel incapable and swamped by difficulties during their shifts, resulting in feelings of hopelessness, ineptitude, and a perceived loss of power over their lives. This pessimistic attitude can subsequently raise the likelihood of relapsing. These mothers may find it hard to recognize a pathway to success after imprisonment, confined by their current predicaments and unable to imagine a future beyond these circumstances (Cuevas et al., 2017). This outlook not only damages personal well-being but also adversely affects their children's development and overall stability in the community. Thus, strengthening self-assuredness among reentering mothers is advantageous for them, their families, and broader society (Law & Guo, 2015). A mother with strong self-assurance tends to engage positively with her children, secure stable work, and contribute constructively to her community, which diminishes the societal expenses connected to repeat offenses.

The importance of self-assurance when managing stress related to reintegration is highly significant, as seen in numerous studies (Hannah-Moffat, 2005; Opsal, 2012). These investigations highlight the essential need to cultivate and reinforce self-assurance in transitioning mothers, boosting their resilience, motivation, and capacity to handle

post-release challenges. In these studies, elevated self-assurance correlated with superior coping methods, enhanced mental well-being, and decreased rates of relapsing.

Advocating for self-assurance can be crucial in empowering these women to regain authority over their lives and strive for a bright and satisfying existence after incarceration (Allen & Bradley, 2015). Interventions that bolster self-assurance may incorporate skill advancement programs, therapeutic guidance, peer mentorship, and community-centered support systems. Hence, discerning the means to nurture self-assurance in this demographic is critical for developing efficient reintegration plans and policies.

Maternal Identity

The journey of motherhood undergoes a significant interruption because of incarceration. This impactful event forces mothers to be separated from their children and cuts off their connection to their nurturing roles in their child's life. In turn, this leads to a state of paused maternal identity. Once released from prison, these women encounter numerous obstacles while attempting to rebuild their maternal identities. They face the emotional complexities of reuniting with their children and navigating societal stigmas that follow incarceration (Brezina & Topalli, 2012). Incarceration creates a forced maternal standstill, taking mothers out of their care giving roles and leaving them in an ongoing limbo that shakes their sense of identity. This disengagement from motherhood generates considerable emotional turmoil, doubts regarding one's capabilities as a mother, and reduced self-confidence. Consequently, these women are subjected to dual

punishment serving time in prison while also dealing with the ripple effects caused by their disrupted maternal identities (Saxena et al., 2016).

Upon returning to society, these mothers confront two major challenges: societal reintegration and recovering their role as mothers. Reigniting the bond with their children and stepping back into the role of a mother is not easy; it requires traversing emotional landscapes, reacquainting themselves with parenting skills, and addressing feelings of guilt and embarrassment that stem from past imprisonment (Roberts, 2011). Moreover, the societal stigma accompanying former prisoners exacerbates this process by influencing relationships with children and impacting self-worth. Societal expectations surrounding motherhood also hinder the reconstruction of these individuals' maternal identities (Bloom & Brown, 2011). Often encountering unrealistic ideals for what it means to be a mother, they grapple with discrepancies between an idyllic representation and their personal experiences or self-perception. Feelings of inadequacy and defeat can arise from these discrepancies, adding barriers to reintegration attempts (Lee & Wildeman, 2013). Ultimately, reshaping and restoring a maternal identity after incarceration is a complex endeavor beyond reestablishing contact with one's children. The process involves grappling with perceptions of self and society, navigating emotional highs and lows, and managing potential conflicts within familial circles. Recognizing the complexities of this journey can offer significant insights for creating effective approaches to support these mothers in their reintegration efforts (Western et al., 2015).

Programs that attend not just to practical matters like employment, housing, and legal services but also consider.

Lockwood (2018) offered a detailed perspective on the intricate facets of rekindling the connection between mother and child after incarceration. Once released from prison, mothers often face a drastically transformed family environment. Care giving responsibilities might have shifted to grandparents, relatives, or foster care in the mother's absence (Hoffmann et al., 2010). Such changes in family dynamics pose significant challenges for the mother as she endeavors to reclaim her position within the family.

Additionally, children may have established profound bonds with temporary caregivers, which could result in conflict or bewilderment when their mother seeks to resume her care giving duties. Furthermore, children may have experienced many emotional reactions during their mother's absence, from abandonment and anger to anxiety and sadness (Poehlmann et al., 2010). Such emotional upheaval can hinder the children's openness to their mother's efforts at reconnection, compounding the difficulty of the situation. It is crucial to recognize that these feelings are natural and can also be intensely potent, particularly for younger children who struggle to grasp the reasons behind their mother's absence fully. The bottom line of a mother's self-worth and maternal identity becomes even more convoluted in this scenario (Booth, 2020). For many women, being perceived as a 'good mother' is intrinsic to self-esteem and identity. Successfully reconnecting with their children and resuming their maternal responsibilities

is frequently regarded as an indication of their value and rehabilitation (Garcia, 2016). Unfortunately, hurdles and potential obstacles along this path can induce sensations of inadequacy and remorse, exacerbating an already delicate sense of self.

Enos's research highlights the necessity for tailored support programs to assist mothers during this trying period. These initiatives should consider both the complex emotional terrain experienced by mothers and their children and offer tools for emotional recovery and productive communication (Easterling et al., 2019). They should also cultivate an encouraging environment where mothers are inspired to reconstruct their maternal identity in harmony with their present conditions rather than being restrained by societal ideals of 'perfect motherhood.' This approach would help alleviate feelings of failure and insufficiency, fostering the establishment of a positive and resilient maternal persona, thus fostering successful reintegration and family reunification.

Reestablishing and reinforcing the maternal identity for previously incarcerated women largely hinges on their ability to resume and embrace motherly roles after release. These roles encompass a broad range of duties, such as meeting the physical demands of their children, offering emotional support, and building a nurturing atmosphere for their children's overall well-being and progress (Celinska & Siegel, 2010). However, responsibilities that appear ordinary for most mothers may become significant hurdles for these women due to the numerous obstacles they encounter while trying to reintegrate into society. They must tackle issues like securing steady employment, obtaining safe

housing, maintaining mental health, and dealing with societal prejudice as they strive to rebuild and fortify their maternal roles.

Establishing an environment that acknowledges and tackles these distinct challenges can greatly affect the formation of a durable, optimistic maternal identity after incarceration. Customized solutions like job and housing assistance, mental health services, parenting courses, and peer support circles can equip these mothers with the necessary tools and encouragement to navigate their path back into society (Stringer & Barnes, 2012). This method addresses practical problems these mothers face and creates a space for sharing experiences, anxieties, and goals, ultimately fostering community ties and alleviating feelings of isolation and judgment (Burgess & Flynn, 2013). Additionally, it is crucial that support networks actively promote and enable the re-establishment of connections between the mother and her children. Offering family therapy sessions, advice on effective communication techniques, and resources to comprehend and manage children's emotional reactions can ease the process for the mother and her offspring while fortifying maternal bonds.

Gaining insight into the complexities involved in redeveloping a maternal identity after incarceration sheds light on the experiences and requirements of these mothers. This highlights the need for an all-inclusive, compassionate approach that considers these intricacies, thereby driving the development of more efficient, customized support strategies (Lockwood, 2018). Such understanding could be invaluable in improving reintegration results for these mothers while empowering their successful reentry into

society and bolstering their maternal roles, eventually contributing to a more tolerant and aware societal framework.

The Prosocial Identity of Motherhood

Motherhood is more than just a role taken on by women; it is an identity that shifts their self-perception and social standing. With this identity come many anticipations and pro-social actions, influencing how women interact with their communities. Prosocial denotes activities that aim to help others and enhance the well-being of society (Aknin et al., 2013). Such behaviors typical of motherhood include nurturing, empathy, and altruism, crucial for raising children and fostering harmonious family surroundings. The pro-social aspect of motherhood tends to have a significant effect on mothers' actions and motivations (Élisson et al., 2022). This impact is also evident in mothers who have been incarcerated and are returning to society. Despite the difficulties associated with imprisonment and reintegration, many mothers are strongly dedicated to their maternal duties (Brown & Bloom, 2009). Studies indicate that preserving the prosocial nature of motherhood can be an influential motivator for these women, pushing them to provide stable environments for their offspring, avoid criminal activities, and positively engage with their community (Opsal, 2011).

Nevertheless, formerly incarcerated mothers often face challenges in maintaining this pro-social identity as they deal with stigmatization, reduced self-confidence, and obstacles impeding effective reintegration. Balancing the positive identity associated with motherhood amidst the negative stereotypes labeled 'ex-offender' can lead to distress and

hinder reintegration attempts (Beichner & Rabe-Hemp, 2014). These women must traverse the complex identity landscape while addressing immediate reintegration concerns such as finding employment and accommodation. Thus, understanding the importance of motherhood's pro-social identity in these situations is crucial for designing comprehensive support systems tailored for these mothers.

Motherhood and Incarcerated Historical Context

During the early 1900s, society predominantly linked women, particularly mothers, to roles within the home. Their primary responsibilities were centered on care giving, nurturing, and serving as moral compasses for their families. Consequently, a mother engaging in criminal behavior harshly contrasted with the societal expectations of that time, making dismissing or overlooking such cases easier (Bertulfo et al., 2016). When ignoring female criminality was no longer an option, these instances were frequently blamed on moral shortcomings or mental defects. Early criminologists suggested that women committing crimes were "born criminals," representing a deviant or atavistic form (Tomczak & Thompson, 2019). This concept displayed characteristics more commonly linked to men, thus allowing society to maintain its image of ideal femininity without probing for societal or systemic reasons.

As the 20th century unfolded, recognition of female criminality increased, creating separate institutions for women offenders. However, these facilities still adopted stereotypes that shaped their policies and treatment. For instance, early correctional programs for women prioritized domestic training and moral education, following societal

expectations that women are nurturers and caregivers (Bush-Baskette, 2000). In terms of motherhood, such norms, and policies have had immense repercussions. Mothers behind bars were often branded unfit, leading to their children being placed in foster care or put up for adoption. The underlying justification was that a delinquent mother could not offer a proper nurturing or morally sound environment for raising children (Norton-Hawk, 2010). Unfortunately, the emotional pain and trauma experienced by both mother and child due to their forced separation were primarily disregarded.

The latter decades of the 20th century witnessed a significant surge in the imprisonment of mothers in the US due to the 'War on Drugs.' Mandatory minimum sentencing laws for drug-related crimes impacted women, especially mothers, causing a remarkable escalation of children with jailed moms (Norton-Hawk, 2010). However, the issues and trials these imprisoned mothers and their offspring suffered were mainly left unaddressed. Conversely, recent times have brought forth a transformation in the perception of mothers entangled in the legal system. Acknowledging the distinct needs and hurdles these confined moms face has spurred the demand for gender-sensitive, family-centric policies and practices. Consequently, a growing movement is advocating for establishing prison nurseries and community-focused residential programs permitting mothers to reside with their kids during their sentence (Bertulfo et al., 2016).

While numerous challenges persist, societal stigmas, insufficient post-release support services, and structural barriers to reintegration hinder mothers as they transition from incarceration to becoming part of society. As such, grasping the historical context

encompassing motherhood and imprisonment can yield critical knowledge to guide current policy and practice toward more comprehensive and nurturing strategies for these families (Opsal, 2011). The escalation of imprisoned women was troubling; however, even more, concerning was that many of these women were mothers. This pattern ignited academic and policy curiosity regarding the societal effects of incarcerating mothers, specifically how it impacted family dynamics and the subsequent consequences for their children left behind.

As we entered the 21st century, researchers explored the struggles facing imprisoned mothers. Numerous studies examined the psychological, emotional, and logistical repercussions of separating mothers from their children due to imprisonment. Furthermore, researchers explored these mothers' challenges while attempting to maintain meaningful relationships with their children throughout their sentences (Saunders et al., 2015). The influence of parental imprisonment on children left behind also became a focal point for research. It became clear that maternal incarceration created a chain of adverse outcomes, heavily disrupting family structures. This impact reached beyond the emotional pain of separation children's social adaptability, academic success, and overall well-being were all affected (Laney et al., 2015).

These findings revealed a harsh truth: the consequences of incarcerating mothers extended far beyond just the women themselves. The effects rippled through their families and communities immediately and over time. Often labeled as "hidden victims" within the criminal justice system, these children experienced an array of adverse

outcomes, such as an increased likelihood of entering foster care, financial instability, and heightened stress and anxiety levels (Berger, 2015). As the understanding of these intricate matters evolves, conversations on alternatives to incarceration for mothers have emerged, urging a comprehensive and gender-sensitive strategy in criminal justice. Focus has shifted towards solutions that address the distinct needs and vulnerabilities of jailed mothers and their offspring, aiming to prevent intergenerational disadvantages stemming from maternal imprisonment.

Numerous obstacles remain despite growing consciousness and attempts to tackle this concern (Elliott & Reid, 2019). Ranging from policy overhauls to hands-on measures designed to back imprison mothers and their kin, a great deal of work is still required to minimize the detrimental effects of maternal incarceration and facilitate reintegration post-release (Western & Smith, 2018). Grasping these historical and present-day difficulties is vital in guiding efficient policymaking and implementation that strives for more nurturing and inclusive outcomes for these families. Similarly, support for alternative sentences and prison initiatives designed for mothers started gaining attention, emphasizing the significance of family-centric policies and measures (Laney et al., 2019). Nonetheless, many mothers encountered obstacles in maintaining communication with their kids during imprisonment due to geographical distance, scarce visitation times, and strict prison regulations (Poehlmann-Tynan & Turney, 2021; Turney, 2019). Moreover, once released, these mothers faced the daunting task of rebuilding relationships, redefining their parental roles, and overcoming societal judgment and practical barriers.

Currently, this ongoing dialogue keeps progressing. The historical backdrop of motherhood and imprisonment unveils a dynamic interplay between societal opinions, policy shifts, and scholarly pursuits. Simultaneously, it highlights the enduring difficulties that incarcerated, and previously incarcerated mothers continue to confront (Comfort, 2019; Garcia, 2016). Comprehending this historical context presents a broader understanding of the intricate problems these mothers experience during their reintegration into society. This recognition emphasizes the need for all-encompassing, empathetic, and holistic strategies to tackle these obstacles effectively (Dow, 2016).

The Influence of Relational Support on Motherhood Identity

The significance of connections cannot be understated for women transitioning from incarceration back into society, as it greatly influences their development of maternal identity. Various sources offer this vital support, ranging from close relationships such as partners and family to wider social circles encompassing friends, fellow community members, and support groups. Receiving such relational support grants a sense of acceptance, empathy, and encouragement that can shield mothers from the pressures of re-assimilating into daily life (Huang, et al., 2014). Fostering a feeling of belonging and validation empowers these women to navigate their identities and build self-assurance (Henderson et al., 2016). For example, a mother who gets affirmative feedback regarding her parenting skills from her family might experience uplift in self-esteem and reinforcement of her maternal identity. It is crucial to recognize that not every relational interaction brings positivity. Some mothers could be subjected to condemnation

or disapproval within their networks, causing feelings of inadequacy or guilt and weakening their maternal identity (Andersen et al., 2015; Bush-Baskette, 2000). Such negativity may impede their societal reintegration and elevate the possibility of returning to criminal behaviors.

The Pragmatic Obligation of Motherhood

Motherhood surpasses the emotional connection and transformation women experience, as it also involves many duties and commitments. These commitments cover every aspect of a child's needs, from essential requirements like food, clothing, and housing to providing exemplary education, adequate healthcare, and a supportive atmosphere for their well-being. For formerly incarcerated mothers reintegrating into society, these responsibilities can be overwhelming. This struggle is intensified by numerous obstacles hindering their ability to carry out their maternal roles effectively (Garcia-Hallett, 2022; Turney & Goodsell, 2018). Financial insecurity is a primary challenge faced by many formerly incarcerated mothers. They often come from backgrounds marked by poverty and economic hardship. Upon reentry into society, they continue to struggle with financial constraints that may have worsened due to joblessness during imprisonment. This lack of financial means makes it incredibly challenging to fulfill even basic needs for their children, not to mention meeting educational and healthcare necessities (Garcia-Hallett, 2022).

