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Abstract

Recidivism, Reentry, and Integration in the Texas Criminal Justice System

by

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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

Reentry programs in Texas can fail to address the social and practical needs of offenders conclusively post-release. As a result, offenders may struggle with unemployment, education, stigma, mental health issues, improper shelter, and inability to meet their basic needs. The purpose of this phenomenological research qualitative study was to establish the perceived effectiveness of reentry programs in Texas and suggest possible solutions for addressing offenders' social and practical needs post-release from prison. The research was built around cognitive transformation theory, which highlights that desistance is achieved when an ex-offender meets specific prosocial elements. Using purposeful sampling, data were collected through interviews with 12 participants, and analyzed by identifying codes and themes related to reentry, integration, and recidivism. The findings highlighted several key themes. Themes related to family experiences were emotional support, financial support, family stigmatization, job assistance and the essence of strong family ties versus weak ties. Themes on challenges related to re-entry included social class, housing issues, substance abuse and barriers to employment. The participants further highlighted the need to improve re-entry programs through mental health support, system reforms and individualized approach to address offender needs. The findings showed emphasis on the critical role of family support and effectiveness of re-entry and integration efforts towards reducing recidivism. These findings have potential implications for positive social change that include improved reentry programs for ex-offenders in Texas, which could lead to a reduction in recidivism rates.

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Dedication

I dedicate this research to my family and friends. They have been my greatest support system. Being there with me throughout my studies has been a great source of inspiration and strength. Thank you! I also dedicate this research to my adviser, Dr. Klemp-North, who took his time to guide and encourage me throughout the dissertation process. His input has been invaluable throughout this whole journey.

Table of Contents

List of Figures	v
Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study	1
Introduction	1
Background	2
Problem Statement.....	4
Purpose of the Study	6
Research Questions.....	7
Theoretical Framework.....	7
Nature of the Study.....	8
Definitions	9
Assumptions	9
Scope and Delimitations	10
Limitations	11
Significance	12
Summary	12
Chapter 2: Literature Review	13
Introduction	13
Literature Search Strategy.....	14
Theoretical Foundation	15
Overview of the Theory	15
Justification for Use	16

Literature Review Related to Key Variables and Concepts.....	17
Phenomenological Studies in Criminal Justice Systems.....	21
Recidivism.....	25
Reentry	27
Reentry and Integration.....	30
Practical, Personal, and Social Issues Affecting Recidivism	32
Family and Societal Experiences on Recidivism.....	34
Summary and Conclusions.....	35
Chapter 3: Research Method.....	37
Introduction	37
Research Design and Rationale	37
Role of the Researcher	38
Methodology	41
Population.....	41
Sampling Strategy.....	41
Participant Selection and Recruitment	43
Instrumentation	44
Data Analysis Plan.....	45
Issues of Trustworthiness.....	46
Credibility.....	46
Transferability.....	47
Dependability.....	47

Confirmability.....	47
Ethical Procedures	48
Summary	49
Chapter 4: Results.....	50
Introduction	50
Setting 50	
Demographics.....	51
Data Collection.....	51
Data Analysis	52
Evidence of Trustworthiness	52
Results53	
Results53	
Research Question 1.....	53
Research Question 2.....	59
Research Question 3.....	65
Summary	68
Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations	69
Interpretation of the Findings	69
Family Support	69
Effectiveness of Reentry Programs.....	70
Insights on Experiences of Ex-Offenders and Criminal Justice	
Professionals	72

Program Outcomes and Recidivism Rates	75
Implications for Practice and Policy	76
Practice	76
Policy	77
Limitations of the Study.....	78
Sample Size and Diversity	78
Geographical Limitations	79
Data Collection Methods.....	79
Recommendations for Future Research	79
Longitudinal Studies	79
Comparative Studies	80
Qualitative Research	80
Impact of Policy Changes.....	80
Evaluation of Specific Interventions	81
Conclusion.....	81
References	83
Appendix: Interview Guide.....	96

List of Figures

Figure 1. Code Matrix Browser.....	53
Figure 2. Code Patterns on the Relationship Between Family Ties and Family Support ..	58
Figure 3. Frequency of Occurrence of Challenges in Interviews.....	60
Figure 4. Frequency Mentioned Elements for Improvement of Reentry and Integration Programs	65

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

In 2021, the number of people incarcerated in Texas was about 118,053 inmates, and about 42,000 were released in the same year (Texas Department of Criminal Justice [TDCJ], 2021). There are, however, high rates of recidivism. The fact that roughly 95% of those admitted to prison eventually leave, and approximately 80% of those released from jail are arrested again within 6 years is attracting the attention of scholars and policymakers. Jerrick (2019) defined this as the *revolving door phenomenon*. This is a major problem in criminal justice, as the aim of incarcerating offenders is to reform their behavior and restrain them from crime (Berghuis, 2018). Even while significant resources and time are devoted to developing programs that aim to manage social safety by combating crime, the frequency of law violations and the number of those who engage in violations continue to increase (Jerrick, 2019). Most released convicts have parole obligations. In Texas, 83,927 ex-convicts had parole and mandatory supervision (TDCJ, 2021). TDCJ requires that parolees abide by rules or risk being reincarcerated.

Reentry is the time when individuals return to society after being in prison (Fahmy et al., 2019) and is a key challenge in criminal justice reform. A lot of pressures come with this period for most individuals, and relapse into criminal behavior is a significant concern (Spooner et al., 2017). Some of the challenges that ex-convicts face during this time include failure to find employment, inability to engage in criminal behavior that led to incarceration in the first place, and even a lack of support from

family members and society. The community is usually biased against ex-convicts, and they are unlikely to be given equal opportunities as those who have never been to prison.

Successful reentry programs will help ex-convicts reintegrate into society (Fahmy et al., 2019). These programs involve more than moving away from crime. Other issues that can be dealt with in reentry programs include housing and employment after release. Examples of reentry programs offered include career and vocational training, postsecondary education, life skills, substance use treatment, cognitive intervention, sex offender treatment, and faith-based programs (Spooner et al., 2017). There are, however, many challenges that hinder successful reentry programs and consequently contribute to recidivism. These programs should therefore be developed to factor in the challenges that ex-convicts may face during reentry.

I will outline the context of the study, the problem statement, the study's purpose, its goals, its research questions, its theoretical underpinnings, its nature, and definitions of keywords in Chapter 1. The study's assumptions, boundaries, restrictions, and importance are discussed after that.

Background

More inmates than ever before are released from jail after serving longer sentences, making it much harder for them to find work and reestablish relationships with their families. Although there are reentry programs in place, prisoners are often less prepared for reintegration, less connected to community-based social institutions, and more likely to have health or substance addiction issues than in the past (Fahmy et al., 2019). A returning state prisoner's capacity to effectively reintegrate may be hampered

by a community's lack of jobs, housing, and social services in addition to personal conditions (Spooner et al., 2017). Creating a public policy to enhance the safety and well-being of all residents requires a full grasp of the traits of returning state inmates and the difficulties they encounter.

Due to the high recidivism rates, the federal government has acknowledged the necessity of researching recidivism and reentry programs. Legislation was passed directing various government actors to execute policies and form organizations to reduce recidivism rates. One law mandated that prisons provide inmates with religiously oriented activities, jobs while incarcerated, academic classes, and career counseling (Jerrick, 2019). TDCJ (2021) has a reentry and reintegration division that works toward developing reentry programs for the seamless integration of inmates back into society. Texas was one of the first states to implement a restorative approach, which reduced crime rates and recidivism rates (Jerrick, 2019).

Recidivism is usually a result of several failures on the part of both society and offenders. An ex-convict could fail to meet the parole and law requirements and fail to make reforms from previous criminal behavior. Society could also fail the released prisoner by not providing them with the appropriate environment for transforming behavior. The complicated difficulties related to ex-convicts' reintegration have limited resources that public officials and criminal justice specialists can use to address (Fahmy et al., 2019). In the United States, strategies to lessen reentry's drawbacks have been implemented for decades, but few initiatives have been wholly effective. The governmental agency in charge of those detained in state prisons, state jails, and private

prisons is the TDCJ. Moreover, this organization manages community supervision (via the TDCJ Community Justice Assistance Division) and supervises those under obligatory community supervision and parole (TDCJ, 2021).

Mental health support and help from substance abuse issues are some of the critical needs among offenders. Upon conviction and release into society, most ex-offenders face stigma within society. Many individuals and organizations do not want to be involved with offenders/people with a criminal record. As a result, in most cases, ex-offenders feel like they are sometimes isolated from society and family members (Riengle et al., 2019). Also, ex-offenders struggle with finding employment because of existing stigmatization. It can become difficult for ex-offenders to cope with their daily lives. These struggles may push them toward substance abuse and mental health issues because they are not accepted into society. Not being embraced in society is always a precursor to pushing ex-offenders back to recidivism. Reentry programs should address these issues and facilitate the seamless integration of offenders into society (DeHaan et al., 2019). This can only be achieved if all stakeholders develop strategies and frameworks to facilitate integration and reduce recidivism.

Problem Statement

Recidivism continues to be a major problem in the United States, with many ex-offenders falling back to recidivism despite reentry programs within the criminal justice system. According to Berghuis (2018), 93% of incarcerated individuals are released back into society after serving their jail terms. This means that reentry programs should be in place to facilitate their integration back into society. Over the past decade, many

prisoners have been released back into society. For instance, in 2014, approximately 650,000 prisoners were released from prison (Gill & Wilson, 2017). However, a huge number of prisoners are rearrested upon release. Liu (2020) highlighted that approximately 68% of arrested individuals are rearrested within the first 3 years after release while 79% of released individuals are rearrested by the 6th year after release. These statistics show the extent to which reentry programs have continued to be ineffective.

Armstrong (2022) highlighted that recidivism rates in Texas stand at 40%. However, offenders who had undergone the Texas-based Prison Entrepreneurship Program had a recidivism rate of 8%. From these statistics, it is evident that effective reentry programs result in significantly reduced rates of recidivism. In this case, ex-offenders who were facilitated to become entrepreneurs experienced much lower rates of recidivism. The ex-offenders who go through this program can employ themselves and address their practical and social needs independently without struggling. For other ex-offenders, reentry programs fail to address their needs. As a result, they fall back to criminal ways to achieve their practical and social needs.

A study on a reentry program in Texas showed that offenders who completed all the program phases were 50% less likely to be arrested in the first 2 years upon release (Cannonier et al., 2021). This shows the ineffectiveness of reentry programs within Texas. Essentially, the point of reentry programs is to facilitate seamless integration into society. However, despite going through these programs in the criminal justice system, offenders had a 50% chance of being rearrested within the first 2 years (Cannonier et al.,

2021). The patterns of recidivism seem to indicate that the number increases as years go by.

A possible reason for the high rates of recidivism is that these programs do not address the social and practical needs of the offenders, leaving offenders more likely to fall back into recidivism as time goes by. Reentry programs do not address prisoners' practical and social needs conclusively. These issues include employment, shelter, education, mental health, stigmatization, family issues, and the risk of substance abuse (Doleac, 2019). In most cases, offenders receive help from their family members and supervision by the criminal justice system after release. However, after a certain period of time, this help and supervision continue to reduce even from family members. As a result, the ex-offenders now face the challenge of fulfilling their practical and social needs. Therefore, their susceptibility to breaking the law to fulfill their needs increases. This research was focused on examining offender and family experiences on reentry programs and their perceived effectiveness.

Purpose of the Study

This qualitative study aims to examine offenders' and their families' experiences of reentry programs and the programs' perceived effectiveness in addressing the practical and social needs of offenders within the Texas criminal justice system. The main focus of this study was to understand whether offenders and their families perceive reentry programs to be effective. I collected data on participants' lived experiences with the programs and how these programs played a role in addressing integration into society and reducing recidivism. Through analysis of participants' responses, I sought to determine

the effectiveness of reentry programs within the Texas criminal justice system, and possible suggestions to address weaknesses of these programs were suggested. In general, I focused on determining the perceived effectiveness of reentry programs in Texas and suggested possible ways they could be improved to promote seamless integration into society by ex-offenders and continued reduction of recidivism.

Research Questions

Below are the research questions that guided the study:

RQ1: What are some of the family experiences with reentry programs?

RQ2: What are some of the personal and social factors that families of ex-offenders feel are overlooked by existing reentry programs?

RQ3: How do these overlooked personal and social factors impact ex-offenders and their families, contributing to recidivism?

Theoretical Framework

The most appropriate theoretical framework for this research was the theory of cognitive transformation. The theory states that for an individual to experience desistance, they have to undergo cognitive shifts that occur during incarceration and integration back into society. The theory highlights that for offenders to integrate back into society, they are usually guided by prosocial elements, which are normally referred to as *hooks of change* (Polaschek, 2019). When these prosocial elements are fulfilled in each individual, they successfully integrate back into society. Without the fulfillment of these elements, an offender fails to integrate into society and does not achieve long-term desistance.

