

10-26-2025

## The Repeal of Welfare Lifetime Ban

Sympathy Sutton Huggins  
*Walden University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/dissertations>



Part of the [Public Policy Commons](#)

---

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies Collection at ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact [ScholarWorks@waldenu.edu](mailto:ScholarWorks@waldenu.edu).

# Walden University

College of Health Sciences and Public Policy

This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

Sympathy Sutton-Huggins

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
and that any and all revisions required by  
the review committee have been made.

Review Committee

Dr. Raj Singh, Committee Chairperson,  
Public Policy and Administration Faculty

Dr. Ernesto Escobedo, Committee Member,  
Public Policy and Administration Faculty

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

Walden University  
2025

Abstract

The Repeal of Welfare Lifetime Ban

by

Sympathy Sutton-Huggins

MPA, Walden University, 2021

MPA, University of Baltimore, 2019

BSS, Fayetteville State University, 2014

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Public Policy and Administration

Walden University

November 2025

## Abstract

The Welfare Lifetime Ban imposed severe restrictions on women's access to essential resources during the critical period following incarceration. By denying housing assistance, food aid, and employment services, the policy created significant barriers to reintegration and undermines both criminal justice and social welfare reform. Little is known about the long-term impacts of the ban or the absence of effective rehabilitative policy alternatives. Few studies have examined its outcomes within the framework of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA). The findings within (PRWORA) enactment briefly stabilized a decline in welfare recipients, and employment rates increased temporarily for single mothers who had children. Researchers found that formerly incarcerated women still faced hardships including obstacles—such as, limited food access, housing denials, less education opportunities and issues keeping long-term healthcare, whether they had children or not. The purpose of this qualitative narrative study was to investigate current policy measures and the lack of supportive programs for formerly incarcerated women through the lens of the theories of social stigma, structural barriers, and empowerment. It was found that women subjected to welfare sanctions faced elevated risks of recidivism, diminished quality of life, and heightened social discrimination within three years of release compared to those who had access to welfare rehabilitative programs. Integrating the Second Chance Act provisions with the Welfare Lifetime Ban can provide essential support services for rehabilitation to assist women in rebuilding their lives, lower recidivism rates, strengthen family dynamics, and improve mental health outcomes contributing to positive social change.

The Repeal of Welfare Lifetime Ban

by

Sympathy Sutton-Huggins

MPA, Walden University, 2021

MPA, University of Baltimore, 2019

BSS, Fayetteville State University, 2014

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Public Policy and Administration

Walden University

November 2025

## Dedication

I dedicate this in memory of my loving parents, Lloyd and Rosetta Sutton; you were the greatest parents a daughter could ever ask for. Your love and support have shaped me into the person I am today.

A very special dedication to my loving son, Gavin Huggins, who has been by my side, cheering me on all the way with his smile and encouraging words throughout this entire dissertation process.

To my family members who were consistently there for me, I appreciate the support that you all expressed when I needed it the most. Especially, for uplifting me through prayer and spiritual guidance.

To my friends who never let me down, you all stood by my side and always gave me support.

To my former professors, teachers, and colleagues who believed in me to strive for excellence to make a difference, so much that you all would always say you can do it, keep going, education is the key. You all helped me develop strength and ability to succeed in every goal that I set for my myself.

God bless you all.

## Acknowledgments

To my chair, Dr. Raj Singh, committee members, Dr. Ernesto Escobedo, academic advisor, and all Walden University staff who guided me toward achieving scholarly excellence.

I acknowledge my son Gavin, and closest family members and closest friends; thank you all for your prayers, motivation, and support to help me complete this journey.

God bless you all.

## Table of Contents

List of Tables .....	v
List of Figures .....	vi
Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study.....	1
Introduction.....	1
Background .....	3
Problem Statement .....	5
Purpose of the Study .....	8
Research Question .....	11
Subquestions .....	11
Theoretical Framework for the Study .....	11
Narrative Policy Theory.....	12
Nature of the Study .....	12
Definitions.....	13
Assumptions.....	14
Scope and Delimitations .....	15
Limitations .....	16
Significance.....	16
Summary .....	17
Chapter 2: Literature Review .....	19
Introduction.....	19
Sociological Framework .....	22

Feminist Theory .....	22
Literature Search Strategy.....	24
Literature Review Related to Key Variables and/or Concepts .....	25
Discrimination and Injustice Drug Sentencing .....	25
Recidivism and Desistance Measure .....	26
Review Related Literature .....	28
Causal Link Between Recidivism and Women Post-Release.....	28
The War on Drugs.....	30
Summary and Conclusions .....	32
Chapter 3: Research Method.....	33
Introduction.....	33
Research Design and Rationale .....	34
Subquestions .....	36
Code Categories .....	36
Role of the Researcher .....	36
Methodology .....	37
Participant Selection Logic .....	37
Instrumentation .....	39
Data Collection .....	40
Data Analysis Plan.....	40
Issues of Trustworthiness.....	43
Ethical Procedures .....	45

Summary .....	46
Chapter 4: Results .....	47
Introduction.....	47
Setting .....	47
Demographics .....	49
Data Collection .....	50
Data Analysis .....	51
Evidence of Trustworthiness.....	53
Credibility .....	53
Transferability.....	53
Dependability .....	53
Conformability .....	54
Results.....	54
Theme 1: Reentry.....	54
Theme 2: Housing.....	56
Theme 3: Employment.....	60
Summary .....	61
Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations .....	62
Introduction.....	62
Interpretation of the Findings.....	63
Limitations of the Study.....	64
Implications.....	65

Recommendations.....	66
Conclusion .....	67
References.....	69
Appendix A: North Carolina First Step Act .....	83
Appendix B: Recruitment Flyer.....	84
Appendix C: Interview Questions.....	85

List of Tables

Table 1. Demographics of Age, Ethnicity, Education, and Homelessness Status ..... 50

## List of Figures

Figure 1. Challenges Post-Release.....	52
--	----

## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

### **Introduction**

There is a crisis among single, unmarried women who do not have an education or someone to emulate within their home, and who could help them provide a stable environment. Children who have grown up in poverty and have been exposed to drugs, violence, and crime at an early age potentially suffer because they do not know how to distinguish between criminal and noncriminal activities and behavior. However, this recurring parent and child broken cycle can be corrected with appropriate rehabilitative programs and assigned reentry case management workers to combat areas of need. With this one-on-one therapy, data can be collected to implement effective treatment and policy planning.

Policymakers in the U.S. Congress must reconsider the welfare lifetime ban that has impacted between 30% and 50% of individuals sentenced to prison who are reincarcerated during the 2-year follow-up period after their release. DeRooy Bennett & Sydes (2019) agrees that within a 2-year prison release the rates of recidivism becomes significantly increased with reoffending and “time to failure”. Duwe et al., (2017) agreed that within the 2-year post release time there must be rehabilitative measures put in effect to help individuals participate in second chance opportunities that are geared to becoming free of recidivism. Previous reports indicated rearrest rates from 26% and 60%, including reconviction rates that ranged from 20% to 63%, and the fluctuation of reimprisonment rates that negatively impact low-income communities (14% to 45%), largely due to the lack of post-release programs (Doleac, 2020; Yuhnenko et al., 2019).

Essentially, when an individual has been restricted or denied welfare programs, it blocks access to recovery from recidivism, drug addiction therapy, and obtaining other rehabilitation needs. The state policymakers provided each state with its own free will to change its welfare lifetime ban based on its criminal activity statistics. The North Carolina Justice Center (2020) suggested that the North Carolina legislature should repeal N.C.G.S. § 108A-25.2 to opt out of the federal Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA). The repeal of N.C.G.S. § 108A-25.2 would create a positive impact toward decreasing food-insecurity-related crimes for women and overall felony drug convictions (North Carolina Justice Center, 2020). Cho and Tasca (2018) found that, in evidence-based investigations, recidivism impacts low-income families due to ongoing controversial policymaking arguments linked to lawmakers' inability to resolve sanctions of compromise severity of welfare lifetime bans and recidivism connected to drug convictions for termination (Sheely, 2020). The welfare lifetime ban includes specific penalties for having a drug felony record, which prevents one from being allowed in welfare programs. The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and Supplemental Need Assistance Program (SNAP) welfare benefits help to prevent many families in the United States from being deprived of nutritious food by offering them food stamp supplements and opportunities for a housing voucher program (Yukhnenko et al., 2019). Arguably, this is why the welfare lifetime ban must be terminated in all states. The program does provide an option for post-released ex-offenders and justice-involved former criminals.

Essentially, having access to welfare benefits helps women get back on their feet when they have suffered hardship, which would help benefit those families and the community as a whole. In this article, I explore past research to find supportive studies that can help increase the repeal termination decisions and give an ex-offender a second chance, other than recidivism. The gap of the study relates to exploring the lack of policy intervention, reoffenders' discrimination history, and denial of rehabilitative programs.