This financial instability is closely related to finding consistent employment. Formerly incarcerated mothers regularly face discrimination and stigma that hampers

their chances of securing meaningful employment (Decker et al., 2015). This problem is further magnified when considering factors such as gaps in work history, outdated job skills, or limited formal education. As a result, unemployment or low-wage jobs solidify the cycle of poverty, further hampering their capacities as providers for their children. Lastly, housing instability presents a significant obstacle for mothers reintegrating into society (Turney & Goodsell, 2018). Obtaining safe, steady, affordable housing can be an immense challenge for these women. Due to their criminal records, many are ineligible for public housing assistance. Additionally, landlord bias and the high expenses associated with private housing render the housing market largely unattainable for them. This turbulence in securing suitable accommodation negatively affects a mother's capability to create a nurturing and stable environment for her children.

Incarcerated mothers face significant challenges when re-entering society, yet many display a commendable dedication to addressing their children's needs, recognizing such responsibilities as crucial to their maternal identity (Dow, 2016). Their commitment arises not solely from obligation but also from the intense love and responsibility felt towards their offspring. Impressively, these mothers prioritize their children's needs and well-being amidst adversity (Walsh et al., 2023). This unwavering commitment to their children motivates mothers, empowering them to break through obstacles encountered during reentry. Propelled by this desire, they find steady employment, obtain housing, and establish a family support network. Moreover, this motivation reduces the likelihood

of returning to crime (Swopes et al., 2017). By embracing care giving and providing roles, mothers gain the purpose and strength to resist re-entering a life of criminality.

However, personal determination and resilience alone are often inadequate for overcoming the systemic barriers previously incarcerated mothers face (Lilliott et al., 2017). Society must offer comprehensive support mechanisms to enable successful community reintegration. Multifaceted solutions are necessary to tackle various issues confronted by these mothers. For instance, job training programs could supply them with essential skills for stable employment opportunities (Sinko et al., 2020). These initiatives may mitigate financial instability and ensure their children's needs are fulfilled.

In addition to vocational training (Sinko et al., 2020), direct financial assistance might be indispensable during their initial period post-release for securing stability. Accessible and affordable childcare services support mothers juggling work and family responsibilities. They can pursue work or education through access to quality childcare options without compromising their dedication to their children. Ultimately, housing availability plays a crucial role in ensuring successful reentry. Potential approaches include adjusting housing policies to accommodate previously incarcerated individuals in public housing schemes or developing initiatives that minimize discrimination within the housing market. Financial assistance programs could facilitate this vital aspect of resettlement.

Mothers and Multiple Incarcerations

Mothers facing multiple imprisonments are up against a myriad of complexities because of the cumulative impacts of continuous incarcerations and reentry and the deep-rooted challenges they wrestle with. Each successive imprisonment interferes with family stability, strains the delicate bond between mother and child, and compounds the obstacles encountered upon reentry (Feingold, 2021; Easterling & Feldmeyer, 2017). This continuous disturbance causes emotional upheaval for both the mother and her children (Booth, 2017). Mothers experiencing multiple imprisonments often have intricate backgrounds, encompassing substance abuse, mental health concerns, and traumatic events that contribute to their ongoing involvement with the criminal justice system (Dixon, 2016; Van Ginneken, 2016). If not appropriately addressed, these problems can contribute to a destructive cycle of imprisonment, release, and re-imprisonment, further intensifying the mother's troubles. For example, substance abuse disorders can hamper attempts to reintegrate into society after imprisonment; they make finding stable employment, maintaining housing, and offering consistent childcare increasingly difficult (Baker, 2021). Mental health problems can hinder successful reintegration if proper treatment and support are unavailable. Moreover, past traumas like violence or abuse can cause lasting psychological effects that impact a mother's capacity to handle life after incarceration.

Repeated cycles of imprisonment and reentry also slowly erode a mother's self-efficacy and belief in her ability to achieve success and manage life events (Chen, 2023).

The decline in self-efficacy can affect multiple aspects of her life, from obtaining employment and housing to confidence in parenting. Additionally, it can adversely impact her motivation to seek assistance, utilize services, and pursue positive changes in her life (Baker, 2021). These recurrent cycles also stress a mother's maternal identity. Constant separations can generate feelings of guilt, shame, and incompetence, making it even more difficult for her to maintain an optimistic maternal self-image. This strained maternal identity may subsequently influence her relationship with her children and hinder her ability to offer them essential emotional support. Furthermore, numerous imprisonments can diminish the mother's connections to her social and support networks. Friends and family might become exhausted or disenchanted after witnessing multiple cycles of incarceration and release, which decreases their emotional and practical assistance. This lack of support can further isolate the mother, adding to the difficulty of her reentry journey.

Facing societal prejudice, mothers who have experienced multiple incarcerations must grapple with an extra layer of challenges during their reentry. The effects of this negative labeling can potentially be more severe and harmful than those linked to a single prison sentence (Menting et al., 2014). This stigmatization can significantly hinder a mother's reintegration efforts, resulting in intensified feelings of alienation and marginalization. The repercussions of such stigmatization stretch further than mental well-being; they also manifest as substantial obstacles in daily life. Frequently encountering discrimination in different facets of life, particularly in obtaining steady

employment and housing, mothers with numerous incarcerations in their past can struggle significantly. Employers and property owners may be reluctant or downright refuse to provide opportunities to individuals with criminal records, rendering it challenging for these mothers to establish a dependable and safe atmosphere for their children.

The consequences of repeated imprisonment are not confined to the mothers alone; their children also face profound and extensive ramifications (Diendo et al., 2022). The offspring of recurrently imprisoned mothers are often subject to a continuous pattern of disturbances in care giving arrangements and emotional distress caused by the separation from their maternal figures (Granja, 2016). The persistent turbulence in their living situations and the stress of ongoing separations contribute to elevated behavioral and academic issues. These children may experience difficulties forming secure bonds, exhibit aggressive or reticent behavior patterns, and face obstacles regarding academic achievements. Furthermore, they might internalize the societal bias linked with their mothers' imprisonment history, which can negatively influence their self-worth and psychological health. Given these detrimental outcomes on children, supportive measures and intervention systems must accommodate the unique requirements of families grappling with multiple incarceration instances (Booth, 2017). Such interventions should not only address immediate needs but also alleviate the impact of ongoing emotional turmoil and instability. This could involve offering mental health care for children, academic support services, and guaranteeing consistency in living arrangements during the mothers' absence.

Furthermore, action should be taken to lessen the societal bias associated with multiple prison sentences to enhance these mothers' reentry prospects and protect their children from its detrimental consequences (Feingold, 2021). Achieving this can include public awareness initiatives, policy modifications to counteract discrimination in job and housing markets, and establishing environments where these families can access support free from judgment. A comprehensive approach imbued with empathy is crucial in effectively assisting families burdened by repeated incarcerations. Even when facing seemingly insurmountable difficulties, it is crucial to recognize that numerous mothers with past multiple imprisonments can successfully reintegrate into society. Research into such triumphs identifies several key elements that contribute to favorable results. These factors encompass personal attributes like self-efficacy, maternal identity, and acquired abilities such as effective coping techniques (Mouton & Roskam, 2015).

Self-efficacy, the belief in one's capacity to surmount challenges and reach goals, is a fundamental component. Mothers with high self-efficacy are often more able to tackle reentry-related adversities confidently and positively influence their future. A solid maternal identity also plays a significant role, offering these mothers a sense of purpose and motivation to overcome obstacles upon reentry. Moreover, acquired coping mechanisms are essential. Proficiencies in stress management, problem-solving, and emotional control can greatly assist mothers in handling the unavoidable barriers and setbacks linked to the reentry process. External reinforcement often intensifies the positive impact of these individual traits and competencies. The value of encouraging

connections with family, friends, and community members is immeasurable. Support networks can offer emotional solace, practical aid, and a feeling of connection that these mothers need for successful reintegration.

The availability of essential services like addiction treatment, mental health care, and employment training programs further bolsters their achievements (DeCou et al., 2015). Addressing the underlying factors that may have led to their incarcerations not only eases their reentry but also helps curb potential recidivism. These inspiring accounts highlight the possibility of transformation despite repeated hurdles. They emphasize the need for a holistic, tailored approach when assisting mothers during their societal reintegration. However, gaps persist in our understanding of this process for mothers. Increased research delving into women's real-life experiences is needed to comprehend their complex situations beyond statistics and policy analysis (Swopes et al., 2017). A deeper exploration into these narratives can uncover opportunities to support these mothers in breaking the recidivism cycle, reconstructing their identities, nurturing stronger bonds with their children, and effectively reintegrating into society. The far-reaching consequences of this research can shape policy, enrich support services, and ultimately improve the lives of these mothers and their offspring.

Stigma and Social Pressure from Having a Criminal Background

Societal-generated stigma acts as a formidable barrier to the effective reintegration of mothers who have faced incarceration (Sharpe, 2015). Its influence is felt on multiple levels, cultivating an often-unwelcoming atmosphere for their return to

society. The stigma tied to criminal records can cause considerable psychological distress. Incarcerated mothers may suffer embarrassment, remorse, and worthlessness from their stigmatized position (Winnick & Bodkin, 2009). These negative self-views can be internalized, harming their self-esteem, trust in themselves, and hopes for the future. They might also experience anticipated stigma, in which they foresee being judged or discriminated against due to their criminal history. This perception can provoke anxiety and mysterious behavior, further obstructing their societal reintegration.

Relationally, the stigma surrounding a criminal past frequently results in social isolation. These mothers could face rejection or scrutiny from relatives, friends, and the wider community, affecting their capacity to establish supportive connections, a crucial ingredient for successful reintegration. Moreover, apprehension about their criminal history becoming public knowledge can strain pre-existing relationships and deter the development of new ones (Denver et al., 2017). In terms of structure, stigma can restrict access to opportunities and resources essential for effective reintegration. Numerous employers are reluctant to employ individuals with criminal records due to concerns over trustworthiness or potential responsibility issues. Consequently, mothers re-entering society after prison often find it challenging to secure steady, well-paying employment impeding their pursuit of financial stability and autonomy.

Parallely, housing possibilities for those with criminal backgrounds are constricted by discriminatory housing policies and landlords' unwillingness to accommodate them. This frequently results in unstable living arrangements or

homelessness, additional roadblocks hindering successful societal reintegration and childcare provision (Uggen et al., 2014). Public stigma may also obstruct access to social support services such as welfare benefits, mental health care, and addiction treatment, as these individuals are often perceived as less worthy or may worry about being judged by service providers.

From a different perspective, the media holds a crucial position in molding public sentiment, and often, individuals with criminal backgrounds are depicted negatively, emphasizing their deviant behavior and threat to society. The media's habit of sensationalizing crime and spotlighting extreme cases results in public stigmatization and subsequent social exclusion for these individuals (Gronholm et al., 2017). Formerly jailed mothers typically experience double the stigma - as previous offenders and mothers who seemingly failed their maternal duties in society's eyes. Media tends to portray these women as 'unfit mothers' or 'fallen women,' heightening the negative perceptions that surround them (Arigo et al., 2018), thus making their societal reintegration journey more challenging as they contend with expectations of motherhood and stereotypes linked to their criminal history.

Additionally, mass media narratives about crime and punishment are frequently swayed by racial and socio-economic prejudices, causing an over-representation of certain demographics, such as ethnic minorities and those facing economic hardships, within the criminal population. These narratives can reinforce stereotypes, maintain systemic bias, and worsen the stigmatization experienced by these groups. Digital media

can intensify stigma due to its lasting nature and extensive reach. Internet searches, social media platforms, and online databases can easily disclose a person's criminal history, impeding their ability to move past their past mistakes and reintegrate into society (Phillips & Gates, 2011). This 'digital punishment' adds an extra layer of complexity to the process of stigmatization, as it extends societal judgment and ostracism associated with a criminal record into the online world (LeBel, 2012).

Public policy also contributes to upholding stigma related to criminal pasts. Legal guidelines restricting employment, housing, and social support for those with a criminal record embed social stigma into legal and social systems (Opsal & Foley, 2013). These barriers bolster societal stigma and restrict resources necessary for successful reintegration into society, thus perpetuating a cycle of disadvantage (Kotova, 2020). Addressing the negative perceptions tied to having a criminal past necessitates reevaluating societal viewpoints, refining media depictions, and amending policies that unjustly hinder the progress of formerly imprisoned individuals (Ahmed, 2023). Recognizing the potential for transformation and progress in these individuals, especially mothers is crucial in facilitating their seamless reintegration into society.

The plight of mothers with criminal backgrounds seeking to rebuild their lives after incarceration is significantly hindered by stigma-driven discrimination (Salem et al., 2021). This prejudice infiltrates critical aspects of their existence, such as obtaining employment and secure housing, both essential to successful reintegration into society. Concerning employment, the negative perception attached to a criminal record severely

diminishes job opportunities. Potential employers, swayed by societal beliefs about criminality, often perceive ex-offenders as untrustworthy or undependable; consequently withholding employment chances (Williams & Rumpf, 2020). Research reveals that possessing a criminal record decreases the possibility of getting a callback or job offer by nearly 50%, even in entry-level roles (Dallaire et al., 2010). This predicament disproportionately affects formerly incarcerated mothers who require steady employment for their well-being and their children's welfare.

Securing safe housing poses another significant challenge for these mothers due to the tarnish associated with their criminal past (Salem et al., 2021). Landlords, housing officials, and occasionally even public housing programs view individuals bearing criminal records as potential risks to community safety and harmony (Moran, 2012). Consequently, these women frequently encounter housing discrimination, where their applications are rejected, leaving them with limited choices often characterized by instability or danger (Opsal & Foley, 2013). Such circumstances can instigate a vicious cycle of homelessness, poverty, and relapse, further complicating their reintegration efforts. In addition, the negative stigma surrounding a criminal record can impede access to vital social support services like financial aid, food assistance programs, and substance abuse treatment. For example, certain jurisdictions impose permanent disqualifications on individuals convicted of felony drug offenses from obtaining forms of public assistance (Denver et al., 2017; Williams & Rumpf, 2020). These barriers make it exceptionally

challenging for formerly incarcerated mothers to cater to their families and adapt to life after prison when alternative sources of support are scarce.

Therefore, the discrimination stemming from the stigma attached to having a criminal record establishes a formidable barrier for these mothers as they endeavor to reintegrate into society, trapping them in cycles of poverty and marginalization (Opsal & Foley, 2013). Thus, it highlights the need for empathetic policies and interventions that tackle societal attitudes and structural obstacles to help these mothers conquer the stigma and effectively reintegrate into society. The ripple effects of a stigmatized identity often surpass concrete barriers, profoundly influencing these mothers' psychological and emotional health (Denver et al., 2017). Coping with the social expectations of having a criminal record can trigger chronic stress, anxiety, and considerable self-esteem decline, all posing substantial hurdles to successful reintegration.

Frequently, these mothers face judgment and estrangement in their communities, resulting in loneliness and hopelessness. This social exclusion can even spread to their families, generating fissures and additional emotional turmoil (Gronholm et al., 2017). The omnipresent societal stigma linked with criminal history can be internalized by these mothers, giving rise to self-stigmatization. This process involves embracing cultural stereotypes and fostering a negative self-view marked by embarrassment, guilt, and a belief in undeserving regard, opportunities, or equitable treatment (Moran, 2012). This self-stigmatization can adversely affect a mother's confidence and self-worth, undermining her determination and ability to tackle reintegration obstacles. It may also

hinder the formation of nurturing and supportive connections, further isolating these mothers and intensifying their struggles during the reentry process.

The influence of societal stigma and cultural pressure does not end with the mothers but also encompasses their children. Offspring of incarcerated mothers often shoulder the weight of their mother's stigmatized status. This related stigma can result in incidents of prejudice, bullying, or seclusion within their schools or communities. Encountering such social adversity substantially elevates their emotional distress, manifesting as behavioral troubles and academic challenges (Gronholm et al., 2017). Additionally, the stigma confronted by these children can affect their rapport with their mothers, possibly inciting shame or bitterness. This stigma might also weaken their social ties, intensifying their emotional anguish and potentially culminating in unfavorable outcomes in their developmental paths.

Development of Gender and Moral Conscience

Exploring further into the nexus of gender standards, ethical values, and criminality, we uncover a complex network of societal anticipations and assessments. Traditionally, women, specifically mothers, have been subjected to certain expectations regarding their conduct, morals, and roles. Society often presupposes that they embody qualities such as compassion, devotion, and ethical uprightness, constituting the family's foundation while acting as a guiding light for their children's morality (Sharma, 2019). This idealized notion of motherhood establishes a lofty ethical standard, making any deviation like criminal involvement incredibly striking. When women, particularly

mothers, participate in criminal activities, they defy the law and infringe upon deep-rooted societal beliefs on femininity and motherhood. Transgressing these gender norms may provoke a heightened sense of betrayal within society and attract more extreme disapproval and stigmatization than men involved in similar activities. Consequently, women with a history of crime are frequently called 'double deviants' for straying from societal norms and legal regulations.