In order to understand behavior change, cognitive transformation is essential. Social experiences work as a driving factor toward the shift in perspectives among individuals. Social experiences can either positively or negatively impact achieving successful integration. The theory highlights that for desistance to be achieved, an individual must first be open to change. Then, individuals require exposure or receptivity to specific hooks of change. Then, a sustained distance pattern will yield transformation from criminal behavior (Weaver, 2019). This theory is relevant to the research study and the problem statement because it highlights how social elements of reentry and integration can be used to achieve desistance. By appropriately addressing the social elements/needs of offenders while they are still in prison and postrelease, the Texas criminal justice system can be improved, reducing the problem of recidivism after integration into society.

Nature of the Study

To address the research question, I conducted a qualitative study through phenomenology research that involves descriptive and comparative methods. The specific research design used phenomenology research techniques to investigate the research problem, involving speaking with ex-offenders' relatives and criminal justice experts during interviews. In phenomenology research, the subjective experiences of individuals are examined and understood as it relates to psychological and social phenomenon. Change interventions are also suggested to increase participation and improve these situations (Zuber-Skerritt, 2021). By partnership between the interview subjects and the study, phenomenological research was used to evaluate the experiences of ex-offenders

and how they can be used to improve reentry and integration. I used data from the research participants to address reentry programs, recidivism, and reintegration.

Definitions

In this section, I define terms used frequently throughout the study.

Ex-offender: An individual who was convicted for committing a crime/breaking the law and has undergone correctional punishment. Correctional punishment can be probation, a prison sentence, or parole. The individual has to have completed their correctional punishment to be referred to as an ex-offender (Gunnison & Helfgott, 2019).

Recidivism: The act of relapsing into the criminal behavior of a previously convicted individual (Jerrick, 2019).

Reentry: The process whereby offenders transition from prisons into society/community supervision after completing their prison terms (Gunnison & Helfgott, 2019).

Reentry programs: Activities and programming to successfully prepare and reintegrate ex-offenders into society and live law-abiding lives (Skinner-Osei & Stepteau-Watson, 2018).

Assumptions

I assumed the information provided by the participants would be truthful and correct. The study of the effectiveness of reentry programs in addressing the issue of recidivism is a sensitive topic. As a result, the respondents might have provided false information, especially those who have experienced recidivism, due to fear of the consequences of people knowing they have committed a crime without being caught. To

address these issues, I assured participants that the collected data would be exclusively for research purposes and that anonymity of participants was guaranteed. This convinced the research participants to provide factual information about their experiences with reentry programs.

Scope and Delimitations

This research was conducted to examine the experiences of released convicts and their families in regard to the effectiveness of reentry programs. In the study, I aimed to identify whether the reentry programs adequately address the social and practical needs of offenders in Texas. The research was focused on ex-offenders, identifying if the reentry programs serve to decrease recidivism rates (see Berghuis, 2018). The variables in the study are the social and practical needs of offenders postrelease, reentry program effectiveness, and recidivism.

The theoretical perspective the study focused on was cognitive transformation theory (see Berg & Cobbina, 2017). I analyzed how certain factors in reentry could lead to the transformation of ex-offenders' behaviors and result in them successfully reintegrating into society or, alternatively, recidivism if no transformation occurs. I also identified how ex-convicts select prosocial elements that help them reintegrate into society. Another theory that could have been considered in the research was the social needs theory. After release from prison, the needs of an offender, such as family support, may fail to be met, which might result in them committing crimes and ending up in prison (Fahmy, 2021).

The study population was limited to ex-offenders in Texas, their families, and correctional officers in charge of reentry programs. The ex-offenders were those without parole (see Fox et al., 2019). The participants were contacted through email. The recruitment period was about one month, and the recruitment process ended after enough participants joined. Analyzing the data collected regarding participants' experiences with reentry programs provided insights into the programs' effectiveness. Future research could focus on one segment of the prison population to determine the effectiveness of reentry programs on that population.

Limitations

One possible limitation of the study was obtaining a sufficient number of participants. Ex-offenders or their families may have been unwilling to participate in the study. A small number of participants would have made it difficult for to reach a precise representation of the population and their experiences. This limitation was overcome by extending the recruitment period until enough participants have joined the study (see Noyes et al., 2018). A higher number of participants increases the chances of more accurate results. Another limitation, researcher bias, may have stemmed from the research method, a qualitative study (see Noyes et al., 2018). A researcher may be biased toward the data and results supporting their hypotheses and arguments. The bias could lead to improper data gathering and analysis techniques. This limitation was overcome by adhering to the issues of trustworthiness in qualitative research (Amin et al., 2020). Keeping a record of every step of the research process ensured the research and data-gathering process was carried out appropriately.

Significance

The research was conducted to explore and address the practical and social needs of released convicts. Despite extensive research on the issue, there has been little focus on reentry, recidivism, and reintegration in the Texas criminal justice system. This research helps fill a gap in knowledge on ex-offenders' practical and social needs after release from prison, which have contributed to recidivism despite there being reentry programs offered.

Summary

In summary, this chapter mainly focused on addressing the background of the study, the research problem, the purpose of the study, the research questions, the scope of the study, and the study's limitations. Reentry programs are meant to facilitate the integration of ex-offenders into society. Nonetheless, these programs continue to be criticized for their ineffectiveness, which has contributed to higher recidivism rates. The research questions outlined in this chapter guided how the research was conducted to address the stated research problem. The assumptions highlighted what was assumed throughout the research process. The next chapter is the literature review, which will expound on literature related to reentry, integration, and recidivism.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Extensive studies have been carried out on recidivism and reentry programs in the criminal justice system. Researchers have explored these concepts to determine the factors that affect reentry programs and those that lead to recidivism. This qualitative research study was conducted to examine the impact of reentry programs on recidivism and integration into the criminal justice system, focusing on offenders' practical and social needs. Recidivism can be addressed by determining the most successful reentry and integration programs. This literature review includes an assessment of reentry programs for ex-convicts in Texas. The chapter is divided into the following sections: research methods, theoretical framework, and literature review of key variables and concepts.

The situation or issue that prompted this study is the high recidivism rates in Texas, and the American society as a whole, despite most of these offenders going through reentry programs before reentering society after prison. Most offenders in American society, especially in Texas, might recidivate if most of their practical and social needs are not addressed upon release from prison. Despite completing reentry programs, ex-offenders experience challenges with employment opportunities, continuing education, and integrating back into society due to the stigma associated with imprisonment (Jerrick, 2019). These practical and social issues continue to contribute to recidivism because they have not been addressed adequately in reentry programs and the society ex-offenders return to.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine offender and family experiences of reentry programs and the programs' perceived effectiveness in addressing the practical and social needs of offenders within the Texas criminal justice system. This study is grounded in the theory of cognitive transformation. This theory is relevant to the research topic and problem statement because the theory seeks to identify the practical and social elements that facilitate successful reentry into society. In theory, these social elements are called *hooks of change*. Therefore, the factors that are typically not considered when designing reentry programs will be highlighted by this theory (Berg & Cobbina, 2017). For instance, unemployment and drug use can be considered hooks of change that must be addressed to prevent ex-offenders from recidivism. In most cases, recidivism results from social elements that impact released prisoners, pushing them toward crime (Weaver, 2019). In this chapter, I cover the strategy used to search for literature, the theoretical and conceptual framework, the literature review related to the key variables and concepts, and a summary and conclusions.

Literature Search Strategy

I searched for literature from search engines like Google Scholar and the Walden University Library to access databases that included Sage Journals, Science Direct, Research Gate, and ERIC. State and federal government websites, academic journals, and peer-reviewed papers were used to find material pertinent to this research issue. The TDCJ gave information on reentry programs and recidivism. The following terms were used in the preliminary search: *reentry programs*, *recidivism*, *integration*,

reincarceration, and *the criminal justice system in Texas*. The references used for the study were restricted to those published in the last 5 years.

The terms *recidivism*, *reentry*, *integration*, *Texas*, *criminal justice system*, and *qualitative study* were used in the mentioned academic database during the search. The same search terms were used in a third Google Scholar search to find additional research on the subject. When few recent published studies were available, relevant scholarship was found by consulting dissertations and conference papers. The searches were also done in additional databases, including JSTOR and Web of Science. Iterative searching was utilized to find pertinent scholarship, which entails using the exact search words across many databases.

Theoretical Foundation

I used the cognitive transformation theory to analyze the relationship between reentry, desistance, and recidivism. The theory applies to the current research because it aims to pinpoint the social and practical factors that enable the successful reintegration of ex-offenders into society. The theory highlights that ex-offenders select prosocial elements that help them assimilate into society upon release from prison (Bakken & Visher, 2018).

Overview of the Theory

A person goes through a cognitive transformation when they realize that overcoming adversity has led to new opportunities and when they change their perspective of an experience from primarily traumatic or dangerous to growth-promoting. Cognitive transformation frequently denotes improved resistance to challenging

situations (Polaschek, 2019). Ex-offenders' neighborhoods may lack the resources necessary for the desistance process and successful reintegration. People purposefully act consistently following their expected identities or whom they are believed to be. Also, people make obligations out of their identities and work to guarantee that their actions are consistent with those identities. The responsibility thus contributes to guaranteeing the consistency of a person's behavioral habits and idioms (Weaver, 2019). For instance, family members who support their families through labor may decide to engage in criminal activity; the identification of a breadwinner is generally stable. This is done under the pretext of providing for their families.

Additionally, it remains uncertain whether past punishments' nonlinear effect on recidivism exists and whether self-perceived individuality can reduce the crime-conquering influence of operational factors (Liu & Visher, 2021). The effects of job, family ties, and reentry programs—all of which are frequently cited as recidivism predictors—are managed to make sure the results of recidivism and self-identity are accurate.

Justification for Use

Cognitive behavioral-based interventions are the most effective in reentry programs. According to a study by Han et al. (2021), prerelease programs, drug treatment, vocational training, and halfway houses to facilitate the transition from prison to the community are the most successful reintegration programs that lower recidivism. Cognitive theory is increasingly used to appreciate how susceptible populations process information and how that dispensation leads to the creation and usage of either traditional

or unconventional coping mechanisms. People tended to employ more constructive coping mechanisms when they reacted positively to stressful circumstances, such as acceptance, contentment, or hope (Doekhie & Van Ginneken, 2020).

Similar to how those who experienced negative emotions in response to stressful events, including despair, rage, or disappointment, tended to use harmful coping mechanisms to handle such circumstances, including engaging in illegal or delinquent behavior. Research shows a complex association between mental illness and sentiment-oriented coping, with those who utilize sentiment-related coping more likely to report high levels of anxiety, sadness, and other mental health symptoms, as well as a social stratification effect (DeHaan et al., 2019). Those who had lower socioeconomic status or lower self-esteem, in other words, had less beneficial coping strategies and, as a result, reacted to novel situations with damaging coping strategies. On the other hand, those who participated in extracurricular activities and had loving families were better equipped to handle stressful situations by expressing their emotions and acting on them.

Literature Review Related to Key Variables and Concepts

Reentry and *integration* are terms used to describe the process of reintegrating people who have been released from jails or correctional facilities back into society in the criminal justice system of Texas. Through this procedure, people are given the help and resources they need to reintegrate into the community and lead fulfilling lives (Armstrong, 2020). This approach aims to help people get back on their feet while equipping them with the knowledge and tools they need to contribute positively to society. In this review, I summarize the prominent publications of the theorists,

philosophers, and researchers who have investigated and researched this idea and the major concepts and terminology present in the framework.

According to Fox et al. (2019), more than 12 million Americans are jailed yearly for crimes committed. There is a similarly increasing rate of adult incarceration, with an estimated 10.35 million people in custody globally (Kendall et al., 2018). Jails house inmates serving short sentences or awaiting trials, compared to prisons that house long-term inmates. Jails, therefore, have quicker reentry of inmates back into society compared to prisons (Fox et al., 2019). Thus, jails are more likely to have higher recidivism rates than prisons are. In this scenario, reentry programs in jails should be improved to reduce recidivism rates.

Despite a drop in crime rates in the United States, there are high incarceration rates (Fox et al., 2019). Several factors contribute to this, including the inability to pay bail and long pretrial detentions. These detentions play a major role in increasing recidivism rates. As pretrial detentions could be long, suspects could lose their housing or employment and may also have to endure psychological impacts. This will likely contribute to them committing crimes after their release and ending up in prison. Additionally, jails often lack sufficient funding to plan for and implement proper reentry programs for inmates (Fox et al., 2019). This is a major hindrance in the reentry efforts to reduce recidivism among those incarcerated.

Chambers (2018) highlighted the significance of community integration and reintegration services in the context of criminal justice reform. These services are crucial for giving people released from prisons the tools and support they need for a smooth

reintegration (Chambers, 2018). According to Mckenzie (2018), community involvement in reentry services is crucial for successful reintegration. Families, places of worship, businesses, and other community members must be involved in providing the resources and support needed for successful reintegration (Mckenzie, 2018). Dunham (2018) pointed out that significance of including mental health services in reintegration. Integrating mental health services is crucial for successful reintegration and for giving people the necessary resources and assistance (Dunham, 2018).

