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Barriers and Success Factors of Reentry Programs for Women After Incarceration

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Walden University

College of Health Sciences and Public Policy

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Jenice K. Jones

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
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Walden University
2025

Abstract

Barriers and Success Factors of Reentry Programs for Women After Incarceration

by

Jenice K. Jones

MHR, Oklahoma University, 2015

BS, Oklahoma University, 2013

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Public Policy and Administration

Walden University

February 2025

Abstract

The purpose of this general qualitative study was to explore the experiences of women ex-offenders participating in reentry programs that led to successful transitioning into society. The overall research problem being addressed are the barriers and success factors in identifying mental health care, housing, parental concerns, and any other stress-related factors associated with the reentry process for women during this exploration. The theoretical framework of labeling was interwoven throughout this study, highlighting its importance in understanding the barriers and successes women encounter. Previous research mainly focused on exploring barriers and successes for men. There is limited research regarding formerly incarcerated women and reentry program provisions. Three themes were identified: (a) lack of accessibility, (b) invisible to society, and (c) situational awareness that contributed to significant descriptors of the reentry process. The key results summarize the main conclusions and provide recommendations for research and/or practice. The social change implications offer transformative opportunities for women to heal within supportive, trauma-informed spaces. These environments foster personal growth, break generational cycles, and empower individuals to rebuild their lives. Additionally, it is recommended that reentry programs incorporate comprehensive assessments to address individual needs, recognizing that tailored support is pivotal in reducing recidivism. Such efforts can potentially help women overcome the stigmas and labels often imposed by community processes. Future research should explore the development of customized assessments, emphasizing stakeholder accountability to ensure a holistic and effective reintegration process.

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Dedication

“Commit your work to the Lord and your plans will be established.” Without the help and strength of my Lord and Savior, I could not have finished this journey. This dissertation is dedicated to my support team, my family including my parents, Georgia & Harry Jones, who inspired me to exceed what I was capable, constantly praying and encouraging me. To my amazing daughters Kalaya (Christopher) and Raina (Kandro) who supported and kept pushing me. To my incredible sister, Dr. Janetha Edwards (Robert), who helped push me to the finish line. Thank you for not allowing me to quit or settle. I thank God for every prayer and encouragement to help me walk out my purpose from each of you. Finally, to my inner circle, picking up slack and going above and beyond.

This is our win!

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

The definition of reentry programs is the effective planning before and after incarceration geared to reduce recidivism (Eddy et al., 2022). Women experiencing reentry after incarceration face different challenges than male ex-offenders transitioning back into their communities (Carter, 2018). The Federal Justice Statistics stated that 155,000 men and women were involved in reentry to their communities (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2019). Further, more than 200,000 women were incarcerated in the Department of Corrections in the United States (Kajstura, 2018). Further exploration is needed of women in the process of reentry and their interpretation of what treatment and reentry programs would be most beneficial (Martilik, 2018). Currently researchers focus on men during the reentry process (Brown et al., 2018). Consequently, this study explored the barriers and success factors that women ex-offenders faced that were different from those of male ex-offenders. This study was conducted to validate empirical data for better outcomes of community-connected resources addressing needs among women ex-offenders (Visher, 2017). Specifically, the state of Oklahoma represented the third highest population of women incarcerated in the United States, with 281 women out of 100,000 in the state of Oklahoma being incarcerated versus 133 women out of 100,000 nationally (Sentencing Project, 2019). These numbers supported the need for this study on the barriers and success factors of reentry programs for women in Oklahoma.

This research contributes to social change by exploring reentry for women ex-offenders who participated in programs and used collaborative community support while decreasing recidivism. Exploring cultivated networks can provide stable employment and

growth opportunities, including other support methods like mentoring (Kelley, 2018).

The potential social implications of this study include helping public administration officials address the disparity of gender-specific needs after incarceration.

Chapter 1 includes the general qualitative design and background on the study. I present the problem statement and provide evidence on the perceptions and experiences of reentry programs for women after incarceration. The purpose of the study was to provide the most effective reentry program barriers and successes unique to the phenomenon of women ex-offenders. The research question presents the key themes explored. The theoretical framework explains the origination, detailed significant points, and discussed how these related to the topic of study. The nature of the study describes the design, the phenomenon that was investigated, and the methodology. Additionally, key terms are defined, and assumptions are outlined, and I present the scope of the study, delimitations, and limitations. Finally, the significance of this study is discussed.

Background

The history of reentry for women who participated in programs was pertinent for this study to understand the perceptions of barriers and success of reentry programs for women. Services for mental health and substance abuse treatment are historically needed more for women in reentry than men (Geenfield, 2007). In addition to treatment, women suffer from sexual and physical abuse, causing traumatic behavior deserving of treatment. However, limited programs target family and community organizations developed for collaborative streamlining (Barringer, 2017). In addition, barriers to men in reentry do not compare to the needs of women in reentry (Kelley, 2018). Thus, researchers have

identified demands of gender-specific needs for women (Bartlett, 2018; Miller, 2016). The continued lack of reentry programming presents a gap for women facing challenges due to the lack of prior preparation before release (Miller, 2021). Economic stability and healthy relationships are needed to fill the gap in other areas that need consideration from women (Sanders, 2016).

A review of the literature also revealed a gap in exploring successful programs promoting reduced recidivism. There is also a gap in the literature related to women ex-offenders' progress in reentry programs (Fedock, 2017). The review of the literature regarding the lack of treatment and reentry programs collaborating with social support for women ex-offenders was the primary reason this study was needed. Funding sources specifically for these needs are rare. Reentry planning was nearly nonexistent before release, and the responsibility for success was often left to the families and communities of women (Willging, 2016). There is a need to study women released from incarceration and on their perceptions and current situations regarding reentry and treatment curriculum in programming (Weseley, 2018). This study revealed themes based on the perceptions of treatment and reentry programming of women ex-offenders.

Problem Statement

The problem in this study was the lack of research regarding women ex-offenders participating in reentry programs and the disparity of services available. Research was needed to explore women ex-offenders and the barriers faced while attempting to successfully transition back into their communities (Miller, 2021; Willging, 2016). The number of women released from prisons in the United States is over 1.5 million (Sawyer,

2019). While a woman's release from incarceration is an advancement for the future of family reunification, the problem is the lack of services and reentry programs to support the transition (Sawyer, 2019). Women are more successful when their specific needs are addressed to bridge the gap between incarceration and a community prepared for their success (Kelley, 2018).

Exploring barriers and challenges for women after incarceration is critical for family restoration and the prevention of recidivism. Recidivism is an individual's relapse back into criminal behavior due to missing needs and extensive barriers. Specific needs of mental health care, employment, education, and parental care are not addressed in the transition process for women (Koski, 2013). In this study, I explored the barriers and success factors for women transitioning back into society after incarceration in Oklahoma after release. I also explored the current disparity in the treatment of women in reentry programs after incarceration and the effects of trauma, abuse, stable career opportunities, and childcare of women in transition. The challenges women face in reentry programs require specific objectives to be addressed (Kelley, 2018). For instance, women have been denied opportunities for housing, hindering them from having the ability to survive successfully.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this general qualitative study was to explore the experiences of women ex-offenders participating in reentry programs that led to a successful transition into society. Although the Department of Corrections provided some level of reentry before release, the phenomenon of interest was to reduce recidivism by linking women

after incarceration with appropriate community support and adequate resources for success. Through the literature review and my findings, this research found segments of successful reentry programs and new developments for women.

Research Question

The following research questions was addressed in this general qualitative study: What barriers and success factors in identifying mental health care, housing, parental concerns, and any other stress-related factors associated with the reentry process?

Theoretical Foundation

This general qualitative study focused on understanding the barriers and success experiences of women ex-offenders who had participated in reentry programs. Thus, the theoretical framework included labeling theory. Labeling theory was established by Durkheim (1897). Labeling theory, defined as the deviance of criminology by Frank Tannenbaum in the 1960s, has been valid in identifying solutions to problems (Barmaki, 2017). Labeling theory was applied to this study to conclude definitive reasons to disqualify ex-offenders from viable resources. This term was identified in the study of Dr. Burt, who stated, “labeling hinders them from gaining employment or securing housing” (Burt, 2018, p. 15). Dr. Burt referred to the study on the participation of African American male ex-offenders in the reentry program and the potential for recidivism due to lack of gainful employment due to negative labeling in the community (Burt, 2018). Labeling theory helps explain restrictions that keep formerly incarcerated women from possessing the basic needs essential to successful living. Further discussion is presented in Chapter 2.

Nature of the Study

The qualitative methodology guided my research because the purpose was to explore the perceptions of women ex-offenders who participated in reentry programs. Qualitative research draws from participants' experiences to verify the evidence of the research problem (Creswell, 2018). The approach of this study clarified why recidivism may happen instead of women ex-offenders becoming successful due to labeling and or wrong relationships. Potential social implications for this study include effective collaboration of community resources of organizations, new policies, and justice reform. Specifically, the research design in this study will use a general qualitative research approach. A general qualitative design investigates personal history. This design was most appropriate for this study because it focuses on the experiences and opinions of others.

I used semi structured interviews to collect data for this study and purposeful sampling to recruit participants (Patton, 2015). I used Williams-Queen validated needs assessment interview questions to gain knowledge of participant experiences (Williams-Queen, 2014). I used video conferencing, such as Zoom, to conduct interviews. Women ex-offenders who met the criteria of participating in a reentry program either prior to release or after obtained successes or barriers during the process and were willing to share their experiences of their reentry openly when selected. I gathered data to identify common themes and patterns to disclose the significance of perceptions. These themes resulted from listening to audio transcription using voice memo, OtterAi transcription, and Delve tool, an audio-to-text qualitative coding tool, for codifying purposes. The goal

was to outline the most effective reentry development. This research offered insights into the differences between the needs of reentry programs developed and the needs of women met.

Definitions

Community: The environment that embraces a normal place of authentic relationships (Koski, 2013).

Employment: A barrier and resource that provides substantial stability when the position provides equitability (Garcia, 2012).

Ex-offender: A person who has faced controversial challenges due to past lifestyles with limited human and social resources (Morani, 2011).

Program development: The combination of approaches and groups to help build a systemic model of intervention to promote success (Hunter, 2016).

Self-sufficiency: A person who no longer relies on public assistance from the government (Leibson, 2005).

Stress: Stress is an overload of life happenings influencing the physical system and changing normal behavior and feelings in the body (Slavich, 2016).

Treatment: Services to address the mental health and substance abuse needs of people (Greenfield, 2007).

Assumptions

For this study, I made several assumptions while collecting data. First, it was assumed that working with justice-involved women in the capacity of diversion would provide credibility and increase the likelihood of women ex-offenders participating in the

study. Second, participants were assumed to be honest in their responses to the interview questions. The third assumption was that the women would provide truthful and knowledgeable responses to the interview questions, providing insight into the phenomenon. The fourth assumption was that the participants had a transparent desire to share all their experiences when they were involved in the reentry programs. Lastly, the assumption that community resources would be readily available and valuable was a practical part of the research and used for future policy reformation.