The implication for social change can be described as a modified welfare reform ban that reduces the rate of recidivism in women who have drug felony convictions (see Martin & Shannon, 2020). Paresky (2017) indicated the welfare lifetime ban refers to President Clinton's 1996 enactment of the PRWORA, which affects this enormous class of individuals by including a provision that places a lifetime ban on access to welfare benefits, including food stamps, for individuals who have been convicted of a drug felony. Paresky (2017) found that the welfare lifetime ban refers to President Clinton's 1996 enactment of the PRWORA. The welfare lifetime ban affects drug felons by the punishment of a lifetime ban on collecting welfare, which disqualifies the person from receiving benefits of rehabilitative programs that include WorkFirst on-the-job training, educational grants, housing, and access to free food.

### **Background**

The criminal justice and government welfare systems penalize women for a lifetime. Restricted sanctions consist of sentencing without optional drug diversion programs and not providing adequate post-release drug treatment resources to fight against repeated incarcerations. According to Immervoll and Knotz (2018), there are

broader areas that expand across central and international claimant groups, increasing efforts of sanctions but barriers scape welfare reform.

Afkar et al. (2017) analyzed the measurement of effective components of addiction relapse, stating that drug addiction negatively impacts an individual's social and cognitive behavior, causing them to commit crimes that they may not ordinarily do. Cho and Tasca (2018) focused on the disparities of women sentenced in drug court and charged with a felony. The study was conducted to determine what stages women experience and how their children are negatively impacted once the mother is sent to prison. Camplain et al. (2019) focused on the separation of racial prejudices related to how many arrests were made of minorities because of drug and alcohol crimes. Luallen et al. (2017) focused on the public assistance lifetime ban and how it related to ex-offenders who are not eligible for job training and are currently at elevated risk of recidivism. Martin and Shannon (2020) focused on the lifetime ban and the impact that policymakers have on the welfare system toward implementing permanent restrictions concerning all individuals convicted of a drug felony.

Nagelhout et al. (2017) focused on the study of unemployment rates within society related to individuals who abused drugs. The researchers created qualitative interview prompts to test the hypothesis that unemployment is highly effective in causing an individual to use drugs. The significance of a policy change involves an essential reason that focuses on women's rights post-release connected within proven advocacy programs, and recidivism can work effectively. Post-release economic risk control must be implemented and integrated for rehabilitative initiatives to lower the high rates of

criminal influencers. Nagelhout et al. (2017) suggested economic recessions are clustered and fragmented, triggering frequent illegal substance abuse, which subsequently creates psychological mechanisms among women newly returning to society. The nature of the qualitative study is to find missing pieces that keep preventing rehabilitation policies like the One Stop Shop Community Reentry Program Act of 2020 reentry program, which stalled and did not become law. Paresky (2017) explored rehabilitative opportunities on how welfare can be an option for disadvantaged ex-felons and studied ways to eliminate the lifetime ban for drug felons.

Rosenberg et al. (2017) suggested that there are racial disparities in drug convictions related to African American versus White offenders. Bhatti (2019) focused on policy change for Virginia state law and the welfare ban in hopes of implementing a reentry program that will lower or eliminate recidivism. Rosenberg et al. identified problems in other states that reconsidered modifying their welfare bans to improve life after prison for drug felons successfully. Sheely (2020) indicated lifetime welfare ban restrictions were said to cause more harm than good for individuals with felony drug convictions. Sheely explored the three stages of the policy, which indicated full, modified, or no ban, to investigate which states were most likely to lift the permanent ban. For instance, each local state's government officials have the authority to opt out or change the full restrictions that enforce the harsher punishments of the lifetime ban.

### **Problem Statement**

There is a problem in the United States of women who need access to rehabilitation programs and financial government assistance to transition back into

society without the pressure of recidivism. The first enactment of the welfare lifetime ban started when former President Bill Clinton passed into law the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act that anyone who was convicted of a drug felony would not be allowed to receive public assistance. Tahar-Djebbar, A. (2022). The law also prohibited access to rehabilitative programs that could aid in housing, substance abuse treatment, and employment. That problem is the welfare lifetime ban.

Currently, no state has conducted a post-release study of women's recidivism occurrences connected to the welfare reform lifetime ban's negative impact to demonstrate any positive outcomes. Tahar-Djebbar (2022) challenged the decision-making protocols used to determine signing into law the PRWORA, which ended the 60-year-old Aid to Families with Dependent Children without providing additional tools to help recipients improve their living conditions and creating more programs for long-term effectiveness and not returning to the welfare system. However, if there were rehabilitative program policies implemented for women post-release, those policies would essentially combat recidivism and lower the rates of criminal activity. The government must develop tracking systems to ensure funding is available for rehabilitative post-release measures that guarantee alternatives outside of committing recidivism such as being eligible for housing vouchers, education, and employment placement.

Wolkomir (2018) found that a U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) study collected data from state prisoners, ages 18 through 55 years, released across 30 states and estimated that approximately 68% were rearrested within 3 years of release and

approximately 77% were rearrested within 5 years of release. In 2021, the Congressional Budget Office introduced bill H.R.3372 in hopes of securing concrete support and accountability for the reentry process, the bill has only passed the House, but it enables the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ; 2022) to create grants for community-based nonprofit organizations. There are many possible factors contributing to this problem, and this bill would be an effective way to track and evaluate qualitative data to initiate rehabilitative programs within state, federal, and local government-affiliated organizations, but it has not been fully passed to date. To operate it would cost \$40 million for annually reporting data through hotlines, text messages, and community reentry centers, divided into \$10 million each year over the 2022–2026 period for the DOJ to provide grant service and assistance to all individuals returning to a community after conviction or incarceration (Congressional Budget Office, 2021).

The study contributes knowledge for the policymakers, stakeholders, and the community needed to address this problem by interviewing women who have experienced crime life firsthand and how recidivism negatively impacts their ability to rehabilitate after prison. An analysis of the one-on-one interviews provides evidence of long-term experiences from women who faced challenges of discrimination when trying to regain independence after serving a prison sentence. This study is completely open-minded to collect information on the alleged mistreatment of women according to their lived experiences as specified in the research questions. The welfare reform lifetime bans increase recidivism for women because they are unable to find suitable rehabilitation programs after being released from prison. President Biden's FY24 budget includes \$3.7

billion for Homeless Assistance Grants to meet existing needs and expand assistance to nearly 25,000 more unsheltered families, including survivors of home violence. The problem affects all demographics in which crime rates continue to rise, especially in poverty-stricken and drug-prone areas. The White House (2022) reported that the Biden-Harris administration is implementing policy initiatives and inclusive strategies to solidify concrete national support to help formerly incarcerated persons transition. Many possible factors contribute to this problem, including drug addiction, lack of rehabilitation programs, welfare lifetime bans, permanent denial of aid, and ex-offenders who are not eligible for job training and are currently at great risk of recidivism because of the government's policy restrictions.

Tahar-Djebbar (2022) argued that President Clinton's rationale for welfare reform focused on the notion of a work ideal, not the actual programs for individuals once the lifetime welfare ban took effect post-release. Initially, President Clinton's thought was an alternative for support to preserve the family values of African American recipients. However, welfare reform did not help society to grow to improve African American women to become independent, as drug crimes and substance abuse increased over the decades families were separated and single mothers were left alone to care for their children; being on welfare became a haven for women of color who were husbandless with illegitimate children (Tahar-Djebbar, 2022).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore current policy measures connected to the lack of rehabilitative programs that would initiate new implementation

of appropriate welfare reform. The One Stop Shop Community Reentry Program Act of 2020 integration with the DOJ is crucial to long-term independence against recidivism. Women within low-income communities who are permanently banned from welfare programs need reentry incentives to ensure successful transitions because felony drug convictions terminate government eligibility for their lifetime. If rehabilitative programs like this cannot get passed, widespread poverty linked to criminal activity will continue to increase. O'Neill Hayes and Barnhorst (2020) reported that nearly 80% in federal prisons and 60% in state prisons are Black or Latino despite historical data showing that, on average, Whites are just as, if not more, likely to use illicit drugs. Paresky (2017) indicated how the high recidivism rate continues to be an ongoing problem, especially at the most critical moments for women recently released from prison who cannot find employment, shelter, or money. Bhatti (2019) found that in 2018, there were three attempts to repeal the ban: two were introduced by Senator Favola, SB 203 (for SNAP) and SB 204 (for TANF) and the other was pushed by Delegate Alfonso Lopez (Democrat-Arlington, Virginia.), HB 945 (for TANF). Unfortunately, no bill passed. Delegate Alfonso stated, "The purpose of this bill was to promote public safety by allowing for positive re-integration for ex-offenders, reducing the burden placed on families and local communities, and basically increasing the gainful employment of ex-offenders" (p. 7). The welfare lifetime ban causes problems for women previously convicted of a drug felony. The civil rights of these women are blocked from receiving any type of eligibility for public assistance programs, such as cost-of-living, food subsidies, and housing vouchers.