The most common factors behind reentry and recidivism include unstable living conditions, returning to economically disadvantaged neighborhoods, and negative peer relations (Skinner-Osei & Stepteau-Watson, 2018). It is not enough to punish and release offenders after their terms end. After incarceration, the criminal justice system should be prepared to help prisoners with reentry programs, as all criminals will eventually be released. The first few weeks after release from prison could be volatile, challenging, and full of unrealistic expectations and stressors (Fahmy, 2021). Recognizing social elements that will aid in creating reentry programs that reduce recidivism is one method to accomplish this. Reentry initiatives in jails should focus on recidivism, job prospects, family reconciliation, and community reintegration (Skinner-Osei & Stepteau-Watson, 2018). Individuals who enter prisons face several challenges, including unemployment, lack of financial security, substance abuse, poor mental health, and poor social relations. They usually encounter these same problems after their release, with the added issue of discrimination, loss of their jobs or housing, and lack of support from their family members.

According to Brief (2022) some of the “static” risk factors that affect integration is age and criminal history. They are referred to as static risk factors because they are not amenable to intervention or rather are not subject to change. In general, age has a robust correlation with criminal offending. Especially following late adolescence, age plays a huge part in crime and post-release offending. Also, past behavior is reliable in predicting future behavior. This implies that people who have had a more extensive prior criminal record have a higher risk of offending post-release. A lot of studies of returning individuals have focused on age and criminal history as predictors of recidivism. Recidivism reduces monotonically with age at release while individuals with a lengthier criminal history are more associated with repeat offending (Andrews, 2019). These are lived experiences that need to be studied more using phenomenological studies.

In prior studies on recidivism, reentry, and integration in the criminal justice system, researchers have emphasized the significance of giving people released from correctional facilities the tools and assistance they need to reintegrate successfully. In order to give people, the support and resources they need, research has shown how crucial it is to involve families, places of worship, employers, and other community members in the reentry process (Mowen et al., 2020). However, to give people the tools and support they need for successful reintegration, this research has also underlined how crucial it is to incorporate mental health services into reentry (DeHaan, 2019). This approach helps the current study because it uses the information from earlier studies to create a successful reintegration program in Texas. This program’s main objective is to provide those released from correctional facilities with the tools and encouragement they

need to reintegrate into society successfully. Families, places of worship, businesses, and other community members will all be involved. This program will also emphasize incorporating mental health services into the reentry procedure to give people the tools and support they need for a smooth reintegration.

Phenomenological Studies in Criminal Justice Systems

According to Patel (2023), phenomenological analysis is the in-depth study of the specific experiences of a person in order to understand them before making generalizing statements. It does not focus on exploring causation but rather it uses data to identify themes that exist in the experiences of participants. This happens as the research compares and contrasts the experiences of participants to understand a larger phenomenon of a specific population. In this study I used phenomenological studies approach because it allowed me to explore the lived experiences of ex-offenders, their families and criminal justice professionals when it comes to reentry and integration as a strategy to reducing recidivism after release from prison. This approach worked justifiably well with cognitive transformation theory because the theory can be used to understand how individuals establish meaning to the experiences of participants and how their unique set of experiences can shape their integration to the society.

Through phenomenological studies, researchers are able to understand the lived experiences of offenders together with their emotions, beliefs and culture. These are some of the factors that can be instrumental in understanding phenomena that has become hard to understand. Through phenomenological studies, researchers are able see the point of view of the participants from their setting and understand the issue at hand better. In this

case, phenomenological studies will help in viewing reentry and integration from the point of view/setting of an offender who has struggled with recidivism or has gone through reentry and integration (Wyble, 2022). By doing so, their challenges can be understood based on the practicality of their experiences and emotions.

Musekwa and others (2021), in their phenomenological study sought to capture the essence of the subjective experiences of participants with correctional rehabilitation programs. 70% of the participants were dissatisfied with correctional rehabilitation programs with most of them stating that they attended these programs only for the purposes of fulfilling release requirements. Further, they highlighted the insufficiency of rehabilitation programs with a major issue being delays from social workers and correctional officers. These experiences affected their commitment to integration programs which can be a factor to recidivism. The use of phenomenological studies in this case helped the researcher in examining the social and psychological experiences that offenders go through in reentry programs. These lived experiences help in understanding the phenomena of reentry and recidivism (Bonngot et al., 2024). Without getting the perception of individuals who have experienced reentry and integration, finding solutions to their shortcomings becomes a challenge.

Franklin (2023), utilized phenomenological studies to study the experiences of African-American men who were previously incarcerated and attempting to rebuild their lives. The phenomenological approach was used to get a detailed and comprehensive approach of their lived experiences. The study participants were 12 African American men between 24 years and 58 years who were previously incarcerated. The findings of

the study showed that they experienced confusion and chaos in their life before and after prison. Even though leaving prison gave them an opportunity to rediscover themselves, the reality of disorientation trying to fit back to the society was evidenced. They largely struggled with employment and acceptance in the society. Further, Russell (2023), used a phenomenological qualitative study to explore how offenders were prepared for integration into the society in private and publicly funded prison systems in New Mexico. The main aim was to study satisfaction levels of the educational process of rehabilitative integration through narrative themes that the study participants perceived to decrease the rates of recidivism from a phenomenological point of view. The findings showed that a most offenders in New Mexico are not adequately prepared for integration into the society. A major issue was the lack of support post-release which was a factor in offenders going back to recidivism.

A phenomenological study by Scott (2024), sought to understand to understand the lived experiences of African-American men post-incarceration in the state of Delaware. From the findings, it was established that incarceration has a disproportionate effect on African-American men hence leading to challenges in transition back to the society. It was established that most of them had feelings of alienation, distrust, stigmatization and discrimination. These led to challenges in securing various needs which include employment, housing, and family reconciliation. All these aspects were a hindrance to a fresh start in their lives. Having trouble with starting life post-release is a major factor that contributes to recidivism and the ineffectiveness of reentry and integration. A major issue is normally on housing and employment. A lot of employers

are usually unwilling to employ someone who has previously been incarcerated. This leads to ex-offenders having to struggle with finding for themselves. With the high cost of living, a lot of ex-offenders are left to depend on their families for support. With this support being inadequate, some usually end up in crime to sustain their lives after being released from prison. The challenge of housing is also an issue to the point that some ex-offenders usually slide back to recidivism for them to be sent back to prison intentionally (Bonggot et al., 2024). It is therefore important to address the concerns that perpetuate recidivism so as to achieve successful integration.

A study by McReynolds (2022), used hermeneutical phenomenological study approach to understand the lived experiences of previously incarcerated African-American men who were seeking outpatient mental health treatment. The study found out that most of the participants avoided seeking help from fear of stigmatization from the society for failing to conform to cultural norms. Further, it established that stigmatization was also linked to racial identity which prevented them from seeking mental health support until some of them end up in recidivism. By studying the experiences of individuals who were previously incarcerated, researchers develop a better understanding of the situations they are subjected to after release from prison. This understanding plays a role in creating empathetic feelings essential for reducing stigma and discrimination. As a result, an environment for successful integration is created. Having an outlook of the lived experiences of individuals who were previously incarcerated is essential to get a realistic perspective of what they actually face in real-life situations. Most of the developed programs have been theorized with their effectiveness not being a reflection of

the current society that people live in (Moak et al., 2020). As a result, having current experiences of ex-offenders can play a role in suggesting possible ways in which reentry programs can be adjusted to mirror current scenarios.

Petreca and others (2024), studies the lived experiences of sex offenders after reintegrating into the society after their release from prison. Using a hermeneutic phenomenological study, they sought to understand self-perception, that of other people in the society, humanization and stigma. The study found out that even after successful integration, former sex-offenders lived with fear of the unknown. Further, they experienced stigma and shame which led to struggles with coping with living in the society. The study highlighted how it is important to involve both the society and these ex-offenders to chart a path towards healing and acceptance of their rehabilitation. Similar sentiments were shared by Riley (2022), in his study on employers should accept that ex-offenders have been rehabilitated and make use of the skills that they acquire while in prison. Through an interpretive phenomenological analysis, the study established that a lot of ex-offenders have a challenge of getting stable employment hence their high risk of recidivism. Most of them are faced with employment barriers which translate to challenges in housing, substance abuse and mental health wellness. It is therefore crucial for employers to embrace the culture of employing successfully integrated ex-offenders so as to accord them a second chance in life.

Recidivism

Up until recently, it was unclear if returning citizens of color experienced different job consequences after incarceration or if the larger context of labor market

racial inequities predominantly influenced post-prison racial employment differences. However, a recent experimental study (Harding et al., 2018) suggests that the lower employment rates among Black returning citizens than Whites do not result from different incarceration consequences.

Millions of people cycle in and out of jail every year. America has a recidivism rate of about 76% (Skinner-Osei & Stepteau-Watson, 2018). This was cited as a problem in the mid-2000s, and the criminal justice system decided to devise second-chance initiatives for people leaving prisons (Han et al., 2021). The overall experience of incarceration can lead to criminal activity and recidivism. This includes how prisons are managed and the social environment in prisons. Factors that affect reentry also affect recidivism. Data also indicate that 30% of freed prisoners have been arrested again within 6 months (Skinner-Osei & Stepteau-Watson, 2018). Also, reoffenders are frequently African Americans who return to areas where there is a high rate of crime and few resources.

Those on probation or parole are more inclined to recidivate because their circumstances are dictated by unfair laws and constraints (Skinner-Osei & Stepteau-Watson, 2018). Typically, parole officers keep ex-offenders accountable, and any slight problems could result in their being sent back to jail (Fox et al., 2019).

Another significant contributor to the issue is a lack of rehabilitation efforts, leading to spiked recidivism levels. Individuals living in rural areas are likely to be incarcerated due to fewer employment opportunities, a higher number of people living in poverty, and below-average income rates (Fox et al., 2019). Similarly, when such persons

are released after incarceration, they may face these challenges, leading to recidivism. They may lack access to proper transport, leading to missed court dates and an inability to access employment (Fox et al., 2019).

The significance of job history has also been addressed (Bhuller et al., 2019). Bhuller et al. found that recidivism is affected by the existence or lack of employment history. Additional facets of social support still need to be addressed, even though this research has advanced the understanding of social support and its impact on recidivism. One such topic is the potential impact of unfavorable family dynamics on a person's propensity to commit a crime in an otherwise supportive home environment. The idea that social support is only sometimes consistently delivered and that the inconsistent delivery of social support disrupts perceptions of positive social support is briefly discussed in Galeste et al.'s (2019) framework of social support. Furthermore, social support can come from questionable sources, which may impact how positive social support affects people.

Reentry

For most of those imprisoned, as well as their families and communities, the transition back into society after incarceration is brutal. They will likely experience difficulties reentering society due to substance misuse, insufficient education and employment skills, a lack of housing options, and mental health problems. As per the National Institute of Justice (NIJ), inmate reentry, or the transition from a life in jail or prison to a life in a community, can significantly impact public safety. Reentry-inter-related studies and evaluations are still supported by NIJ, which include state-wide

reentry initiatives and studies that look at the process of going back into civilization in the context of the community, neighborhood, and family that the returning individuals return to (Ames, 2019).

Berghuis (2018) estimates that 93% of U.S. convicts will eventually visit their families again. A large number of released inmates, high rates of recidivism, and the financial weight of the prison system are only a few of the problems that impact the reintegration process. According to Skinner-Osei & Stepteau-Watson (2018), reentry is the successful transition of ex-convicts from correctional facilities back to their families and communities. The reentry period is usually the most challenging as most prisoners are likely to commit crimes that will lead to them being sent back to prison due to lack of proper housing, inability to find jobs, discrimination by neighbors, and inability to reconnect with their families. These factors significantly hinder the reentry process. The post-release period can be a high-risk time for ex-convicts, characterized by limited financial resources, inadequate social support, and poor continuity of care (Kendall et al., 2018). Fahmy (2021) also agrees that they may fail to get the support they need from family and friends during their social integration. Stable family support ensures a positive reentry outcome for ex-convicts, reducing recidivism. Research also suggests that social support is one of the most important factors during the reentry period (Fahmy, 2021). Social support can help reduce the harmful effects of stressors during reintegration into society and can be linked to improved mental health.

According to studies by Sampson et al. (2018), the Black Public Defender Association, and the Center for Justice Research (2020), prisoner reentry is crucial to any

racial justice agenda. African Americans have the highest confinement rates of any racial or ethnic group, and most live in typically underprivileged neighborhoods. For example, recent studies on reintegration in Boston found that just two areas were the destinations of 40% of programmed participants. Ultimately, segregated neighborhoods premised on class and race frame reentry experiences.