Scope and Delimitations

This qualitative study's scope involved semi structured interviews with 10 women ex-offenders of their experiences and perceptions in the reentry program as participants. In this research, I used a purposeful sampling of women ex-offenders. The scope of this study focused on women ex-offenders and how well they survived in the community population that may have failed them, been a part of families that did not culturally develop them or had relationships with people they served time for. However, this study aimed to understand participants' experiences in reentry programs and the treatment, if any, they received geared for their success despite their former backgrounds.

The first delimitation of this study was for women ex-offenders involved with reentry programs after release from the Department of Corrections in the state of Oklahoma. All women ex-offenders who had been actively involved in the reentry program and who were currently involved disclosed if they were able to overcome specific barriers after release from incarceration by being involved in the reentry program. Another delimitation was the stigmatization associated with spending time in

the Department of Corrections and the hardship afterward. I was careful to not influence outcomes and address biases immediately during the process.

The labeling theory was the best consideration for this study's theoretical framework in exploring additional barriers and challenges women faced after incarceration. I used labeling theory to assist in measuring the success of participants who met the criteria in a reentry program. Successful aspirations of becoming relational by women ex-offenders with programs that specifically address under-researched topics of trauma, mental health issues, parental concerns, and the stress associated with the reentry process changed the development and resolutions to contributing to social change.

Limitations

Although the general findings of this population may have been limited, this qualitative study found participants who were readily willing. The method of inquiry used for this study was in-depth interviews. The qualitative data analysis was influenced by the beliefs and perceptions of the participants (Patton, 2015). In this study, the validity of the participants' perceptions can be inaccurate (Creswell, 2018). The first limitation of this qualitative study was to remove broad generalizations. Therefore, the results provided adequate information by the sample size included in this study. The second limitation of this study could have been the modification of the interview instrument.

Significance

This study added practical contribution to the existing body of research focusing specifically on the barriers and success factors of women ex-offenders within 1 year of release from incarceration. The exploration of experiences of women ex-offenders to

engage with their communities built on the evidence of success in their programs and redevelopment of barriers that contributed to the needs of women. This project was unique to the theoretical contribution Hunter (2016) recommended and may have provided themes to evolve and address under-researched areas. A single theoretical framework of the labeling theory identified the evolution of exploring barriers and success factors of reentry programs and the treatment women after incarceration received.

Summary

This study explored the women ex-offenders and their perceptions of the kinds of treatment and reentry programs received. Because most previous researchers had promoted treatment and reentry programs focused on men, there was a knowledge gap as to the unique needs of women ex-offenders and how they believe the components of their transitional process could be more successful. The results of this study revealed common gender-related barriers. There appears to be a lack of evidence-based material focused on the unique barriers related to women. Chapter 1 included themes of the current research of women ex-offenders. The literature review in Chapter 2 explores what historical success factors of reentry programs for women ex-offenders assisted in their success. Chapter 2 will also elaborate on barriers and success factors of reentry programs for women after incarceration in a theoretical framework.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this general qualitative study was to explore the experiences of women ex-offenders participating in reentry programs that would lead to a successful transition into society and the barriers faced while attempting to successfully transition back into their communities (Willging, 2016). For instance, the increase of incarceration is related to behaviors influenced by substance abuse, which causes significant disadvantages in the immediate needs for successful reentry for women (Edwards et al., 2022). The problem in this study was the lack of research regarding women ex-offenders participating in reentry programs and the disparity of services available.

Reentry programs are geared to help individuals transition successfully back into society. The definition of reentry programs is a streamlined connection between resources in the community and individuals released from incarceration (Hunter, 2017). According to the National Institute of Justice (2019), reentry programs produce plans for breaking barriers and challenges after incarceration for positive social impacts of individuals. But the effectiveness of what works in the transitional process are still lacking in the literature (Duwe, 2017). To address challenges faced at different levels, categorizing similarities and differences in the challenges is key. However, these categories need to be lined up with resources to help the stability of reentry. Having certain resources is needed for women to immediately be released from prison (Salem et al., 2021).

The Federal Justice Statistics stated that 155,000 men and women were involved in the reentry process to their communities (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2019). More than 200,000 women were incarcerated in the Department of Corrections in the United States

(Kajstura, 2018). The state of Oklahoma represents the highest population of women incarcerated in the United States, with 281 women out of 100,000 in the state of Oklahoma being incarcerated versus 133 women out of 100,000 nationally (Kajstura, 2018; Sentencing Project, 2019). These numbers support the need for this study to explore the barriers and success factors of reentry programs for women in Oklahoma. Further research is needed on programs in other states (Mciver, 2020). However, the state of Oklahoma exceeding the national rate of incarceration for women presents a problem in the initial conviction process, and the hope for this study is to address predictors of recidivism for women. Limited studies show that women ex-offenders do not have access to or are provided with options for diversions or programs that contribute to the success of their transitions after incarceration (Kajstura, 2018). Research highlights a lack of care and resources targeted toward women ex-offenders in the process of reentry (Edwards, 2022; Heidemann, 2016). With more evidence, non-profit organizations and other agencies may receive funding designated to provide solutions to barriers and challenges faced by individuals transitioning to communities with significant resources (D'Amico, 2017).

Chapter 2 will consist of analyses of research on the historical overview of prisons, parole, and the impact on women. The literature review will include how America and the state of Oklahoma, in comparison, have impacted women being released from prison. The next section will outline the ideal female ex-offender geographically regarding the availability of resources and policy implementation. The last section will focus on the influence Oklahoma has in social services, family, collaboration of

resources, and corporate America. The conclusion of the literature review will compare men's and women's ex-offender's experiences facing barriers and successes in employment, education, mental health care, childcare, and restorative justice.

Literature Search Strategy

This literature review comprised numerous sources, including articles, books, governmental and historical websites, and dissertations. The literature for this research consisted of more than 200 articles on the topic of study. Articles were obtained through Walden University library databases, including Sage Publication, EBSCO, Google Scholar, ProQuest, LexisNexis, and Westlaw. Key search terms included *women, ex-offenders, reentry, community, incarceration, employment, program development, transition programs, recidivism, barriers, challenges, successes, labeling theory, credibility, dependability, reliability, validity, and research methodology*. Literature was also accessed through the Walden Library, linked to Thoreau's multi-database search. This search provided peer-reviewed scholarly journals specific to the articles on the topic, which were drawn from databases including Sage publications, EBSCO, Google Scholar, ProQuest, LexisNexis, and Westlaw. Google Scholar was used to reference other articles. Dissertations and theses were searched to identify similarities and differences in the topics of women ex-offenders who have become successful in transitional programs and how those dynamics promoted community collaboration.

Theoretical Foundation

In examining policy-making systems, current reentry systems need improvements to address barriers and challenges brought about positive change. Tannenbaum's labeling

theory describes labeling as a stigmatization that negatively influences the judgments of those in the community to serve ex-offenders (Tannenbaum, 1938). This theoretical framework lays the foundation for the general qualitative approach. The research question is closely identified with the labeling theory that is connected to reentry programming and development.

Labeling Theory

Labeling theory is the identification of an act of deviant behavior publicly addressed as unacceptable behavior and a violation of moral standards in its original definition (Tannenbaum, 1938). Evidence shows that when a crime is labeled, it is the cumulative work created by the community and the changes needed would have to be made by the community (Tannenbaum, 1938). Labeling theory appears to exclude individuals from legitimate social opportunities that can build the human being's self-efficacy portfolio (Bernburg, 2019). This theory explains key themes that may disqualify ex-offenders from viable resources in the current study.

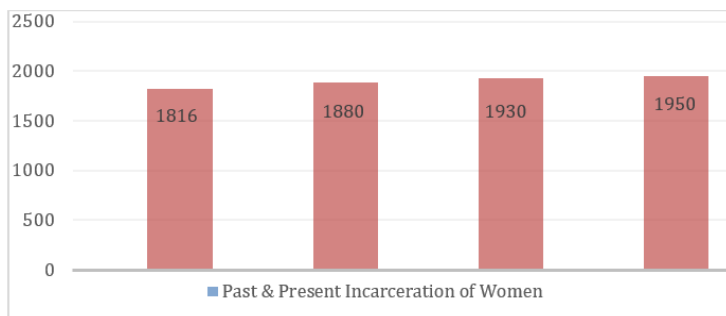
Labeling refers to societal stigma by individuals' negative perceptions of self (Karimu, 2015). According to labeling theory, the label leads to defiant behavior that may interrupt seeking viable solutions to resources. The progression to receive adequate assistance and resources associated with defiant labels can be debilitating. For example, mental illness is still a major stigma in many communities (Markowitz, 2017). Women are also categorized as a societal group when they have been involved with the criminal justice system, and they become adjusted to negative terminology (Alarid, 2010). The status developed from negative social adaptations does not improve the probability of

women ex-offenders becoming successful in reentry. Female ex-offenders are faced with stereotypes that can cause them to become disqualified with certain benefits needed for success (Gay, 2020). Therefore, their character may be violated before the proof of receiving reasonable benefits deserved. Stigmatization of labeling can also become generational, and children become the target with criminal behavior being multiplied generationally through preconceived perceptions (Augustyn, 2019).

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts

History of Incarceration for Women

Women were the minority in prison, but after the Civil War their convictions grew (Barnes, 1921). The greatest causes of incarcerating women between 1903 and 1933 were unique. Reasons included, property crime, public order offenses, and the offense of committing abortions (Kurshan, 1992). Women were many times sentenced to the same places as men, and their needs were often unattended to because of the lack of preparation in the reformatories created for men doing hard labor. Treatment for women was demeaning and gruesome during this time in history because women were seen as not worth rehabilitation. However, the emergence of treatment, not punishment, was introduced to the population of women to help them better become whole, as indicated in the year of progression (see Figure 1).

Figure 1*Historical Progression of the Incarceration of Women*

In 1930, the establishment of the Parole Board was created to address the growth of the increased prison population (U.S. Department of Justice, 2003). Women were said to be more maintenance-driven and required more one-on-one attention (Pishko, 2015). In the hopes of relieving some of the burden brought on by incarcerating women, the system of parole became a solution. One solution was to use women as servitude in the homes of masters who would be responsible for the rehabilitative behavior of the woman (Pishko, 2015). However, during the 1950s only specific people were designated as qualified to serve those in a special model coined as “rehabilitative” (Phelps, 2013).