Golembeski et al. (2020) argued that since the welfare policy enactment of 1996 lacks updated evaluations, it implicates reentry discrimination. However, if questions arise from this statement, there is a need to investigate the connection of why long-term penalties toward individuals are still being allowed to permanently deny welfare rehabilitative assistance under the lifetime ban's punishments. Halpin (2018) indicated that rehabilitative measures for women desiring to engage in reentry programs related to second-chance opportunities, educational grants, housing, resources, health care, and child protective counseling services must be documented and regularly tracked. Halpin (2018) argued that to prove that policies are needed to implement long-term effectiveness, data must be associated with recidivism, essentially causing higher collateral risks for these women being released from prison. Without the help of bipartisan policymaking, women will continue to be subjected to a lifetime of challenges that hinder rehabilitation under the welfare lifetime ban restrictions. Edwards et al. (2022) argued that recidivism is problematic during the first few months of the post-release period; inconsistencies of disadvantage are evident. Despite the lack of existing self-efficacy data, policymakers must implement reentry-to-society programs to track women's post-release efforts as they transition from prison to normalcy, with an organized plan that initiates assigned caseworkers and regular evaluations once they obtain a release date to ensure conditions are designed to help assuage recidivism.

### **Research Question**

RQ: How can women's lived experiences change the existing welfare reform lifetime ban program restriction to encourage rehabilitation policy implementation between policymakers?

### **Subquestions**

a. What types of program changes can the federal government implement within the welfare reform lifetime ban to focus on rehabilitation for women's reentry program development?

b. How policymakers' restrictions on program defense within the federal government can reevaluate welfare reform programs for women who are recently released from prison?

### **Theoretical Framework for the Study**

In this section, I discuss the reason for incorporating the theoretical framework. Pettus et al. (2021) indicated that at the time of reentry for ex-felons, there are factors integrated within extraordinary lived experiences of recidivism histories that include disproportionate rates of trauma and poverty. According to Ventura (2021), women in the criminal justice system are more likely than the normal demographics to suffer from multiple mental health disorders such as anxiety, borderline compulsive personality disorder, and post-traumatic stress disorder. Essentially, theoretical frameworks help to measure criminal justice system penalties toward women while in prison and after their release. By providing explanations from previous research and integrating a comparative bridge that supports reentry program developments, this research will be based on

narrative and feminist theory. Applying feminist theory helps to show direct relevance to potential discrimination for analyzing women's lived experiences to request policy changes that can impact the quality of life for these women and reduce recidivism overall for community safety. Emerson (2018) indicated that traumatic experiences are associated with women who have historical incarcerations with a high prevalence of substance use disorder, in which little assistance is provided, leaving them vulnerable to ongoing exposure to personal relationship violence and recidivism. Connecting and networking between underserved communities that are considered below or within poverty levels allows women who need assistance after release to obtain services.

### **Narrative Policy Theory**

The narrative policy framework (NPF) is useful to understand how policy development can be significant for social change processes to engage with rehabilitation. Shanahan et al. (2018) argued that the NPF is a policy process framework that has two major expositions detailing core assumptions, levels of analysis, hypotheses, and definitions of narrative concepts. The NPF will be useful to my research to explore welfare reform restrictions and policy lifetime bans.

### **Nature of the Study**

The nature of this qualitative study is to explore the lived experiences of ex-felon women through the lens of previous criminal history and phenomenological feminist gender-response theory that involves women, recidivism, welfare reform, and policy intervention. I used purposeful sampling to recruit 20 ex-offender women who have been convicted of a drug felony, who are 18-40 years old, who live with children in Greenville,

North Carolina. From their answers to the survey questions, each participant was identified as someone who has been denied welfare assistance under the Welfare Reform Act. Data were collected using a researcher-developed interview protocol. Data were inductively coded using categories and subcodes. Fullmer et al. (2022) suggested that person-specific conditions are viewed as an individual's mindset for reentry (e.g., self-esteem, the desire to change), whereas context-specific conditions are viewed as the access to resources or services during the reentry process (e.g., housing, employment, medical insurance). In Chapter 2, I discuss the rationale of this qualitative study's research design. O'Kane et al. (2021) suggested the use of code frequencies to explore patterns, similarities, differences, and individuals. Subsets of data based on characteristics, known as attributes, help to identify categories, characteristics, unions, and groups. Link and Hamilton (2017) argued that over long periods of time, parallel concepts reintegrate exposure to causal factors that create turning points or chains of social risk, potentially leading to reinitiating substance abuse behavior, evoking various stressors, triggering criminal patterns to obtain housing, find family relationship acceptance, and comply with conditions of release. However, the chain of social risks only provides a short-term fix to existing problems when there are no current policies for post-release rehabilitative programs.

### **Definitions**

*Drug felony:* A controlled substance that is illegally transported or used for distribution to sale (Tuttle, 2019).

*Recidivism:* Criminal acts that result in rearrest, reconviction, or return to prison with or without a new sentence during a three-year period following the person's release (National Institute of Justice, 2022).

*Rehabilitation:* The extent to which a program is implicated in the reduction of crime by repairing the individual in some way by addressing needs or deficits (National Institute of Justice, 2022).

### **Assumptions**

The assumptions are that formerly incarcerated women who grew up in poverty have childhood trauma that led to a criminal record or a drug felony and experienced violence physically and emotionally, most likely triggered an environment of low self-esteem, increased risk of substance abuse leading to mental illness, consistent higher unemployment rates, homelessness, and poor health (Wolkomir, 2018). The research was intended to show that the government's lack of rehabilitation programs prevents ex-offenders from obtaining a higher quality of life and having the desire to commit any form of criminal activity. Collins and Stockton (2018) indicated that being able to centralize theory can provide an aid toward recognizing assumptions and connections to epistemological dispositions, which in turn allows the researcher to methodically look for, as a result of bias, thinking related to what was preexisting or what was predicted. For example, the researcher should not be too quick to form opinions about the experiences; rather, the goal is to explore and investigate each finding as information.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

The scope of this study was to explore the experiences of disadvantaged women who have been released from prison and denied the ability to choose rehabilitative programs that match their self-sufficient needs toward becoming independent and avoiding recidivism. The target population consists of North Carolina low-income female ex-felons seeking to change their lives for the better and who need rehabilitative programs to move forward from recidivism. Findings may be used by policymakers to reevaluate the restrictions on the welfare lifetime ban. The rehabilitative opportunity for women who suffer from transitioning back into society independently is needed for learning a noncriminal lifestyle. Williams et al. (2021) suggested that African American feminist scholars continue to advocate for Black women experiencing discriminatory prison sentencing compared to their white counterparts. The scope of the current study will include these two races. Harmon and Boppre (2018) indicated that the rise of female criminality may stem from changes in gender roles based on sociological/criminological research theories such as differential association/social learning theory, strain/anomie theory, and social control/social disorganization. Harmon and Boppre suggested that White women's criminal behavior was tied to sociopsychological factors that consist of the lack of social control, in contrast to Black women's structural and deprivation factors and decreased family and community ties. The current study focused on women between 18 and 55 years of age who have been affected by the policy enactment of the PRWORA, which is a policy integration within the welfare lifetime ban restrictions. The current

study only included participants who were released from prison, not currently incarcerated individuals.

### **Limitations**

Limitations of this study could have involved difficulties within fact-finding inquiries to verify where a participant has applied for welfare assistance and been denied or discriminated against due to their criminal drug felony record. Essentially, because of the confidentiality laws that prohibit personal records from being open to the public, this could potentially be a limitation. However, since the research study was based on the lived experiences of women who continue to recidivate, it may not interfere with collecting the necessary data.

### **Significance**

This generic qualitative research study involved the effects of women and children's well-being that impact social change problems within the community and explored the lived experiences relevant to increases in recidivism. In North Carolina, 2,411 women are released from prison each year due to recidivism. Between 52% and 97% of women were added back to state prison populations compared to men. The drawback was driven by the growth in women's populations (Sawyer, 2019). A National Institute of Justice (NIJ) (2022) study found that transition services are significantly high, and 79% of women interviewed 30 days pre-release cited "employment, education, and life skills services" as their greatest areas of need. Sawyer (2019) reported that the Second Chance Act was signed into law in 2008, authorizing federal agencies to award grants to state and local agencies and nonprofit organizations to provide employment

assistance, substance abuse treatment, housing, family programming, mentoring, victims support, and other services to people returning to the community from prison or jail, but the evaluation of these rehabilitative program initiatives is not being systematically tracked to support the policy change needed. Mowen et al. (2019) found that individuals who lack affectionate family support or who experience decreases in affectionate support during the reentry process may be at risk of reoffending. The strategic technique is to show compassion and trustworthiness with the ex-offender to form a positive relationship ensuring that they can overcome their hinderances. Exploring the experiences of women who have been discriminated against because of the welfare lifetime ban can help with rehabilitation and lifestyle changes for the betterment of vulnerable communities.