According to Fox et al. (2019), some people have mental issues and substance abuse problems in detention facilities. Such individuals are prone to multiple incarcerations and recidivism compared to other individuals. Compared to other ex-convicts, prison inmates with a history of mental health disorders or substance abuse usually experience worse outcomes when released than others (Kendall et al., 2018). Incarcerated people usually have higher rates of mortality, mental health issues, and substance abuse issues than the general population. However, people with strong social support and no mental health issues will likely be healthier than those without. Strong social support also means ex-convicts are less likely to commit crimes warranting arrest and being sent back to prison.

According to Muentner and Charles (2020), it is legal to discriminate against ex-convicts regarding employment, housing, and education. They usually lose rights like voting, carrying weapons, and serving on the jury. A person might become permanently involved in the criminal justice system after just one arrest. This makes it easy for criminals to recidivate. Instead of patchwork changes or isolated new initiatives, our approach to criminal justice must be completely rethought to eliminate racial discrimination in our system and improve reentry results. Instead of a framework for a

policy that emphasizes punishment as a kind of risk management, we must place more emphasis on political, economic, and social reintegration, harm reduction, and the human rights of individuals that have been imprisoned. An evidence-based implementation strategy for improving transitions from prison to civilization will focus on expanding independence, minimizing ethnic and racial disparity, and guaranteeing public safety (Cannonier et al., 2020).

Reentry and Integration

Reentry programs have been established to help rehabilitate ex-offenders released each year. Reentry programs' main objective is to assist recently released felons in effectively reentering society. They are responsible for lessening the strains of returning to community and family life (Skinner-Osei & Stepteau-Watson, 2018). Reentry programs offer help for mental health, substance abuse, employment, family reunification, and education. According to research, ex-offenders who take part in reentry programs are less likely to commit crimes again. However, when underfunded and not conducted properly, they can lead to criminal behavior (Hassoun Ayoub, 2020). The criminal justice system has identified several evidence-based reentry programs to help integrate released offenders into society. Assessing the offender's risk, criminogenic need, motivation development, community-based therapy, and punishments are a few variables that can aid in the implementation of reentry programs (Lussier & Frechette, 2022). These factors will help develop programs best suited for each offender instead of using a similar approach for all reentry programs.

Berghuis (2018) asserts that reintegration programs may be community-based, penal, or both. To facilitate the integration process, such programs should emphasize the transition from prison life to life in the community. Reentry programs typically include numerous phases that start while prisoners are still behind bars. Three phases of reentry programs are separated: inside prison walls, community integration, and integration, where independence is encouraged (Berghuis, 2018). Reentry programs frequently only last a few weeks because the risk of recidivism is greatest in the first year after release.

The lack of theory on dealing with reintegrating programs leads to reentry programs that are based on correcting the offenders' deficits in that they assume that a little bit of guidance and supervision can lead to the correction of behaviors by the offender (Weaver, 2019). Most reintegration therapies focus on increasing human and social capital through supporting clients with employment, and housing, fostering stronger social ties and overcoming drug and alcohol abuse. The interventions mentioned can be used to decrease recidivism. First, employment is seen as keeping people from perpetrating crimes and, therefore, a good factor for resiliency during reintegration (Berghuis, 2018). Similarly, regarding social support, forming strong bonds with friends and family after release will help prevent ex-convicts from criminal activities.

According to Razali and others (2021), however, despite focusing on filling in the deficits of the ex-offenders, reentry programs should be strength-based in that the approaches should be based on building the strength of the offenders. An example of a rehabilitation program established for ex-convicts is the bridges to life (Kendall et al., 2018). In this program, individuals focus on accountability, repentance, forgiveness, and

reconciliation. From the statistics collected by the TDCJ, the recidivism rates of ex-convicts that undergo the program are markedly low than the general offender population (Kendall et al., 2018).

Reentry programs should be diverse. They should be designed to develop vocational, educational, and job skills and teach prisoners about drug and substance abuse and cognitive, behavioral, and psychological issues (Han et al., 2021). These programs are geared towards rehabilitation and self-improvement for successful reentry into society. These programs should be available both while still in prison and after release. Post-release programs tend to be more effective in reducing recidivism (Han et al., 2021). Several organizations can carry out these programs, including religious organizations, nonprofit groups, prison staff, and community groups. For small-time offenders, the best intervention methods are those that are community-based rather than criminal justice ones.

Practical, Personal, and Social Issues Affecting Recidivism

According to LaCourse and others (2019), reentry barriers prohibit people from successfully reintegrating into their communities after being released from jail or prison. The adjustment for convicts back into society is challenging. A few well-known barriers include a lack of access to high-quality addiction treatment centers, jobs, education, and housing. After being released from prison, people have a lot to deal with when they return to society, including issues with family, education, housing, and employment. Several social and economic requirements that people on probation have could encourage recidivism. One of these demands can be a lack of stable housing.

According to research, other justice-involved populations, like those released from prison, frequently experience housing instability and homelessness, which are linked to recidivism (Jacobs & Gottlieb, 2020). Housing inaccessibility for those with criminal histories has a significant impact, including the potential to raise recidivism rates. In a study by Liu (2020), the systemic model should be acknowledged as a feasible framework for applying the macro social disorganization perspective to individuals' recidivism. It adequately explains the impact of community context on reentry outcomes and demonstrates the full range of social controls imposed on inmates after release. The systemic model postulates that social networks and linkages within a neighborhood serve as a form of social control over crime at the neighborhood level. The atmosphere of a community has an impact on the behavior of its residents. The lives of recently freed inmates are integrated into the communities they return to after reintegration.

Former inmates may experience intense social control in a neighborhood where residents are connected and cohesive. They may be more likely to receive assistance and support from their neighbors if they live in a neighborhood where neighbors interact and build bonds. Meanwhile, it is probable that because of the connections among neighbors, ex-offenders are discouraged from acting irresponsibly for fear of being seen and making their actions public when neighbors pass the information on to one another (Fahmy et al., 2019).

Upon release, especially from supermax custodies, individuals usually struggle with adjusting to time constraints, sensations and healthy sleeping and eating patterns. Further, the cost of housing has been a huge issue especially with the trend of increased

cost of housing and shrinking budget. When the cost of living goes up, the possibility of reoffending also goes up. This is because when ex-offenders struggle with housing after release, they may end up engaging in criminal activities for them to be able to afford rent (Green, 2024). Also, they may end up in drug abuse which is a factor that contributes to recidivism. Therefore, to address these issues, understanding the lived experiences of ex-offenders is imperative. Through phenomenological studies, researchers are able to get an accurate account of the lived experiences of ex-offenders or other people around them such as family members (Kheswa & Lobi, 2024). These lived experiences provide a vivid and clear description of the issues affecting them as well as the possible contributors of recidivism during reentry and integration.

Family and Societal Experiences on Recidivism

It is widely accepted in the literature that family support plays a significant role in prosocial reentry outcomes. Mowen and Boman (2018) highlight that helpful connections can involve conflict suggesting that conflictual family interactions could weaken the prosocial linkages from familial support. The idea that family support matters are generally supported by research, even though additional study is needed to delve into the specifics of the importance of family support during reintegration. Scholars have increasingly urged for additional specificity in understanding the mechanisms via which family support provides these essential linkages despite the knowledge that family support reduces the number of aberrant outcomes. Liu and Visser (2021) state that while many projects have implicitly studied numerous aspects of family support, only a small

number of research have explicitly examined how diverse dimensions of family support play significant roles during the reentry process.

Thus, legislators in the criminal justice system are particularly interested in community sentencing, which is meant to lower the prison population partially. Also, there are many more people serving community sentences than in prisons. *Community punishments* refer to various criminal justice sanctions, such as suspended sentences, electronic monitoring, probation with supervision, obligatory community work, compulsory therapy or training programs, and other measures. Several professionals believe such community punishments are more affordable than prison (Drake, 2018). They may also be more successful in lowering recidivism and averting the criminalization of offenders moving forward.

Summary and Conclusions

Many vital themes were found in the literature review for this qualitative study on recidivism, reentry, and integration in Texas' criminal justice system. Several essential themes were found in the literature review for this qualitative study on recidivism, reentry, and integration in Texas' criminal justice system. They included the effect on a successful release from jail into society, recidivism risk factors such as poverty and a lack of solid family support systems, and the requirement for comprehensive intervention programs created especially for ex-offenders. This literature analysis identified several viable initiatives to lower recidivism rates, including enhanced cooperation between governmental and nonprofit organizations, houses of worship, employers, and nonprofit groups. Developing family bonds is also crucial for helping ex-offenders reintegrate into

society successfully. Last, but not least, ensuring that people have proper access to healthcare services can significantly help to reduce criminality among those who have been released from prison or imprisonment.

A systematic technique combining keyword searches and a thorough analysis of pertinent publications was utilized to find the literature. The resources available for reentry and reintegration, the difficulties experienced by stakeholders in the criminal justice system, and the factors influencing recidivism were all examined as part of the conceptual and theoretical framework used to explore the topic of study. In the context of Texas' criminal justice system, the literature study outlined essential terms and variables linked to recidivism, reentry, and integration and analyzed their significance.

The chapter's summary and conclusions pointed out several gaps in the literature on recidivism, reentry, and integration, such as a dearth of studies on the efficacy of reentry programs, the difficulties in reintegrating people who have been incarcerated, and the impact of community-level factors on recidivism. By concentrating on the experiences and viewpoints of Texan stakeholders in the criminal justice system, the current study has tried to close some of these gaps. The chapter's summary and conclusions pointed out several gaps in the literature on recidivism, reentry, and integration, such as a dearth of studies on the efficacy of reentry programs, the difficulties in reintegrating people who have been incarcerated, and the impact of community-level factors on recidivism. By concentrating on the experiences and viewpoints of Texan stakeholders in the criminal justice system, the current study has tried to close some of these gaps.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

In this study, I examined offenders' and their families' experiences of reentry programs and the programs' perceived effectiveness in addressing the practical and social needs of offenders within the Texas criminal justice system. In this chapter, I focus on the research design and rationale. The chapter includes the role of the researcher, the methodology, and issues of trustworthiness associated with the research.

Research Design and Rationale

As highlighted in Chapter 1, three research questions guided this research:

RQ1: What are some of the family experiences with reentry programs?

RQ2: What are some of the personal and social factors that families of ex-offenders feel are overlooked by existing reentry programs?

RQ3: How do these overlooked personal and social factors impact the ex-offender and their families, contributing to recidivism?

To conduct the research study, I adopted phenomenology research design. Phenomenology research design focuses on capturing a precise and vivid description of individual's lived experiences that can help in understanding the essence of the phenomenon that is under study (Heotis, 2020). As such, the research questions focused on asking what it is like to experience reentry and integration of ex-offenders. The research questions sought to understand offender and family experiences of reentry programs and the programs' perceived effectiveness in addressing offenders' practical and social needs within the Texas criminal justice system.

In phenomenological studies, the research focus is on capturing rich description of experiences within a subject's setting (Tomaszewski et al., 2020). For the case of this study, research focused on the lived experiences of ex-offenders, their family members and correctional officers from the point of view of their settings. They were not asked questions that do not touch on their lived experiences within their settings. Further, in phenomenological studies, the interviews are open-ended questions that are unstructured with the aim of gathering information of participant's beliefs, feelings, perceptions and convictions with respect to the phenomenon under study.

In phenomenological studies, the researcher is able to encourage the participant to give a detailed account of their experience in an open and visceral manner to the point that their lived experience becomes evident. This helps in providing better insights to a social phenomenon; with the phenomenon either being relationship, emotion, program or culture (Dangal & Joshi, 2020). By applying a phenomenological research design for this qualitative study, I addressed the issue of recidivism in relation to reentry programs from a practical perspective, bringing out the reality of reentry programs, integration, and recidivism within the Texas criminal justice system. The research design allowed me to be in touch with the reality of the issue under investigation and use the reality to gather what was relevant to addressing the research problem.

Role of the Researcher

As a researcher, I was a participant in the research study. In order to understand the relationship between reentry programs, integration into society, and recidivism, I actively participated in the research process. This active participation was in the form of

asking questions from the questionnaire and determining the direction the interviews would take during data collection. As a researcher, I engaged in a participatory conversation with the participants by interviewing them during data collection. A participatory conversation is an interview that involves interactive dialogue between the interviewee and the interviewer. This type of conversation allows a researcher to ask the prepared interview questions while also allowing them to ask more probing questions to generate a deeper understanding of the problem at hand. These probing questions are normally not on the initially prepared interview question list and are usually important for a better understanding of an interviewee's responses (Swain & King, 2022). I acted as the moderator of the interview, which helped ensure that interviewees provided the most appropriate responses relevant to the research. This ensured that all questions were ethical and did not offend or intimidate the research participants.

Because the research was mainly focused on issues relating to Texas' correctional systems, a potential research bias was in the sampling choice. In qualitative research, the sample should reduce any outside static and focus on a pure sample with a lived experience of the problem under study (Wadams & Park, 2018). In this case, sampling research bias might emerge from selecting participants without experience in reentry programs, offender integration, and recidivism. To address this possible research bias, the selected sampling strategy ensured that the sample selected for the research only included criminal justice professionals, possible offenders who have gone through reentry programs, and family members of ex-offenders.