The influence of parole, during the process of probation and parole, has been identified in a longitudinal study that women have a better chance to conquer barriers and challenges with individual support and guidance (Stone et al., 2018). Women released from prison in the United States have significantly higher needs. Therefore, they demand all sectors to take a closer look at serving this population and the transition programs needed to promote continued success. For example, more violent acts of sexual and physical abuse are overlapping in institutions housing women in addition to their needs

not being addressed (Cowan, 2019). Women released from prison appear to have overwhelming needs increased by their imprisonment stay. Women who are released without reentry programs are released with mental health barriers to overcome. In contrast, when women receive words of positive affirmations from parole officers, the encouragement brings and carries recharging of the soul that helps to replenish any setbacks or challenges brought about in the transitional journey (Stone et al., 2018). Developing public policy that significantly addresses women's needs is critical (Convington, 2000).

Need for Better Reentry Policy in America

America has limited resources focused on women and their success throughout the entire reentry process (Witmer, 1927). By redefining laws and becoming proactive in establishing laws, America may build intentional systemic programming (Witmer, 1927), which can assist in establishing better reentry programming for women (Thompson, 2010). The path to bridging the gap of unsuccessful reentry starts with the willing collaboration of community, family, and non-profit organizations geared strategically to better impact the process of reentry (Williams, n.d.). Insight into the creation of a nexus in the criminal justice system may strengthen the broken and weak parts of what has hindered the reentry process since its incision (Williams, n.d.).

Reentry in America

The confinement of women started in 1838 in New York City according to (Kurshan, 1992). The type of social control was driven by white supremacy development of the prison system, dominating social values. During this time of reentry in history, the

concept of adding treatment to build a precise framework to balance the needs of women. Previous research had explained that there was minimum help and services for women accommodating their distinction from male needs. According to Miller (2021), specific programming for women must be specialized to address the complexity of female needs.

Nowotny (2017) presented the need for general health education among prisoners and the greater importance it is for women than for men. Also, understanding a participant, while an integral part of a reentry program, does not make them a successful candidate. The study conducted by Li (2018) was based on self-reported individuals and their health, the future research recommended study for this topic would expect self-reports from the women who will be strategically chosen for this interview.

Dum (2017) suggested through the California study on reentry, which termed stigmatized population, may cause devastating housing and living options than anticipated by the ex-offender. When living conditions are subjected to the perceptions of those who can provide housing to ex-offenders who may be desperate. According to Dum, actions like these are irresponsible of probation and parole to relegate actions like these as acceptable. I explored how the responsibility of accountability should be the outcome when considering how and where to safely house those in the reentry population.

Begun (2017) noted that while many ex-offenders attempt to make sobriety their focus, without proper support from professionals, most are not able to succeed in this task. The barriers attached to this researched population consisted of not being able to meet the financial obligation associated with mental health care and awareness. The

participants for this study identified resources not obtained because of risk or priority at the stage of reentry into the community.

Preferred Reentry Service in the World

According to researcher Kendall (2018), the United States prison population consists of more individuals who are riddled with mental health illness and substance abuse. This population needs rehabilitation and not incarceration. Prison is not the answer according to this extensive qualitative study with Kendall (2018), pointing out a need for extensive study is needed in the evaluations of reentry programs to understand certain programs. The disparities of effectiveness in services in mental health and substance abuse care before release were relevant to explore for this study and found problematic for participants.

Inspired by Doleac (2018), rehabilitation ordered through court proves to be a successful system of educational program effectiveness. Prior research showed a need for opportunities for further research from existing literature that could be designed to develop programs evaluating and measuring the impact of reentry education (Doleac, 2018). Reentry practices should hold a standard of different accountability through the reentry process so participants do not fall through the cracks, of which many did.

Oklahoma Reentry Policies and Practices

The medical department of the Oklahoma Department of Corrections has linked with the Social Security Administration to assist in the reentry process of formerly incarcerated individuals (La Vigne, 2008). Reentry Policy Council and a Transformational Justice Interagency Task Force joined with the State of Oklahoma to

establish a law in 2007 to bring parenting programs as part of the reentry program one year from release (Christian,2006). Thus, the family dynamic of the reentry process is vital to establish.

Reising (2017) linked with the challenge of research study identifying women as the largest and fastest-growing population who receive extensive barriers to reentry of the programs available to them. Women in Oklahoma have a disadvantage in their communities because of the massive amount of restoration needed. The massive collaboration of social services is needed. The fear of not including mentorship, proper reunification of women to their children, enough health care to address the needs of traumatic experiences, and lack of employment opportunities can prevent communities from building a thriving economy.

According to the Second Chance Act 2007 (USDJ 2012), a comprehensive reentry grant program supporting agencies such as non-profit organizations. The non-profit organizations and the correctional facility should formulate an agreed-upon relationship, recruiting qualified participants who meet a risk assessment. The support systems through family are considered the most important and desired among those released and may help strengthen reunification in the process of reentry.

Reentry Program Adult Males

Lattimore (2009) suggested the evidence is limited for men considering the provision of resources in the community and extending those resources to build better programs that include multidirectional effects of success. LeFevre (2019) noted the importance for men in the study to receive support in comprehensive programs by having

a live connection with a trustworthy individual. Mizel (2019) found that the services provided are not necessarily what is important to be granted as success; however, the provision of practical benefits superseded previous studies with specific benefits. More reentry practices could be improved to this study by identifying funding sources for strengths-based programs to improve community values.

Berghuis (2018) examined the effectiveness of reentry programs for male ex-offenders targeted to specific results of housing, employment, substance abuse, and the support of the community. Evidence of successful reentry of formerly incarcerated males has shown that programs that included at least one of the above supports, provided reduced barriers in the process. Adult males who acquired these most needed resources may add to the statistical outcomes of success, providing that the follow-up process may be a part of the equation. This data was linked to this research by providing comparable standardized data.

Formerly Incarcerated Women Defining Success

Heidemann (2016) suggested the overwhelming attention given to recidivism as the key measure of success is not a valid tool. It would be another means of human violation to set this standard. The participants of this study defined success as having a home, being resilient, and time of release and consistency coupled with hope. This study is limited by the population of formerly incarcerated women who were transient and due to the circumstances of sober living, who were unable to account for stable housing. However, this study indicated that former relationships were a negative option for the future of the formerly incarcerated woman. Those relationships included the opposite sex

of men who had been abusers to those women until they took charge. Also, other formerly justice-involved relationships were found to have benefits to helping women. Women who had established healthier relationships and were stable enough to help a former substance abuser was available to help orchestrate other women in their new lives of reentry.

Hlavka (2016) suggested additions to this body of study will include the need to help instill purpose in the process of transformation in the programming for continued care. The process of this study serves while participants are incarcerated to enhance the successful reentry transition. Including holistic development in the areas of spirituality, building healthy relationships, and social acceptance may be requirements needed to become successful for the whole person.

Restorative Justice

As a systemic resolution to bridging the gap between offenders, public officials, and the community, restorative justice may be a resolve for the success of women after incarceration. Restorative justice is a system of authentic justice geared to effectively link the formerly incarcerated with the community to rehabilitate. While reentry programs presume to help lower recidivism, the combination of restorative justice is a community plan that can bring significant change with collaboration (Suzuki et al, 2021). Restorative justice can lead to the transformation of decreasing over-incarceration if a well-thought-out plan is implemented successfully. Taking into consideration the strength of restorative justice could potentially help community partner buy-in if focus is made within the structure of all partners benefiting.

Restorative justice is a new evolving approach to serving formerly incarcerated people. According to Nascimento et al., (2023), restorative justice programs act as giving hope to those who have been discounted in their humanity because of the labels attached to their livelihood. This study has the potential to bring inclusive knowledge to all parties, making resources readily available to all people. Helping Justice impacted women may have a better chance of service because of the manner restorative justice will apply to gender-specific needs.

Restorative justice is a new concept that has several ways of conducting balance in organizational police control. Research discusses the behavior of police officers' influence on accountability in the prevention of misconduct (Pavlacic et al., 2021). The concept of restorative justice may link well with the framework of labeling theory to better understand why police misconduct continues. This exploratory study demonstrated strong reliance on the unfair treatment police give when labeling the acts of individuals, namely women, in the process of arrest. Police misconduct could be a major contributor to further harm of formerly incarcerated individuals striving to get their lives on track.

Lodi (2021) stated restorative justice practices in schools to interrupt the pipeline system of students to the prison. The limited study of this concept, while still new and emerging, has the potential to break down educational systems targeted to the dysfunction of incarceration. Those violated, those causing the violations, and the community have important roles, and all suffered from the violations. The plan of restorative justice is about taking responsibility for actions leading to harm and with a plan of action to make things right (Lodi et al., 2021)

Restorative justice has a strong approach to exposing the dysfunctional patterns of the criminal justice system with the defilement of human rights in prison. To destroy obsolete policies and practices in and out of the prison systems. Restorative justice impact can meet the demands of social structures in bridging gaps (Beichner et al., 2022). Women and their lived experiences in the criminal justice system will help build this study in creating new themes and strategies. Beichner suggested the establishment of new relationships would be an advantage to the community and the women served in restorative justice.

Housing

The lack of appropriate housing is a major contributor to the increase in over-incarceration. Those formerly incarcerated are faced with numerous trials delivered by housing authorities with extensive waiting lists. This presents further problems for women in reentry programs who are attempting to reunify with their children. Studies show, that without proper and stable housing, women can lose their children to the system (Beck et al., 2023). Educating and helping remove fear from landlords of giving opportunities with the proper accountability can help justice-involved women embrace their second chances.

Reentry housing is a crisis that does not promote decreased recidivism, but with the assistance and collaboration of streamlined community support, this may prove to be an evolution to healing the process of this basic need filled. According to person-centered care, a research study indicates that justice-involved reentry participants are more successful when a team of navigators is part of the reentry transition process of housing

(Baker et al., 2023). Accountability included in this process should be included in this process. Housing for justice-involved should be considered as community stakeholders become involved in resolving devastating family problems. For this study, the housing crisis should be put on the map as a critical resolution to resolved family restoration.

Reece stated that women facing reentry into society can be harmed more than prior incarceration by the lack of sufficient housing. One main cause of being inconsistent in staying in line with success after incarceration is being able to secure safe and reliable housing. In many cases, communities are not prepared for the mass release of inmates, when the matter of having housing is not readily available (Reece et al., 2023). Housing, if not satisfactory for a formerly incarcerated woman has posed new problems for women attempting to survive with a label and provide for themselves and family.

Another barrier to housing can be the link between prerelease case workers and release to the community. Being released with a maximum of \$50 into society is a threat to successful reentry. This is an extreme part of whether a woman being released has specific housing to protect her from the lack of other elements needed and barriers she may face. According to Doyle (2022), if this need is not met without delays or access, the ability to be compliant with the criminal justice system is impossible. This study explored how philanthropy of greater investments can make these transitional processes easier for formerly incarcerated women, who choose to make a personal difference in their lives.

The felony label is more harmful than the actual incarceration leading to the same lack of housing access as someone who has spent time residing in the Department of Corrections. In addition to the challenges of housing acquisition, Bryan (2022) states, that

while sentencing may escalate the probability of housing instability, the labeling changes the perspective of qualification. This study may help conclude the qualifications of access this exploratory study may expose.