### **Summary**

This generic qualitative study was developed based on the need for policy change in connection with women who have issues being denied rehabilitation access. The welfare reform lifetime ban for state, local, and federal government policy laws have indicated that drug felonies automatically and permanently disqualify anyone with a drug felony conviction to become eligible for public assistance determination, but the federal government in each state has allowed authority to modify or change restrictions. Within the criminal justice system, new policymaking decisions create a better foundation for rehabilitation performance measures to improve the stability of women who previously committed crimes leading to a drug felony criminal record and recidivism. Significantly, recidivism among women has continued to rise and is continuing to be problematic, especially in areas within low-income neighborhoods where crime rates increase. Over

60% of imprisoned women are mothers of children under age 18. In Chapter 2, I discuss the significance and causal links of women after release that are connected to substance abuse, drug convictions, policy initiative objectives, feminist theory, discrimination, injustice drug sentencing, recidivism, and desistance measures.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### **Introduction**

In this chapter, I discuss the importance of researching substance abuse, drug convictions, policy initiative objectives, feminist theory, discrimination, injustice in drug sentencing, recidivism, desistance measures, causal links, women after release, and the war on drugs. The impact of women incarcerations and recidivism spread globally within low poverty areas when there is an increase in crime rates associated with the factors that influence women's recidivism, substance abuse, and mental illness post-release. The lack of rehabilitative welfare programs has not helped to provide a way to combat reincarceration. Breuer et al. (2021) indicated from previous studies that formerly incarcerated mothers who have faced reoccurring imprisonment experience higher levels of dissociation that negatively impact the natural bond between mother and child.

Bachanan et al. (2017) suggested that the reoccurring convictions negatively impact rehabilitative efforts to create programs for women reoffenders who have young children but end up returning to prison because of employment issues, criminalization from rearrest, frequent prosecutions, and substance-abuse-related pressure to commit crimes for money or food. Sullivan et al. (2022) argued that the first month of women exiting prison is most critical for being assigned program rehabilitation transitions because there is a higher risk of thoughts leading to suicidal behavior, drug overdose, and recidivism. Burke et al., (2018) indicated the significance of community involvement and acceptance for developing a meaningful social change renewed environment for

integrating rehabilitative programs to assist with self-sufficiency, rejuvenation and motivation for women and their children connected to life after prison.

Smith et al. (2019) argued that there is limited access to reintegration program services and resources to assist women with probation and parole requirements as they return to their low-income communities. This limited access creates significant negative barriers in which recidivism is likely to occur. Once the prison sentence has been completed and the release date is approaching, there should be sufficient transitional, rehabilitative programs that provide temporary welfare assistance until employment goals have been met and there is public housing to ensure a place for them to live and not become homeless.

Alper et al. (2018) suggested that community reintegration is complex because women require a substantial number of social, justice, and healthcare services. Post-release, 35% of female prisoners were rearrested, and 14 per 100 women paroled returned to jail because they failed to meet parole requirements. Smith et al. (2019) researched the community health delivery system by investigating the challenges of women's lived prison experiences and the lack of opportunities that involve recidivism. The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) (2021) could effectively track rehabilitative programs through these types of data resources if the federal government implemented policies that mandate accountability within community health delivery systems and reentry programs.

Afkar et al. (2017) found that according to research investigations, almost 37% of the U.S. population aged above 12 have experienced the use of narcotic substances at

least once, 5.5% of whom have experienced substance abuse problems at least once during their lives. The statistical reports published by international organizations, particularly the World Health Organization, the International Narcotics Control Board, and the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, suggest that drug abuse is increasing globally.

The Biden-Harris administration's drug policy priorities for year one included the passage of the Substance Use Disorder Prevention that Promotes Opioid Recovery and Treatment for Patients and Communities (SUPPORT) Act in 2018, which required the Office of National Drug Control Policy to produce a statement of drug policy priorities by April 1, 2021 of the first year of an administration and an inaugural national drug control strategy in the second year (Afkar et al., 2017). The impact begins at arrest and continues through incarceration and after release back into the community. Arrest and incarceration for crimes related to substance use and possession disproportionately affect Black, Indigenous, and people of color communities. According to a report from Gupta (2022), the White House argued that in an analysis of National Registry data through mid-October of 2016, African Americans may be nearly five times as likely to go to prison for drug possession as Whites, and data on exoneration outcomes suggest innocent Black people are about 12 times more likely to be convicted of drug crimes than innocent White people.

The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) (2021) forecast an amendment for drug policy in the National Drug Control Policy Reauthorization Act (1998) to direct the Office of National Drug Control Policy to publish a list of drug control grant programs,

and for other purposes focused on enacting preventive measures to combat substance abuse, drug distribution, and implementing strategies for controlling drug use and saving lives. The 2020 National Survey on Drug Use and Health stated that almost 20 million people living in the United States who need addiction treatment are not currently receiving services (Gupta, 2022).

### **Sociological Framework**

#### **Feminist Theory**

Dunbar (2021) described feminist criminology as a theory potentially involving the behavior women experience within the criminal justice system. Essentially, women who have committed drug crimes or have been in prison because of various types of criminal activity are not able to function on a normal level in society. For example, some barriers cause forms of dysfunctional existence such as gender inequality, substance abuse, mental illness, and recidivism. The feminist theory explains that crimes are most likely committed under distress by women because of how they view monetary success in areas related to education, money, and identity employment. Dunbar (2021) found that criminal behavior strains experienced by women suggest that having less access to monetary success than men within society would lead to committing a significantly higher number of crimes to feel validated or accepted. Feminist theory research studies discovered that there are problematic histories uncovered of women being the primary care provider of children in low-income families, which may have slightly negative impacts on their ability to reconvict compared to men, but reports still indicate higher rates of physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, low education, poverty, and welfare (i.e.,

receiving financial income support from state sources) and are more likely to be diagnosed with mental health conditions (Dunbar, 2021; Shaw, 1994; Zinger, 2020). Zinger (2020) argued that 42% of federal female prisoners are Indigenous, 25% higher than Indigenous people overall.

Criminalized behavior among women increases recidivism and continues to suggest that feminist criminologists are on track in their theory of women being repeatedly exposed to drugs and violence in the home without having other resources to depend on. Therefore, women return to criminal activity, and the revolving door to prison remains a problem. Due to the lack of reentry programs accessible in housing, employment, educational opportunities, and public assistance, rehabilitative measures within the federal government and community support post-release efforts are short-lived.

According to social justice feminist research advocates and book writers, “Coming Back to Jail: Women, Trauma and Criminalization” (Comack, 2018; Skorstengaard, 2018) explores and identifies key aspects within women inmate’s Indigenous environment that stems from residential schools, poverty, sexual abuse in communities, and ongoing intergenerational trauma. Arguably, these issues are embedded significantly in society and the criminal justice system. Comack (2018) indicated that the responsibility of keeping these women out of jail does not fall solely on the shoulders of the inmates themselves. She argued that this “avoids the tendency to construct the women as ‘psychologically damaged’ or as ‘embodying victimization’” (p. 28).

### **Literature Search Strategy**

Post-release studies indicate that criminal behavior and recidivism among women must be addressed by identifying the problems and implementing programs through networking that support each need. Edwards et al. (2022) suggested that post-release reentry program intervention helped prevent desires to reoffend or transition them back into society through alternative ways that benefit self-independence. Yukhnenko et al. (2019) conducted a two-year systematic review study about women's recidivism and post-release. They found that 26% to 60% of reconvictions stemmed from habitual incarcerations.

Moore et al. (2020) indicated that their system review of reentry interventions for substance abuse problems involved evidence-based treatments, resulting in an unclear explanatory approach of inconsistencies for specific treatments. However, the relapse and recidivism were higher post-release. Most of the information within this literature review was found within peer-reviewed research studies. The reviewed case studies and literature provide a clear indication that women need alternative rehabilitative programs to help them transition from prison life to normalcy, toward becoming law-abiding, upstanding citizens.

Research on rehabilitative programs for women committing recidivism has not been studied enough to provide policymakers with the ability to evaluate data collection post-release. However, this study could help to share the lived experiences of the women who need employment, education, and housing reentry programs. The welfare lifetime ban restrictions prevent alternatives to becoming eligible for public assistance program

benefits, even when second-chance opportunities are limited. The lack of programs being tracked is only one reason women struggle to become independently self-sufficient. The implementation of providing programs for women a few months before release can help with intervention methods so that they will be prepared for second-chance programs, which are individually designed for offenders' employment, housing, and substance abuse treatment. This study focused on articles, research studies, and firsthand lived experiences published between 2018 and 2022 to complete the analysis.

### **Literature Review Related to Key Variables and/or Concepts**

#### **Discrimination and Injustice Drug Sentencing**

The discrimination and injustice of African American women versus White women offenders are prominent in the criminal justice system. Only 16% of White offenders are resentenced, more than Black female offenders who have committed the same drug crime (Alper et al., 2018). Criminologist Maruna (2017) suggested embracing “[Shifting] the lens away from individual journeys to a much more collective experience, drawing attention to the macro-political issues involved in crime, justice, and reintegration” (p. 13). Maruna (2017) found that women naturally submit to authority during sentencing to bargain, with societal expectations being the easiest influence to protect their children to keep or regain custody and be convinced by male partners to plead guilty (Jones, 2011; Sankofa, 2018). Sankofa (2018) indicated that 3,673,100 women were under correctional control, or approximately 1 in 68 adults in the United States, were on probation (period of supervision in the community, typically imposed as an alternative to incarceration) by the end of 2016.