Society's moral conscience significantly impacts its views on crime and punishment. Honest assessments from the community often contribute to retributive attitudes toward crime punishment is not simply viewed as a deterrent or an opportunity for rehabilitation but as a form of moral retaliation (Cushman, 2008). Such attitudes can be particularly harsh towards mothers who face gender-specific ethical expectations. Diving deeper into the significance of moral conscience, it is vital to comprehend its role in shaping the experiences of imprisoned mothers. Moral conscience represents a person's internal compass that governs their understanding of right and wrong, consequently influencing their actions. This inner compass is firmly entrenched in one's personal beliefs, societal norms, cultural values, and ethical guidelines. When individuals' choices breach their moral conscience, potent emotions like guilt, shame, and regret can arise.

Regarding mothers behind bars, the ramifications of unlawful conduct go beyond the legal implications to encompass the profound emotional aftermath linked to ethical breaches. These women often wrestle with overpowering guilt and humiliation, fueled by their cognizance of perpetrating deeds that contravene social standards and personal

morals (Sexton, 2015). This guilt is particularly magnified when their law-breaking activities have caused separation from their offspring, which conflicts with society's expectation for mothers as providers of love and care. Such deep-seated guilt and shame carry significant consequences for these maternal figures. These emotions potentially undermine their self-image and sense of worth, culminating in a negative self-concept and weakened self-esteem. They may view themselves as 'unfit mothers,' resulting in hopelessness, self-contempt, or even depressive symptoms. These negative self-perceptions can obstruct their capacity for forging meaningful connections with others, including their children, hampering successful societal reintegration (Cooper et al., 2013).

Moreover, moral conscience is instrumental in molding mother-child relationships following imprisonment. Guilt-ridden emotions may influence interactions between these mothers and their children; some might excessively compensate for perceived shortcomings while others grapple with inadequacy or detachment issues (Shariff et al., 2014). Understanding these mothers' psychological intricacies is essential for tailoring appropriate assistance throughout their reentry process, ensuring triumph over reintegration challenges. Recognizing the relevance of moral conscience in incarcerated mothers' lives can foster empathy and comprehension, acting as an antidote against the prevalent stigma and objectification surrounding this demographic. Appreciating their guilt and remorse alongside their yearning to right their wrongs and rebuild their existence can restyle public perception, constructing a conducive atmosphere for their reintegration endeavors.

To elaborate further, past experiences during one's formative years play a crucial role in molding an individual's moral compass. For imprisoned mothers, negative childhood events like physical or emotional trauma, neglect, or exposure to violence may hinder the standard progression of an ethical mindset, resulting in a skewed understanding of right and wrong (Cushman, 2008). It is essential to point out that many of these females have encountered recurring cycles involving crime, substance misuse, and distress, which contributes to their overall moral evolution. Past traumas and psychological health concerns hold significant influence as well. Such adversities may cause emotional instability, hinder cognitive functions, and impact the capacity to make morally sound judgments. Similarly, mental health issues among incarcerated women can impair their ethical thinking and decision-making abilities (Sexton, 2015). Hence, addressing these root causes through sensitive care approaches and mental wellness services is vital for boosting moral growth and easing successful reintegration.

Additionally, experiences within the judicial system have a substantial impact on jailed mothers' moral progress. Positive encounters such as active involvement in rehabilitation programs can encourage introspection, cultivate moral development, and inspire favorable behavior modification (Jemal, 2017). Conversely, negative experiences like severe punishments or humiliating treatment may solidify detrimental self-image, stunt moral growth, and intensify reintegration obstacles (Sharma, 2019). This highlights the potential advantages of initiatives that enhance ethical decision-making abilities, compassion, and moral reasoning among confined mothers. Techniques like cognitive-

behavioral therapy can assist women in comprehending the repercussions of their actions while nurturing empathy for victims and promoting ethically conscious choices in the future (Watts & Hipolito-Delgado, 2015). Similarly, moral recognition therapy, a systematic method designed to improve ethical thinking, has exhibited reduced repeat offense rates in criminal justice demographics.

Among the essential aspects of addressing women's unique needs within the criminal justice system are fostering healthy relationships, boosting self-esteem, addressing mental health and trauma, encouraging impactful parenting, and developing vocational and life skills (Jemal, 2017). These programs are typically grounded on respect and empathy, recognizing that many women in the criminal justice system have experienced trauma and abuse. For example, gender-responsive programs often integrate therapy or counseling sessions that specifically tackle issues such as domestic violence, sexual abuse, or other forms of trauma predominantly affecting women. These programs enable women to process their experiences and establish coping mechanisms, thus decreasing the chances of recidivism (Ross, 2017). Parenting effectiveness is another vital element of gender-responsive programming. Since many imprisoned women are mothers, programs that provide parenting courses or encourage mother-child interactions can help preserve family connections, improve children's well-being, and bolster mothers' self-confidence and desire for transformation.

Furthermore, offering vocational training and life skills development customized to women's needs and preferences can empower them financially and socially. Such

programs frequently include skills such as financial planning, job searching, and maintaining steady employment to prepare women for successful reintegration into society. Cultivating moral conscience is also a crucial component of gender-responsive interventions. These approaches may encompass ethical recognition therapy designed to improve moral reasoning and decrease recidivism (Watts & Hipolito-Delgado, 2015). These interventions can foster moral growth and behavioral change by aiding women in understanding the consequences of their actions and promoting empathy toward others.

Psychological and Social Adjustments

Transitioning back into society following incarceration presents a multitude of challenges, characterized by various psychological and social adaptations. For mothers, these obstacles tend to be more intense and diverse owing to the dual responsibilities of reintegrating personally and reestablishing their parental roles. Psychologically, post-incarceration mothers must face an array of complicated issues. The lasting impacts of the prison experience often leave emotional wounds that include potential traumas suffered within the prison setting. Physical or emotional in nature, such traumas could stem from violence, severe conditions, or the isolation and stress inherent to prison living. The subsequent consequences may result in mental health problems like depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), making reintegration even more difficult (Bryant, 2019).

In addition to confronting trauma, these mothers are burdened by the deep-seated stigma linked to their prior incarceration. Perpetuated by societal stereotypes, this stigma

can impede their efforts to reconstruct their self-image and regain confidence (Ankie et al., 2017). They frequently face feelings of shame, guilt, and worthlessness, posing challenges to their psychological healing and ability to perceive themselves positively beyond past transgressions (Simpson et al., 2018). Furthermore, the self-identity of these women often undergoes a significant shift upon reentry. They have to reconcile their motherhood with the stigmatizing label of ex-convict. Balancing these contrasting identity aspects can prove complex due to societal norms that impose conflicting expectations on mothers as opposed to the stereotypes surrounding criminality (Bryant et al., 2018).

Socially, moms rejoining society also face daunting obstacles. Reestablishing relationships strained or broken by incarceration is crucial. This encompasses relationships with their children that might have deteriorated due to prolonged absences and connections with family members, friends, and partners. Handling these relational complexities demands substantial emotional effort as well as navigating newly negotiated roles after imprisonment (Nielsen et al., 2015). Finally, securing stable employment and housing remains a substantial hurdle towards social adaptation. The negative perception of a criminal record can limit access to job prospects and living arrangements, as employers and landlords might hesitate to give opportunities to those who have served time (Marks, 2019).

It is important to address the health barriers faced by mothers who have been previously incarcerated in order to facilitate their successful reintegration into society.

The trauma endured both during and after their time in prison can have lasting effects. Coupled with the stigma and pressures of reentry these traumas often give rise to mental health issues. Among this group, depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) are particularly prevalent (Etzet, 2018). Feelings of hopelessness despair and a sense of worthlessness can contribute to depression among these women, which is often exacerbated by their exclusion from society and the challenging circumstances they face (King & Smith, 2023). Conversely, anxiety is commonly associated with the uncertainties that arise during the reentry process and the fear of relapsing into behavior. On the other hand, PTSD is a complex issue that can stem from the harsh prison environment and the potential for violence further amplifying past traumas from before imprisonment (Szablowinski, 2012).

The impact of these health challenges on a mother's ability to successfully reintegrate into her community cannot be overstated. If left unaddressed these problems can hinder her capacity to secure and maintain employment fulfill her parenting responsibilities effectively and rebuild connections. Moreover, they can contribute to substance abuse issues that further complicate the reentry experience (Segrave & Carlton, 2010). Recognizing the significance of health services is of utmost importance, for various reasons. These vital services encompass a range of options such as therapy, group therapy, and medication among other forms of treatment. Individual therapy for instance offers an environment where these mothers can navigate their traumas, develop coping strategies, and rebuild their self-esteem and sense of self (Kelman et al., 2022).

Behavioral therapy (CBT) is an approach that has demonstrated its effectiveness in addressing conditions like depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) by assisting individuals in recognizing and altering detrimental thought patterns leading to negative behaviors or emotions.

Group therapy on the other hand offers a sense of belonging and shared experiences diminishing feelings of isolation and reducing stigma. It also promotes the acquisition of skills and fosters peer support, both crucial elements; in the process of reintegrating into society (Laws, 2019). In instances incorporating medication into a comprehensive treatment plan may become necessary. Medications, like antidepressants, anxiolytics, and mood stabilizers have been proven effective in assisting women with health conditions. These medications can aid in symptom management enabling mothers to participate in their treatment and journey towards recovery (Harner & Riley, 2013). However, it is worth noting that simply offering these services is not sufficient. Mothers, in these situations often encounter obstacles when it comes to accessing health care. These barriers encompass limitations, awareness about available resources, and the stigma associated with seeking help for mental health concerns. Therefore, it is equally imperative to implement strategies that enhance access to and utilization of these services.

Moreover, it is crucial to provide trauma-informed care when working with this group. This approach recognizes the reaching impact of trauma. Strives to prevent any further distress or re-traumatization. It entails comprehending the paths that have led

these women to their circumstances respecting their autonomy and empowering them to play an active role in their recovery (Yvette & Vanessa, 2014; Haney, 2012). Substance addiction often poses a substantial obstacle in the path toward successful reintegration for previously incarcerated mothers. Many of these women have past experiences with drug and alcohol misuse, which may have started at a young age or been triggered by challenging situations, such as poverty, trauma, and mental health problems. Their addictive tendencies do not cease during incarceration; rather, they tend to persist and potentially resurface upon release.

Substance dependence can profoundly hinder the psychological adaptation process for these mothers. They might turn to substances to handle the stress and anxieties associated with reentry or find it difficult to overcome their addiction due to insufficient support and resources. In numerous cases, substance addiction can result in lapses into criminal activity, raising the likelihood of re-offending. Tackling substance addiction among previously incarcerated mothers necessitates all-encompassing and focused interventions. Initially, it is crucial to recognize addiction as an illness requiring medical care and therapeutic intervention instead of merely considering it a criminal or moral shortcoming.

Counseling is an integral component in combating addiction. Various approaches include individual counseling, group counseling, and family therapy. Through individual counseling, mothers can engage directly with a therapist to uncover their addiction's origins, develop coping mechanisms, and enhance resilience. Group counseling provides

peer support and an opportunity for sharing experiences that can significantly contribute to recovery. Family therapy aids in repairing strained relationships and fostering a supportive home atmosphere that is vital in averting relapse (Haney, 2012). The process of adapting to societal norms and expectations after a period of incarceration is multifaceted and complicated. Among the prime difficulties is managing the negative societal labels that come with having a criminal record, resulting in social exclusion commonly experienced by mothers who have served time (Vaswani et al., 2021). This unfavorable perception infiltrates numerous facets of their lives, posing considerable obstacles in obtaining a stable living situation, landing a job, and fostering connections with their family and local community.

Acquiring stable housing serves as an essential foundation for individuals reentering society. Unfortunately, many ex-convict mothers face barriers concerning housing policies that tend to discriminate against those with criminal backgrounds. Some property owners are reluctant to sign leases with former felons, while public housing alternatives may be limited or closed off entirely based on the nature of prior offenses (Bhatia, 2020). Consequently, this renders many mothers vulnerable to precarious living arrangements or, even worse, homelessness - situations that can notably thwart their progress towards societal reintegration and heighten the chances of returning to criminal behavior (McGuire et al., 2021). Considering this predicament, tailored housing programs catering to individuals with criminal records may be instrumental. By providing reasonably priced and stable lodging options coupled with encouraging services to assist

mothers in adjusting after release from prison, these programs can be invaluable. These support structures can encompass varied aspects like case management advice and emotional counseling as well as life skills education and employment guidance all aimed at ensuring a successful transition to self-reliant living.

Insufficient engagement during incarceration additionally interferes with the natural development of the parent-child connection. Many correctional facilities' rules like restrictions on physical contact during visits exacerbate this issue. Furthermore, the harsh and often frightening prison setting is incompatible with the compassionate and emotionally vulnerable interactions common in mother-child relationships (Paintain & Cassidy, 2018). Upon their release, these mothers confront the formidable task of reigniting bonds with their children and reasserting their caregiver role. They must manage feelings of guilt and embarrassment, handle potential resentment, or fear from their children, and try to bridge the emotional gap caused by their absence. This process becomes even more complex if the children have formed strong ties with alternative caregivers during the mother's absence, resulting in possible tension and competition.

Motherhood and Parenting

The journey from being a prisoner to a functional member of society plays a crucial role in reintegration, particularly for mothers as they work to reclaim and reshape their care giving responsibilities (Gabriella & Miklós, 2022). Imprisonment often leads to mothers being physically absent and less involved in their children's upbringing, which can create an emotional burden for both them and their kids. Thus, reassuming the

maternal role goes beyond mere physical presence or living with their children; it encompasses rekindling emotional bonds, restoring trust, and consistently providing care and support (Keller et al., 2022; Kar, 2011). On top of that, society tends to expect mothers to step back into their ideal caregiver roles immediately upon release, putting immense pressure on them (Easterling et al., 2019). This can be daunting, especially as they tackle obstacles like securing stable jobs and housing, battling the stigma of being ex-prisoners and addressing their own mental health or substance abuse issues. Notwithstanding these hurdles, many mothers regard resuming their roles as caregivers to be a vital part of their identity transformation (Brown & Bloom, 2009).

Besides these external factors, mothers may grapple with internal feelings of guilt and incompetence stemming from their absence during incarceration. This perceived failure towards their children can have adverse effects on their self-esteem and belief in their parenting abilities, further amplifying the reentry challenges. However, motherhood can serve as an empowering force for these women as well. The urge to support their children and be a part of their lives can fuel their determination and resilience. Many mothers tirelessly strive to overcome reentry barriers and reconstruct their lives for the benefit of their offspring. Research establishes that a profound devotion to motherhood can act as a safeguard against relapse into crime (Gabriella & Miklós, 2022).

Hence, it is imperative that reentry initiatives and policies recognize and address the distinct requirements and challenges linked to motherhood. This entails offering services such as parenting classes, family therapy, and family reunification assistance.

Furthermore, granting mothers access to indispensable resources like cost-effective housing, childcare facilities, and job training programs will empower them to fulfill their caregiver duties more competently. Incarceration can be an especially trying time for both mothers and their children, as forced separation often results in emotional challenges, the disruption of the mother-child bond, and feelings of abandonment in the child (Kar, 2011). In some instances, resentment towards the imprisoned parent might develop in children due to a sense of being deserted. As a result, reestablishing relationships upon the mother's release can become significantly more difficult.

Numerous studies emphasize the critical role of maintaining contact between mothers and their children throughout incarceration to alleviate some negative consequences. Consistent communication reassures children about their mothers' well-being, sustains a connection, and reduces abandonment feelings. Furthermore, it grants incarcerated mothers hope, motivation, and purpose while helping them navigate the emotional hardships of imprisonment and preserving their maternal identities (Bhatia, 2020). Visiting is an essential method for preserving this bond. However, hurdles such as geographical distance, visitation regulations, and intimidating prison atmospheres can hinder regular visits (Gabriella & Miklós, 2022). Distance poses a substantial barrier since prisons are frequently far from inmate home communities, making family visits expensive and time-consuming. Restrictive visitation policies or those that disregard child welfare can also create obstacles. Unwelcoming prison environments may not promote positive exchanges for children.