Anticipation bias is another potential bias that can develop during the process of research. Anticipation bias is the process whereby a researcher already has a premeditated result for the research. As a result, the researcher will tend to collect data through questions that lean toward proving their implanted thoughts within the research. Anticipation bias is normally influenced by a researcher's assumptions, values, and implicit beliefs about their research topic (Wadams & Park, 2018). In this research, anticipation bias was dealt with by ensuring that the research questions were neutral and did not force the research participants to answer the interview questions in a way that forced them to lean toward a specific direction. The research participants were allowed to answer questions based on their knowledge and experience, after which the data collected were used for analysis.

One ethical issue that needed to be addressed during the research is the issue of power differentials. This issue related to criminal justice professionals directly involves with reentry programs. Essentially, these professionals are responsible for ensuring that reentry programs are effective. Therefore, the fact that they have the power to make these programs effective might push them toward providing responses that suggest reentry programs are completely perfect. To address these issues, the research participants were assured of their anonymity and that no consequences would follow their responses. This strategy gave them the confidence to respond appropriately without fearing scrutiny or victimization.

Methodology

Population

A population is the pool of individuals to define the sample size. A population is usually a large group with the same characteristics (Wesson et al., 2017). The criteria for identifying the target population for this research was individuals with direct experience in reentry programs, integration, or recidivism. Therefore, the population under study comprised criminal justice professionals in Texas, family members of ex-offenders in Texas, and offenders who have gone through reentry programs in the Texas criminal justice system.

Sampling Strategy

Purposeful sampling was adopted as the sampling strategy for this research. According to Staller (2021), purposeful sampling is a sampling strategy whereby the researcher recruits participants from the population based on their judgment. The researcher uses their judgment to select participants who will provide the best perspectives for the phenomenon under study. The purpose of purposeful sampling is to cultivate an information-rich sample size with experience with the topic under study, hence providing the most relevant data for the research (Staller, 2021). Purposeful sampling was relevant for this study because not everyone in Texas has direct experience with reentry programs, offender integration into society, and recidivism. Therefore, a researcher must use their judgment to pick the best-fit participants from the population. Participant selection through purposeful sampling helped select those with the most

relevant information for the study. This helped ensure the data collected were from individuals with experience with the phenomenon under study.

Different selection criteria were used to select the sample for the study. The most fundamental criterion was that all research participants must be from within Texas. The scope of this research was within Texas. Therefore, all the research participants must have been from Texas because the problem under study is unique to Texas, and only participants from Texas could appropriately address the issue being investigated. Another criterion for selection was if the participants met any of the following: being a criminal justice professional with experience in reentry programs and recidivism, being a family member to an ex-offender from within Texas, or being an ex-offender who has previously undergone reentry and integration into society in Texas. Participants who met the highlighted criteria for selection were selected to participate in the research.

The sample was made up of 12 participants. According to Vasileiou (2018), the 12th interview usually reaches saturation. In qualitative interviews past the 12th interview, no new information on the themes under study can be obtained from the research participants. Therefore, this research had a sample size of 12 because the number is the statistically recommended saturation number in qualitative research. Data saturation is essential in determining sample size because it occurs when no new insights can be extracted from extra participants. In order to avoid repetition, a researcher must work with a sample that achieves saturation. Saturation helps in ensuring that no new information or relevant data are left out while at the same time reducing repetition among participants (Vasileiou et al., 2018). Therefore, 12 participants were selected to answer

interview questions on reentry programs, integration of ex-offenders into society, and recidivism.

Participant Selection and Recruitment

First, I sought approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to allow me to conduct the research. Approval is important in research as the researcher can prove to prospective participants that the interviews are solely for research purposes. Twelve participants were selected to participate in the research through purposeful sampling. The participants were then identified, contacted, and recruited. For the criminal justice professionals, I first researched the criminal justice professionals involved with Texas' correctional system. For individuals who have had a member of their family convicted in the past, I contacted my acquaintances for help identifying individuals who meet this criterion. Once I identified the most appropriate candidates for my study, I contacted them using official channels, such as email, to inform them of my intention to recruit them for the study on recidivism, reentry, and integration within the Texas criminal justice system. By contacting them, I informed them of my intention to recruit them and the research problem that I intended to address, as well as informed them that they were best placed to provide information to help address the research problem. In addition, the email assured them of confidentiality and anonymity. Their responses were anonymous and were used solely for research purposes. The purpose of assuring them of anonymity and confidentiality was to convince the participants that their responses would not have any consequences afterward.

Once I received feedback from the initial participant email requesting them to participate in my research, I followed through with a follow-up email. The follow-up email expounded on what the research was about. In this case, the research was generally about understanding the link between reentry programs and their effectiveness in promoting offender reentry into society while reducing the chances of recidivism. In addition to expounding on the purpose of the research, I inquired about the most appropriate time to set up an interview for data collection. The location or mode of the interview depended on the research participant. The research participants were allowed to take the interview over a phone call or schedule an in-person interview, depending on their flexibility and preferences. Further, before starting any interviews, I asked the participants to provide their consent.

Instrumentation

Data collection was done using an interview protocol (Appendix). A researcher develops unstructured interview questions in the form of phenomenological interviews. Phenomenological interviews are used to research lived experiences. They mainly focus on participants' lived experiences and the meanings they make from the lived experiences. A researcher develops a detailed description of each participant's experience of the phenomenon under study by asking open questions about their feelings, understanding, and perceptions (Roulston & Choi, 2018).

The concept of phenomenology guided the decision to develop unstructured in-depth interviews as a form of data collection. Through unstructured in-depth interviews, a researcher takes a conversational approach to data collection where they engage in a

meaningful conversation with the research participants concerning the different aspects of the research problem. Through unstructured in-depth interviews, research participants are not bound to provide predetermined answers. Instead, they respond based on their perceptions and experiences (Eppich et al., 2019). In this case, each question in the interview protocol was designed to create an open dialogue between researcher and participants. The aspects addressed in the interview questions included ex-offender unemployment, the risk of recidivism, stigmatization associated with being imprisoned, level of education, and other practical and social needs, which include shelter, food, mental health, and social support. All these aspects were asked so as to provide an overview of lived experiences or perceptions from the research participants. Their responses formed the basis of exploring reentry programs, integration, and recidivism within the Texas criminal justice system. At the start of the interviews, I informed the interview participants they would be recorded and also informed them at the end that the interview was recorded. Recording the interview was for reference regarding coding and developing themes during the data analysis phase.

Data Analysis Plan

The research study was qualitative. Therefore, data collection was done through interviews which were recorded. The research analysis was done using the MAXQDA software. First, I transcribed the interviews of each research participant using the software. Upon transcribing the interviews, I read through the transcribed interviews keenly while identifying the codes and themes that address the issue of reentry programs and their effectiveness. The identified codes and themes formed the basis of data analysis

as they were used to develop relationships between the codes. These relationships represent the effectiveness of reentry programs in promoting integration into society and reducing recidivism.

Issues of Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, trustworthiness is one of the less obvious goals researchers aspire to gain. Trustworthiness refers to the extent to which the reader can judge if the researchers conducted their work honestly and reached plausible conclusions (Amin et al., 2020). In research, gaining trustworthiness indicates that the readers will believe whatever is documented is true. However, despite the works being trustworthy, it will not be possible for the readers to get the precise results as the researcher. There are specific research protocols and criteria that a researcher can use in order to create a credit report, which includes dependability, confirmability, transferability, and believability (Rose & Johnson, 2020).

Credibility

Credibility aims to show how consistent the findings are with reality (Amin et al., 2020). This concept is highly subjective, depending on individual judgments. Understanding how the theories and findings are related to research is important. It can be achieved through plausible research findings that adequately represent responses received from participants. I will establish credibility through triangulation. Triangulating is the process of collecting data from multiple sources and fieldwork and finding the patterns that have been repeated in the sources (Amin et al., 2020). Triangulation has the

advantages of increasing the credibility of findings and giving a deeper and more thorough understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Amin et al., 2020).

Transferability

The method by which a researcher proves that the outcomes of a study are related to different contexts, populations, and phenomena of a comparable kind is known as transferability. Researchers can demonstrate the generalizability of their findings to various contexts, situations, and scenarios by using thick descriptions as a technique (Amin et al., 2020). In this research, I will use thick descriptions in data collection, analysis, selection of participants, and research setting.

Dependability

Dependability is the likelihood that the findings of the study will hold up to reproduction by other researchers (Rose & Johnson, 2020). I used an audit trail to create dependability in this research. These are the records that remain after the research endeavor. The dependability of the research was determined by examining the records I kept in my journal throughout the research process.

Confirmability

Confirmability is as close as qualitative research can come to objective truth. To create confirmability in research, one should audit the research process and involve other researchers (Rose & Johnson, 2020). For this research study, I created confirmability by making notes and keeping a journal of my analysis and decisions while doing the study.

Ethical Procedures

The relationship between researchers and participants might raise ethical issues for the former when individuals are directly participating in the study. In qualitative research, the participants and researchers are bound to get close. This sometimes poses an ethical challenge in terms of privacy, creating honest associations, and preventing distortions (Reid et al., 2018). The Declaration of Helsinki and the Nuremberg code's guiding principles are well known for establishing procedural ethics, which is required for receiving first permits for research investigations (Reid et al., 2018). Qualitative research must therefore adhere to the same standards of self-rule and informed consent as biological research and other pertinent studies.

Researchers need to be aware of the harm that could be done to study participants. Similarly, the interaction between qualitative researchers, their colleagues, and participants should always be based on confidentiality (Roth & Unger, 2018). Qualitative researchers should emphasize moral writing similarly while honoring others' lived experiences (Reid et al., 2018). Informed consent is a condition that must be met, and doing so is more than just completing a formality. The potential risks to participants in qualitative social research are typically underestimated, and they result from how a researcher and participant engage with one another.

Finding, foreseeing, and analyzing ethical applications in research may be more challenging. Defining risk-reduction strategies can be challenging (Roth & Unger, 2018). Some of the difficulties could come from circumstances where researchers unintentionally reveal data confidentiality to the public. It is, however, possible to

confirm the findings and clarify key ethical issues throughout the planning stages of qualitative research. Furthermore, the reflexivity idea does not appear to advocate for specific types of reactions in study scenarios (Reid et al., 2018). Instead, it is an insightful idea that can allow for ethical preparedness in the complexity and abundance of social research.

Summary

This chapter mainly focused on the research design and methodology used in this research. A phenomenological research design was used for the qualitative study to examine offender and family experience of reentry programs and their perceived effectiveness. This design was selected because it facilitates research about lived experiences. The researcher participated actively in the research by participating in the interviews. The target population was families of ex-offenders and criminal justice professionals within Texas who have experience with reentry programs. The specific sample for the study was determined through a purposeful sampling strategy since the participants have to be individuals with knowledge and experience of reentry programs. An open-ended interview protocol was used to collect data. Data analysis was through the transcription of the interviews and making connections between the identified codes using the MAXQDA software.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative research is to examine Recidivism, Reentry, and Integration in the Texas Criminal Justice System. The findings of this research are essential towards understanding the high levels of recidivism within Texas despite having reentry programs that are perceived to be effective. The aim of the results is to help stakeholders and policymakers by providing suggestions of how reentry programs can be improved within the Texas criminal justice system.

This chapter will examine the study setting, the demographics, elaborate the process of data collection, data analysis, evidence of trustworthiness as well as the results.

Setting

A month before the process of data collection, I used my networks to request participants to take part in the study because the study used purposive sampling. It utilized participants who had previously gone through the criminal justice system, families of people who had gone through the criminal justice system and criminal justice professionals. With this population being difficult to identify, purposive sampling was used. After they had agreed to take part in the research study, I emailed them with the consent forms for them to agree to take part in the study.

All the interviews were done over call. I called the interviewee and recorded our conversations. On average, the interviews took around thirty to forty minutes for each participant. Further, we had no rescheduling issues because the participants chose the

most appropriate time from their schedules for them to take part in interview. We took the interviews in quiet locations that did not have noise.

Demographics

I interviewed 12 participants in the interview. The table below shows the distribution of demographics.

Demographic	Number
Family of Previously Incarcerated	5
Previously Incarcerated	3
Criminal Justice professionals	4

Figure 1: Demographics

Data Collection

Before starting my research, I obtained an approval from the Institutional Review Board. Using open-ended interview guide, I interviewed all the identified participants while at the same time journaling. Journaling allowed me to take notes on the questions and responses from the participants and track their thought processes. As a result, it helped me avoid personal bias and remain neutral throughout the whole process of data collection.

Due to time constraints and busy schedules, the process of data collection was done using phone calls. I used probing to allow participants to clarify and elaborate their answers. This also helped in giving a wider view of their perceptions on reentry and integration as we did not stick to only the interview guide. The probing with extra questions helped participants in clarifying their responses. With the 12th participant, it

was assumed that saturation had been achieved and new participants would not add new perspectives to the already collected responses.