Women are more likely to be jailed (detained before trial or sentenced) for nonviolent offenses than men (82.9% compared to 73.5%), to serve their first sentence (48.7% compared to 36.8%), and to be “nonviolent recidivists” (35.3% compared to 33.3%) (Sankofa, 2018). Beijersbergen et al. (2015, as cited in Auty & Liebling, 2020) found that perceptions of procedural justice were related to post-release offending. Prisoners who felt they were treated fairly and respectfully by correctional authorities during imprisonment were less likely to be reconvicted in the 18 months following release. Butler, Solomon & DeLisi (2021). Potential participants who are interested may be hesitant to reveal personal information concerning their experiences of incarceration pertaining to drug convictions.

### **Recidivism and Desistance Measure**

Alper et al. (2018) completed an analysis of 30 states to measure recidivism and resistance to provide information relevant to deeply understanding criminal behavior within a specific timeframe and determine how ineffective or effective the sentencing was. Alper et al.’s (2018) study lasted nine years. Follow-up periods were conducted at various intervals between 2005 and 2014. Sometimes, desistance checks were initially completed in the first year post-release, compared between 35% of women and 45% of men. The next 3 years after prison, the results were 84% for men and 77% for women. Even though, at the highest of 83.4%, recidivism had been committed, the rearrest of drug crimes did not always involve the same offense because some of the crimes varied from violence to property damage and public disorder (Alper et al., 2018).

Sered and Norton-Hawk (2021) optimistically believed assessments in desistance for analyzing criminal behavior, recidivism, persistence, policing and judicial policies, bail guidelines, plea bargaining, and how lines are drawn between licit and illicit substance use were key triggers to soliciting sex for money versus informally trading sex to have a place to sleep. DeLisi, Drury, and Elbert (2019) argued that incarceration causes issues related to criminal identity, which can hinder desistance, employment, and education, women who feel desperate often react to current situations based on past trauma, leading to deprivation and increased risk of recidivism. Gålnander (2020) explained that women who have been released from prison and abstained from drugs could initially be positive toward the outlook, hoping for jobs, housing, and child custody while exposed to rehabilitation programs, but subsequently, within a few months, expectations began to change, and things seemed to take a downward turn.

Butts & Schiraldi (2018) suggested that community correction agencies should encourage policymakers to rely on outcomes related to criminal desistance and the social integration of people on probation or parole. Drug offenses include possession, trafficking, and other miscellaneous or unspecified drug offenses (Alper et al., 2018). Desistance is measured as the percentage of prisoners who, after a particular year, had no subsequent arrests (Alper et al., 2018). Public order offenses include violations of the peace or order of the community or threats to the public health or safety through unacceptable conduct, interference with a governmental authority, or the violation of civil rights or liberties (Alper et al., 2018). Property offenses include burglary, fraud, forgery, larceny, motor vehicle theft, and other miscellaneous or unspecified property offenses

(Alper et al., 2018). Recidivism is the “tendency to relapse into a previous condition or mode of behavior” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Cochran et al. (2017) examined Deprivation Theory, which links prison constraints to interventions affecting misbehavior, potentially influencing both desistance and persistence in recidivism.

### **Review Related Literature**

Sullivan et al. (2019) argued that the first months for women exiting prison are most critical for being assigned program rehabilitation transitions because there is a higher risk of thoughts and chosen methodology and methods that are consistent with the scope of the study, leading to suicidal behavior, drug overdose, and recidivism. Variables and concepts will be examined from an analysis by completing open-ended questions concerning the lived experiences of women offenders and ex-offenders who have transitional challenges because of their felony drug convictions that permanently prevent them from being approved for federal and state government assistance rehabilitative programs. The North Carolina Justice Center (2021) found that in Greenville, North Carolina, increased recidivism of women is up by 40% since the 1996 welfare reform lifetime ban. The literature reviewed for this study found that others have investigated this problem by focusing on crime rates and welfare reform in other states. Of 30 states, 10 kept the lifetime ban, 13 opted out, and 7 preferred a modified version (Martin & Shannon, 2020).

### **Causal Link Between Recidivism and Women Post-Release**

Haas and Spence (2017) examined prison life while inmates prepare to exit in hopes of not returning. Their research study involves practices of questionnaires and

examples of what-if scenarios to influence an inmate's perception of overcoming barriers and readiness strategies for release to reintegrated successfully back into society (Haas & Spence, 2017). However, that is not the case, and even though this attempt focuses on a healthy mental exit, the issue of recidivism continues to have a large impact on the community and the cost of housing a prisoner. Despite the guidance that is stipulated and emotional support without the rehabilitative program designed to combat those specific areas of lack on the first day of post-release, unfortunately, the quick return to prison will happen. Most of the criminal charges for ex-felons could probably be expunged with the help of post-released rehabilitative programs so that there is an opportunity for a fresh start toward getting federal grant approval, decent employment, housing, and financial stability.

Butts & Schiraldi (2018) arguably suggested that policymakers who focus on recidivism directed as evidence of justice effectiveness have confused the ease of bureaucratic indicators of system decision-making with a simple measure of individual behavior and rehabilitation. The majority of the women who have been released from prison do not expect to become homeless immediately, but once they are arrested and sentenced, the outcome usually results in loss of home and custody of their children. Unfortunately, without public assistance programs, women do end up back in prison. It is imperative that policymaking geared to combat recidivism becomes one of the strategies to help criminals who desire to learn how to be productive citizens. Recidivism will continue to happen repeatedly, making life for these women at higher risk of reoffending because of the lack of post-release rehabilitation programs. Butts & Schiraldi (2018)

suggested that community agencies must influence policymakers' discussions to measure the effects of justice interventions to evoke implementation policy outcomes of studying criminal desistance, social development, societal well-being, and the social integration of ex-offenders on probation and parole. The causal link between recidivism and women's post-release rests in the power of the policymakers. Too few research studies provide substantial evidence that post-release rehabilitative programs can offset the return to prison. The BJS analysis found that 18% had been arrested at least once within a year of being placed on community supervision (Butts & Schiraldi, 2018). Each rehabilitative program needs to be designed from qualitative data where real interviews, transcripts, and coding variables present a conclusive result to be evaluated frequently, not just set aside.

### **The War on Drugs**

The United Nations (2022) of the International Narcotics Control Board for 2021 reported that drug trafficking relies on the dynamic between supply and demand. To combat the scourge of such trafficking, nations must focus equally on reducing both supply and demand through comprehensive strategies and policies that engage the public and private sectors and civil society. Butts & Schiraldi (2018) stated that the justice system should monitor and assess how people are reintegrated into a community following system contact. The policymakers and the public goal should be to ask questions to educate themselves concerning recidivism and help initiate rehabilitative programs for improved community safety. It is the federal government policymaker's obligation to enforce programs and make this high priority just as important as enforcing the laws.

Polomarkakis (2017) argued that the United States and Mexico are prime examples of avid supporters of the drug law enforcement regime, having been among the first countries to raise the flags of the war on drugs. The United States drug war is far from being a controlled system integrated with law enforcement because there is no policy enactment that enforces patrolled safety in drug-infested low-income environments. Otherwise, recidivism and higher criminal activity would not be as predominant in those areas. Everyone is negatively impacted on some level when reentry programs are not being mandated or required as a condition for post-release compliance.

Sawyer (2019) found that in 2016, about 81,000 women were released from state prisons nationwide, and women and girls accounted for at least 1.8 million releases from local jails in 2013. Formerly incarcerated women (especially women of color) have much higher rates of unemployment and homelessness and are less likely to have a high school education than formerly incarcerated women (Sawyer, 2019). Bronson & Carson (2017) found that African American women ages 18 to 19, were at a 4.4 percentage higher rate than white women at 1.8 percent compared to Hispanic females to be incarcerated. Women in federal prison had higher than 50 percent convictions for drug trafficking incarcerations than men. Bronson & Carson (2017).

National Survey on Drug Use and Health indicated that 19.5% of people aged 12 years and older used illicit drugs in the past year, and 7.4% of people aged 12 years and older met the criteria for a substance use disorder (SUD) (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2019). Unfortunately, the older the drug offender is, the worse their chances are for getting the help they need, including mental health services

and trauma therapy. These programs need to be available to all people of any age who have a drug problem. According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA; 2020), there is a public health crisis within communities, and there is a high-risk need for rehabilitative efforts to pull together treatment and recovery services. Brundage and Levine (2019) argued that a negative strain exists between community health, social systems, children, and families.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

This chapter described how the impact of women being incarcerated has a long negative effect on life after prison, the causal link among recidivism, desistance measures, racial discrimination in drug court sentencing, and lack of policy post-release programs. The federal government must become more involved in transparencies that concern the community to redevelop existing policies and restrictions that block opportunities for welfare assistance because not everyone incarcerated due to a drug charge is unreachable for change. Each person should be given a chance to join a rehabilitative program for self-help and utilize substance abuse seminars to become free from that type of lifestyle. The welfare lifetime ban is only part of the problem for women and their families. A substantial number of people cannot get employment, afford food, and appropriate shelter for themselves and their children. In Chapter 3, I discuss the role of the researcher, recruitment, trustworthiness, ethical procedures, and data collection strategies.