Other communication avenues like phone calls, written correspondence, or digital methods can also keep contact alive (Ogrizek et al., 2020). Nevertheless, these options can be stymied by prohibitive costs and regulations. For example, prison phone calls are often costly, while digital communication which is growing commonplace in society tends to be limited or inaccessible within penitentiary facilities. It is therefore crucial that policies and procedures encourage mother-child connections during incarceration. Potential strategies could involve making visitations more child-friendly; subsidizing phone call expenses; or examining secure digital communication alternatives. Initiatives that aid children in visiting prisons or provide support during visits might also be advantageous. These efforts can maintain the mother-child relationship throughout imprisonment, leading to improved outcomes for families and promoting a successful reentry for mothers.

Assuming the role of a parent once more demands the restoration of authority, which can be a complex endeavor (Stone et al., 2015). The child might have adapted to their mother's absence, forming new habits and routines under the supervision of interim caregivers. For the mother, reasserting her parental status may entail redefining boundaries, establishing expectations, and introducing fresh routines (Paintain & Cassidy, 2018). Re-building trust, when compromised or lost, takes patience and concerted effort. For children, their mother's absence due to imprisonment could foster feelings of desertion, deception, or indignation. For the mother, regaining this missing trust is vital to reviving a significant and supportive connection with their children. It requires

transparent communication, continuous fulfillment of promises, and showing unwavering love and care.

Another key determinant of fruitful reintegration into society is stable employment; likewise, much like in housing matters, the stain of a criminal past can significantly hinder these mothers from securing reliable jobs. Many businesses express reservations or refuse outright to employ someone with a prior conviction due to anxieties about trustworthiness issues, liability worries, or impressions of societal norms (McGuire et al., 2021). Lack of meaningful employment or underemployment can lead to monetary instability, creating a struggle to meet the basic needs of these mothers and their children, thereby heightening the risk of re-offending (Knox, 2018). Rebuilding connections with family members and nurturing the bond between children and their incarcerated mothers is crucial for successful societal reintegration, albeit facing numerous hurdles. The period of separation, characterized by restricted communication and physical and emotional distance, can cause relationship strain and evoke feelings of resentment, bewilderment, or abandonment in children. During their mother's detainment, the children might have been cared for by relatives or foster families, affecting their sense of safety and steadiness.

Attending to their children's emotional necessities is another crucial element of successful parenting following imprisonment. Children may undergo various emotions connected to their mother's incarceration and subsequent comeback bewilderment, anger, worry, solace, or happiness. Comprehending and catering to these emotional

requirements can encourage recovery and the re-establishment of a safe, fostering mother-child bond. Parenting initiatives can serve as invaluable tools for mothers confronting these obstacles. Such programs can equip mothers with the needed expertise and awareness to deal with the intricacies of parenting after imprisonment. For example, they can supply training in efficient communication techniques, guiding mothers in discussing openly and truthfully about their captivity with their children while empathetically addressing their doubts and apprehensions.

Moreover, these initiatives can give direction on forming and maintaining discipline in children's lives by helping mothers achieve an equilibrium between being loving and authoritative. Furthermore, they can offer insight into emotional assistance by showing mothers methods to discern and effectively meet their children's emotional needs. The welfare of youngsters whose mothers are imprisoned deserves thoughtful consideration. These kids often face a host of issues arising from their moms' confinement. The problems they encounter can take various shapes, like emotional suffering, school-related difficulties, and an increased likelihood of demonstrating unsociable tendencies. The psychological fallout from a mother's imprisonment can deeply affect her children. Abrupt separation, societal perceptions of having a jailed parent, and everyday life upheaval can seriously impact their emotional well-being.

Scholastic hardships regularly crop up for these youngsters as well. The mental and emotional burden caused by their mother's imprisonment might undermine their capacity to concentrate on schooling, leading to subpar performance, disinterest, and

elevated drop-out rates (Bunn et al., 2023). They could also experience stigmatization at school; further compounding their academic tribulations. Another key concern is the heightened possibility of exhibiting antisocial conduct. A mother's absence may interfere with a child's sense of attachment, causing feelings of desertion and turmoil (Gabriella & Miklós, 2022). Such emotional chaos might heighten the likelihood of troublesome behaviors like aggression, disobedience, and premature criminal involvement.

Interventions offering support have the potential to mitigate these hazards and contribute to better outcomes for these youngsters (Bunn et al., 2023). For instance, therapy services can aid them in processing emotions, managing their experiences, and strengthening resilience. Therapists furnish a secure environment where children can voice their emotions and acquire effective coping techniques. Sometimes, family therapy proves beneficial too. It helps mend mother-child relationships and nurtures wholesome family dynamics. Educational assistance provisions such as tutoring and academic guidance can address scholastic challenges. Tutors offer help with class work while academic advisors assist kids in handling school matters like controlling workload, handling stress, and tackling bullying or stigmatization (Gabriella & Miklós, 2022).

Relationships between Mother and Child after Incarceration

The Integral Nature of the Mother-Child Bond

From the instant of birth, an ineffable and profound link is established between a mother and her offspring. This connection has its roots deeply embedded in our evolutionary history, representing an innate, fundamental force that permeates the core of

human connections. It is more than just an emotive bond; it serves as the foundational basis that influences a child's emotional and psychological growth during their crucial developmental years (Ford, 2022). In 1988, esteemed psychologist John Bowlby shed light on the significance of this mother-child connection, highlighting its critical importance in human development (Vander Horst et al., 2020). He suggested that this attachment is not a fleeting aspect of early life but rather a potent force with far-reaching effects on an individual's entire existence. Once formed, this bond becomes the keystone for a child's emotional stability and resilience.

This attachment goes beyond mere emotions, extending its influence on a child's social interactions. It sculpts their ability to create and maintain relationships and assists them in deciphering the intricacies of human connections. It fosters their skills in trust-building, empathy, and forming deep-rooted relationships with others. The mother-child connection holds significance beyond just emotions; it serves as the foundation for a child's psychological welfare (Ford, 2022; Van Rosmalen et al., 2015). It governs how they perceive their surroundings, their position within them, and crucially, their self-esteem. Ultimately, the bond between mother and child functions as a vital force, an adviser, and a steadfast support system. It is the unspoken melody that echoes throughout a child's existence resonating through their joys, heartaches, obstacles, and victories alike. With this connection at hand, a mother supplies her young one with not only tools for navigating the world around them but also equips them to flourish emotionally, socially, and psychologically.

Impact of Incarceration on the Mother-Child Relationship

The pervasive issue of imprisonment extends beyond those confined, strongly influencing the very fabric of family life, particularly for mothers and their offspring. The abrupt and often unforeseen absence of a mother due to incarceration acts as a devastating disruption to one of humanity's most vital connections. This involuntary separation, imposed by unyielding walls and legal restrictions, casts a somber veil over the emotional lives of mother and child alike (Ford, 2022). The moment a mother is imprisoned, her child experiences the sudden loss of the comforting presence that once served as the bedrock of their emotional well-being (Bowlby & Ainsworth, 2013). This is not merely an empty space; it is a seismic shock. With a limited understanding of the rationale or subtleties behind this parting, the child wrestles with feelings of desertion, bewilderment, and profound sorrow.

Yet emotional turmoil is only part of the story. Research study by O'Malley & Devaney, (2016) delves into the psychological ramifications faced by children whose mothers are incarcerated. The outcome is troubling. These youngsters tend to exhibit trauma-related symptoms as they grapple with forced estrangement. A clouded sense of unease overshadows their inherent enthusiasm and inquisitiveness. As fear replaces a natural eagerness to engage with the world, they may retreat inwards, attempting to shield themselves from further anguish. In other cases, suppressed emotions and frustrations boil over into violent outbursts. For mothers behind bars, suffering takes on a dual nature the incarceration itself combined with an acute awareness of the distress and uncertainty

endured by their children on the outside. Overwhelming feelings arise from being absent during crucial times in their child's life missed milestones and an inability to provide comfort or guidance take an enormous toll.

Rebuilding the Bond: Challenges and Hurdles

As the prison doors open wide, marking the conclusion of a sentence fulfilled, mothers returning to society and family life find themselves facing a new chapter brimming with obstacles. Reconnecting with their child is not as simple as picking up where they left off; instead, it resembles traversing a landscape altered by powerful forces. The burden of a painful past hangs heavily upon the hearts of these women. Overwhelmed by guilt for time lost and priceless moments missed, mothers struggle with concerns of inadequacy that make them question whether they can reassume their positions as caretakers, defenders, and providers of emotional support (Besemer& Dennison,2018). They are also haunted by an uneasy anxiety that perhaps the connections once severed cannot be fully mended, fearing that their child may reject their embrace rather than welcome them back.

At the same time, children of all ages experience a whirlwind of emotions upon their mother's return. While some cling to the hope of reigniting their relationship, others find themselves caught in waves of bitterness. They feel that their mother was absent during crucial moments in their lives, whether those moments were significant or seemingly insignificant. As distrust seeps into their thoughts, they begin to doubt the legitimacy and durability of the newly reformed band (Tasca, 2014). Meanwhile, some

children still harbor the fear that another farewell will soon come, breaking hearts and overturning lives once again. To make matters worse, these internal emotional struggles are only amplified by external pressures arising from society's judgment. Outside imprisonment confines exists an unspoken yet prevalent stigma against those who have once been behind bars. This preconception influences interactions and taints how these mothers are perceived, impacting their self-esteem, and affecting how even their own children view them. Consequently, the child may confront whispers, accusatory gazes, and critical attitudes from both peers and the wider community further exacerbating their emotional charade.

According to McClure et al., (2015), the complex matrix of emotions and challenges that a child goes through when their mothers are incarcerated exposes a range of subtle factors that must be addressed. The path to rebuilding this relationship is far from straightforward; strewn with both internal and external obstacles, success requires persistence, empathy, and above all, unwavering.

The Role of External Factors

The process of reestablishing the relationship between a mother and child following incarceration is undeniably fraught with emotional and psychological complexities. External circumstances play a critical role in either laying the groundwork for repair or placing hurdles along the way. Such factors are not merely side issues; they directly impact and intertwine with the emotional journey of reconnection. Housing stability is a key challenge faced by these reunited families. A home provides more than

mere shelter; it offers a sanctuary of safety, comfort, and consistency. For mothers striving to mend broken bonds with their children, a lack of secure housing goes beyond logistic difficulties. It creates an uncertain atmosphere, where daily worries about shelter take precedence over gentle moments of reconciliation. Booth (2020) emphasized the significant consequences of such insecurity, suggesting that an unpredictable environment may significantly hinder or even completely obstruct the fragile process of reestablishing trust and closeness.

Similarly, financial struggles can overshadow relationship repair efforts as mothers focus on basic survival rather than emotional connections. Economic hardships may force distressing decisions where immediate necessities outweigh long-term goals for restoring relationships (Holden et al., 2022). Limited financial means also reduce access to support services such as counseling, therapy, or community programs, widening the rift between mother and child (Fowler et al., 2022, Ginapp et al., 2023). A less apparent but equally powerful challenge arises from shifts in family dynamics during the mother's incarceration. In seeking stability and love, children may forge new connections with other family members, caregivers, or peers. As the mother returns to this altered landscape, she no longer finds herself in familiar territory but must navigate a transformed family structure. These new relationships, though essential for the child's welfare during separation, may give rise to feelings of displacement or competition (Harper et al., 2021; Powell, 2020), adding another layer of intricacy to their already arduous journey back into each other's lives.

Promising Interventions

The shadow of imprisonment lingers, notably affecting the bond between mothers and their children. Despite the immense obstacles, a flicker of hope arises from carefully crafted interventions that encourage rekindling fragile connections. Recently, there has been an upswing in initiatives dedicated to fortifying the mother-child relationship, leading to a transformative impact on their lives (Pinard, 2010). At the heart of these efforts lies family therapy. This method is grounded in the notion that family dynamics play an essential role in shaping individual actions. Family therapy embraces a comprehensive outlook, focusing not solely on the personal struggles of a mother or child but highlighting the relationship between them. By promoting honest communication, family therapy helps uncover hidden emotions such as resentment, guilt, or fear and addresses them collectively (Jonson & Cullen, 2015; Garofalo, 2020). It becomes a voyage of mutual understanding in which both mother and child are guided to confront and resolve their past emotional baggage.

In addition to family therapy, group counseling emerges as another powerful resource. The strength stems from communal experiences and common stories. As mothers face their distinct challenges, they find comfort in others who walk similar paths. A group setting cultivates camaraderie and reassures them that they are not alone in their battles (Pettus-Davis et al., 2015; Mowen et al., 2019). Further, watching others reconnect can inspire and provide practical advice for overcoming their own issues. Moreover, the significance of trauma-informed care must be acknowledged. These

interventions take into account that experiences such as imprisonment and resulting separation have caused deep-rooted trauma, with far-reaching psychological consequences (Malik et al., 2023. Muentner& Charles, (2023) highlights the importance of this approach since it does not just focus on external symptoms but delves into hidden emotional wounds. By equipping mothers with coping mechanisms designed for dealing with trauma, these programs help them traverse the divide created by their absence with more empathy and comprehension (Covington, 2022).

Ultimately, while reestablishing connections after imprisonment may appear overwhelming, specialized interventions offer a glimmer of optimism. By tackling complex emotional and psychological trials head-on, these programs pave the way for a harmonious and empathetic mother-child relationship (Couloute& Kopf, 2018). Though the journey may be lengthy, with the right resources and support, it leads to a brighter, more connected future.

Recidivism Rates and Their Impact on Family Reintegration

Understanding Recidivism

At its essence, recidivism embodies a recurring cycle where an individual, once punished for wrongdoings, reverts back to similar criminal behaviors. Nevertheless, this basic explanation falls short of capturing the extensive implications of this issue, particularly in the context of motherhood (Malouf et al., 2014).Picture a mother endeavoring to reconstruct her life after serving time for past errors. Each day exemplifies her determination while she contends with societal prejudices, seeks steady

employment, and most importantly, reestablishes relationships with her children. Now, envision her suffering and despair when she stumbles for various reasons and becomes entangled again within the criminal justice system. This relapse into criminal activities represents more than a mere offense; it signifies a heartbreaking regression in her path toward family reunification.

For mothers, the consequences of recidivism are multi-layered. Firstly, there is the immediate sorrow from new separations from their children. This encompasses not only physical distance but also a widening emotional gulf over time. Youngsters, already marred by previous separations, now face heightened feelings of desertion and mistrust. They become doubtful of their mother's commitment and struggle with uncertainties that stem from her absence (Wallace et al., 2020). Additionally, each instance of criminal misconduct exacerbates the obstacles to family reconnection. It is no longer just about surmounting past errors, but also addressing the burden of further misdeeds. Society's often harsh judgments cast recidivist mothers under increased suspicion, making the pursuit of a 'normal' life even more unattainable (Malouf et al., 2014). Job prospects decrease, social support networks may weaken, and overall societal trust erodes.

Factors Contributing to High Recidivism Among Mothers

Bond and Doonan (2020) offered significant insights into the complex network of factors causing high recidivism rates, particularly among mothers. They discovered that a wide range of interconnected elements, deeply embedded within socio-economic conditions, significantly influence repeated offending. Central to this problem is the

powerful effect of limited familial resources. As many mothers return from incarceration, their families serve as their primary and often most vital source of support. This is where they find comfort, stability, and a platform for reintegration into society. Yet, when families come from poverty-stricken backgrounds, this essential foundation becomes unsteady. Confronted with financial limitations and everyday survival struggles, these families face immense challenges in offering the comprehensive assistance needed for smooth re-entry.

In addition to financial barriers, a lack of social capital further complicates matters. This notion, which extends beyond mere economic prosperity, includes community connections, relationships, and trust available to individuals. For mothers attempting to reconstruct their lives post-incarceration, social capital can prove priceless. It helps create job opportunities, fosters community acceptance, and provides moral support. Regrettably, though, many mothers return to communities with scant connections and eroded societal trust. The resulting lack of solid social networks leaves them isolated and often drives them back to old behaviors and associations that led them astray initially (Chamberlain & Wallace, 2016). Another critical but frequently disregarded aspect is inheritance not just in the form of material possessions but also inherited social standing, education opportunities, and prospects. When mothers originate from environments marked by generational poverty, educational deficits, and scant opportunities, carving out a new path becomes exceedingly difficult. Instead of acquiring

assets or opportunities to facilitate reintegration, they inherit hurdles that further obstruct their way.