Data Analysis

After completing the interviews, I went ahead to transcribe each of the interviews and put together the transcriptions. The transcription was done on MAXQA and all the transcriptions transferred to the data analysis section. The aim of thematic analysis is to gain an understanding of the meanings of patterns that come up from data collected from participants' lived experiences (Burgess et al., 2023). Analysis of data paid attention to possible codes, themes, and patterns that related to the variables under study. The process of analysis involved going through each interview step by step while coding them using the identified themes and codes. The themes identified were criminal justice system and reentry programs, community and society, role of social policies, challenges in reentry and integration, family support and the impact of family ties.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in the analysis of data from this study is important to the quality of the study. To ensure trustworthiness and increase credibility in the collected data, views from participants is essential which is why the study took a qualitative approach (Carter et al., 2015). To improve trustworthiness, I utilized journaling during data collection. By using a journal, the interviewee is able to take notes that are important in allowing them to track the process of data collection hence minimizing instances of bias. For example, the journal helped me track the follow-up questions that were not in the interview guide. Then, I coded the transcribed interview questions which ensured the

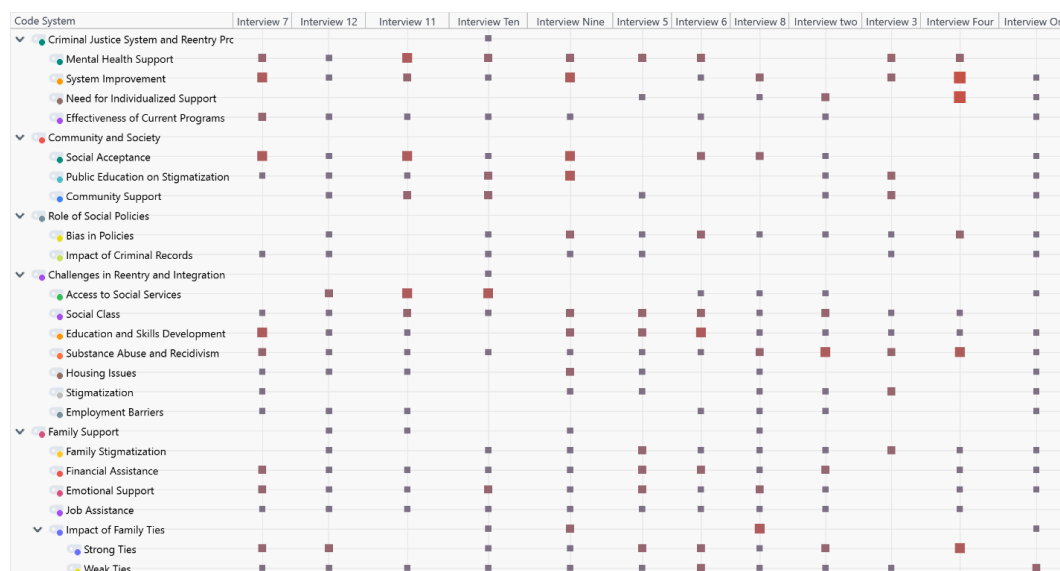
transferability of data collected. Further, the transcribed interviews were reviewed to ensure the responses were accurate with what was in the audio.

Results

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceived effectiveness of reentry and integration programs in Texas and their role in reducing recidivism. In this chapter, I focus on the findings of the research. Results are grouped in accordance to the research questions used to guide this research. Figure 1 shows the frequency of occurrence of the different codes used in the research analysis. The research focused on 12 participants.

Figure 2

Code Matrix Browser



Results

Research Question 1

For this study, the first research question was as follows: What are some of the family experiences with reentry programs? The main themes of focus in this research

question were family support and impact of family ties. Family support was explored under the codes of financial assistance, emotional support, job-search assistance, and family stigmatization. On the other hand, impact of family ties was explored under the codes strong ties and weak ties.

Family Support

Family Stigmatization. When it comes to family experiences with reentry and integration, one of the most common issues that came up was stigmatization. Participant 5 highlighted,

I believe that family members contribute to the stigmatization of people who have previously been arrested. This is because a lot of family members are always or rather do not want to be involved with someone who has previously been incarcerated or previously been imprisoned.

Further, Participant 4 pointed out, “If part of your family discourages their children from engaging with you after being released from prison, chances of stigmatization are high because of the isolation you feel from your family members.” Therefore, it was established that stigmatization happens through the isolation of ex-offenders and the unwillingness of family members to engage with someone who has been released from prison.

On what could be the cause of stigmatization of ex-offenders during reentry and integration, Participant 10 highlighted, “within families, stigmatization can occur, especially if there are unresolved issues or negative perceptions about the individual’s past behavior.” Therefore, aside from the fact that some family members do not want

anything to do with someone who has previously been incarcerated, the unresolved issues before incarceration play a role in higher levels of stigmatization of ex-offenders, which makes them feel unwanted within their families/society.

Financial Support

In terms of financial assistance, it was established that a majority of released offenders usually need financial assistance for basic needs, including food, housing, and transportation. Participant 11 stated, “Financial assistance is often one of the most immediate forms of support that families provide. This can include helping with rent, utilities, transportation, and other essential expenses.” This was reinforced by Participant 5 who said, “I have personally been in a position of helping them by providing them with the finances that they would need to run their daily needs, to interact with others, and to support themselves in what they need in their daily life.”

Financial assistance is necessary because most ex-offenders struggle with finding employment immediately after being released from prison. Participant 1 stated,

We as the immediate, nuclear family has always been there for him, especially when it comes to financial assistance. Considering the fact that it was really quite hard for him to be employed to get a job, since most of the employers around Houston do not take in people who have been previously convicted.

However, some families do not provide financial assistance to ex-offenders immediately after release. Participant 7 stated, “Some of them neglect their kin after being released from prison do not want anything to do with them, especially when it comes to finances.”

Emotional Support

During reentry and integration, ex-offenders have different experiences when it comes to how their families support them emotionally. Some received solid emotional support while others do not receive any form of emotional support from their families, which can be a contributor to recidivism. Participant 2 stated, “Emotional support wasn’t really forthcoming from my family side because, they didn’t want anything to do with me. I got most of the support from my friends and other convicted people in the society.” This shows that previously convicted individuals suffer from emotional challenges when they do not receive emotional support from their family.

Further, Participant 7 highlighted, “Some family members provide proper emotional support, while others do not provide proper emotional support.” This is because some of them do not want anything to do with people who have been previously incarcerated, which makes for emotional straining to someone who has undergone the incarceration process and is now in the reentry and integration process. The research establishes that the process of reentry and integration is a stressful endeavor that requires proper family support. Participant 12 said, “The reentry process can be incredibly stressful and overwhelming, so being there for him, listening to his concerns, and encouraging him was essential for his mental well-being.” Without proper emotional support, ex-offenders can suffer from issues such as depression, which can exacerbate their possibility of recidivism especially when it comes to issues related to drugs.

Job Assistance

Employment is a major issue that ex-offenders struggle with upon release from prison. Therefore, it is essential that family members play a role in assisting ex-offenders in obtaining job leads; a criminal record makes it hard for them to find employment.

Participant 4 highlighted,

We, as family members normally are, ask our acquaintances to help in employing these family members. One of the ways is by writing proper recommendation letters for them or by asking organizations, or rather businesses, that are being run by acquaintances to help employ our kin, even if it means employing them on, small jobs or other menial jobs.

Further, Participant 6 highlighted the role their family played in helping them acquire a job, stating “My family members played a role in suggesting possible job employment opportunities that I could apply for and writing for me recommendations which helped me secure a job in terms of emotional support.” Many families also assist in securing employment by leveraging their networks, providing references, or helping with job applications and interviews. Without the input of family, securing employment can be harder for ex-offenders, especially during reentry.

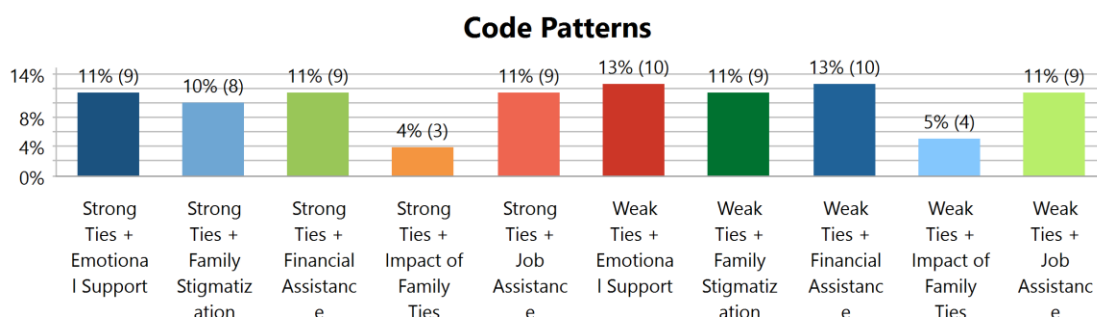
Impact of Family Ties

Family ties play a role in how ex-offenders successfully integrate into society. Further, family ties affect other aspects of family experience such as financial assistance, emotional support, and job assistance. Figure 2 shows how family ties relate to other code

patterns. Family ties, whether strong or weak, have an impact on the other variables of family support.

Figure 3

Code Patterns on the Relationship Between Family Ties and Family Support



Strong Ties. Strong family ties are vital toward the successful reentry of an ex-offender into society. Family serves as a support system for an ex-offender toward adapting to life outside prison. Participant 1 highlighted, “If someone has challenges, you will advise them on what solutions they can take and what they can do to, to improve their life and, live better compared to when you don’t have strong family ties.” Further, Participant 8 stated, “In my opinion, as much as being in prison strains family relationships, strong family ties or rather, when families build strong bonds with their released family member, their orientation integration is more effective.” This underscores the effectiveness of reentry and integration when family ties are strong.

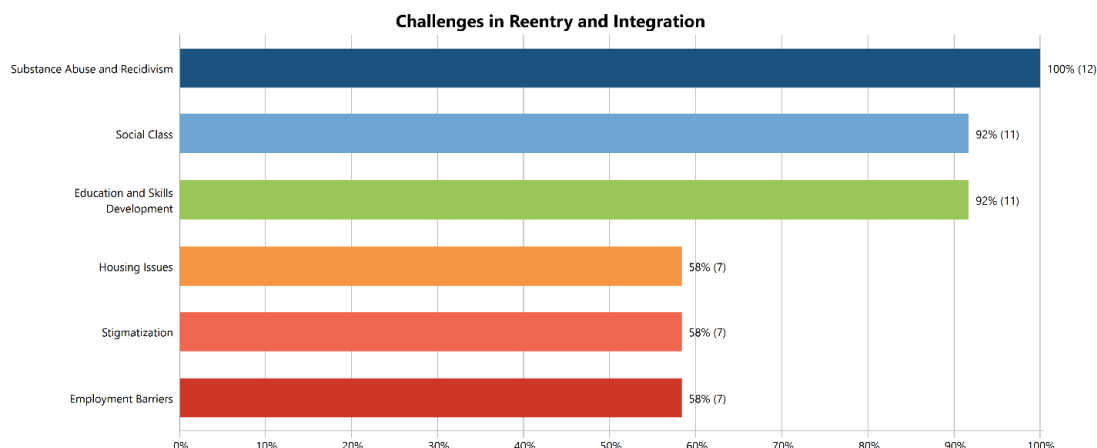
Weak Ties. From the results, someone who has weak family ties will struggle with reentry and integration. Participant 5 stated, “Convicts will feel isolated and will not have the support when they have weak family ties. Therefore, integration and successful reentry into the society becomes quite a challenge for them.” This is because of the lack

of support from their family, as family is one of the strongest pillars in the society. Participant 9 further highlighted, “Weak family ties can make reentry much more difficult.” Without a supportive network, individuals may feel isolated and discouraged, which can lead to higher rates of recidivism. To reinforce this, Participant 7 stated, “If the family ties or family bonds are not rebuilt, there’s a highly likelihood of someone getting back to recidivism due to weak family ties.” All the participants agreed that weak family ties are one of the main reasons offenders reoffend because they do not have someone to guide them and support them upon release from prison. Participant 1 stated, “Weak family ties are one of the major reasons as to why some people fall back into recidivism and end up being incarcerated again.”

Research Question 2

Challenges in Reentry and Integration

In this study, I sought to understand some of the personal and social factors that families of ex-offenders feel are overlooked and morph these challenges into successful reentry and integration. Figure 3 shows the frequency of occurrence of these challenges in the interviews conducted. Substance abuse and recidivism were the biggest challenges followed by social class, at 100% and 92%, respectively. Other challenges were education and skills development, housing issues, stigmatization, and employment barriers.