Employment

To prove the harm caused by the barriers of employing formerly justice-involved individuals, Sheppard et al. (2020) describe it as being an unfortunate disqualification because societal stakeholders have stigmatized individuals with criminal backgrounds with preconceived ideas that remove opportunities for employment access. For this explorative study of barriers and success of women in reentry programs, employment is one of the major contributors to why women recidivate. Providing for the family after incarceration can be one of the key factors in decreasing mental health stress on a formerly incarcerated woman. Authentic support to help formerly incarcerated women with life skills education can transform what has been seen as a handout to enhancing life skills and watching those skills actively implemented into a sustainable plan. The goal of this study is to find recommendations to overcome the breakdown of stakeholder perceptions in the prevention of bridging this gap.

In addition to the lack of employment opportunities, Hwang's (2022), research discovers the need for entrepreneurship being another option instead of employment. This research highlighted that breaking the employment barrier for justice-involved individuals, especially in the face of societal labeling, is a formidable challenge. However, social connections and community networking can serve as powerful tools, facilitating employment opportunities and creating pathways for justice-involved

individuals to become employers themselves. In conclusion, justice-involved entrepreneurs could hold the key to transformative solutions that benefit both individuals and the broader community. The community's success is contingent upon having treatment before being released from incarceration. It is also important to have support linking the system-impacted individual in advocacy for employment because finding employment will help eliminate temptations to revert to old habits (Huff, 2022). By addressing disparities and providing targeted support, particularly for women, employment becomes a critical factor in empowering caregivers to support their children.

This study underscores the pressing need to secure sustainable and meaningful employment opportunities for women, ensuring stability and better outcomes for their families. Goger (2021) established an evidence-based plan for those reentering society to implement system independence, engage in public community safety, addressing barriers and strategies to overcome common barriers of housing, employment, education, and mental health inadequacies. These solutions will include additional funding opportunities, political education, overcoming the stigma of formerly incarcerated, and making new policies a substantial part of these solutions. In this qualitative study, I used the suggestions noted by participants to enhance the interview process of the participants who had actively engaged in reentry programs.

According to Salem (2022), formerly incarcerated women, have more chances of experiencing homelessness due to the extensive barriers not addressed. In this study, gendered pathways are taken into consideration as unique provisions are continually unmet, and transitioning is unbearable. The state of homelessness takes barriers to

another level in mental health and behaviors associated with unmet needs. Unfortunately, not having an address and access to other basic needs proves negative and hopeless when a residence and work history are not provided to a potential employer. Salem (2022) indicated that reentry is not only related to limited resources but also appears impossible with no familial support, of which all other factors are considered. The actions of the community and the interventions of namely peer support can alleviate some of the lack of formerly incarcerated women.

The deception of things going back to normal after extensive time away from home and families due to incarceration is a myth. Employment opportunities are included in these significant challenges for numerous reasons. The prison experience creates new challenges and returning home has significantly increased. Incarceration, while labeled as correcting and or rehabilitative, does not address health issues previously experienced. Quality employment is not a resolution for formerly incarcerated individuals who have faced health challenges in substance use and mental health (Connell et al., 2023). In the exploration of this study, the researcher will look for services of success and reasons for no success. Finding out how a bridge can be leveraged with the right opportunities to help employment strategies and accountability work will be a main outcome for the formerly incarcerated woman.

The most customary prison work programs are vocational and labeled as ambiguous when compared to the effectiveness of employment outside of prison. Nur et al., (2022) were not certain of successful outcomes after this study, however, there were slight factors of success. This study assisted in strengthening the efforts of the

participants reentry programs in how formerly incarcerated individuals can become successful in the reentry process when given the opportunity for vocational training.

President Biden has released an incarceration-to-employment initiative to ensure. Specific training with an agreement between the Department of Justice and the Department of Labor. The grants and funding will provide jobs for formerly incarcerated individuals in the efforts to further develop programs to assist (Probasco, 2022). Employers are given a tax break when hiring formerly incarcerated individuals to be implemented in 2030. While this initiative is a positive outcome, educating employers between now and then could position communities in a productive state.

Racial Disparity

Mitchell (2019) describes gender and racial disproportionate incarceration in prisons as a system of strategies created and targeted to decrease the chances of black women's opportunities after incarceration. As black women are increasingly the subjects of severe exploitation especially in their role of motherhood, assistance from those who specialize in reentry such as case managers is key. Studies show that while challenges are difficult for women, black women's realities are insurmountable (Mitchell, 2019). Safety for black mothers and their role in raising their children have racial injustices, including in the forming of a new life.

The unique experiences of black women in addiction and mental health, lead to specific practices regarding their stigmas to have successful reentry experiences. During this research, it uncovered some participants reliving the experience causing some problems (Gunn, 2021). In the past of the researcher's experience, reliving participants'

traumatic experiences may cause unexpected triggers, as the researcher will be prepared to care for these potential moments of triggers. This vulnerable population was expected to give a better discussion of transparency and created unique themes to this study.

The lack of rehabilitation and racial disparity go hand and hand when implicit laws are enforced for formerly incarcerated individuals in the process of reentry. According to the study by Ortiz et al., (2019), the broken system was intentionally ill-equipped to effectively serve formerly incarcerated individuals, namely, the black population. This study brings individuals into a vicious cycle of captivity in the criminal justice system without justice (Ortiz et al, 2019). While the purpose of this study is to indicate the holes in the lives of women who participate in reentry programs, we may find more intentional acts of criminalization by the systems that are supposed to help. In conclusion, racial disparity is a lifetime of injustice and inequity for black populations. The historical discussion of Miller (2014) has brought up the defining carceral shift, where racial power is transferred from the institution to the people in the state.

The criminal justice system is a system of failure for certain races and cultures according to Alper et al., (2018). The pretense of communities helping to serve as a recidivating statistic of 7 out of 10 formerly incarcerated will return to prison due to a broken system of sincere rehabilitation. When the outcomes of this exploratory study of 10 participants revealed the truth of their experiences, the expectation of success uncovered how the barriers of their situations were overcome, and what assistance contributed to the success or failure that was certainly noted. The goal of this study was

to expose the reality of the reentry process and how, as a community, taking responsibility can make a social change of improvement.

Gaps In Research

Berghuis (2019) suggested in a recent study of limitations to identify women who are not affiliated with an agency and to explore the significance of relational support as done with the successes of women in a reentry program. Also, Stobbs (2019) posited future research should include a study on high-risk supervision of women due to limited study on their reentry process. Strengthened comprehensive evaluations may improve the exploration of the needs and completion of reentry programs. This practice could assist in influencing a broader area of lack in the reentry process.

Summary

Chapter 2 explored areas of barriers and challenges, women ex-offenders have after incarceration through a literature search and strategy review. The theoretical framework of labeling and relational theories will be the foundation for this study. Using a historical overview of prisons, parole, and the impact made on women in America and the State of Oklahoma will add to the knowledge of developments already in place and reveal what is not. This study will identify the ideal female ex-offender in Oklahoma, the influence of specific resources for men and the lack of those resources for women.

The literature review introduced the research gap, which raises the need for current research on problems with the lack of successful reentry programs that answer the needs of women facing gender-specific challenges. Further study may identify new areas to be included in the strategy for women's success in reentering society. Women's unique

challenges may reveal plans before the actual release to decrease recidivism as part of the plan.

Chapter 3 contributed evidence-based material related to women based on the gap in literature research. It discussed general qualitative methods, using the role of the researcher, the design and rationale, and the analysis of the methodology. Chapter 3 will contribute a thorough discussion of the instrumentation, analysis, and ethical procedures determining trustworthiness in this study.

Chapter 3: Research Methods

The purpose of this general qualitative design study was to explore the experiences of women ex-offenders ages 18 years or older participating in reentry programs that led to negative and successful transitioning into society. Further research was needed to examine the specific needs of formerly incarcerated women in the reentry process (Martilik, 2018). The study was focused on what treatments benefit women in reentry programs. I examined the barriers and successes targeting goals of specific needs of women in reentry programs in contributing to reducing recidivism.

In the research methods section, I identify the population and justify the sampling strategy, state the selection criteria, and how the criteria were met. I also discuss my plan for data collection and analysis and the coding software I used for this study. Chapter 3 is concluded by discussing issues of trustworthiness, credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and Walden University's Institutional Review Board's (IRB) ethical procedures.

Research Design and Rationale

The research question that guided this study was "What barriers and success factors in identifying mental health care, housing, parental concerns, and any other factors related to stress that can be associated with the reentry process?" This study will help improve barriers that formerly incarcerated women face in the state of Oklahoma while experiencing excessive incarceration. There has been little research conducted on reentry programs and the success offered to women after incarceration. This qualitative study ensures the collection of stories to interact with the women while cultivating

themes in the analysis of their stories. The central phenomenon of interest was based on the perceptions and experiences of the chosen women ex-offenders in reentry programs (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The research tradition of interpretivism for the qualitative analysis of this study integrated the human experiences of women ex-offenders in reentry programs for further barriers and successes not discovered.

The rationale for choosing a qualitative method for this study was influenced by Patton (2015). According to Patton, qualitative research is used to examine small samples in specific scenarios. Additionally, the qualitative method can be used to capture and understand the perspectives of the people studied and understand the impact of the systems connected to the sample (Patton, 2015). Further, qualitative research, “centralizes the complexities and subjectivity of experiences and values” (Ravitch & Carl, 2016, p. 5)

Role of The Researcher

My role as the researcher was to observe and analyze of qualitative data collected virtually by Zoom through in-depth interviews with formerly incarcerated women who had resided in the Department of Corrections in the State of Oklahoma and participated in reentry programs. As the researcher, I had no prior supervisory or instructor relationships involving power over the participants. However, I did know of individuals who could make referrals between myself and the study participants. I managed biases through reflexivity. Reflexivity is a process that reduces bias by allowing the researcher to acknowledge assumptions through the redirection of their lens (Dodgson, 2019). By minimizing bias from this study, I was able to promote rigorous results of trustworthiness

that were critical and based on the cultivation of detailed information implemented during the collection and interpretation of data.

Methodology

Participant Selection Logic

The participants are women ex-offenders who have actively participated in a reentry program before or after release from prison in a midwestern state of the United States. Purposeful sampling was used for the targeted selection of participants to study with similar characteristics of the research problem (Campbell et al., 2020). I used an invitation letter to identify, contact, and recruit participants through Facebook social media who are women in reentry programs who had participated or resided in transitional living in Oklahoma (see Appendix B). Additional social media solicitation for participants released from the Department of Correction was used to recruit additional participants when the sample size was insufficient. Consequently, I collected data through proximity with participants and snowball sampling to acquire additional participants at six. Snowball sampling is a term for gaining referrals to produce other qualified participants who meet the criteria (Naderifar et al., 2017). I posted in the previous group I had created on Facebook that needed additional participants. The invitation letter contained my contact email for individuals interested in participating in the study.