Lastly, the intertwined challenges that mothers face while attempting to reintegrate after incarceration are intrinsically linked to their families' socio-economic situations. Although personal determination plays a role in these circumstances, it is the external environment characterized by family resources, social ties, and inherited obstacles that ultimately shape their reentry trajectory. Acknowledging and addressing these factors is essential in our joint efforts to minimize recidivism among mothers.

Impact on the Child

In the context of family dynamics, the regular presence of a parent acts as a tether, imparting a feeling of safety and connection for youngsters. Regrettably, the disruption of this equilibrium, particularly with the recurrent imprisonment of a mother, leads to considerable emotional turmoil for the child. Denny (2016) reveals the far-reaching effects that continuous separations can impose upon a young mind. Each occurrence of maternal incarceration may present the world as erratic, as the very foundation of their emotional realm of their mother seemingly vanishes and reemerges without any forewarning. It is not just about disrupting daily routines; it erodes their fundamental grasp on trust and dependability.

Numerous children in such situations begin to experience abandonment. They might wrestle with profound questions surrounding their mother's departures and whether they are at fault. These emotions can take a heavy toll, causing children to doubt their

self-esteem and place in the world. It is more than just the physical absence of their mother; it is the lingering uncertainty and unaddressed emotional void left after each goodbye. Additionally, these unstable circumstances often exhibit external consequences. Children may exhibit behavioral issues ranging from aggression to introversion. They may falter academically or socially, struggling to relate to peers who cannot comprehend or empathize with their turbulent journey.

There is also the quiet battle against psychological afflictions. An underlying current of angst, despondency, and an all-encompassing dread of further desertion may permeate their daily existence (Skinner-Osei & Stepteau-Watson, 2018). Even upon reunification with their mother, concerns over another impending separation can overshadow moments of happiness. Ultimately, the vicious cycle of maternal recidivism does not solely confine mothers within physical cell walls; it also entraps children into an unseen prison built from emotional chaos. To genuinely comprehend its full extent, we must acknowledge that repeatedly losing and regaining a mother can mold a child's perspective, emotional reactions, and their very identity. Therefore, the societal toll of maternal recidivism reaches well beyond the incarcerated individual it reverberates throughout the lives of the children left grappling in its aftermath.

Challenges for the mother

For mothers trapped in a relentless cycle of imprisonment, the experience goes far beyond mere confinement. Each time they return to incarceration, they face a complex web of obstacles that infiltrate their everyday lives. Securing steady work becomes a

formidable pursuit for these mothers. Employers frequently hesitate or outright decline upon learning about an applicant's multiple imprisonments. While one offense may be seen as an isolated misstep, several incarcerations suggest a pattern that many employers are skeptical of (Denny, 2016). Consequently, unemployment or underemployment leaves mothers struggling with financial hardships while attempting to reintegrate into society.

Obtaining housing, an essential necessity has also proven elusive. Locating a place to call one's own is becoming increasingly tricky, particularly in a culture that tends to regard former convicts with apprehension. Landlords and housing associations worrying about safety and potential criminal conduct might be hesitant to rent to those with a recurring criminal background (Ganapathy, 2023). Consequently, numerous mothers find themselves perpetually seeking shelter or, in more severe cases, becoming homeless. However, the most significant challenge might be the unspoken fight against societal stigma. Repeated incarcerations not only brand these women as criminals but also cast doubt on their roles as mothers and valuable members of society. Each distrustful glance murmured judgment, or outright act of discrimination serves as a reminder of their tainted image. Over time, this burden of external judgment can seep into their core beliefs, transforming into feelings of self-doubt and hopelessness. Mothers may view themselves through the distorting lens of social perception, questioning their capability and worthiness to support their children.

In short, when it comes to mothers ensnared in the cycle of recidivism, securing employment and housing is just the beginning. The deeper issues involve combating societal prejudices, managing self-perception, and attempting to create a sense of normalcy in an environment that continuously reminds them of their past errors. The journey is not solely about serving a sentence; it is about seeking redemption in the eyes of society, and more importantly, in their hearts.

The Role of Community and Support Programs

Returning to society after imprisonment is a complicated and multifaceted journey. Central to this path is the daunting task of overcoming recidivism, which sadly, many succumb to. However, a ray of hope exists within community programs and support services (Cooper-Sadlo et al., 2019). When these systems are efficient and well-supplied, they can serve as strong defenses against repeated offenses. Still, their effectiveness is not always certain and relies on numerous elements. Chamberlain & Wallace, (2016) unveiled a disturbing discovery: a considerable number of community programs and services, despite good intentions, may unintentionally exacerbate the issue they aim to resolve. Mothers face a unique intersection of various societal clichés and stereotypes deeply ingrained in biases concerning class, race, gender, and sexuality. These preconceptions can color the manner in which support is offered, resulting in potential discrepancies between an individual's needs and the assistance provided.

Take, for example, a program intended to help with job placements that neglects the distinct challenges confronting a single mother. Childcare demands, flexible work

hour necessities, and the emotional distress of being apart from her children all influence her employability (Dargis & Mitchell-Somoza, 2021). Yet if the program follows a uniform approach without addressing these subtleties, its likelihood of making a real difference decline. Likewise, therapeutic services that fail to acknowledge and tackle the compounded social pressures experienced by mothers, particularly those from disadvantaged racial or economic backgrounds might not deliver the comprehensive support needed (Ganapathy, 2023; Loper et al., 2019). For a mother grappling with not only the stigma of being incarcerated but also society's biases regarding her race or class, standard therapy sessions could barely begin to delve into her personal experiences (Poehlmann-Tynan & Eddy, 2019).

The Bigger Picture: Societal Impact

Delving into the complexities of recidivism, it is evident that its impact extends far beyond just the individuals directly affected. Indeed, the ramifications of this problem permeate throughout society, influencing economic prosperity, community relations, and even the core foundations upon which our neighborhoods are established. Ponder the economic implications for a moment. Recidivism essentially represents a cycle in which individuals, after completing their sentences, relapse into criminal activities and eventually find themselves back within the legal system (Alward et al., 2020). This repetitive sequence drains significant resources, encompassing expenses such as court proceedings, legal representation, incarceration costs, and post-release supervision. Each

time a person re-offends, the repercussions reach beyond personal setbacks; it extends to an additional financial load shouldered by taxpayers.

Ultimately, this leads us to an important insight: successful reintegration involves more than just providing support; it demands an extensive comprehension and recognition of the complex array of obstacles that different individuals confront (Alward et al., 2020). For mothers specifically, this entails acknowledging their intersecting identities and addressing the unique challenges emerging from them. Nevertheless, monetary aspects are merely one component of a larger issue. The safety of communities is undoubtedly a critical matter. Elevated recidivism rates indicate that the underlying factors fueling criminal activities whether socio-economic inequality, mental health challenges, or addiction struggles remain unresolved.

Reintegration and associated social impacts

Returning to society after a period of incarceration can be an intricate and challenging experience, akin to maneuvering through a complicated game. Every step presents obstacles in adjusting to a world that is both familiar and uncharted. Each former prisoner endures their own unique struggles; however, for mothers, the process is especially winding. They not only strive to reestablish themselves in society but also work on repairing damaged relationships with their children and regaining their role within the family. The ripple effects of this multifaceted reintegration process stretch beyond the individual, weaving through the very threads of our communities (Anazodo et al., 2019; Wallace et al., 2020). They mold interactions and influence social dynamics on

multiple levels. The vast and diverse social implications offer insights into the hindrances faced both by these individuals and the wider societal context in which these challenges emerge.

At the core of these obstacles is the prevalent issue of societal prejudice. For mothers returning from imprisonment, the label of 'prisoner' or 'ex-offender' often overshadows every other aspect of their identity, including their role as mothers (Hamilton & Belenko, 2019). This societal labeling proves crippling as they wrestle with deep-rooted views of themselves as failures not just within society but, more importantly, as caregivers. These preconceptions impact not only how society perceives them but also have tangible consequences such as obstructing their chances for fruitful employment opportunities. Consequently, this can trap them in a vicious cycle of poverty and make them more vulnerable to reengaging in criminal activities.

Instead of focusing solely on the "ex-offender" label, it is crucial to recognize the various roles these women fulfill, most importantly as mothers. By concentrating on their prior misdeeds, society unintentionally disregards their diverse experiences, boiling them down to brief mentions of bygone errors. This oversimplified view diminishes these women's multifaceted identities and heightens their sense of alienation in the community. As they strive to reestablish themselves, this societal shortsightedness exacerbates the feeling of being perpetual outsiders, complicating an already difficult journey. Taking a step back to grasp wider implications reveals the harsh outcome of a failed reintegration process. A domino effect emerges, both heartrending and deeply impactful as mothers

who falter in reconnecting with society frequently struggle to mend broken bonds with their loved ones (Fahmy, 2021). As a result, their children experience a void, devoid of maternal care and direction. This absence leads to various emotional and psychological hurdles throughout their lives.

Beyond the immediate family unit, the entire community bears the brunt of the reverberations. Rather than tapping into the hidden potential these women possess the community wrestles with repercussions stemming from reintegration failures (Baldwin, 2018). This not only concerns tangible aspects like increased reliance on social assistance programs but also intangibles such as eroding community solidarity. Thus, it is crucial to shift from solely perceiving these women through the lens of their history. Acknowledging and leveraging their capabilities can transform them from apparent burdens to inspiring symbols of hope. By enabling smooth reintegration, communities can access a treasure chest of untapped resources. Once successfully reintegrated, these mothers can strengthen the socio-economic fabric of society, reduce dependency on social support systems, and set forth a path for future generations to overcome cycles of inequality (Cherney, 2021).

Housing and Community

For countless individuals, a home symbolizes safety, a sense of belonging, and a personal haven. This fundamental component holds even more importance for those aiming to reintegrate into society, particularly mothers who have experienced

incarceration. A home represents more than just a physical space; it signifies the opportunity for a new beginning, a steady grounding, a secure environment, and a nurturing shelter (Simmons et al., 2022; Douglas et al., 2020). Amidst the turbulence of life after prison, it provides an unwavering source of reliability and structure.

Nevertheless, the journey to obtain such sanctuary is filled with obstacles, often turning a seemingly simple process into an exceedingly difficult endeavor. Mothers emerging from imprisonment face the burden of their pasts, which act as colossal hindrances in their pursuit of housing. Strikingly, the very penal system intended to reform them inadvertently casts an enduring shadow on their lives once released. The indelible marks left behind may be invisible but continue to hold considerable consequences.

Public housing originally intended to assist the most susceptible can sometimes become an impenetrable fortress for these women. The policies implemented may have been devised for safety and justice; however, they frequently marginalize those with criminal histories. This unintentional yet detrimental exclusion drives them toward society's outskirts, exacerbating their vulnerability and perpetuating their marginalization (Winkler, 2022). Furthermore, the private housing sector introduces its unique set of hurdles. Propelled by financial incentives and ingrained societal views, this market can be inhospitable for mothers who have experienced incarceration (Williams et al., 2021; Kirk, 2018). Landlords may find themselves swayed by deeply rooted stigmas encircling imprisonment either consciously or subconsciously. Consequently, the mere presence of a criminal record regardless of its relevance or regency stands as a hindrance; these

mothers are confronted with shut doors and lost chances (Lesley et al., 2020). Their struggle epitomizes an extensive societal issue that calls for our attention and action.

The dilemma of reintegration extends much further than just impacting individual lives. It echoes profoundly in the broader context of communities, illustrating a web of aspirations, apprehensions, and down-to-earth realities. Communities are fundamentally group-oriented bodies that flourish through strong connections and common objectives. However, when confronted with integrating formerly incarcerated mothers back into society, these communities encounter a multifaceted fork in the road (Chamberlain, 2018). Achieving equilibrium in the reintegration process is far from easy. On one hand, there lies an empathetic wish to aid these mothers by acknowledging their humanity and capacity for self-improvement. On the other hand, valid worries linked to security and financial consequences present themselves. The importance of property values, often regarded as a material representation of community accomplishment, intersects with abstract yet very tangible anxieties about community wellbeing (Gurusami, 2019; Schneider, 2017). These fears, although originating from authentic places of worry, at times initiate a sequence that amplifies the issues they seek to mitigate.

Despite these obstacles, an opening for transformational change arises. A modest yet meaningful shift in viewpoint can enlighten an alternative course. What if communities began perceiving these mothers not as potential dangers but rather as unexplored sources of promise? Adopting such a perspective has the capability to dismantle impediments and cultivate inclusivity (Western & Smith, 2018). Imagine a

community environment where modes of assistance are seamlessly integrated into its framework. Mentorship initiatives could function as vital links, pairing previously incarcerated mothers with experienced community members who can provide guidance, counsel, and encouragement (Turney & Wildeman, 2018). Community centers which often serve as central hubs for neighborhoods could develop into safe havens that promote personal growth. These centers would offer opportunities for previously incarcerated mothers to access resources learn invaluable skills and establish significant relationships (Arditti, 2012).

The returns on such endeavors are numerous. In addition to the tangible advantages like reduced recidivism rates, they foster an atmosphere where every individual feels appreciated, acknowledged, and enabled (Pattillo et al., 2022). It nurtures a sentiment of communal elevation where reciprocal support and collective growth become standard practice. Within this progressive framework, communities not only tackle the immediate hurdles of reintegration but also build the foundation for a future in which every person, regardless of their history, contributes to a dynamic, unified, and prosperous group (Nicole et al., 2020).

Summary

The challenge of welcoming back formerly incarcerated mothers into the community are multifaceted, as communities must balance the desire to support rehabilitation with legitimate concerns about safety and economic consequences. Despite the well-founded nature of these worries, they could unintentionally intensify the very

issues communities are trying to prevent. A change in outlook, seeing these mothers as valuable resources rather than potential risks, may provide an optimistic alternative. By creating nurturing conditions, such as mentorship initiatives and well-equipped community centers, communities can enable successful reintegration. These efforts not only lower recidivism rates but also bolster the community's connection, leading to collective growth and empathy.

At the heart of this story lies the powerful mother-child bond, a deeply rooted and vital connection that becomes compromised due to incarceration. This sudden separation can trigger a domino effect of emotional and psychological hurdles for both mother and offspring. Upon re-entry into society, obstacles such as reestablishing connections, battling social stigmas, and confronting personal guilt and emotions further hinder the restoration of this crucial relationship.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the research methodology by advancing the research question of the stressors and challenges for mothers re-entering communities after imprisonment, particularly due to weakened social support networks. Although scholarly articles provide insights into the issues faced by ex-prisoners, understanding the distinct hardships and necessities exclusive to mothers adapting to life outside prison remains limited. The goal of this research is to bridge this knowledge gap and contribute real-world value. Instead of merely identifying issues, the study aspires to ignite change by championing tangible community-based initiatives that genuinely support these mothers' reintegration. The methodology adheres to severe and inclusive standards adopting a qualitative research design mainly focusing on narratives and perceptions of clinicians about the incarcerated mothers who are re-entering society.

Research Design & Research Rationale

Research Design

In order to effectively explore the multifaceted and complex lives of mothers who have transitioned from incarceration, clinicians can help solve this knowledge gap by providing insights through their perceptions of what these mothers go through. The challenges these mothers face extend beyond mere statistics, encompassing deeply personal experiences, societal views, emotional health, and tangible circumstances. As such, adopting a methodological framework as intricate and refined as the subjects being

examined is crucial. This research employs a qualitative methodology that focuses on data provided by the clinicians. According to Headley & Plano Clark (2020), sourcing out people's perceptions of a specific subject matter can be based assessed through qualitative means. Therefore, the different perceptions of clinicians can only make sense if a qualitative design is employed to get the required information.

Additionally, the qualitative methods enable us to probe the clinicians' perceptions about the mothers who have been incarcerated and entering their societies (Paynter et al., 2019). By utilizing tools such as interviews, it can be easier to source out data and insights into their daily challenges, strategies for coping, and hopes for an improved future based on what the clinicians say. The qualitative data unveils narratives that reveal the human experiences behind the statistics.