Figure 4*Frequency of Occurrence of Challenges in Interviews****Social Class***

From the research, it was established that addressing the issue of social class and providing more equitable resources and support for all individuals can help reduce recidivism rates and create a fairer society. Participant 10 stated,

Social class plays a significant role in recidivism. Individuals from lower socioeconomic backgrounds often face more significant challenges during reentry. They may lack access to resources such as stable housing, employment opportunities, and quality healthcare.

These factors can create a cycle of poverty and criminal behavior that is hard to break hence the higher levels of recidivism. Also, Participant 7 highlighted,

A huge number of people who are in prison are from, lower social classes. They're usually in prison, mainly because of lack of employment. lack of inability to sustain themselves, and generally the way of living in, lower social classes

where people engage in illegal activities, the sale of contraband goods, burglary, scamming to for them to survive the high, cost of living in the Texas.

Therefore, it was established that ex-offenders from a lower socioeconomic class in Texas are more likely to reoffend compared to those from higher socioeconomic backgrounds.

Other issues that were identified from the findings is the relation between social class and financial capabilities of ex-offenders during the process of reentry and integration. Participant 6 highlighted, “Some people do not enjoy this privilege of getting proper financial assistance from their family member which is a major issue because they may end up getting back into prison for, for trying to illegally get finances.” The fact that some offenders come from a lower social class, they may struggle with finances which might push them to engaging in illegal activities resulting in them ending up in prison again.

Education and Skills Development

From the research, it was established that from personal experiences, families of ex-offenders feel like education and skills development is usually quite inadequate in the criminal justice system. Participant 6 stated, “Someone who has been, incarcerated for so long does not have proper education or other education that is up to date, such as in terms of maybe technology and skills.” The research also found out that the participants agree that educations and the development of skills is essential in reducing the likelihood of recidivism. Participant 2 said, “Education gives you, I would say, more exposure to life,

which allows you to, to value, to value your own freedom. So having higher education means you have more push to not falling back into recidivism.”

Participant 11 stated, “Our reentry programs should offer educational opportunities, including GED classes, vocational training, and partnerships with local colleges. Further continuing education postrelease should be insisted on to improve job prospects and provides a sense of purpose for ex-offenders.” By investing in education for incarcerated individuals, we can significantly improve their chances of successful reintegration and hence reduce recidivism rates. Participant 9 highlighted, “I’ve been continuing my education part-time at a community college, studying business management. Having an educational background has made it easier to apply for jobs and has opened up more opportunities for me.” From this, it is evident that though overlooked sometimes, education helps in developing critical thinking and problem-solving skills which are usually essential in navigating the challenges of reentry and integration.

However, Participant 4 held contrary opinions and felt that education does not play a role in successful reentry into the society. Participant 4 stated,

Most of these processes are usually, for lack of a better word, socially centered.

They’re centered into helping someone get back to the society. And getting back to the society has no relation to the level of education, so I don’t really think that the level of education has an effect on reentry.

Substance Abuse and Recidivism

The study found out that substance abuse was prevalent in Texas upon release of ex-offenders from prison. Participant 3 highlighted, “They still think that you’re a

criminal and this becomes hard for you. So, you might end up taking being drunk, you might end up using a drug, and this might get you back to the prison.” This was in relation to how stigmatization of ex-offenders might contribute to them engaging in substance abuse and in the long-run recidivate. Also, Participant 10 stated, “Many of our clients have a history of substance abuse, and the stress and challenges of reentry can trigger relapse. Without proper support and treatment, it becomes a vicious cycle that’s hard to break.” This underscore the need for proper support to help prevent ex-offenders from being triggered into substance abuse by the challenges they face upon release from prison. To highlight the issue of recidivism due to substance abuse, Participant 8 stated, “When substance abuse levels are high, chances of someone getting back to recidivism are high. This is because, they get to use drugs that are illegal, and once caught, they end up in prison.” Further the Participant 4 agreed that “chances of recidivism due to drug abuse are high compared to someone who does not engage in drug abuse after being released from prison.” Therefore, substance abuse is a major contributor of recidivism.

Housing Issues

The study further sought to understand how housing issues have been overlooked by reentry programs and how they contribute to recidivism. According to Participant 1, “An incarcerated person struggles to get a house to rent because, most landlords have a policy of not renting out their places to someone who has been convicted of a felony.” Further Participant 12 shared their brother’s experience by stating, “My brother faced difficulties in finding housing because many landlords are hesitant to rent to individuals with a criminal record.” The results established that housing policies were a major issue

that led to the challenge of housing for ex-offenders. Participant 11 stated, “Some housing policies disqualify individuals with criminal records from accessing public housing or rental assistance programs.” These policies prevent released ex-offenders from getting proper shelter which affects them both emotionally and mentally.

Employment Barriers

Employment barriers were a major issue identified in the study. From the results, a lot of ex-offenders struggle with employment. The struggle is a result of employment barriers placed against them as well as their inadequate employability skills. Participant 7 stated, “Someone should not be should not be restricted from free movement across different states to look for employment. They should be given proper skills that especially for people who have been incarcerated for very many years.” Further it was established that social class was also a barrier to employment. Participant 6 highlighted, “People live in disadvantages, disadvantaged areas where they have low job prospects and lower likelihood of employment as a result.” In addition, Participant 11 highlighted, “Employment barriers are also prevalent, as many employers are hesitant to hire individuals with criminal records. These policies can create a cycle of disadvantage that makes it incredibly difficult for individuals to successfully reintegrate into society.” To elaborate how ex-offenders struggle with employment barriers, Participant 2 stated, “I struggled on my own to find a job which was quite hard, since a lot of companies don’t want anything to do with someone who has been previously convicted, be it a small criminal charge or a huge charge.”

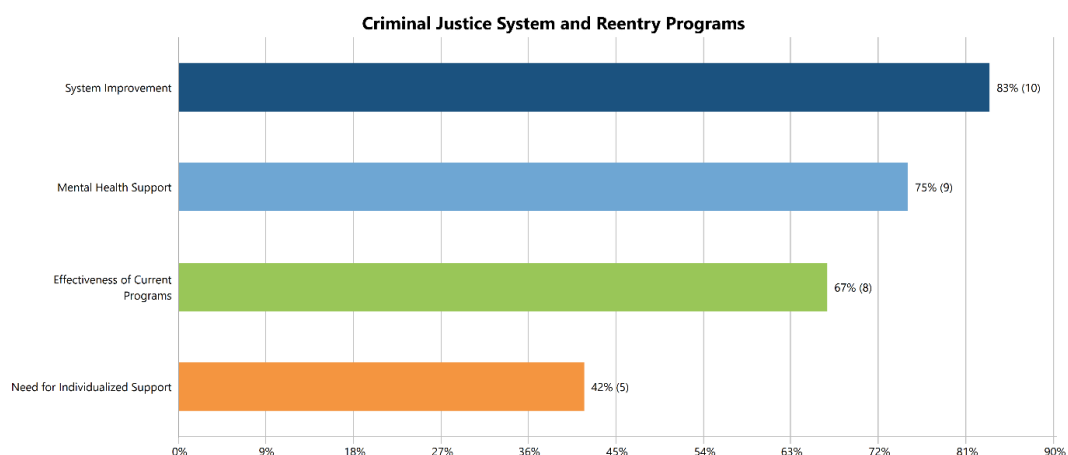
Research Question 3

Criminal Justice System and Reentry Programs

To understand the impact of overlooked personal and social factors in reentry programs, the study focused on effectiveness of current programs, system improvement, mental health support and the need for individualized support. Figure 4 shows that the most crucial need is system improvement followed by mental health support with the need for individualized support being the least mentioned factor.

Figure 5

Frequency Mentioned Elements for Improvement of Reentry and Integration Programs



System Improvement

It was established that one of the major contributors of recidivism was the fact that existing reentry programs are not very effective. This therefore has led to the need for improvement of reentry program systems and general criminal justice systems. Participant 1 stated, “Our systems should be more accommodating and accept the fact that someone being released from prison means that they have reformed.” Participant 4

further highlighted, “We should probably come up with policies that are prevent discrimination of people who have been previously incarcerated from employment, since most of them are not able to get employment due to the fact that.” All participants agreed on the need for system improvements in the Texas criminal justice system. This was reinforced by Participant 7 who stated, “Policy changes should shift away from the attitude that someone some that punishment should continue after sentences have been served.”

Need for Individualized Support

Individualized support is one of the issues that was highlighted to be an issue that most of the reentry programs in Texas do not promote. However, the participants highlighted the need for individualized support in reentry programs. Participant 8 stated, “The criminal justice system should be more individualized. The criminal justice system should focus on a prisoner and not them as a whole, because prisoners have different needs.” Further, Participant 5 highlighted,

I would advise that new systems should be put in place. A good example is systems such as, allowing them to learn software skills which can help them come work remotely and be able to earn from the ever-changing technology.

To elaborate the importance of individualized support, Participant 4 stated,

Someone might be needing proper training or other proper education to help them get jobs after release. So, the criminal justice system shouldn’t just be general or vague when it comes to reentry and integration, but rather it should be more

personalized to ensure that the individual needs of a of a of a prisoner are addressed before they are released back into the society.

In addition, Participant 2 stated,

We need, systems that are more offender-centered, or rather, individual centered.

We all have, varying issues. varying challenges that, contribute to recidivism after being released. So, reentry and integration in our criminal justice system should be individualized to ensure that whatever needs I have been dealt with before I'm released back to the society without my individual needs being dealt with.

All these responses point to the need for individual support in reentry programs in Texas.

Mental Health

To avoid the issue of recidivism due to strain in mental health, the participants suggested different techniques which are normally overlooked in existing reentry and integration programs. Participant 12 highlighted that they “participated in family counseling sessions, which helped us understand each other better and rebuild trust.” This is an issue that a lot of people do not consider as they usually assume that recidivism is usually triggered by the offender themselves and not people around them. Participant 3 also suggested ensuring that ex-offenders are facilitated to get employment immediately after release to protect them from mental health issues associated with unemployment. Participant 3 stated, “Giving this person enough time to be busy so that he’s occupied with being busy instead of occupied being stressed on what people think about him.” Being employed distracts them from focusing on the negative things that people say.

The role of family was also underscored in the study. Participant 6 highlighted that their family suggested for them to see a therapist to help with their mental health: “They even suggested to have me see a therapist so that I can avoid the issue of drug abuse after being released from prison.” This shows how family is important toward the mental health of an ex-offender upon release from prison.

Summary

This chapter focused on the introduction, setting, demographics, data collection, data analysis, evidence of trustworthiness and the results. The results brought out the challenges faced by incarcerated individuals after release which ranged from family issues, employment challenges, drug abuse and flaws in the reentry and integration programs. Chapter 5 will focus on interpretation of findings, implications of practice and policy, limitations of the study and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how reentry and integration in the Texas criminal justice system are essential to curbing the problem of recidivism. In this chapter, I focus on discussion, conclusions, and recommendations that have been derived from the research on how reentry programs are effective in Texas. The focus is on the understanding of how these programs affect the rates of recidivism through the addressing different needs of ex-offenders postrelease. The chapter is organized into sections that include interpretation of the findings, implications for policy, limitations of the study, recommendations for future research, and conclusions. Through an extensive discussion, this research aims to explicate the wider significance of the research findings and propose possible strategies that can help in improving the effectiveness of reentry programs.

Interpretation of the Findings

Family Support

Family support during the process of reentry and integration is essential. Families are the primary support system ex-offenders can depend on for support immediately after release from prison. Family members are essential for offering emotional support and practical assistance including financial and employment facilitation.

Families are important when it comes to offering logistical and emotional support to ex-offenders immediately after their release from prison. Proper emotional support is essential for ex-offenders during reentry as it helps them deal with the stress and stigma of reentry. According to Keene et al. (2018) ex-offenders struggle a lot with

stigmatization upon release from prison. This is mainly because some people in society still see them as criminals and therefore isolate them from society while not wanting to associate with them. Further, upon release from prison, ex-offenders usually require logistical support that includes housing and financial support for their practical needs such as transportation and other daily activities. If families are actively involved in reentry programs, it is expected that better outcomes of integration are realized, which can help in reducing recidivism. According to Sharma (2024) family therapy is an essential strategy upon the release of an offender as it helps family members come to terms with their new reality of being related to an ex-offender. Further, in case offenders and their family had any unresolved issues of the past, family therapy can help resolve these giving the released ex-offender a platform for family support. This support system is essential for an ex-offender as it helps them build a stable life postrelease, resulting in reduced risk of recidivism. Reduced risk of recidivism results from a sense of belonging and the need for accountability when someone has strong family ties.

Effectiveness of Reentry Programs

From the study, it was established that different families have varying perceptions on how reentry programs are effective in Texas. On the other hand, program officers acknowledged that some reentry programs were effective while others needed improvements. Reentry programs that focus on comprehensive services that include mental health support, job training and skills development, and substance abuse rehabilitation were highly rated. According to Bryant (2022), robust reentry programs develop a structured environment that helps ex-offenders in addressing multiple

challenges that they might face upon release which include isolation from society, threat of substance abuse and addiction in addition to discrepancies in their job skills with those required in current job markets.