I verified the interest of participants meeting the research criteria once they had been identified, contacted, and recruited. The participants for this research consisted of women over the age of 18. I also used the state court networks for the Department of

Corrections website to verify that a participant meets the criteria of serving time after recruiting through social media. Any woman serving for any type of crime and verified was eligible and justified to participate in this study. For this study, participants knew per my approved flyer that they meet at least two basic criteria (a) to be 18 years of age or older at the time of study and (b) had experience in a reentry program before or after prison incarceration in a southwestern state.

The rationale for the population size of 10 participants was chosen based on the probability of gaining the most variation in the collection of data (Patton, 2015). The sample size was determined by how rapidly saturation was attained during the data collection and analysis process. Saturation is the point at which new information is not uncovered (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I shared that once participants continue presenting same information, the perspectives regarding their experiences, then saturation takes place (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I reached saturation between nine and 10 participants.

Instrumentation

The primary data collection instrument I used in this study was a questionnaire developed by Williams-Queen (2014). I requested and was granted permission to use the questionnaire and modify if needed by Williams-Queen (see Appendix A). In addition, I created a subsequent observation sheet, along with an audio recording used to transcribe all responses providing sufficient data through Otterai (see Appendix C).

I used a general qualitative analysis to examine the experiences of women ex-offenders. The qualitative narrative research approach communicates words, concepts, and situations' structures while investigating the lives being studied (Patton, 2015).

The women ex-offenders who met the criteria were verified as formerly incarcerated using the State Courts Network. Participants were willing to share their reentry experiences openly and were identified and chosen for this research by soliciting through Facebook social media recruitment posts (Appendices B & C). The participants were then contacted by phone or email; from there, I requested or suggested days and times of interviews that would best fit their schedules. I was transparent with the request in the initial recruitment while giving participants the right to refuse information to the interviewee at any time during the process, requesting the participant's consent. Once the interviews had been observed, transcribed, and coded for relevant categories and themes (Rubin & Rubin, 2012), subthemes were created.

The needs assessment was most appropriate for this study because it was used to assess the needs of ex-offenders and the barriers and challenges to employment, housing, community resources, correctional rehabilitation, and vocational training drawn from the perceptions of these participants. The questionnaire was developed using evidence-based studies to identify critical themes (Williams-Queen, 2014). Content validity was established by testing the sample of 10 participants regarding the barriers and successes of mental health care, employment, housing, and parental care needed and available after incarceration. The mention of labeling used for this population demonstrated the need for advocacy to link resources from incarceration to the community. This questionnaire was detailed to specifics listed and appeared to address upcoming themes, such as the harsh stigma brought up during the study that made it difficult to reach due to labeling.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Participants were recruited via a social media Facebook group created specifically for this study for women who met the research criteria. A flyer was posted to the specific group private Facebook group I created for those in my network to include the criteria and my contact information for solicitation (see Appendix F). The participants were solicited through my networks, and it was communicated to my networks that their referrals could not come from their places of work. Once the referrals contacted me by phone, I communicated that after receiving their email address via text or via email, I would send them a consent form in which they could read and reply to the email, “I consent,” in the body of the email. Participants immediately received a calendar invitation of the agreed-upon date and time of the virtual interview, along with a Zoom link. All interviews were audio recorded during the interview to secure the information given.

This qualitative research study’s data collection questionnaire and sources included observation sheets, my journaling, audio transcription files, and an audio recording using Delve Tools Thematic software to house the text transcriptions. This qualitative data analysis platform helped code sentences, phrases, or paragraphs from submitted transcripts to highlight quotes in numerous categories. The 10 participants interviewed lasted approximately 30-90 minutes and were audio recorded using a voice memo app.

The participants exited this research study at their will. As one of the requirements for this study, the participants were allowed to leave at any time. The

existing participants were debriefed and given sincere thanks for their eager participation in the study and for how their engagement could make significant changes in systems and be helpful for future research on this topic.

Data Analysis Plan

Data analysis was done using my handwritten notes and Otter AI, a transcription tool. Afterward, I used qualitative coding software for analyzing data using Delve software data analysis for coding, organizing, categorizing, and labeling common themes in the data. I used the coding in these systems to interpret, organize, and structure observations and interpretations into meaningful theories. Coding in this qualitative research allowed me to be reflexive, critical, and rigorous with potential findings. The common ideas identified became the strategic themes linked to the participants' experiences. Finally, the themes and ideas discovered were interpreted to contribute to a larger body of knowledge.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Credibility is one of the most effective means to build and establish trustworthiness regarding research studies. Quality time spent engaging with thorough observation of this study was vital. It was key to spend time gaining relevant information and understanding in the interviews how the experiences relate to exploring barriers and successes in their respective reentry programs for this study. Credibility is the internal validity between the participant and the researcher that builds trustworthiness (Kyngas, 2020).

Transferability is the external validity that helps a reader comprehend the strategy

behind what is being shared (Slevin, 1999). To form this type of clarity, I was flexible in understanding the diversification of variables analyzed by the participants' experiences for this study. Analyzing the similarities of the participants allowed the findings to be transferable to future study.

Dependability was focused on the process of how the information is delivered. Dependability is defined as the security and consistency of interviews being conducted and studied (Boucerredj, 2018). This principle is responsible for the consistency of the experience throughout the interviewing process. The experience is preferred to be rational, traceable, and documented for tracking purposes for this study. The logic behind dependability will link with the reliability of the study (O'Sullivan et al., 2003).

Confirmability of responses of the participant's interpretation of experiences will be confirmed. The findings must be linked to the interpretations of dependable information relevant to the study. This definition is the truth of history and experience (Johnson, 2020). The data derived from the interviews were confirmed in the results of coding techniques and the clear and accurate responses of the participants.

Ethical Procedures

My responsibility as the researcher was to ensure that all ethical procedures were followed to gain access to participants, according to the American Psychological Association's ethical standards for human participants. Protection for the welfare of humans was necessary to ensure appropriate consent was given and administered (American Psychological Association, 2020). Before contacting potential participants, I applied to Walden's University IRB. During the IRB process, I waited for IRB approval

before I started the participant recruitment process. Ethical concerns related to recruitment were addressed with (a) informed consent, (b) social media flyer, (c) volunteer participation, and (d) communication of data security process. The same treatment was included in making valued selections, ensuring fair and equitable treatment as ethical practices for this vulnerable population. Participant privacy and data collection were essential to the population of participants, with assurance of anonymity of personal information included for this study. I proceeded to initiate the ethics process by completing Form A.

Once IRB approved this proposal (approval no. 08-13-24-0623833), an approved flyer was attached to the private social media group of a prepared researcher message. The participants met the desired criteria and agreed to participate by replying to the email where the informed consent form was attached for reading. The protection of this data included assigning participant numbers instead of actual participant names. The numbers were used on my observation sheets to protect participant identity. All printed information used for the study was placed behind two forms of locked sources, on a jump drive, in safe and private area, and in a file cabinet. The electronic documents will be stored in Google Documents under a password for 5 years after the research has been completed, then shredded.

Summary

I used a qualitative research design and approach to understand the experiences of justice-involved women who have participated in a reentry program before or after incarceration. Through semi structured interviews for this population of formerly

incarcerated women selected, topics, themes, and theories of the participant responses will be studied. The rationale for participant selection, data collection, instrumentation, procedures, the protection of human subjects, and the data analysis plan were also discussed. I described my role as an observer and the role of the participant. I discussed the barriers and successes of how the transcribed information contributed to evaluating themes that will become the study results. The findings of this study will be included in Chapter 4, where I will discuss the setting of the study, demographics, data collection, data analysis, evidence of trustworthiness, and the study's results.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this general qualitative study was to explore the experiences of women ex-offenders participating in reentry programs. I explored barriers and success factors of reentry programs for women of any age after incarceration. The following RQ was designed to address this purpose: What barriers and success factors in identifying mental health care, housing, parental concerns, and any other factors related to stress can be associated with the reentry process? This chapter outlines the research setting and determines the possibility of influence on the findings of this study. The demographic section documents participant characteristics. I further identify the reporting process and how the data were coded. The section on evidence of trustworthiness discusses steps and strategies to meet credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The Results section addresses and organizes the data to express how the emerging patterns and themes aligned or did not with the RQ. Finally, the summary section identifies how the study answered the core RQ.

Setting

My approach to focusing on what was shared or known during the study, without venturing into business experiences from the stories of women in my nonprofit, caused me to be constantly aware of my thoughts. No personal or organizational conditions influenced participants or their experience during the study. As a nonprofit's founder and executive director, helping women break cycles while promoting health equity and strengthening the community has inspired this study. While our nonprofit serves women facing prison time and those leaving prison, none of the participants from

the program were participants in this study.

By creating a comfortable environment for the participants during interviews, I facilitated more open and authentic responses from the participants, which was crucial for gathering meaningful data. This consideration helped ensure that the insights drawn were well-supported by the participants' experiences and perspectives. Setting a friendly environment created a situation in which the participants were relaxed and more likely to share their genuine insights and experiences without feeling guarded or, in some cases, withdrawn.

The participants chose the interview dates and times, which were conducted via Zoom and recorded by phone. Due to the schedule variations, the interviews were scheduled conveniently for the participants to attend. No adverse circumstances related to the setting may have impacted the participants during the interview or their experience in general.

Demographics

Ten female participants agreed to the study, scheduled an interview date and time, and acknowledged the receipt and their consent by email to participate in the study. Those who participated in this study were all women between 18 and 70. All participants acknowledged a general understanding of participation in reentry programs. All participants were familiar with the reentry process of their experience and shared their race information, with the majority (70%) identifying as White, two (20%) identifying as Black, and one (10%) woman identifying as Indian. Seven women identified as being incarcerated once, one woman identified as being incarcerated five times, one was

imprisoned four times, and one was incarcerated three times. The demographics also included employment statuses as one full-time student, four unemployed, five full-time employed, and one full-time business owner.

Data Collection

The 10 female participants who met the study's criteria were recruited through purposeful sampling (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Each interview was conducted via Zoom within 10 days. Each interview consisted of approximately 45 to 60 minutes of data collection for the 10 needs assessment questionnaires. The data was recorded using a voice memo app on my phone.

In Chapter 3, I said I would contact participants by telephone or email, which I did eventually. However, the potential participants contacted me via phone because my phone number was on the approved flyer. I decided to confirm the following scheduled interviews before the interview and waited for a response. An unusual circumstance was encountered during my first three interviews on the Zoom recording. There was no audible recording, and I had to reschedule the interviews by calling and scheduling again with another option of recording on voice memo from my phone. This caused me to do a test recording prior to each of the 10 interviews before starting the actual interview.