Rationale

The choice to utilize qualitative data is based on the nature of the research. Since the main data is collected from the perceptions, then it is important to employ the method that is relative to such a technique. This selection is far from random and is adapted to address the multifaceted obstacles encountered by previously imprisoned mothers as they re-enter society. Qualitative techniques act as an essential tool for analyzing the perceptions of the clinicians on the mothers' emotional complexity and individual experiences (Jacobson & Mustafa, 2019). By employing methods like semi-structured interviews, one can assess their deepest beliefs, concerns, and ambitions. Such qualitative approaches allow us to investigate personal aspects that are challenging to quantify, such

as emotional stress's subtleties, interpersonal relationship dynamics, and different coping mechanisms' significance. In essence, qualitative data furnishes the research with a rich, detailed narrative, which is frequently neglected when exclusively dealing with figures and statistics.

This qualitative research focuses on the clinicians' personal, subjective, and biased opinions as they encounter experiences from incarcerated mothers. Utilizing a semi-structured interview, this investigation aims to uncover the complexities entwined in individual narratives and shared histories (Harney & Lerman, 2021). Purposefully chosen, the participant pool is notably diversified by collecting the perceptions from clinicians in different hospitals and health centers. For example, some of the clinicians can come from the local & community hospitals, and others represent the prison health centers while the rest come from home-based care. Collecting this data from these diversified clinicians allows them to provide different perceptions which can make an important conclusion in the long run. Every perspective serves as a distinct lens, illuminating various aspects of the central issue. This all-encompassing method ensures an extensive examination of the subjects' struggles, aspirations, and potential opportunities for assistance as they reintegrate into society.

Research Question

RQ1: What are the perceptions of the clinicians towards the incarcerated mothers who have transitioned from prison?

By this research question, the foundation of data collection and analysis can be formed easily since accessing the required information from the clinicians is available (Headley & Plano Clark 2020). Through their interactions with mothers transitioning from prison, the clinicians develop specific perceptions that can create a basis for the data regarding the stressors mothers face and how these practical findings can be transformed into valuable support systems within the community for mothers who have reintegrated after imprisonment.

Conceptual Framework

At the core of this study is a clearly outlined theoretical structure that significantly influences both the direction of the research and the interpretation of the results. Serving as a guiding compass and blueprint, this structure directs the question into the numerous obstacles and experiences faced by mothers while traversing the difficult path of reentering society after a prison sentence (Cohen & McKay, 2020). Instead of examining this transition in isolation, the paper strives to comprehend it within a broader context of societal interactions and personal psychological processes. To accomplish this goal, the research heavily relies upon the expertise and viewpoints of clinicians who frequently observe these mothers' intimate moments of struggle during reintegration.

The theoretical framework primarily consists of two distinguished concepts that jointly establish the basis for our analytical method. The first concept, Social Support Theory, asserts that an individual's mental and physical well-being can be greatly impacted by both the quality and quantity of their social connections (Cohen & McKay,

2020). This theory emphasizes the importance of relationships be they familial, friendly, or professional in providing a safety net against life's hardships. In relation to our study, we are prompted to examine: How do available or lacking support networks affect mothers' adjustment to life outside prison? Furthermore, how do clinicians perceive the influence of these networks on mothers' coping strategies and overall mental health?

The second theoretical perspective, Stress, and coping Theory, focuses on the psychological complexities surrounding individual responses to stress. According to this theory, when confronted with challenges, individuals utilize various coping mechanisms whose effectiveness can be influenced by multiple aspects such as social support (Leprince et al., 2018). This perspective is particularly relevant considering the unique stress factors that formerly incarcerated mothers confront upon returning to society. By adopting this viewpoint, the research aims to explore: What are the primary stressors these mothers encounter? How do they select and apply coping techniques, and what are the outcomes? Additionally, from a clinician's perspective, how do these coping methods correlate to the mother's overall well-being and likelihood of successful reintegration?

The path of ex-imprisoned mothers unravels an array of complexities, nuances, and hurdles that may seem unfathomable. In our pursuit of examining the depths of this journey, the research focuses on the complex web of experiences these mothers' traverse (Leprince et al., 2018). Central to our question is the powerful issue of support: What types of assistance can these women access? Are there individuals offering emotional nourishment, a comforting presence, or a nonjudgmental listening ear? Can they find

guidance through experienced mentors or valuable advice? Moreover, when confronted with difficulties, are there practical resources such as financial aid or physical help that can alleviate their struggles?

Nevertheless, the question of support constitutes just one aspect of this comprehensive study. To genuinely grasp the scope of their lives, it is essential to examine both the positive and negative aspects, comprehending the numerous trials and tribulations dotting their existence (Cohen & McKay, 2020). What barriers do they encounter? Are they societal in nature, stemming from biases and preconceptions? Alternatively, do these challenges arise from personal aspects, echoing past events that still permeate their present lives? Furthermore, another facet emerges the themes of resilience and adaptability. How do these mothers summon the courage to persevere in the face of adversity? What coping mechanisms becomes their guidepost through choppy waters laden with hardships? Do they find solace through self-reflection or perhaps gain strength through communal bonding? Could there be mental techniques utilized to alter their perspective and identify silver linings?

Ultimately, this investigation transcends individual experiences to mirror a broader tapestry encompassing their entire lives. How do these diverse encounters influence their overall well-being? Do they achieve a sense of connection and purpose or grapple with emotions such as isolation and despondency? And more importantly, how do these elements impact their future trajectories, particularly in relation to the risk of recidivism? With this research, the goal extends beyond mere observation and

documentation we strive to empathize and comprehend (Leprince et al., 2018). By focusing on the realm of previously incarcerated mothers, we hope to illuminate the nuances of their experiences. This provides a comprehensive picture that resonates with both understanding and empathy.

Research Methodology and Instrumentation

Sampling

The foundation of this study relies on a deliberate sampling technique. This decision stems from the inherent attributes of qualitative research rather than being a random choice. The main objective is not to draw sweeping generalizations applicable to a wider populace, but instead, we seek to delve into the distinct experiences, obstacles, and viewpoints connected to the matter being examined (Baldwin, 2021). Therefore, we specifically target clinicians as respondents due to their in-depth knowledge and direct exposure to the challenges that incarcerated mothers face during their reintegration into society. By concentrating on this demographic, we aim to unveil a diverse array of discernments that can shed light on the intricate difficulties and coping mechanisms related to our study's subject.

Data Collection

For the purpose of procuring substantial and significant information, this research will use semi-structured interviews. The semi-structured interviews consist of open-ended inquiries, granting participants the liberty to convey their opinions, convictions, and experiences without feeling restricted. This tactic not only guarantees that the

interviewees' perspectives remain genuine but also paves the way for unforeseen yet precious revelations (Baldwin, 2021). Additionally, the discussions offer an engaging environment where clinicians can exchange their experiences and contemplate the stories shared by their colleagues. This collective ambiance can yield a more comprehensive grasp of the topic as participants frequently expand upon each other's input, thus presenting multifaceted outlooks.

Data Analysis

Afterward, painstakingly analyzing the relevant data in order to figure out narratives becomes inevitable. The research approaches the matter through thematic analysis, a method suitable for qualitative data that focuses not only on cause-and-effect correlations or variables to be measured. In this process, however, this approach is used as a key tool to unfold the layers carrying information (Baldwin, 2021). Themes are then found out, analyzed, and interpreted from the data set, especially such ones that recur in it. The thematic analysis offers an organized way of examining different opinions on the experience of imprisoned mothers as seen through the lenses of clinicians. The dominance stories and sub stories are carefully weaved together in an elaborate fashion resulting in one coherent story that deeply explains the sentiments clinicians entertain. Unlike many studies that just explore the exterior, this method reaches deep into nuanced daily lives and perspectives.

Ethical Concerns

It is worth noting that the ethics of this research must be protected as it progresses since any ethical breach along this path could tarnish the work of this study. Unequivocal support for informed consent from all subjects is one of the important components of ethics in research undertaking. It helps people understand the true essence of the study, what it is for and its possible consequences making it possible for them to volunteer in a free will without feeling coerced (Paynter et al., 2019). The ethic of informed consent will play a role alongside the research institute's strict policies designed to keep participant information anonymous and private. Considering that some areas discussed in the research have sensitive repercussions on the parties involved, the research team is committed to ensuring that participants remain protected from any undesirable exposure or harm.

Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Recruitment

At the beginning of our research process, we carefully pinpoint suitable individuals to participate in the study, specifically focusing on clinicians who have worked directly with incarcerated or previously incarcerated mothers. Our systematic identification process involves thoroughly investigating various institutional environments such as hospitals, clinics, and rehabilitation centers (Paynter et al., 2019). Additionally, we tap into professional networks, connecting with an extensive range of specialists who may have interacted professionally with this distinct group of mothers.

Upon identifying potential participants, the researcher will proceed to formally contact participants by sending out a well-crafted and precise invitation, which can be sent either electronically via email or as a traditional paper-based version mailed to their physical address. No matter the method of delivery, the content of the invitation stays homogeneous, clearly explaining key aspects of the research (Paynter et al., 2019). This encompasses a concise introduction to the study's purpose, participants' expected involvement, an approximation of the required time commitment, and reassurance that strong confidentiality measures are in place to protect their information.

However, merely receiving an invitation does not guarantee a spot in our study. Due to the specialized nature of the research subject matter, it is crucial to ensure that every participant possesses substantial experience and valuable insights capable of enriching our collected data. In order to achieve this goal, we implement a screening process not an exhaustive interrogation but rather a brief discussion wherein potential participants answer initial questions (Norman & Enebrink, 2023). These questions revolve around their professional experiences, placing particular emphasis on their interactions with incarcerated or formerly incarcerated mothers. Once they successfully pass this screening phase, they officially join the research cohort. This thorough approach guarantees that our research is based on genuine and well-informed viewpoints.

Participation

Every successful research endeavor hinge on the involvement of enthusiastic participants, and our study is no exception. Nevertheless, this research firmly believes

that participation goes beyond mere engagement; it becomes a mindful and informed choice made by every healthcare professional who decides to join us on this path. The foundation of the research ethical approach lies in the principle of informed consent. Prior to the start of any interview, it is vital that each participant is equipped with a complete understanding of the study they are about to take part in (Pace et al., 2019). This encompasses an extensive orientation session where professionals are introduced to the main objectives, methodologies utilized, potential risks they might encounter, and naturally, the advantages they might reap both individually and as contributors to a larger academic discourse.

After equipping the clinicians with all the requisite knowledge, attention shifts to logistical matters such as scheduling. Fully aware of how tight clinicians' schedules can be, the research will prioritize flexibility by arranging interviews at times that will not interfere with their professional duties. Additionally, the chosen venue for these dialogues is meticulously selected to ensure privacy and discretion, allowing participants to speak candidly without concerns about being overheard (Borelli et al., 2010). Regarding time commitment, we honor our participants' hectic lives. Every interview is skillfully tailored to be succinct yet exhaustive, and expected to last around 45 minutes to an hour. This guarantees the collection of detailed insights without unnecessarily prolonging the discussion.

Data Collection

As we embark on this journey into our research's core the data-gathering stage interviews serve as our chief instrument. These sessions go beyond straightforward Q&A dialogs and are structured to foster fluid conversations. Leveraging a thoughtfully crafted set of open-ended questions, we strive to ignite discussions that encourage clinicians to reflect profoundly on their memories and professional encounters relating to imprisoned mothers (Sutherland et al., 2021). Each account, every imparted experience reveals another aspect of the subject at hand. Recognizing the importance of precision in qualitative investigation, this research will audio-record these conversations but only with prior permission. This practice guarantees that no tidbit of information is overlooked, and every observation provided by healthcare professionals is documented in its entirety, forming the groundwork for an exhaustive analysis.

Population

This research zeroes in on a specific group that calls for a certain collection of experts as its focal participants. Central to this study are medical practitioners who have braved the daunting territory of assisting jailed or previously jailed mothers. This collection goes beyond a standard cohort of healthcare providers, encompassing an array of expertise and viewpoints. Ranging from clinicians, who explore the complex mental aspects of these mothers, to psychologists, who seek to comprehend behavioral tendencies and emotional reactions, the scope is vast. Moreover, counselors hold a crucial position, providing guidance and tactics to tackle the countless challenges faced by this

demographic. Clinicians, conversely, address the social and environmental elements, grasping the wider systematic hurdles while connecting them to resources and assistance (Pace et al., 2019). Regardless of their individual methods, each professional contributes to a comprehensive understanding of these mothers' lives and obstacles, rendering their perspectives invaluable to this investigation.

The decision to concentrate on such a specific group is far from coincidental; it is profoundly deliberate. Due to their unparalleled circumstances, incarcerated or formerly incarcerated mothers present a multitude of intricate issues that call for specialized care. This demands experts who possess not only academic training but also tangible experience with this particular audience. Through daily interactions, these clinicians bear witness to the emotional, psychological, and societal trials endured by these mothers. They gain access to inner battles, societal scrutiny, and the often-convoluted path toward recovery and re-entry into society. Their combined knowledge, encounters, and time spent observing this group create an abundant pool of information (Borelli et al., 2010). By emphasizing this distinct population, the study hopes to tap into these insights and shed light on previously cloaked areas, ultimately crafting an all-encompassing narrative that does justice to incarcerated mothers' struggles and aspirations.

Sampling

In the extensive realm of research, samples can be compared to the threads that compose a story, representing a study's depth, genuineness, and significance (King et al., 2021). Bearing in mind the intricate nature and multifaceted challenges faced by

imprisoned mothers, this investigation embarks on an ambitious journey: engaging with a substantial group of 8-10 clinicians. Such an extensive sample emphasizes the seriousness and scope of the inquiry.

Choosing a Qualitative Sampling method specifically, the purposive sampling approach allows for a keen eye to identify threads that genuinely express the complexities of the subject matter. While gathering 8-10 clinicians may seem like a nod to mere numerical force, there lies a more subtle reasoning beneath. By casting a broad net, the study aims not only to collect information but also to delve into a rich array of clinical perspectives. This site guarantees that captured perceptions are as diverse as they are profound. From seasoned psychiatrists with years of experience in assisting incarcerated mothers to young counselors offering novel viewpoints, this research seeks to converge wisdom, experience, and innovation. In doing so, it aims to illuminate the numerous obstacles imprisoned mothers face while also identifying potential support and rehabilitation pathways (King et al., 2021). Consequently, the extensive sample mirrors the research's aspirations and its dedication to comprehensive comprehension.

In the scope of this research's participants, diversity is more than just a concept it is essential. The world of clinical professionals is vast and varied, covering numerous areas of expertise, each providing a unique viewpoint on the difficulties faced by imprisoned mothers. Consider a clinical psychologist exploring the complex cognitive and emotional turmoil these women may encounter, or a social worker dissecting the complicated web of societal factors influencing their post-incarceration lives

(Sutherland et al., 2021). Additionally, clinicians, with their refined clinical knowledge, can clarify the physical consequences of imprisonment-related trauma and shed light on the interplay between physical and mental distress.

However, the richness extends beyond the array of specializations. It is further enhanced by the range of experiences that clinicians bring to the discussion. Picture a seasoned professional with a career spanning several decades. Their wealth of experience is not merely about case volume but also historical context (Hissel et al., 2011). They have observed policy changes, societal attitude shifts, and prison system transformations. Their input connects past trends to current issues, allowing for an intricate comprehension rooted in historical context.

Contrastingly, newer clinicians in the field should not be overlooked. They may lack chronological breadth but offer a unique form of value. Their education frequently aligns with modern advancements in their profession. With perspectives free from historical bias, they often introduce invigorating insights. These professionals provide a snapshot into today's clinical landscape, infused with contemporary stories, cutting-edge methods, and a more current empathetic approach toward incarcerated mothers (Fowler et al., 2018). Ultimately, the combination of experienced wisdom and newcomer perspectives guarantees that study outcomes are both well-founded and future oriented.

The intricate fabric of a clinician's personal demographics significantly influences their professional point of view. Factors such as age, which may seem trivial, can be a storehouse of specific generational beliefs, values, and potential biases. For example, a

younger clinician who has matured within the digital age may exhibit a distinct approach compared to a seasoned expert who began their career before the digital revolution. Likewise, gender dynamics have the ability to subtly yet meaningfully affect interactions and observations. A female clinician might inherently comprehend certain maternal challenges with empathy, while a male colleague could offer a unique and equally crucial perspective (Hissel et al., 2011).