## Chapter 3: Research Method

### **Introduction**

In this chapter, I discuss the research design method, participant selection, instrumentation, ethical procedures, data collection plan, and issues with trustworthiness. The war on drugs legislation was significant in understanding the phenomenon of quality of life for women post-release, to identify key indicators of recidivism. In this research, ex-offenders were given an opportunity to have their side of the story told. There is a lack of studies conducted that can help assist policymakers and the community in obtaining information for rehabilitative treatment purposes and data evaluation. The data collection process started with recruiting individuals by posting flyers in high-risk areas where potential recruits may visit frequently, such as government public assistance buildings, substance abuse clinics, and correctional facilities. A quick response (QR) code was printed on the flyer to provide easy access to collect answers to questions about whether a potential participant fits the research study's goals. Once the individuals agreed to be contacted, I confirmed their cooperation, planned a time, and arranged an initial date for the first set of interviews. The survey questions were completed anonymously if the potential participants did not wish to meet in person.

The study effectively coincides with participants' information about research that will be open to the public to provide knowledgeable access and address questions about safety concerns related to women's criminal activity post-release, to help create treatment plans. Peterson et al. (2017) argued that scoping reviews allow the synthesis of broad research topics to remain systematic and accountable, to obtain a wider conceptual range.

Abbott et al. (2017) indicated that women's lived experiences of health care in prison versus community health access are vital in contributing to the information collected, but there are challenges to researching such a rigorous qualitative study when recruiting participants. This qualitative research study could inform policymakers about the research and how to explore the information collected from interviews to help create rehabilitative post-release programs that can track enrollment for reentry opportunities toward education, employment, and housing. The information can assist with potential social change for how policymakers could collaborate or make decisions for women's prison release programs toward designing rehabilitative options that significantly impact effective transitioning out of prison alternatives for high-risk women recidivists.

### **Research Design and Rationale**

The study that I conducted involved purposeful sampling of participants. A QR code printed on the flyer for potential inquiries created easy access for selection processes and survey questions. The recruiting process was straightforward through a process of choice for participants who chose to volunteer to be interviewed. An informed consent form was provided once the prospective participant agreed to be interviewed. The data analysis process entailed collected information from 20 women. A recorder was used to track interview information. A qualitative data analysis software program was useful for organizing and coding the transcript data.

The rationale of this narrative qualitative study explored the exploratory phenomenological approach of lived experiences between women who have children and were unable to take care of themselves adequately because of their drug felony

convictions. Drug felony conviction terminates welfare public assistance options to program benefit rights for women in all areas, preventing them from gaining access to rehabilitation, employment, education grants, voting and even government housing. The rationale of policymakers' current views needs to be explored to revise old restrictions within welfare laws to discover potentially new policy implementation to evoke positive social change that can impact women's rehabilitation treatment long-term.

The qualitative research study was designed to explore women who have been convicted of a drug felony and denied public assistance, which included a lack of rehabilitative post-release programs. The criminal justice system has drug deferments for sentencing that are specifically designed to help youth offenders, but there are times when those programs do not help adults who get caught with drugs. Lindquist-Grantz et al. (2021) researched how substance abuse users caught with drugs were given an option for a diversion program that connected individuals to treatment instead of criminal sanctions being used more frequently to address substance abuse criminal sentencing. Consequently, these diversion programs are evaluated based on five prevalent study outcome categories service utilization (program retention and completion), recidivism criminality, substance abuse use, psychosocial functioning, and additional outcomes (e.g., trauma, quality of life, housing) (Lindquist-Grantz et al., 2021). Perrin et al. (2021) stated that in 2005, the casual drug use crisis increased for adult women 18 to 64. The use was 2.7 times higher than men who had tried cocaine.

RQ1: How can policymakers who oversee welfare programs encourage rehabilitation efforts for women convicted of a drug felony?

### Subquestions

a. What types of program changes can the federal government implement within the welfare reform lifetime ban to focus on specific rehabilitation for women's reentry program development?

b. Are policymakers within the federal government doing enough to reevaluate welfare reform programs for recently released women?

### **Code Categories**

This research could enhance the community's knowledge about the importance of having policymakers vote for rehabilitative programs for women once post-release is near. Therefore, the implementation of program evaluations is needed to enforce rehabilitation for families to get the help they need to improve their lives to prevent recidivism. Saldaña (2016) indicated that coding cycles in qualitative research are beneficial in providing an improved understanding. Coding has two cycles to assist the researcher in processing the data. Coding and transcription are crucial for developing and enhancing my research topic interest. The following are the code categories: drug felony, welfare ban, women post-release, prison, rehabilitation program, reentry, and lived experiences.

### **Role of the Researcher**

My role as the researcher involved efforts to reduce bias, such as not forming any personal observations, criticism, or unethical conclusions. I provided full compassion and understanding. As the researcher, it was imperative that I use open-ended questions with straightforward intentions to explore each participant's experience by coding and

interpreting their answers without forming personal opinions. Surmiak (2020) suggests that it is beneficial for researchers to always consider the risk of a confidentiality breach in advance and to ask participants whether they agree to full disclosure. The American Sociological Association (ASA; 2018) and the British Sociological Association (2017) indicated that some Anglophone professional codes of ethics in the social sciences allow the researcher (in exceptional cases) to break confidentiality, for example, in “health- or life-threatening” situations or child abuse, there is no penalty for failure to notify, which merely constitutes a moral obligation (Code of Criminal Procedure, 1997). According to the Personal Data Protection Act (1997, 2018), the importance of a social researcher in the United States, for instance, a Walden University student, must abide by the rules, which mandate that all documents may be kept for five years after the research study has been completed. Social researchers in Poland and from the European Union have a duty to protect the personal data of their research participants (American Sociological Association, 2018; British Sociological Association, 2017). I did not interfere by allowing biased personal feelings or assumptions to cloud the data results.

## **Methodology**

### **Participant Selection Logic**

The beginning strategy of the purposeful sampling process for recruiting was responding to survey answers from the posted flyer’s QR code. To generate a large volume of feedback, the flyers were posted within nonprofit organizations such as United Way, religious community homeless shelters, mental health clinics, and government agencies such as the Department of Social Services and the Department of Public

Transportation. Once the potential participant contacted me, I provided my email address and QR code to make sure that each participant understood that the survey questions must be completed. Vitte (2018) argued that women's addictive behaviors are not studied as much as men's due to a lack of research. The participants were given an opportunity prior to the interview to view the informed consent form once selected. Next, they were debriefed on their privacy rights for participating. Each selected participant was debriefed about the interview concerning whether they felt uncomfortable with any question, and they had the right to stop at any time. The target of the interest group consisted of women who had been incarcerated for a drug felony and were denied access to welfare reform programs. The sample size was 20 women. The rationale for selecting this number of women was justified according to their experience within the criminal justice system and their reoccurrence of committing drug crimes. The selection process was based on how each individual answered and questions provided in the survey. The women selected for the next level did represent the overall population of their peers throughout demographics, nationality, and age (e.g., African American, Latina, Asian, Hispanic, White, or other racially/ethnically diverse nationalities). The goal for selecting each participant was based on their willingness to participate and how they experienced recidivism, honesty about their history of drug use, criminal activity, and experiences with discrimination. Perrin et al. (2021) suggested that qualitative fieldwork and relational sociology applied to empirical analysis reveal the reciprocal influence of individual practices and structural functioning.

## **Instrumentation**

Within this section, I evaluated in more in-depth the selection processes for the study of participants. Essentially, the snowballing sampling method was used to influence participants to fill out the survey questions with honesty and trust. After each sampling survey, the interview questions had a significant impact on identifying women's ability to see the importance and trust the researcher. The information collected related to how women were mistreated in targeted areas of the criminal justice system. According to Nightingale (2020), triangulation is a technique to analyze the results of the same study using different methods of data collection for three primary purposes: to enhance validity, to create a more in-depth picture of a research problem, and to interrogate different ways of understanding a research problem. The semistructured interviews set a foundation for inquiry about specific lived experiences that created an environment for open-ended questioning in which they produced rigorous feedback and direct answers.

This qualitative study used a theoretical exploratory approach that interchangeably identified with both narrative and feminist frameworks and was conducive to addressing women's lived experiences of being involved with the criminal justice system, drug felony convictions, substance abuse, mental breakdown, poverty, physical, and emotional abuse. Even though each area had a potentially significant outcome related to recidivism and increased criminal activity, no legal discrimination lawsuits were filed to pursue restoration or penalty damages. This research study was conducted for the benefit of supplying data and information to the federal government's policymakers and their stakeholders, who can make changes to help formally incarcerated

women become self-sufficient and independent through completing rehabilitative programs post-release.