Data Analysis

After each interview, I used OtterAi transcriptions to review the exact work to perform data transcription. I transcribed the interviews and listened to each participant's audio for data alignment and engagement. Transcription is linking one perception voice to another, creating a pattern (Patton, 2015). The 10 files were imported into the delve

tool database and maintained for this study, and close attention was given to each semi structured interview, in which each audio recording and transcription were reviewed multiple times and compared with one another. Notes, thoughts, and considerations regarding these interviews were added to the delve tool database and used for clarity and understanding.

Thematic data analysis occurred inductively in this study, moving from breaking up transcripts to comparing narratives, ultimately developing themes. The interviews were coded independently and analyzed concerning individual findings, and collective similarities were identified as directed by Patton (2015). The first-round coding process was completed by delvetool (<https://delvetool.com>), which identified and labeled 246 independent codes, several repeated throughout the analysis of the 10 interviews, with 158 codes. These codes were manually checked for accuracy and understanding and analyzed again. Codes unrelated to the barriers and success of formerly incarcerated women who participated in reentry programs were omitted from the analysis to maintain focus.

The second coding round was conducted by hand utilizing pattern coding, as identified by Saldana (2021). Pattern coding identified categories and themes in the data. Themes were analyzed, recognized, and used to determine 32 answers to the core RQ supported by direct participant quotations. Codes, categories, and themes related to the question protocol were extracted and deduced from participant interviews. Various codes were found and repeated throughout interviews among the participants. Mental health care was identified nine specific times, with support, lack of support, and collaboration

among the three most common repeated codes. The themes of the reentry process of mental health care, housing, and parental concern barriers and successes were identified. This led to three primary themes: (a) lack of accessibility, (b) invisible to society, and (c) situational awareness. Lack of accessibility involved the myriads of basic needs that formerly incarcerated women facing reentry to society immediately need. According to several participants, these include the things taken for granted in everyday living. Invisible to society is the perspective formerly incarcerated women experience after serving extensive sentencing for crimes committed, only to find out that they are not visibly cared for or thought of as a viable contribution to society. One participant stated, “When you get out, you are treated like you are not a human, and it breaks down your esteem.” Finally, situational awareness included family dynamics from where the women came from and how they were raised. Many of the descriptions were drawn from the patterns of family dysfunctions, left unattended trauma to fend for themselves, or how they saw the actions of those they trusted as models handling situations of life.

Table 1 details the themes and subthemes of experiences of formerly incarcerated women in reentry programs. There were cases of discrepancy with participants who appeared stable in safe and reliable housing. These women found themselves in the same places where childhood trauma had taken place. The participants believed that although they were different and wanted different lives, the inability to have access to specific resources kept them in mental incarceration.

Table 1*Themes and Subthemes*

Themes	Subthemes	Description	Participants
Lack of accessibility	Mental Health Care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extensive depression • Anxiety • Loss of children • Past Trauma 	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9
Invisible to society factors	Labeling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of emotional support • Lack of housing provision • Lack of employment 	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10
Situational awareness	Family Dysfunction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Triggers • Emotional Instability • Financial Insecurity • Toxic Relationships • Uncomfortable with rejection 	P1, P2, P4, P5, P8, P9, P10

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was developed in the initial stage of the research study and has been its foundation throughout. Cultivating trustworthiness in qualitative research is built on credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. These four components collectively strengthen the trustworthiness of my qualitative research

Credibility was established by thorough observation, whereas trustworthiness was through intent listening to the participants in this study. The key to gaining relevant information and understanding in the interviews was how the experiences relate to exploring barriers and successes in their respective reentry programs for this study.

Credibility was established through reflexivity and peer examination. As mentioned, credibility through internal validity between the participant and me was a significant factor.

The research purpose, methodology, data collection, and analysis were described to establish transferability. Clarity was formed in the flexibility of understanding and the diversification of variables analyzed by the participants' experiences for this study. Thus, the similarities between the participants' findings were interpreted as transferable to future studies.

Dependability occurred with a focus on how the information was delivered. I was responsible for the consistency of the experience throughout the interviewing process. The experience was rational, traceable, and documented for tracking purposes for this study. Finally, the interviews, the results of coding techniques, and the participants' precise and accurate responses were confirmed.

After analysis and coding, the participants' interpretations were confirmed for accuracy. The coding techniques and the participants' precise and accurate responses confirmed the data derived from the interviews. The findings were linked to the interpretations of dependable information relevant to this study.

Results

Lack of Accessibility

Lack of accessibility was an overarching factor used to describe the main barriers formerly incarcerated women faced in reentry and out of their control. Having the basic needs to live a sustainable life to avoid the obstacles that increased the chances of

recidivism was crucial. Many women are released from prison with \$50 to sustain them while transitioning to housing deemed safe. Due to the participants' desire to leave prison and become physically free, the sheer truth of many situations include severe lack.

Lack of accessibility poses subthemes that interfere with and disturb mental health stability. The onset of extensive depression and anxiety, the loss of children, and past trauma are factors that prolong successful reentry. The lack of accessibility produced a state of depression for some participants, making it challenging to follow halfway house or transitional living rules.

Various reentry housing rules included finding employment in a timely matter. Many participants feared they could not sustain households without their children, which would be difficult after hearing the word "no" countless times regarding employment opportunities before being given a chance. Some participants shared a deep fear of relapsing due to insufficient resources; there was always a potential for repeating wrong behavior due to the lack of resources and their accessibility.

Other women participated in reentry programs where they were able to have access to resources but still lived at the home where the original offense happened, and root causes promoted participants to go to prison. One participant found herself in the exact house where she was violated as a child by someone she trusted and ended up living in the residence where she was violated because she could not find a place where she could live safely with her children (see Figure 2).

Figure 2*Lack of Accessibility: Mental Health Care**Extensive Depression*

Extensive depression refers to a diagnosis experienced by formerly incarcerated women while in their reentry processes and the lack of accessible resources. Additionally, extensive depression leads to the inability to successfully meet the requirements of reentry programs promptly. Having applications for employment and a housing plan outside of sober and transitional living, many times, was impossible.

When asked about mental health care success and barriers to formerly incarcerated women, one of the major concerns was the state of depression some experienced during the time of accessing the basic needs after incarceration. The loss of hope and being able to provide for oneself was difficult. One of the critical challenges of moving forward was overcoming depression.

Anxiety

Anxiety refers to what formerly incarcerated women name as to how they feel when trying to accomplish goals and tasks society says are needed. When anxiety is a factor in the lack of accessibility, the reentry process was hindered and found resistant to rejection, according to five participants. One participant stated, “it was hard for me to find employment when I was first released out of prison, because I had a lot of gaps in between employment.” While transitional living was available, this participant had previously left the same transitional living with a balance and because she could not find employment, this caused anxiety and depression. Participant #1 said, “It’s hard to get back on your feet.”

Loss of Children

Loss of children refers to the physical custody and residence of the participants’ children. When asked about the care of their children and how it affected their transition back into the community, many situations were targeted, and needs were addressed or not addressed. This situation considers many variables as the women answered the question. The most common was that their children either spent their time with family, a mother or a sister of the participant, or some participants had already lost full custody of their children during the sentencing process. These participants had their parental rights terminated. While children may have been in a safer environment than when living with mom, the lack of chances to redeem themselves after incarceration appeared grim for some.

One participant had been away from her children for years and without visitation because her children were living with foster parents who chose not to volunteer to subject the children to the incarceration environment. A participant shared that while she was hurt severely because of her own decisions causing the situation she was in, it is not fair for others to take your rights away even if someone does make a mistake, especially while in active addiction. There was a constant theme of why incarcerating us is more popular than helping us without judgment to get our lives together.

Past Trauma

Many participants mentioned past trauma when thinking of their experiences in life and how they arrived incarcerated. Some discussed the violations that happened to them as children, such as sexual and emotional abuse. Many dreaded leaving their children with family who did not protect them in their homes as children and growing up.

Invisible To Society Factors

Lack of Emotional Support

The lack of emotional support can be incredibly damaging for anyone, but for women trying to overcome a difficult past, it can feel especially isolating. When emotional support is absent, it can leave someone feeling disconnected, undervalued, or like they are facing their struggles alone. This lack can make it harder to heal, as healing often requires empathy, validation, and connection from others.

For women working to overcome trauma, guilt, or a history of being underserved, this emotional support is crucial in rebuilding self-worth, finding stability, and forming healthier relationships. Without it, feelings of loneliness and self-doubt can sometimes

overwhelm any progress made. Therapy, positive social connections, and peer support can help bridge that gap, but when those resources aren't available, it makes the road to recovery more challenging.

Figure 3

Invisible to Society: Labeling



Emotional Support

Three participants referred to a lack of emotional support that would have helped when facing the labeling that is now wrapped around their lives. The labeling of felons was hurtful and sometimes made it feel like there was no way to overcome all the hurdles out there. “When we get out, it is really slim for people to give you a chance, even if you have already served your time.” There were very few places you could go that would inspire the ladies to move past their past. It’s very effective to be accepted into a program that builds you up.

Those reentry programs also have resources and connections they will call to help you get what you need on the spot, and having basic needs was just as crucial in the process. Many participants talked about how, even though they had secured housing, it

was worse than being locked up. Some women in the housing played games and wanted to see if you would go along with not following house rules.

Lack of Housing Provision

Housing in sober living and transitional living was still sometimes dangerous because of the location and the people who stayed there because they had burned their bridges with others and were not trusted. One participant said she would not talk because she wanted to do the right thing all the time. She said when she was released, she planned to stay focused on herself even if she lost people who she used to call friends. Living in a small room with three or four other people sometimes made me keep to myself.

Lack of employment

Support was a significant concern for the five participants interviewed. Not only did they have to be out of the house at a specific time if we did not have a job, but I had to take anything valuable to me along with my personal information so that it would not get stolen. One participant said she wanted to have her children but some of the houses were not safe places for kids to live.

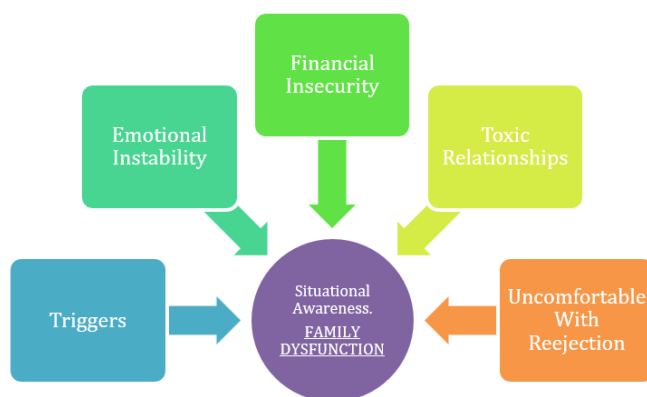
Situational Awareness

Situational awareness often develops as a response to external events, particularly negative ones. When someone experiences something out of their control, like trauma or loss, it can trigger a heightened awareness of their surroundings, people, and even their own emotions. This heightened awareness can be a coping mechanism, a way to protect themselves or anticipate future challenges. It's almost like their mind starts operating in a mode of hypervigilance, trying to prevent more harm or loss.