Cultural origins also enrich this complex spectrum of understanding. Clinicians from collectivist societies might place greater emphasis on community and family support systems in their evaluations, while those from individualistic backgrounds could prioritize personal resilience and independence. These cultural nuances have the power to interpret behaviors, attitudes, or stressors that incarcerated mothers of various cultures might display. Geography holds significance beyond mere physical locations too. Clinicians working in urban environments may be more attuned to issues arising from fast-paced, highly populated areas such as the balance between anonymity and public scrutiny (Borelli et al., 2010). On the other hand, professionals in rural or semi-urban settings might concentrate on the influence of tight-knit communities, where each person's story becomes part of shared local knowledge, thereby affecting the reintegration journey for incarcerated mothers.

Data analysis plan& Issues of trustworthiness

This research design will use a rigorous thematic analysis of data. In line with the semi-structured interviews of clinicians, the recorded data shall be transcribed and

structured in an orderly manner. Data familiarization is the first step and researchers get to fully immerse themselves with this content to have an overall knowledge. Afterwards, recognizing reoccurring trends, or themes, becomes necessary (Fowler et al., 2018). With this approach, the main themes will be generated from the data, revealing subtle aspects of the clinical nurses' views on maternal lives after prison. When the themes are established, they will be organized systematically so that one may be able to determine what they really mean to someone. It will go beyond discussing the single themes to examine how they are associated with each other, adding more substance to the story. These themes will serve as benchmarks for scrutiny enabling relating field work observation to theoretical concepts.

In terms of trustworthiness, the following strategies have been adopted to strengthen the credibility of a described qualitative study. The triangulation approach has embedded in its design various data sources such as the semi-structured interview that cross-checks the validity of the outcomes making the study credible. Member checking forms part of the process involving validating interpretations and taking on board the different views that participants hold. The authors focused on prolonged interaction with clinicians to ensure that they understand what they went through so that this study can be dependable (Borelli et al., 2010). Research decisions and processes will be scrupulously trailed with the aim of documenting all that took place in the process to enhance the credibility of the study. It recognizes reflexivity by addressing possible bias using a self-revealing mindset. To further maintain the conformability and objectivity of external

audit and peer debriefing. By providing detailed descriptions in reporting findings, the transferability of insight to other environments is facilitated which increases the reliability of the study because it was thorough.

Data storage & ethical considerations

Since motherhood is a vulnerable state, it necessitates storing the collected data in such a way that it adheres to relevant ethical issues while researching motherhood in the clinicians' experiences. High security is required in the storage of information about women's incarceration as it frequently involves very private stories that society tends to consider taboo. The digital data, such as the interview recordings and transcripts, will also be kept on encrypted systems with password protection, which will reduce the chances of unwanted access (Hissel et al., 2011). The physical documents should be kept in a secured and restricted access room where only the privileged can either retrieve or handle them. A key move will be anonymizing participants' identities by use of codes/pseudonyms to protect the privacy of incarcerated mothers. Secure and respectful data storage practices must be applied as these women might be subjected to additional challenges within the criminal justice system.

During the study, all institutional rules and ethics must be strictly observed by the research team. After completion of the study, the data that can identify the respondents will be eliminated to protect their private lives since they are incarcerated due to various crimes committed against other people. Heightened sensitiveness is required on beneficence and non-maleficence for incarcerated women including provision of support

mechanisms and clear debriefing processes. Finally, it is necessary to seek ethical approval from the relevant correctional authorities or the ethics review board, knowing that ethics in the criminal justice setting are special and ought to be considered. It is imperative that research on the experiences of incarcerated mothers be conducted with integrity, ensuring proper consideration of these ethical issues.

Summary

This chapter proposes a well-structured study design on how mothers who have been in prison experience high-stress levels caused mainly by reduced social support upon return to the community. While the existing scholarly literature offers insights into challenges that ex-prisoners encounter in social reintegration, understanding the specific difficulties associated with motherhood remains elusive. Therefore, this research aims to fill the knowledge gap and advocate for community-based approaches in support of these mothers leading to real-world solutions. Qualitative research design in narratives and perceptions of clinicians that interact with the women coming back to society after a period of incarceration. In doing so, it intends to spur a change in society, which will be informed by the findings and recommendations of this research aimed at the provision of reintegration packages. In severe and inclusive terms, the selected research design demands a correspondingly complex and thorough methodology that could match its substance.

A research question, "What is the perception of clinicians on incarcerated mothers that have successfully returned to open society?" directs this study. Social Support theory

and stress/coping theory are included in the conceptual framework to understand how social networks and coping relate to affecting the well-being of mothers during reintegration. This implies that a purposeful selection of between eight and ten clinicians with unique specifications is carried out. Semi-structured interviews entail using open-ended questions that encourage elaborate, meaningful discussions about clinician experiences and perspectives. Data analysis utilizes thematic analysis, capturing reoccurring phenomena in the narratives. Above all, ethical considerations include obtaining informed consent from subjects, maintaining the anonymity of participants, and ensuring confidentiality. Recruitment entails working in cooperation with medical institutions, professional associations, internet ads, and chain referrals. The clinicians are motivated by giving out incentives like financial compensation and continuous professional development points.

Chapter 4: Findings

Introduction

This study was conducted to explore the perceptions of mental health clinicians on the stressors that mothers transitioning from prison face as they try to integrate into the community. The participant sample for this study consisted of 8 mental health clinicians who have experience working with mothers who are transitioning out of incarceration. Participants were between 30 and 50 years of age. All eight participants were actively employed as mental health professionals and had experience working with women/mothers that were incarcerated and were reintegrating back into the community.

All eight participants have 1-11 years' experience working with women/mothers that have been incarcerated and are transitioning back into their community.

Setting

The qualitative research on the stressors and barriers to reintegration of mothers from prison was carried out under several personal and organizational conditions that affected the participants and their experiences. Knowledge of these conditions is important when making a correct interpretation of the study findings.

Participant Demographics

The study's sample was composed of eight mental health clinicians, all of whom had at least one year of experience working with mothers who had been incarcerated and are presently reintegrated back into their communities. All eight participants came from a wide range of experiences, cultures, demographics, and backgrounds. Among them, seven hold a bachelor's in mental health or social work field, and one holds a bachelor's in psychology. Of these eight mental health clinicians, three have a master's degree in social work; one has a master's in forensic psychology; one has a master's in counseling; two hold a master's in human services; one did not have a master's degree; and the last holds a master's degree in educational and corporate wellness.

Mental health and substance abuse issues were a common theme noted by the participants, there were clear similarities and differences in the types of mental health and substance abuse issues that participants reported. Two of the 8 participants discussed one of the key issues that mothers that transition out of prison struggle with auditory

hallucinations. Three of the eight participants noted that incarcerated mothers with mental health issues such as auditory hallucinations, self-medicated with mind altering substances. The participants also discussed how hands-on intervention programs can assist transitioning mothers cope with mental health problems and crisis situations. The second theme of “Criminal background” addresses the influence of recidivism rates in incarcerated mothers during post release incarcerated mothers.

The emerging subthemes of criminal background were identified by six participants. They noted that the impact of having a criminal background influenced recidivism rates among mothers reentering back into the community. There are 12 subthemes that are related to criminal background and the needs of mother's transitioning out of prison: workshops, programs, finances, housing, education, challenges, stereotypes, integration, shame and guilt, difficulty, experiences, self-efficiency. All 8 participants explained how mothers who have criminal backgrounds struggle when they return to their families. These struggles included access to programs and workshops that train them in coping skills and decision making. In addition, a history of incarceration also impacted the mother's ability to find employment, manage their finances, gain housing, and deal with shame and guilt.

The theme of having a criminal background influences recidivism rate emerged. Participants felt that “emotional baggage” played a significant role in how mothers transition from incarceration. This includes the importance of mother-child reunification and the mothers’ ability to be sensitive to returning to the parental role following

incarceration. Participants stated that they commonly saw mothers who were transitioning that were easily frustrated, experienced substance abuse problems, had mental health issues, suicidal ideation, and a sense of hopelessness.

Overall, five of the eight participants see incarcerated mothers facing emotional challenges while reintegrating into community due to their responsibilities for their children. Five of the eight participants felt that it was important to understand the stressors that these mothers face to improve educational and social support programs within the community. They also felt that parenting workshops were an important aspect of the training that should be offered to mothers transitioning out of prison.

“Unique Tailored Interventions,” was the fifth and final theme. This theme addressed how integrating tailored interventions and strategies would support mothers transitioning out of prison. All eight participants expressed the need for a holistic and hands-on approach for post-release mothers. They all believed this approach would increase successful transitions and reduce recidivism rates.

The study identified that incarcerated mothers face unique challenges and lack of support which leads to recidivism. Hence, tailored support is crucial for successful reintegration. Resource approaches through case management and advocacy were among the top suggestions that could be used to address depression, anxiety, auditory hallucinations, substance abuse, or other mental disabilities common among incarcerated mothers.

Data Collection

Mental Health clinicians live within the community and also work within mental health agencies. Interview data was collected from all eight participants over the span of three weeks. To set the interview dates and times, the participants had to call me on my cellular phone. After each participant provided consent to proceed, I conducted virtual interviews with the participants. The interviews lasted between 20 and 60 minutes. All the interviews for this study were done through Face Time or WhatsApp. I asked all of the participants to find a quiet and secluded area and to wear headphones or a wireless listening device, for example Bluetooth. For interviews, I prepared a small office that was exclusively for me. All the interviews were recorded. Otter.ai was used to transcribe the interviews.

The transcribed content was then transferred into a Microsoft Word spreadsheet. In this spreadsheet, I used color coding to organize the data, with each color representing a different code or theme that emerged from the participants' views. Recurrent themes were identified and grouped together. To further develop these themes, I used affinity coding, which involved extracting keywords from the transcriptions through Otter.ai. This process enabled me to form more detailed themes. After thoroughly reading the transcriptions, I used the Excel spreadsheet to highlight relevant statements and paragraphs, ensuring that each theme was clearly defined and supported by the participants' own words.

The interview was developed in a semi-structured format with questions derived from the primary research question and a review of the existing literature. Each question was designed to illicit detailed answers. The study provided the participants with an opportunity to choose what they wanted to disclose and how much they wanted to disclose. The interviews were set up in a casual manner so that each participant would be comfortable telling their own their story in their own words I had no idea of what participants would be willing to share, the participants were allowed to dictate the flow of the interviews (Garcia, 2016).

Data saturation is the point at which data collected is repetitive. In this study, I reached data saturation when the data collected was at the point of data redundancy; this was when nothing new could be added to the themes already identified in the participant's narratives. I ensured that I reached the saturation point by looking at the quality of answers to my research questions and the frequency at which the 5 main themes were reached.

To ensure the accuracy of my data analysis and the messages conveyed by the participants, I employed a member-checking process. This process involved selecting participants who were both willing and capable of participating. I conducted member checking via WhatsApp and Face Time, ensuring smooth communication with no interferences. During this process, the participants confirmed that my interpretations of their input was accurate and reflected their intended messages. Furthermore, the participants provided additional insights that informed the research implications. They

highlighted critical issues, such as the challenges mothers face in the parenting process after incarceration. Specifically, they noted the time it takes for mothers and their children to find a balance and reestablish their relationship after being separated. This feedback was crucial in validating my understanding of the data and ensuring that the participants' experiences were accurately represented in the study.

Data Analysis

Data Preparation

The first method I applied in data preparation was to create a verbatim transcription of the interviews. I later blanked out all participants' details in each transcribed interview to ensure that their identity was not easily recognizable (names, geographical locations, and any other information that might lead to the recognition of the participant). Following the audio-tape transcription, I transferred the data into the Otter.ai software to help in developing two Microsoft word spread sheet report themes/codes/sub themes, which are made up of paragraphs, sentences, and words from the entire research project. Otter.ai produce (Action Items) from transcribe transcripts which means that data is divided into smaller/specific pointers that I used to develop sub-themes.

Creating a Codebook

I developed a codebook as and when themes appeared so that I was able to list all the relevant code labels and provide definitions for the themes that were classified as codes. During each data analysis stage, as a cyclical process, the codes were further

developed. Otter. Ai helped me to sort the keywords from each transcript which in turn helped me to define the codes from each participant.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

In the development process, identifying the point of saturation and the appropriateness of the strategies used, for example, interviews, transcriptions and coding consistency allowed for the positive evaluation of the quality of the codes. I reviewed the research question to confirm that all the questions had been satisfactorily answered and I also reviewed the transcripts to confirm that no new themes had emerged which would have to be incorporated. The analysis of the data unveils emerging and iterative patterns, which were described in detail and consistently contrasted throughout the research, and finally, contrasted with my theoretical framework.

Transparency and Interpretive Validity

Transparency is important for qualitative researchers. I therefore ensured that I gave detailed accounts of my code evolution and data preprocessing to show the clarity of my approach. Similarly, my adherence to interpretive validity (member check) ensured that the data collected and analyzed were accurate and credible. During the study, I incorporated member checks to enhance its trustworthiness. Moreover, member checks were useful to avoid the possibility of researcher bias and to naturalize the demarcation of the authority transfer from the researcher's assumption of the role of the expert to a co-authority. My member check sessions help me in checking for credibility and the precision of the explanation.

During the interview, I asked participants whether they would be willing to go through member check and all the participants agreed to go through member check. During the member check I wrote down all the participants' responses on a piece of paper. The participants spoke freely. The participants felt at ease and rather than explaining the problem from an individual point of view, they also described the things they saw incarcerated mothers go through when they are released back into society.

Results and Thematic Findings

This section contains the study findings and therefore the analytical themes that describe mother's post-incarceration experience on mental health and substance abuse issues, criminal records, emotional effects on mother-child reunification, and the need for unique interventions based on the perceptions of the participants. The four main themes identified were (mental health & substance abuse, criminal background, emotional baggage on child-reunification, and unique tailored interventions.

Employing the critical self-efficacy theory (citation), the responses of the participants seemed to align with the results from the other studies described in the literature review section. As a result, the key assumptions of the critical self-efficacy theory helped in reconsidering the notion that maternal imprisonment may cause impairment of the incarcerated mother's capability to manage stressors during reintegration.

There are several issues the participants raised during the interview. The focus is regarding the research question. Participant 1, a clinician, emphasized the importance of

mental health and substance abuse treatment for incarcerated mothers, highlighting how consistent treatment can reduce recidivism rates. Participant 2, with personal experience working with mothers re-entering society, underscored the necessity of building rapport and providing robust support systems to help these mothers navigate their challenges. This sentiment was echoed by Participant 3, who stressed the value of ongoing workshops to provide consistent support and motivation, helping mothers reintegrate successfully into the community.

Participants 4 through 8 further elaborated on the significant barriers faced by incarcerated mothers, such as difficulty in securing employment, housing, and custody of their children due to their criminal records. They highlighted the importance of tailored support programs, including case management and psychosocial rehabilitation, to address these challenges. For example, Participant 8 recommended mandatory court programs and parenting coaches to aid mothers in overcoming stressors and improving child-rearing skills. These insights provide a crucial context for understanding the data gathered and underscore the need for holistic and sustained interventions to support incarcerated mothers effectively.

Mental health and substance abuse

The participants all felt that factors like mental illness and drug dependency affect incarcerated mothers and are among the stressors or challenges affecting mothers integrating into society.

Participant 7 emphasized the importance of social support through treatment for substance dependency and mental health to lower recidivism, recounting her experiences with mothers suffering from auditory hallucinations and self-medicating behaviors:

“These mothers who are struggling from the hearing, auditory hallucination, right and they don’t know how to manage it...so they may smoke, they may drink to suppress the behavior to suppress all the mental illness, but because a lot of them do not understand mental illness, and to get the proper treatment for the mental illness they try to cope with and self-medicate on their own.”

Participant 2 highlighted the struggles of incarcerated mothers with auditory hallucinations and the associated challenges such as shame, stigma, and limited access to treatment, stressing the need for social support to rebuild self-confidence. “For instance, somebody is bipolar, schizophrenic. They hear voices...The first thing they want to do is to select a drug of choice, especially one that they were addicted to...It requires a lot of self-esteem because if they have a mental health disease, they have probably been hearing voices and that is a spirit of condemnation they hear all the time...You are useless.”

Participant 4 discussed the interconnectedness of mental health, substance abuse, and environmental factors in contributing to criminal behavior; and the importance of social support in reducing isolation and encouraging treatment. “If they have social support, they are more likely to receive the help they need mentally regarding substance use or any disorders.”