### **Data Collection**

The data collection process was completed using qualitative data analysis Atlas.ti software. The software was useful for organizing coding from interviews, emails, transcripts, and telephone conversations. Essentially, this research topic identified with the approach for helping post-release women transition back into society to enroll in rehabilitative programs once reentry resources are accessible. Paresky (2017) indicated how the high recidivism rate continues to be an ongoing problem, especially at the most crucial moment for women recently released from prison who cannot find work or are not allowed to be approved for a reentry program through welfare programs. I took the initiative to contact former offenders through flyer notifications, posting at government buildings, and at homeless shelters to promote interest. I provided a quiet and secluded space to conduct each interview for approximately one hour. I maintained acceptable trust by reassuring participants that all information within the Walden University class environment shared or discussed in the interview would be destroyed after 5 years. I ensured confidentiality to gain participants' trustworthiness.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

This research explored how the welfare lifetime ban has impacted women post-release, the penalty of being denied access to public assistance programs that would help them become rehabilitated after prison life. Women in this category have occurrences of recidivism. For instance, the welfare lifetime ban terminates opportunities for them to get

back on their feet, such as government benefits, housing vouchers, educational grants, drug and alcohol treatment, or therapy. Overall, this research study was conducted with the intention of helping policymakers gain more insight into creating more effective rehabilitative programs and to provide answers to questions about why women are at higher risk of committing recidivism.

According to NIDA (2020), women are more likely than men to develop a physical dependency on drugs (e.g., tolerance, withdrawal symptoms) more rapidly, and they are less likely than men to seek treatment due to social circumstances. Therefore, it is important to establish the most purposive foundation that relates to the actual impact of women and their lived experiences, criminal history involving recidivism, and drug use. Hamilton and Finley (2019) suggested that qualitative methods are an integral component of implementation research—i.e., “the scientific study of the use of strategies to adopt and integrate evidence-based health interventions into clinical and community settings to improve individual outcomes and benefit population health” (p. 1). The method of choice helps with studying the phenomenal theories connected to women’s criminal behavior and how they got to the point of being influenced. The data analysis plan supported a harm-risk reduction approach geared toward basic sampling and data collection procedures using inductive and deductive approaches in qualitative analysis, including guidelines for ensuring rigor, validity, and reliability of data reported.

Hamilton and Finley (2019) and Finley et al. (2018) argued that ethnography can be defined as “close engagement with a social group over time” (p. 5) and typically makes use of multiple methods (e.g., observation and interviews) to ensure triangulation

(mixing) of data sources. Keith et al. (2017) found that the consolidated framework for implementation research offers openness to findings guided by data collection and analysis, including a top-down or framework-driven analytic method in which optimism identifies or reflects with preset domains and constructs the more inductive emergent side. An ex-offender's experience can be justified through a process of evaluation and exploring their life and hardships after prison. The knowledge that can be learned involves hearing the stories of women who experienced drug convictions without program help, who need assistance in not returning to a life of crime or recidivism.

The goal of this qualitative study analysis was to produce work that offered value to social change, community well-being, multilevel policymakers, and stakeholders (Hamilton & Finley, 2019). Comparatively, hand coding was less effective than qualitative data analysis software. Qualitative data analysis was more accurate and faster for the person who needs to meet deadlines. The best way to avoid errors and misinterpretations was to proofread transcripts. This way, it helped confirm and allow credibility. Surveys included a QR code that allowed participants to answer questions without giving their names will help with confidentiality measures. The experience for women can be explored by offering a way to express themselves by having a voice. The target audience must be directed at those who can benefit from the research and bring light to the subject through newfound information to create a new policy. The theoretical framework structure will involve data from women and children connected to federal government restrictions to assist with welfare reentry programs.

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

As a rule, trustworthiness establishes credibility for the researcher. It is significant to provide details to explain the topic's potential benefit to social change. Each participant will be given an opportunity to read and become familiar with privacy and informed consent forms. During the process of selecting participants, the researcher will complete an initial Zoom session immediately to answer any questions and discuss the survey. Compassion and professionalism are key to forming a trusting, positive relationship for getting the participant to agree to an interview. Transferability of kindness and understanding can influence perceived interaction to encourage trustworthiness. The value of kindness should not be minimized in drug courts or any avenue of the criminal justice system. Women seemed to do better in drug court when they felt they were treated kindly and people cared about them, particularly their counselors and the drug court judge (Gallagher et al., 2021). The researcher must represent all stages of trustworthiness, such as transferability, credibility, confirmability, and dependability. Each is significant in strengthening this qualitative research study. Transferability in this study relates to the researcher's biased thinking toward understanding the interviewees' opinions, emotions, and lived experiences and forming personal conclusions. Credibility is the triangulation process, construction for establishing trust between the participant researcher and the subsequent reader.

Notably, for credibility to be enforced, the researcher used different strategies of data triangulation to establish findings (i.e., data from transcript audits, test scores, and protocol analyses, all focused on the same phenomenon); investigator triangulation in a

comparative analysis for this study would create rigorous data collection. Nyirenda et al. (2020) suggested that confirmability keeps the researcher from becoming too emotionally attached to evaluation or findings and assuages the social-desirability bias. Maintaining reflexivity enhances consideration and acknowledgment of how one's beliefs and experiences influence the research process, participant responses, and how data are collected, interpreted, analyzed, and presented (Nyirenda et al., 2020). Perrin et al. (2021) and Sattler et al. (2017) found that monitoring drug use and drug dealing allows them to distance themselves from the devalued figures of the junky and the drug dealer, thus, to legitimize their practices so that they do not run counter to the dominant values of the society.

Dependability and conformability helped formulate results from data collected to provide consistency in evaluating transcribed interview information. Each participant's confidentiality is expected to be supported by the researcher. Rosenberg et al. (2017) found that White and Black people are treated significantly differently within the criminal justice system. This should not be allowed, but these drug offenders must have the same options in sentencing to fully access the benefit of criminal justice diversionary, prison, or reentry programming. It is important to be cognizant of the economic reasons for their involvement in the drug trade and address their economic needs. Furthermore, the valued participation and trustworthiness will help enable reliability and validity within this qualitative research study while upholding privacy measures needed to instill authenticity.

### **Ethical Procedures**

Privacy and Code of Ethics procedures will ensure that all performance measures are held in the highest regard, which involves an informed consent form explained, signed, and utilized for analysis only through the confidentiality of each participant's interview. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) stated that informed consent is the cornerstone of ethical research. Zegwaard (2015) suggested that work-integrated learning models and contexts diversify. There is a need for research to provide a strong evidence base to further our understanding and help with informed decision-making to advance practice. According to Fleming and Zegwaard (2018), informed consent is a binding contract agreement that includes the rights of each participant who agrees to participate in the research; however, the signed consent form can be withdrawn at any point, including access to their information. The researcher eliminates any risk of having personal gain, conflict of interest, and privacy exposure of the participant's information or identity. Consequently, an ethical issue of potential harm in areas of emotional and reputational destruction can isolate the participant and cause them to withdraw from being interviewed.

Therefore, the researcher needs to eliminate and minimize any threats. The ethical conduct of beneficence falls under the acts of charity and kindness that exceed strict moral obligations (Arifin, 2018; Kinsinger, 2009). The Walden University Institutional Review Board Office of Research and Compliance has the right to evaluate the raw data related to this qualitative research study, but only what is considered relevant for a maximum of five years after the criteria have been met.

## Summary

This chapter provides an in-depth description of the research design rationale that included strategy techniques for coding, statistics from the National Survey and Drug Institute, in which substance abuse, mental health, the role of the researcher, the Personal Data Protection Act, data collection analysis plan, trustworthiness, and ethical obligation. Current evidence suggests that women benefit from continuity of care and one-on-one case management transitioning from prison to the community when incorporated with gender-responsive programming that targeted co-morbid mental health and SUDs, especially integrating a successful rehabilitation program design to better address the unique challenges. The target areas within this chapter are crucial to the redevelopment of policies to provide women with an alternative to recidivism. The researcher's ethical role in this study offers confidentiality and anonymity in transcribing, reporting, and fact-finding evidence-based documentation.

The exploratory purpose of understanding women's lived experiences concerning increased criminal behavior goes far beyond just committing a crime of drug offense. That is why it is critical to complete this study to evaluate causal links contributing to this behavior. The researcher's objective is to provide policymakers and stakeholders with these data to analyze and track for implementing and funding future rehabilitative programs. In Chapter 4, the researcher proceeds with collecting data and interviewing participants to answer research questions, organizing data, and reporting findings.