On the contrary, it was established that some stakeholders in the criminal justice system feel that some reentry programs lack comprehensive support systems for ex-offenders, resulting in inadequacy in addressing their personal and practical needs/issues. In most cases, the programs address general issues and not the interconnectedness of these issues. For example, the study established that social class is interconnected with family support. Therefore, reentry programs that do not address interconnected issues might not be as effective. This suggests that reentry programs need to adopt a multifaceted approach for them to be effective. According to Skinner-Osei and Osei (2020), collaborative programs should address multiple criminogenic variables to be effective. They should be able to extend their services to include cultural competency and psychological and emotional factors and not focus only on the practical needs of offenders. Further Skinner-Osei and Stepau-Watson (2018) established that 50% of ex-offenders recidivate within 1 year even after being accorded housing, employment assistance, and food. This confirms that reentry programs should not only address the practical needs of offenders but also address their personal needs and the dynamics of their immediate environment to facilitate successful reentry.

Even though supportive reentry programs exist in Texas, significant gaps remain. Most of the respondents in this study reported that services provided in reentry programs have not been tailored sufficiently to address the unique needs of ex-offenders

postrelease. According to Donnelly (2021), one-size-fits-all approaches in reentry programs overlook individual differences of ex-offenders such as varying levels of substance abuse issues, family relations, social class, and mental health conditions. As a result, the effectiveness of these programs varies among different offenders. This explains why the research has established varying responses on the effectiveness of reentry programs in Texas. These gaps highlight the need for the development of personalized ex-offender support plans that address specific circumstances unique to individual ex-offenders, ensuring that crucial aspects of integration into society are not neglected.

Further individualization/personalization of reentry programs emerged as the foundation of any effective reentry program. Case managers, much like a personalized assignment to ex-offenders, should be warranted in order to appropriately tailor the support. Case managers make an enormous difference by paving the way through various services, offering continuous support, and overcoming specific barriers to reentry. In this manner, an ex-offender would definitely receive support in the areas they need the most and be regulated for further supportive and effective reintegration.

Insights on Experiences of Ex-Offenders and Criminal Justice Professionals

The perspectives of family members, ex-offenders, and criminal justice professionals provide invaluable insights on how effective reentry programs are. These experiences underscore the essence of addressing key areas in reentry programs that pose a challenge to reentry and integration.

Access to employment and education is an important aspect of integration of ex-offenders into society. Simoneau (2020) highlighted that reentry programs should be in a position to provide GED preparation, vocational training, and job placement for ex-offenders in order to achieve higher success rates. From the study, the role of family and society through social acceptance cannot be underestimated. Society and the community at large should embrace the fact that ex-offenders have been fully reformed and should be accepted back into society. As a result, job placement and training for them will be realized as most organizations do not employ ex-offenders for fear of backlash from society aside from existing policy barriers. As Kılıç and Tuysuz (2024) highlighted, ex-offenders who are able to secure jobs are less likely to reoffend because employment offers them a platform for financial stability, structured routine, and a sense of purpose. In addition, when reentry programs offer educational opportunities, ex-offenders are able to obtain skills that increase their chances of being employed in current job markets. From the study, it was established that participants in education and skills development programs had lower stress levels and higher self-esteem, which are major contributors to successful reentry and integration.

Stable housing is a critical factor in the determination of reentry success. Programs with transitional housing that helped ex-offenders find permanent housing significantly reduced recidivism rates. Stable housing can provide a secure environment wherein ex-offenders can focus on rebuilding their lives without the immediate stress of homelessness or unstable living conditions. Results showed that those receiving housing support were more likely to have continuous employment and positive activities in the

community, further reducing their chances of reoffending. According to Bowman and Ely (2020), ex-offenders face a huge problem when it comes to the issue of housing especially due to the existing policies that bar them from renting or owning homes. Many property owners refuse to rent to ex-offenders, which leaves them struggling to rent/own a home. Struggling with housing affects the mental health of ex-offenders which could lead to recidivism. Stable housing is essential toward the emotional well-being of offenders, which is a factor in promoting successful integration to the society.

The high level of mental illnesses and substance abuse among ex-offenders is a major obstacle to reentry success. Particularly effective were programs that had combined mental health and substance abuse treatment. These helped the ex-offender to control their conditions and lowered relapse and re-offending. The study highlighted the integrated treatment plans dealing with co-occurring disorders related to both mental health and substance abuse, therefore proving the link between these complex problems. When individuals have mental health challenges, the chances of engaging in drug abuse are significantly higher. Therefore, ex-offenders should always have continuous support to help them maintain a positive mental health outlook. This is similar to Nixon (2020) who states that most effective programs provided continued support and aftercare, which made it possible for the ex-offender to get the necessary help on a continuing basis when going through life in this misunderstood reentry phase.

Program Outcomes and Recidivism Rates

The ultimate measure of effectiveness of reentry programs is the reduction in recidivism rates. The research provided important insights into what works and what does not.

Positive Outcomes

The study found out that programs that combine a maze of services for people with various needs: such as employment training, housing, mental health, and substance use treatment have significantly lower recidivism rates. The broad programs make a flexible setting for ex-offenders' multiple needs and become a key to successful reentry into further life in society. The research revealed that the participants in such programs have higher levels of satisfaction, felt a sense of belonging, and were more positive about their future.

Challenges and Limitations

Despite these positive outcomes, a number of challenges persisted. First was the fact that funding constraints often hampered the extent and quality of services provided. Most programs were considered weak due to the perceived nature of their ineffectiveness and a lack of community involvement/support. Also, there was a lack of long-term support. Many ex-offenders require more than intervention at reentry and need continued support for sustained periods in order to remain stable and crime-free. This study underlined the key issue of system improvement and resources for programs to provide all-dimensional and continuous support.

Community Involvement

The study suggested that programs that take in community involvement and social acceptance had the greatest value. Community support offers more resources and opportunities to aid ex-offenders in their chances for successful reintegration. Hamilton and Hale (2024) suggested that they include partnerships that create a network of support that extended beyond the reentry program, intertwining ex-offenders with the community by reducing the stigma associated with their past. The results also brought out the role of community engagement in making sure ex-offenders are placed in a supportive environment that would foster positive outcomes. These include partnerships that create a network of support that extended beyond the reentry program, intertwining ex-offenders with the community by reducing the stigma associated with their past.

Implications for Practice and Policy

Practice

Holistic and Integrated Services

Reentry programs should be holistic, ensuring that employment, mental health, and housing services are integrated. In this respect, services need to be coordinated for comprehensiveness. Being holistic recognizes the problems of ex-offenders as being interrelated and constructs a better framework from which to address them. Integrative services were seen to have higher levels of successes and good outcomes for participants of such a program.

Family Involvement

Involvement of the family in the reentrance process could be encouraged and programmed to support the available support system for ex-offenders. Family therapy and support groups should be included in programs focusing on the strengthening of these relations. This provides a stable, supporting environment that can greatly increase the potential for successful reintegration, as is shown in this research, which definitely establishes that families are able to exert a major influence on keeping relatives out of prison and living stable lives in the long term.

Personalized Case Management

Personalized case management is one of the cornerstones of reentry programs. Case managers can offer fully individualized supports that definitely enhance the results of an ex-offender. Personalized case management ensures that ex-offenders receive resources and guidance that satisfy their unique individual barriers to reentry. The study shows that individuals receiving personalized case management reported higher levels of satisfaction and success during the reintegration process.

Policy***Funding and Resources***

Comprehensive reentry programs need adequate funding. Funding should be accorded by the policymakers to only those programs with proven impacts on recidivism rates. Stable funding ensures that programs can provide high-quality services in a continuous manner to the very diverse needs of ex-offenders. The reason for doing this

study is that it highlights the importance of getting enough resources to fund effective reentry programs.

Training and Development

Continuous training of the program staff is very important. More competent staff are in a better position to learn and manage ex-offenders' diverse service needs and provide high-quality support. Training programs should focus on the latest best practices in reentry support, mental health care, substance abuse treatment, and case management. Actually, this study found out that well-trained staff had positive impacts in both program effectiveness and individual outcomes for participants.

Collaboration and Community Partnerships

Strong partnerships with local businesses, schools, and community organizations will enlarge resource opportunities for ex-offenders. Policymakers must encourage and facilitate these partnerships. Community partnerships build a network of support extending beyond the reach of a particular reentry program, availing more resources and opportunities to ex-offenders. According to the study's findings, community engagement is important in promoting positive outcomes for the ex-offenders.

Limitations of the Study

Sample Size and Diversity

The study had a relatively small sample size and may not necessarily portray the most diverse population of ex-offenders in Texas. Subsequent studies should be conducted with a larger and more diverse sample to allow generalization. This would

ensure a broader understanding concerning the effectiveness of the reentry program effects in different demographics and regions.

Geographical Limitations

The study focused on a state, Texas, which might have some characteristics unique to it. Thus, it is not directly generalizable to other states with different reentry programs and resources. Future research should aim at comparative studies across various states or regions for best practices and successful strategies.

Data Collection Methods

This approach is most likely to be biased, therefore, based on self-reported data. Either underreporting or overreporting of the participants regarding their study experiences and outcomes might have taken place. In future research, mixed methods should be used, whereby self-reports are complemented with objective measures, including employment records, recidivism rates, and mental health assessments to provide a claim of effectiveness for a reentry program.

Recommendations for Future Research

Longitudinal Studies

Future research needs to take on the longitudinal designs regarding long-term outcomes of ex-offenders who attend reentry programs. Longitudinal studies are required to assess if the benefits initiated right after being subjected to the program are preserved over time and likewise establish which predictor variables inquired about in this literature review do better illuminate either disappointment or prosperity in the long run.

Understanding the long-term impact of the reentry programs is very important in developing strategies that ensure lasting reintegration and reduction in recidivism.

Comparative Studies

Comparative studies that look at reentry programs in different states or regions can identify practices and strategies that are most successful. They would show which program models have been very effective and underline contextual factors that may influence outcome effectiveness. Through comparative research, best approaches on entry support can also be passed to policymakers and practitioners.

Qualitative Research

Much richer insight into the personal experiences of ex-offenders and their families can be gained through in-depth qualitative research in terms of failures and successes regarding reentry. This may bring out subtle nuances pertaining to failures and successes in reentry. Qualitative research could therefore complement quantitative findings and provide a more holistic view of the process of reentry.

Impact of Policy Changes

Future research should explore how policies have changed and the association with variation in reentry outcomes. Other information that will be of importance for future policy formulation processes pertains to what legislative and policy changes influence the effectiveness of reentry programs. This study also enables the statement of those policies that support successful reintegration and those that are to be revised.

Evaluation of Specific Interventions

Research needs to be conducted on the effectiveness of interventions within reentry programs, such as cognitive-behavioral treatment, substance abuse treatment, and vocational training. Understanding the elements that most effectively work will help refine the design of programs for overall better outcomes. Specific intervention evaluations can also inform resource allocation and program prioritization.

Conclusion

Research into the effectiveness of reentry programs in Texas places a premium on comprehensive and individualistic support to ex-offenders. The general findings underscore the multidimensional nature of the challenges that go with reentry and how holistic approaches focusing on employment, education, housing stability, mental health, and substance abuse are better ways forward. Two pivotal components; family members' involvement and personalized case management are shown to have proved effective in attenuating the success of reentry programs.

Future studies are required using a longitudinal design, also requiring comparative and qualitative studies with impact assessment of specified interventions and policy changes. In continuing to look at and refine reentry programs, we can develop more strategic ways in which to reduce recidivism in general and support successful reentry specifically for ex-offenders, and thereby contribute to a safer and more inclusive community.

In conclusion, the success of offender reentry programs is based on handling their diverse and complex needs. Making our programs more effective at achieving long-term

success for ex-offenders and their families involves concentrating on holistic support tailored to the individual and engaging in strong local community partnerships. We can further refine these programs through continued research and collaboration in pursuit of a fair, supportive society for all.

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Appendix: Interview Guide

1. How do you relate to the re-entry and integration process? (In what capacity have you interacted with the process?)
2. How do family members support incarcerated members during re-entry and integration after release from prison?
 - Do they provide financial assistance?
 - Do they help them secure jobs?
 - How about emotional support?
3. Does substance abuse play a role in increased recidivism?
4. When it comes to social policies, do they prevent offenders from accessing social services and employment post-release?
5. In what ways does re-entry and integration address the issue of stigmatization after release.
 - Do family members contribute to stigmatization? If yes, how?
6. Do family ties play a role in re-entry and recidivism?
 - How does strong family ties play a role in successful re-entry?
 - How does weak family ties play a role in successful re-entry?
7. Does social class play a role in the possibility of an individual sinking back to recidivism?
8. When it comes to levels of education among offenders, does it contribute to the success of re-entry and integration?

9. What can be done to help in improving the effectiveness of re-entry and integration?
 - What should the society do better?
 - What is role of family?
 - What should the criminal justice system do?