Participant 1 described the self-inflicting behaviors observed in incarcerated mothers and emphasized the need for consistent treatment to lower recidivism rates: “Self-harming behaviors or that which affects... the next thing the mother is taken to jail because you know, mentally they’re not there... I encouraged mothers to continue attending their psychiatrist. Most often, they will have a history of self-harming behaviors... mothers stop going for treatment because they feel better, and they feel like they do not need the medication anymore... if they do not want to remain committed to treatment. It impacts the children.

Participant 6 noted the likelihood of returning to criminal behaviors due to mental instability and stressed the importance of ongoing treatment: “If mothers are receiving treatment for whatever mental health disorder they have been prescribed, they will likely continue on the right track and not be reincarcerated.”

In general, the narratives suggest that mental health and substance abuse disorders should be treated with extensive social support and treatment programs for incarcerated mothers to reintegrate into society.

Criminal Background

Main Findings: The findings of the study show that criminal background plays a major role in post-release incarcerated mothers and is among the stressors or challenges affecting their reintegration into society.

Participant 3 emphasized the difficulty mother’s face in securing employment due to background checks. It will be even more difficult for her because of her record and

that's what makes it difficult for those that are incarcerated. It is also their record you know who they are their reputation in essence. Participant 1 shared a poignant experience illustrating how a criminal background can hinder post-incarceration reintegration: "I had the privilege of working as a Temporary Assistance to Needy family specialist... There was one specific case where the mom had just been released from being incarcerated... she got a part-time employment... And then while she was there working, they ran her background, and then they came to her... And they walked her out the store because her background was not cleared."

Participant 4 highlighted the importance of hands-on approaches in workshops to help mothers manage their emotions and avoid reverting to criminal behaviors. "When you are working with mothers when she is frustrated, you are helping her to control her emotions... you cannot just tell someone, you have to demonstrate... you have to bring two people and teach the mother how to calm down as well as the children." Participant 3 discussed the benefits of ongoing social support through workshops to help mothers reintegrate and overcome their criminal backgrounds, "Different types of workshops, you know, repetitively can renew the mind... it can help the mother to learn and apply it to her life... not just a one-time workshop, but several times... it will motivate her more and provide useful tools for success."

Participants 1 and 4 noted the interconnectedness of financial stability, housing, and employment challenges with recidivism rates, "...recalling mothers to food

pantries... other things that will restore them and relieve pressure...because coming out of jail that could be 5-6-7 years, they need to get back on their feet.”

“They have a record, so they have a harder time getting a job, a harder time getting custody of their children... it is just all around harder for them to find housing.”
(Participant 4)

Participants 1, 7, and 2 discussed the impact of stigma and stereotypes on the reintegration process. “They get the feeling of being overlooked; stereotyped and labeled... they are treated differently.” (Participant 1). “The stigma... someone may judge you because you were incarcerated... they are looked down upon by society.” (Participant 7). “There is an element of shame and stigma... they believe everyone is aware of their affairs and everyone is judging them.” (Participant 2)

Participants 1 and 3 highlighted the importance of integrating mothers into vocational rehabilitation programs and providing tailored interventions to support their reintegration.

Thus, the goal is not only on the reintegration in the community but also on treatment that will ensure that the individuals do not end up in jail again. “Social integrated processes such as social skills, class or workshops... learning social skills and learning life skills to counter a criminal record.” (Participant 3).

Participants 1 and 3 also emphasized self-sufficiency as crucial for reducing recidivism rates and achieving long-term success: This is the reason why self-sufficiency

is good because it gives people the feeling that they are wanted, and it eradicates codependency. (Participant 1)

“In a nutshell, that is the bottom line, the success...hopefully, the mother will have a vision to see success not only for herself but for her family, children.” (Participant 3). In general, the narratives show that more extensive support should be provided to the formerly incarcerated mothers in the form of workshops, financial security, housing, employment, and eradicating stigma to ensure their successful reintegration into society.

Emotional baggage’s impact on Mother-Child Reunification.

Main Finding: The study shows that the process of reintegration of mothers with their children after incarceration is characterized by emotional difficulties that influence the ability of the mothers to regain their parental roles.

Participant 2 emphasized the importance of building relationships and rapport with mothers coming out of jail, which is crucial for their emotional and psychological stability, “You must create and establish a relationship with these mothers after jail ... Even if there is treatment through substance dependency or mental health, it depends on the relationship created with a mother.” Participant 4 discussed the complex nature of mother-child relationships post-incarceration and the necessity of providing resources to break the cycle of emotional turmoil: “Their relationship with their children is a very special one...many of the things that they have suffered they have made their children suffer...But children need love and they need care and if you provide them with means to care for their children then normally the chain will be broken.”

Participant 3 pointed out the hopelessness that post-release mothers might feel without support, which can severely impact their mental health and their children's future, “The toughest struggle that a post-release mother undergoes is if there is no support at all, no program...She feels that there is no hope for her children, no future...because she has no hope for herself...this may make her suicidal, affecting her mentally and emotionally.”

Participant 6 highlighted the role of therapy in addressing trauma for both mother and child, aiding in a smoother transition; “There are a lot of traumas involved for both the child and the mother...through therapy for both mom and child, it will make the transition better because it’s not easy.” Participant 1 stressed the importance of therapy for mothers to address past abuse and its potential transition to their children: “The girl also said in therapy, you want to make sure that you’re working on yourself, your past trauma, your past abuse...because it can transition over into the children, sometimes consciously and unconsciously.”

Participant 2 reinforced the benefits of therapy in developing better coping mechanisms, which are crucial for post-release mothers: “again and again therapy has shown that you are less likely to use [substances] when you are getting the help that you require.” Participant 7 discussed the necessity of mature and non-judgmental therapists to help mothers cope with stressors and overcome past tragedies: “An experienced or a case manager who is a licensed therapist or non- prejudice can assist the incarcerated mother to deal with stress factors.”

Participants 7 and 5 elaborated on substance use as a coping mechanism and the need for proper treatment programs to provide better coping skills and life skills: “People with mental illness consume substances to self-medicate...effective treatment programs include ways to cope, how to stay sober, identify relapse signs, and accept diseases...It assists women to learn how to handle pressure in the home.” (Participant 7). Participant 6 suggested tailored programs like Psychosocial Rehabilitation to help mothers understand their triggers and develop coping strategies: “Stressors that may be present can be managed by programs such as Psychosocial Rehabilitation but developed for the mothers only.”

Participant 1 emphasized the role of outpatient programs in teaching coping skills and reducing recidivism: “The mom attending some form of outpatient Psychosocial Rehabilitation group will learn better coping skills, and better insights, thus will not be going back to jail and will be more self-reliant.” Therefore, the narratives suggest that it is crucial to offer therapy and specific support programs to assist the previously incarcerated mothers to cope with emotional distress and ensure a positive reunion with children. Such interventions help in preventing the mother and child from going round in circles and help in creating a stable environment for them.

Unique tailored interventions.

Participants all emphasize the need for tailored interventions. They emphasize that tailored interventions were vital in helping the incarcerated mothers after their release. They felt that these interventions were necessary for mothers to reintegrate into society.

Participant 2 highlighted the importance of hands-on support systems, emphasizing church and community programs. This mother who has been to jail requires a strong tailored support system... The recovery center where I used to work, I will take them to the church department, drops them off so they get that full support. Participant 3 discussed the impact of live testimonials and educational technology. "It is better to have someone to be like a testimony to the mother... It will give motivation and hope... We need more hands-on activities."

Participant 4 stressed the need for proactive and practical interventions. "I wish that hands on approaches occur prior to the incarcerated mother's breakdown... attempting to teach incarcerated mothers hands on, everything is hands on, went through it step by step because most of them do not know how it is done." Participant 3 emphasized the need for holistic support encompassing spiritual, mental, physical, and emotional health: They are spiritual health, mental health, physical health, and emotional health and continued, "if she doesn't have a good strong positive spirit, spiritual health is going to decline."

Participant 2 supported the holistic approach, emphasizing the need for comprehensive care: That is why it must be a holistic tailored approach that is not only about the physical aspect, but also about the mental and spiritual one. Participant 8 recommended mandatory parenting programs tailored to incarcerated mothers' needs: Parenting coaches teach parents how to parent and can identify the parent's deficits and help them correct them. . . They can also come to the home to monitor the parent and

then advice on how to be a good parent. Participant 8 also highlighted the success of family treatment courts in providing necessary resources. “The success rate of the parents who have enrolled is great... housing is provided, they do drug screens, they have to work, and they’re provided resources to get jobs.”

Participants discussed the importance of accessible resources tailored to the unique needs of incarcerated mothers: Participant 6: “There are tools provided in the program that can enable incarcerated mothers to understand how to handle some of the crises and situations. “

Participant 7: “The absence of resources or the access to resources can be an issue for incarcerated mothers.” Participant 4: “Incarcerated mothers need a specific case manager to help them to understand resources... giving them a piece of paper saying here are resources and no way of getting there is not useful.”

Participant 8 addressed the need for tailored interventions for mothers with specific issues like substance misuse and low IQ. “We have to ensure that whatever way we are adopting to teach them they are able to grasp it... We cannot teach them as we would teach a normal person who does not have a low IQ.”

Summary

In this chapter, the participant characteristics, interview procedures, and participant interviews were explained. The participants’ perceptions on the stressors and needs of incarcerated mothers who are being reintegrated back into the community. In

the last chapter of the dissertation, I discuss the research and elaborate on its implications for positive social change.

Chapter 5: Findings

Introduction

This study was conducted to explore the perceptions of mental health clinicians on the stressors that mothers transitioning from prison face as they try to integrate into the community. The participant sample for this study consisted of 8 mental health clinicians who have experience working with mothers who are transitioning out of incarceration. Participants were between 30 and 50 years of age. All eight participants were actively employed as mental health professionals and had experience working with women/mothers that were incarcerated and were reintegrating back into the community. All eight participants have 1-11 years' experience working with women/mothers that have been incarcerated and are transitioning back into their community.

Interpretation of the Findings

Every participant in this study discussed how lack of mental health and substance abuse services for mother's transitioning out of prison. According to the participants, mothers who transition out of prison face underlying issues that emerge from this larger theme of mental health and substance abuse issues. The underlying issues often include self-inflicting behavior, auditory hallucinations, lack of self-confidence, anxiety, depression, and criminal and deviant behaviors. Although mental health and substance abuse issues were a common theme noted by the participants, there were clear similarities and differences in the types of mental health and substance abuse issues that participants reported. Two of the 8 participants discussed one of the key issues that mothers that

transition out of prison struggle with auditory hallucinations. Three of the eight participants noted that incarcerated mothers with mental health issues such as auditory hallucinations, self-medicated with mind altering substances. The participants also discussed how hands-on intervention programs can assist transitioning mothers cope with mental health problems and crisis situations.

Participants noted that mother's transitioning out of prison need to utilize. The second theme of "Criminal background" addresses the influence of recidivism rates in incarcerated mothers during post release incarcerated mothers.

The emerging subthemes of criminal background were identified by six participants. They noted that the impact of having a criminal background influenced recidivism rates among mothers reentering back into the community. There are 12 subthemes that are related to criminal background and the needs of mother's transitioning out of prison: workshops, programs, finances, housing, education, challenges, stereotypes, integration, shame and guilt, difficulty, experiences, self-efficiency. All 8 participants explained how mothers who have criminal backgrounds struggle when they return to their families. These struggles included access to programs and workshops that train them in coping skills and decision making. In addition, a history of incarceration also impacted the mother's ability to find employment, manage their finances, gain housing, and deal with shame and guilt.

One of the themes that emerged was the underlying issue of having a criminal background influences recidivism rate. Participants felt that "emotional baggage" played

a significant role in how mothers transition from incarceration. This includes the importance of mother-child reunification and the mothers' ability to be sensitive to returning to the parental role following incarceration. Participants stated that they commonly saw mothers who were transitioning that were easily frustrated, experienced substance abuse problems, had mental health issues, suicidal ideation, and a sense of hopelessness.

Overall, five of the eight participants see incarcerated mothers facing emotional challenges while reintegrating into community due to their responsibilities for their children. Five of the eight participants felt that it was important to understand the stressors that these mothers face to improve educational and social support programs within the community. They also felt that parenting workshops were an important aspect of the training that should be offered to mothers transitioning out of prison.

“Unique Tailored Interventions,” was the fifth and final theme. This theme addressed how integrating tailored interventions and strategies would support mothers transitioning out of prison. All eight participants expressed the need for a holistic and hands-on approach for post-release mothers. They all believed this approach would increase successful transitions and reduce recidivism rates.

The study identified that incarcerated mothers face unique challenges and lack of support which leads to recidivism. Hence, tailored support is crucial for successful reintegration. Resource approaches through case management and advocacy were among the top suggestions that could be used to address depression, anxiety, auditory

hallucinations, substance abuse, or other mental disabilities common among incarcerated mothers.

Resources approaches were mentioned for the children and mothers to utilize to deal with certain crisis situations. Anxiety and depression were identified as significant problems. Participants advocated for additional case management services for post release mothers that target these issues. Participants agreed that a plan of action should be put in place as a guide for post release mothers to follow.

Limitations of the Study

This study had a limited sample size; nevertheless, it offered a rich and descriptive understanding of post-release mothers' stressors from the mental health clinician's viewpoint.

In addition, all eight participants work directly with this population, so their opinions may be biased by those interactions

Recommendations for Future Research

Further research could focus on specific stressors that mothers who are transitioning out of prison experience while reintegrating back into society. Specific research should be conducted into how mothers who are reintegrating into society manage to also reunite with their children successfully. This type of future research may assist in implementing effective, sustainable, and viable support programs for these mothers transitioning back into society.

Implications

This study has several implications for positive social change. In their study, Elliott and Reid (2019) noted that the type and nature of therapeutic and supportive services are best identified and provided to the clients in the right manner to produce the best results. This research is based on the perceptions of mental health professionals who work with mothers who are transitioning from incarceration back into society. All participants in this study noted that incarcerated and formerly incarcerated mothers need support services that will help them deal with substance abuse, abuse, emotional baggage, and family and relationship issues. These support services should also assist mothers to reestablish healthy relationships with their children.

Social Change

The results of this study suggest that there may be a paucity of resources available to mothers transitioning out of prison. Social justice is a way through which vulnerable, marginalized, and/or oppressed individuals and groups can access supportive measures and policies which are non-discriminatory in nature (Garcia, 2016). In terms of specific social change, the findings from this study may contribute to positive social change on multiple levels including individual, family, agency, and community/system levels. These implications are based on the findings of the participants' experiences and knowledge, which give a holistic view of the barriers and possibilities for the mothers with prior incarceration

1. The research findings demonstrate that reunification of a mother and a child entail both physical and psychological dynamics, and therefore, the incarcerated mothers require family-informed reintegration services.
2. To meet the needs of the previously incarcerated mothers, reentry organizations require offering mental health, substance abuse treatment, vocational training, and housing services accessible and available in the community.
3. Develop policy changes that would allow the reintegration of mothers with a history of imprisonment by eradicating obstacles and providing them with mental health, substance abuse, and anti-stigmatization services, including housing, education, employment, and healthcare.
4. Community members should be informed about the needs and rights of mothers transitioning out of prison. Mothers with criminal records need to be protected.

Methodological and Theoretical Implications

In terms of methodology, this qualitative approach assisted in capturing the realities of the formerly incarcerated mothers through the lens of mental health clinicians who work with this population. The in-depth interviews offered a deeper understanding of how mothers who are transitioning out of prison may struggle with reintegration. Theoretically, the findings align with the ecological model (citation) that highlights the roles of personal, familial, and community levels in the reintegration process of the formerly incarcerated.

Conclusion

As proposed by O'Brien (2014), depending on several factors, the effects of imprisonment are numerous. First offenders and people that have been incarcerated consequently experience significant difficulties the moment they get home (O'Brien, 2014). Culturally, multiple incarcerations affect the family relationships in several ways. This compounds the problems during the reintegration process (Anakwenze & Zuberi, 2013). In most cases, existing individual and economic difficulties are observed; multiple convictions always lead to untreatable violations of the family structure that are difficult or even impossible to correct (Foster & Hagan, 2014)

All participants in this study agreed that mothers transitioning out of prison should be given adequate resources and support for them to successfully transition back into their communities. Based on the interviews with the participants, these resources should include mental health treatment, substance abuse treatment, coping strategies, employment, reunification with children, and parenting. To reduce recidivism and increase positive social change, all participants noted that individualized, hands-on treatment and services should be provided to these individuals for them to successfully reintegrate into society.

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