For women, especially those who have faced adversity or trauma, situational awareness can become a way to gain some semblance of control in environments where they feel powerless. But it can also be draining, leading to anxiety or a constant sense of being "on guard." Many times, these situations occur in childhood and last throughout adulthood (see Figure 4).

Figure 4

Situational Awareness: Family Dysfunction



Family Dysfunction

Family dysfunction is the learned patterns and behaviors passed down to children, generally unintentionally, when people are raised. These patterns are established and developed because habits were instilled and passed down. As children, these women shared of addiction, domestic and sexual abuse, and thoughts of deception.

Triggers. Triggers were caused by many things. Living in a house of former addicts makes it hard to stay focused if your mind is not already made up before you get released from incarceration. Reentry plans must be detailed, and one participant shared them for it to help. Then, the people that are given the plan must follow them.

Emotional Instability. One participant stated that she found out in therapy treatment that because she was sexually abused as a child, the thought of anyone hugging her without permission reminds her of the times her family members would molest her. The participant said she even told the person she trusted, and they did not believe her. “I put up walls to protect myself, and that often made me think about things that were not true. Therapy gave me the chance to evaluate what my true emotions were and not live in what happened to me from someone who was sick.

Financial Insecurity. We never had money when growing up, so when I got the chance to be on my own when I was older and started trafficking drugs, I felt like I was helping instead of doing something wrong. So, when two of the participants said that it was not until they were incarcerated that they saw the effects drugs had on people and their long-term decisions, it made them understand better. This was a chance for women to be content without having to do unlawful things to acquire finances.

Toxic Relationships. When three of the participants discussed their mother’s habits of having men take care of them for sex, it was hard to talk about. However, another participant said she thought she stayed because of false security. Several participants became aware of how bad the relationships were, when they were no longer subjected to the abuse.

Uncomfortable with Rejection. A participant discussed being abandoned by her mother as a child and wanted to have her around all the time. She said, “I could not understand why my mother would leave without telling me and return days later. I thought she did not love me.” Accepting how a participant was treated that was out of her

control made choosing and doing the right thing confusing and sometimes impossible.

Summary

This chapter presents the analysis results, including the feedback connected to the research questions and a consistent analysis with the general qualitative methodology.

Ten participants were interviewed for this general qualitative study. The interview questions were structured to understand the experiences of a woman formerly incarcerated who participated in a reentry program to do better. One participant said her experience in her reentry program helped her access housing and employment. She said she would do better than she was asked so that her background would not make her lose her job, and she got promoted quickly and eventually purchased a car and got her place. She said she gives back to organizations by volunteering because someone gave her a great second chance. Six of the ten participants had similar experiences with the accessibility of resources. One participant had started a thriving legal business and volunteered by sitting on boards that helped women like her.

Using consistent general qualitative methodology, the levels of semi-structured interviews, cross-analyzing, open coding, and thematic. Fifty-two codes emerged from open coding. By cross-analysis, I identified the similarities in participants' responses. The comparisons of the analysis were made through the delve analysis tool software to discover codes into subthemes. The progression of comparison analysis was compared to arrive at three key themes. The key themes developed from the experiences of formerly incarcerated women who participated in the reentry programs were (a) lack of accessibility, (b) invisible to society, and (c) situational awareness factors.

There were no significant differences in the factors contributing to the process women faced in reentry. However, it was evident that better work needed to be done to address the needs of women entering society with different goals. Organizations need more research on the value of cross-collaboration for participants' well-being. Thus, there is not a complete resource adaptation to help women in reentry. Chapter 5 will include a summary in further analysis of the three themes discovered.

Chapter 5 Discussions, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this general qualitative study was to explore the barriers and success factors of reentry programs for women after incarceration. I obtained qualitative data that can advance knowledge on the gender-specific needs of the perception of reentry program for women. I used these collective experiences to examine how women navigated through their individual needs and the impact the barriers experienced had on their goals. Previous research has shared that essential programs for post incarceration for women are essential (Edwards et al., 2022). The theoretical framework was confirmed in that the results indicated that housing, employment, and family dynamic needs were the most essential. Additionally, labels attached to formerly incarcerated women looking to transition successfully into society are hindrances to the progressive (Augustyn et al., 2019). Three themes were identified as critical factors from the experiences of formerly incarcerated women: (a) lack of accessibility factors, (b) invisible to society factors, and (c) situational awareness factors. The results of my study may provide solutions and opportunities for formerly incarcerated women to have viable resources in the community that effectively collaborate, accomplishing the mission of reducing recidivism.

Interpretation of the Findings

Lack of Accessibility Factors

Factors related to the formerly incarcerated women were impacted by the reentry program formatted for them through specific programs. Each participant had a different scenario regarding their immediate release from incarceration. Two participants had family support to assist in the transition to the reentry program. But housing stability

made available immediately for formerly incarcerated individuals can also make recovery and stability a vital part of safety (Abo et al., 2022). With the homes along with peer accountability, the success rate of reentry can increase.

Furthermore, formerly incarcerated women having gender-specific needs, including loss of children and personal challenges that prohibit them from receiving adequate care. Six of the participants acknowledged having extensive struggles adhering to housing requirements due to lack of parental access to their children and anxiety caused by trying to keep it emotionally together when trauma prevailed over all the negativity attempting to lead a successful life. When formerly incarcerated women participating in reentry programs are looking forward to leaving institutional facilities more than focusing on the reentry process, they fail when they do not consider the hardships of the reentry variables not previously discussed. Some women discussed overcoming shame and defeat when attempting to do the right things to establish a new life. Formerly incarcerated women experienced a deep yearning for the good things of their former lives, such as being with their children, having clarity of thought before drug use, or getting involved with relationships that were not beneficial.

Although formerly incarcerated women frequently report depression, anxiety, loss of children, and past trauma, underscoring the pressing need for mental health care, these needs are rarely addressed initially, as systemic barriers and lack of accessibility to mental health services remain significant challenges. Therefore, the consistent findings from previous works in the evaluation of current reentry programs for women leaving prison (Edwards et al., 2022), my study's conclusions indicate that formerly incarcerated

women facing reentry programs still face mental health challenges due to the lack of accessibility to resources needed to make and sustain a life not inhibited by former living. Alignment with the disparities of effectiveness in services in mental health and substance abuse care before release from prison is relevant to explore (Hlavka, 2016; Kendall, 2018). The development in spirituality, building healthy relationships, and social acceptance may be requirements needed to become successful for the whole person.

There was an emphasis from the participants on the lack of accessibility and minimal access to affordable or comprehensive mental health services, exacerbating existing conditions. This intersection of challenges retraumatized women, making it harder to meet their emotional and practical responsibilities as parents. Addressing these issues effectively requires trauma-informed mental health services, family reunification support, and systemic changes to reduce barriers for formerly incarcerated mothers. Gendered pathways should be considered, as unique provisions are continually unmet, which affects transitioning to society (Salem, 2022). Homelessness, which did arise initially for two of the participants, affected their mental health and other behaviors associated with unmet needs.

Invisible to Society Factors

Housing challenges include reentry support, provision, employment, and labeling in the participants' communities. Nascimento et al. (2023) spent time addressing restorative justice programs as giving hope to those who had been discounted in their humanity because of the labels attached to their livelihood because they were formerly incarcerated. My study concluded that formerly incarcerated women were not able to

address or provide gender-specific needs due to the challenges of not being a vital part of society. The limitations appeared endless and difficult to overcome in many cases.

Baker et al.'s (2023) study indicated that justice-involved reentry participants were more successful with the support of navigators as an integral part of the reentry transition process. The participants in my study who appeared most successful in their reentry programs could access collaborative support across programs whose programming expertise leveraged their needs. Markowitz (2017) found historical data that highlights the stigmatization of mental illness. Markowitz highlighted that a critical dynamic could be the unintended consequences of labeling and categorization in reentry.

Labelling, though often intended to identify needs or provide targeted support, can frequently yield unintended negative consequences, particularly for women. My findings underscore how societal invisibility compounds the challenges faced by formerly incarcerated women during the reentry process. This invisibility exacerbates interconnected barriers such as access to housing and employment and the pervasive effects of community stigma. These challenges, as identified through the experiences of all formerly incarcerated women participants in my study, perpetuate cycles of marginalization and hinder successful reintegration into society.

Another barrier to housing can be this disconnect, which often determines whether a woman has access to safe and stable housing, essential for mitigating other challenges she may encounter during reentry. According to Doyle (2022), when these housing needs are not addressed promptly and effectively, compliance with the requirements of the criminal justice system becomes exceedingly difficult, if not

impossible. I discovered that without adequate housing, women are left vulnerable to compounding barriers, such as unemployment, stigma, and instability, which further hinder their ability to reintegrate into society successfully.

Finally, Sheppard et al. (2022) identify the lack of employment as a significant and harmful barrier for formerly incarcerated individuals, often stemming from stakeholders' stigmatization of those with criminal backgrounds. This exploratory study on the barriers and successes of women in reentry programs highlights employment as one of the most critical factors influencing recidivism. The common factor found in the study was the inability to secure stable work, which limits financial independence and reinforces cycles of marginalization, making it a pivotal issue in the reentry process for women.

Situational Awareness Factors

Family dysfunction emerged as a significant theme in the experiences of formerly incarcerated women in reentry programs. Five participants described how triggers such as emotional instability, financial insecurity, toxic relationships, and discomfort with rejection contributed to their current circumstances. These factors underscored the complexity of their journeys as they sought to navigate reentry while striving to rediscover and redefine themselves.

During interviews, two participants revealed the difficult experience of returning home after reentry programs. While the home was described as a stable and safe place for formerly incarcerated women, it was also identified as a site where triggers, emotional instability, rejection, and old habits resurfaced. Lodi (2021) discusses the complex

dynamics between those who have been violated, those who cause violations, and the significant roles that communities play in the suffering caused by such violations. This theme was echoed by participants who had experienced abuse, leading to their incarceration because of attempts to protect themselves.

Beichner et al. (2022) suggested that establishing new relationships could benefit both the community and women in reentry, as new social structures positively impacted their experiences in the criminal justice system. However, building new, healthy relationships was essential yet challenging for many women in reentry programs, mainly when they lived near other women with similar struggles. Despite these challenges, their willingness to confront past triggers and behaviors no longer aligned with the new lives they sought to build was crucial in making necessary changes. In my study, three participants shared that setting and maintaining personal boundaries became progressively more straightforward as they shifted their self-perception, allowing them to stick to their decisions over time.

Limitations of the Study

The first limitation of this study lies in the methodology, specifically the use of qualitative research. While qualitative research was the most appropriate methodology for this study, it is essential to note that the findings cannot be generalized. The nature of qualitative inquiry emphasizes the in-depth exploration of individual experiences, and as such, the results are reflective of the specific sample rather than a broader population.

The second limitation was the sample size. The study included ten participants, which, according to Patton (2015), is considered enough for qualitative research,

especially when aiming for a detailed exploration of participants' experiences. While the sample size was relatively small, it allowed for an in-depth analysis using qualitative methods. Given the exploratory nature of the study, this sample size was appropriate for capturing the nuanced experiences of formerly incarcerated women in reentry programs.

The third limitation was modifying the interview instrument, which the original creator had previously used and approved. Although the instrument was adapted to suit the specific needs of this study, the modification introduced the risk of limiting the scope of participants' responses. In particular, the structured questions might have restricted the participants' ability to provide open-ended responses, potentially limiting the breadth of data collected. Despite this, participants were still willing to disclose their experiences fully. The semi-structured interview design, with its flexibility for follow-up questions, allowed the researcher to gain additional clarity and insight when needed, ensuring a richer understanding of the participants' lived experiences.

Recommendations

Future studies should use a random sampling technique to target participants in other states that may have a better, more robust Department of Corrections and communities. This would help simplify the reentry process and significantly reduce recidivism. Reentry programs, non-profits, and other social service agencies should be included in the reentry process before participants are released from incarceration.

Participants who wholeheartedly participated in their programs, with minds made up for success, were less disappointed when situations did not work out. Two participants briefly attributed their success, along with all the hardships associated,

to their shared relationships with God as a fundamental part of their recovery from substance abuse and former family patterns. Spiritual practices like prayer, meditation, or mindfulness can reduce stress, improve emotional regulation, and enhance mental resilience. Including these practices in reentry curricula can equip participants with tools to navigate challenges and prevent relapse.

By emphasizing the transformative power of faith and spirituality, reentry programs can address participants' holistic needs, fostering physical and psychological recovery and deeper personal and communal growth. Future studies should include stakeholders and funders in providing housing and employment with livable wages so that participants have better chances of succeeding in the negative. Secure, safe, and reliable housing is foundational for stability. Future studies should explore partnerships with housing organizations, landlords, and public housing authorities to ensure participants can access affordable living conditions.

Beichner et al. (2022) stated that restorative justice has a strong approach to exposing the dysfunctional patterns of the criminal justice system and the defilement of human rights in prison. Old policies and practices in and out of the prison systems should be destroyed and updated. Restorative justice's impact can be positive in demanding social structures and bridging gaps for formerly incarcerated individuals, namely women. Furthermore, new concepts include restorative justice as the method of linking accountability to the community to buy into the structure of the benefits it will bring to have integrated, safe, reliable housing, mental health care, employment, and timely family reunification.

The focus of my study was formerly incarcerated women participating in reentry programs in a southwestern state. The experiences of women in another geographical area should be explored to determine whether their reentry programs have different experiences. Also, determine if robust alternatives could offer different solutions to incarceration. Researchers should continue to explore women to include presentencing assessments to evaluate the need for integrated rehabilitation instead of incarceration.

Implications

Excessive incarceration of women has become a growing issue in the United States, creating a range of challenges for families, particularly those who must rearrange their lives to raise children they never expected to take responsibility for. This also contributes to the generational cycles of incarceration. My general qualitative study is unique in its focus on the detailed experiences of women participating in various reentry programs in the Southwest. The study highlights these women's barriers and successes as they navigate their journeys. The findings from this study can potentially foster positive social change in multiple ways.

According to the National Institute of Justice (2019), reentry programs are designed to address the barriers women face post-incarceration, helping to break the cycle of recidivism and promote reintegration. However, a study by Duwe (2017) indicated that the effectiveness of current reentry processes remains unclear, with many strategies still needing refinement to be more impactful. The experiences of reentry programs in addressing barriers and success factors for formerly incarcerated women highlight several key challenges, including mental health care, housing, employment,

parental concerns, and other stress-related factors associated with the reentry process. Participants in my study reported the measures they took to remain engaged in reentry programs, particularly while living in group homes with other women who continued to struggle with family issues, past relationships, and addiction. This significantly challenged staying focused on their previously developed reentry plans. Furthermore, reentry programs often operated in isolation, with longer timelines and limited collaboration with other community partners who could have supported women in their efforts to stay sober, meet basic needs, and follow house rules.

According to the Second Chance Act of 2008, non-profit organizations and other agencies may receive funding to address the barriers and challenges faced by individuals transitioning into communities with significant resources (D'Amica, 2017). Edwards (2022) notes that women who struggle with substance abuse often face unique challenges that may hinder their ability to engage effectively in reentry programs. Additionally, limited research indicates that women ex-offenders often lack access to reentry programs or other services that are essential for supporting successful transitions after incarceration (Kajstura, 2018).

At the societal and policy levels, community collaborations hold significant potential for positive social change. Issues such as employment, housing, mental health care, and family restoration can be effectively addressed through partnerships between communities and stakeholders. By establishing clear accountability among entities and participants, women are afforded a greater chance of success and the opportunity to reunite with their children.

However, the stigma associated with societal labels often instills fear, leading to concerns about loss and jeopardized futures, especially when support systems are not readily accessible. Some women expressed a preference to serve their sentences, only to realize upon release that little had changed in their lives. This general qualitative research study found that relational support played a pivotal role in fostering hope for women who believed they would never achieve anything meaningful after incarceration.

Conclusion

Leveraging all community resources—including stakeholders, non-profits, and families—provides the best opportunity to promote community safety, rehabilitation, self-sufficiency, and the successful reintegration of formerly incarcerated women into productive citizenship. However, when the focus of incarceration shifts to simply housing women in environments that perpetuate and intensify their past trauma, we jeopardize the safety and stability of our communities. Instead, we must create opportunities for women to heal in supportive, trauma-informed spaces that foster growth and break generational cycles; we can work together to build stronger, more resilient communities that unlock the full potential of every individual.

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Appendix A: Instrument Access

Subject: Request: Interview Instrument Access

Date: Thursday, February 14, 2019, at 11:37 PM

To: Dr. Williams-Queen

Hello,

My name is Jenice Jones, and I am from Tulsa, Oklahoma and attending an online Doctoral Study at Walden University. My topic is: The Exploration Of Barriers And Success Factors Of Reentry Programs For Women After Incarceration and I would love to use and cite your needs assessment questionnaire if this is the direction my study will follow. So far, your questionnaire is the closest to the needs I would like to address for the population I will interview.

Please let me know if and how this would be a possibility to keep in compliance with academia.

Thank you,

Jenice Jones

Subject: Re: Request: Interview Instrument Access

Date: Thursday, February 14, 2019, 8:16 PM

To: Jenice Jones

Hello Jenice,

Yes, you have my approval to use the questionnaire. I hope it's normal. Good luck!

Sent from my iPhone

Subject: Re: Request: Interview Instrument Access

Date: Saturday, February 16, 2019, 9:27 AM

To: Dr. Williams-Queen

Thank you, Dr. Williams-Queen, for your permission.

Jenice Jones

Needs Assessment Questionnaire

Demographic

Appendix B: Social Media Recruitment Post

Hello and welcome to my doctoral research study page. My name is Jenice Jones and I am a Ph.D. (Doctor of Philosophy) candidate at Walden University in the Public Policy and Administration Program. I am conducting a study in partial fulfillment of my dissertation. I am recruiting 10 to 15 research participants who meet the following criteria:

1. Currently or previously a participant in a reentry program.
2. Have barriers connecting in the community.
3. Have had successes connecting in the community.

PLEASE NOTE: Individuals participating in any part of my program are excluded from participating in this study. Participants will be interviewed, which will consist of being asked to answer at least 16 questions about their experiences with linking to resources to assist with needs. All interviews will be audio recorded and conducted via Groupmeet, Zoom, or by phone. Each interview will take approximately 30-60 minutes.

Participants can ask me questions about the research study and interview process before the interview. There will also be a debriefing after the interview for additional questions to be asked. The study results will be provided to participants through a brochure/pamphlet. Additionally, the study findings will be published in a professional

journal. This study is voluntary, and you can stop the interview any time. You will not be penalized or punished in any manner for not participating in this study or withdrawing after beginning participation.

Please note that this is an opportunity to provide your voice in the development of reentry programs in the future for women to be adequately served. My research study is not connected or affiliated with my current position. This research study is in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy in Public Policy and Administration. If you meet the criterion and are interested in participating in the study, please click the link to access and read the informed consent form.

Thank you all in advance for all the consideration and time given to this matter!

Appendix C: Needs Assessment Questionnaire

Demographics

1. Age
2. Sex
3. Race or ethnicity
4. Employment status
5. How much time has passed since you were released from corrections and custody?
6. How many times have you been incarcerated?

Interview Questions

7. What would you identify as one thing you perceive you need in employment?
8. What would you identify as one thing you perceive you need in social situations?
9. What would you identify as one thing that you perceive you need in education?
10. What would you identify as one thing you perceive you need in housing?
11. What would you identify as one thing you believe would help you successfully complete probation or parole?
12. What would you identify as one thing you perceive you need in Community resources?
13. What would you identify as one thing you perceive you need from the

correctional system?

14. What would you identify as one thing you perceive you need in vocational training?

15. Of all the needs that were discussed, what do you identify as your greatest.

need?

16. If there are any additional needs that you would like to discuss with me that you believe would help you be successful in society, what would they be?

Developed by Ashley Renae Williams-Queen

Appendix D: Recruitment Flyer

There is a new study about the experiences of women who have faced barriers and successes in reentry programs.



Interview Study

SEEKS WOMEN WHO PARTICIPATED IN A REENTRY PROGRAM

About the study:

- One 60 minute virtual or phone interview that will be audio (no video) recorded
- The published study will not share any names or details that identify you

Volunteers must meet these qualifications:

- 18 years old or older
- Formerly incarcerated and participated in a reentry program
- Identifies as a woman

This interview is part of the doctoral study for Jenice Jones, a Ph.D. student at Walden University. Interviews will take place immediately.

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Appendix E: Dissemination Plan

The Dissemination Plan:

This comprehensive dissemination plan is meant to honor participants' contributions and ensure transparency in sharing study results.

The selected and qualified participants as the primary audience contributing to the study.

1. The communication to participants will be in written form in a summary report I will create.
2. The message will be crafted in plain language to ensure all materials are clear and non-technical. Key findings will highlight the most important results and their implications. Then, the context for the findings will explain their relevance to participants' contributions.
3. I will be prompt in communicating the results as soon as they are finalized to maintain interest and relevance.
4. The participants will be allowed to provide feedback on the dissemination process and the study findings.
5. Ethical considerations: To protect participants' identities and sensitive information in all communications. The informed consent will ensure that participants gave consent for receiving study results.