## Chapter 4: Results

### **Introduction**

In this chapter, I discuss the results and findings from collecting data related to interviewing participants and recruiting, as well as reporting the steps for completing the process. The qualitative study was conducted to explore the lived experience of women to understand how formerly incarcerated women of various races were negatively impacted post-release due to the lifetime welfare ban restrictions. The welfare lifetime ban was enacted by policymakers to permanently block all individuals convicted of drug felonies from receiving rehabilitative program benefits, which included public assistance for housing approval financial assistance, educational opportunities, and overall terminating a chance to be rehabilitated and become independent to live in society as a productive citizen. The research was geared to recruit women who lived in Greenville, North Carolina. Ages ranged from 18 to 55 years old. These individuals must have been charged and convicted within the past 3 years. The research question is as follows: How can formerly incarcerated women's lived experiences change the existing welfare reform lifetime ban program restrictions to encourage rehabilitation policy implementation between policymakers?

The theoretical framework coincides with this data collection process that Pettus et al. (2021) indicated when analyzing the lived experiences of women who were recidivists post-release. The research found evidence to support the analysis that termination prohibited women from having a chance to enroll in rehabilitation programs, which seemly left them vulnerable to reoffending criminal activity, live in poverty, and

suffer without providing an effective solution. A research study was conducted by Ventura (2021) concerning women who were repeatedly involved in the criminal justice system. Investigative causes and outcomes determined that they had an inability to recover under those circumstances. In the next sections, I discuss settings, findings, women's lived experiences, demographics, data collection, data analysis, themes, and results. I also provide a summary.

### **Setting**

The research setting was created to allow participants an opportunity to initially take a survey. All prospective participants needed to be residents of Greenville, North Carolina, to be selected and participate. Essentially, once the survey questions had been answered correctly with no issues, the potential participant could move on to the next steps. I provided an opportunity for each to receive a copy of the informed consent form and a copy of the interview questions. However, due to the time constraints of scheduling and concerns of COVID-19, all participants agreed to complete online surveys and telephone interviews through email and telephone correspondence when necessary. During this time, they had an opportunity to withdraw from the research project. Statistically, the City of Greenville, North Carolina, was purposefully selected because of high-risk criminal behavior among women, and according to data within these demographics, 26% of female state prisoners were serving time for drug-related crimes (National Center for Drug Abuse Statistics, 2024). The America's Health Rankings Annual Report, published in December 2023, indicated disparities among women ages 18–49. The report showed a high ranking of five weighted against the highest value of

7.8% ranking of top states toward misusing psycho-therapeutic drugs, such as potent narcotics, pain relievers, tranquilizers, stimulants, sedatives, crack cocaine, and heroin (America's Health Rankings Annual Report, 2024).

### **Demographics**

The area of Greenville, North Carolina, is an older, retired community, but also where East Carolina University students live and thrive. The population was 90,053 in 2023. The unemployment rate was 3.9% in October 2024, and the metro population was 175,119. The United States: ranked 252 among North Carolina cities. Typically, this location has a large, diverse population of nationalities and a mixed community, which allowed me to select from women of African American, Hispanic/Latino, White, and Asian races. However, many residents had concerns about their family's safety and would like to keep their neighborhood crime-free as much as possible. That is why it is important that women have reentry options to rehabilitate themselves when they get charged or convicted of drug crimes, which leads to permanent termination of public assistance programs that could assist them in staying out of the criminal justice system. Without these rehabilitative methods, they cannot become productive citizens and not commit recidivism, which creates a revolving door.

**Table 1***Demographics of Age, Ethnicity, Education, and Homelessness Status*

Participant	Age	Ethnicity	Education	Homeless
P1	21	African American	HS Diploma	No
P2	25	White	HS Diploma	No
P3	18	Asian Mixed	HS Diploma	No
P4	30	African American	HS Diploma	No
P5	23	White	HS Diploma	No
P6	32	Asian	HS Diploma	No
P7	30	Chinese	HS Diploma	No
P8	41	African American	HS Diploma	No
P9	19	White	HS Diploma	No
P10	42	Hispanic	HS Diploma	No
P11	33	White	HS Diploma	No
P12	48	African American	HS Diploma	No
P13	39	White	HS Diploma	No
P14	20	Asian/White	HS Diploma	No
P15	25	White	HS Diploma	No
P16	19	Native American	HS Diploma	No
P17	28	African American	HS Diploma	No
P18	26	Hispanic	HS Diploma	No
P19	35	White	HS Diploma	No
P20	24	Hispanic	HS Diploma	No

**Data Collection**

The data collection process included 20 women interviewees who were formerly incarcerated due to a drug felony conviction. Each interview entailed a secure meeting via confidential Zoom link that consisted of a quiet area that included privacy. The data collection process ranged from January 2024 through September 2024. The timeframe for each interview was between 60 to 90 minutes, but the average interview lasted for 60 minutes. The Privacy Code of Ethics was enforced to ensure trust was obtained and there were no discrepancies or inconsistencies. The selection process was easily accessible through a flyer that indicated all information about the research. The flyer stayed up for a few weeks, leading the responses to pick up quickly. At the beginning of the selection process, there was just one challenge when respondents wanted to take the survey without

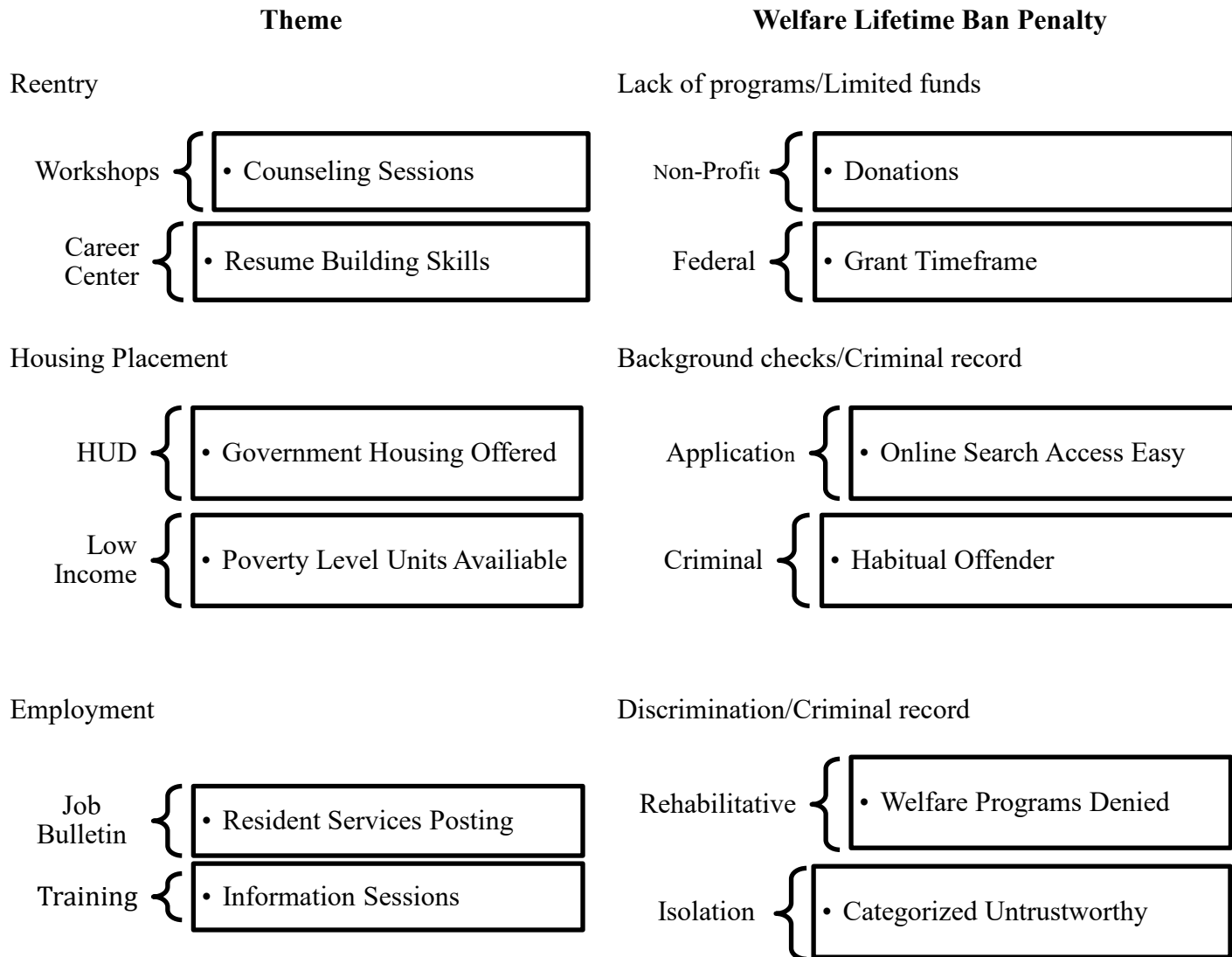
meeting the criteria. To meet the level of saturation, as I stated in Chapter 3, my goal was to interview a sufficient number of women who experienced discrimination by being terminated from the welfare assistance programs post-release within the past 3 years of their conviction. Immediately after each participant had completed their interview, they were given a \$25 gift card to Amazon.

### **Data Analysis**

When completing my data analysis, I chose to use the software, Atlas.ti. This software provided the most effective way to transcribe my interviews. I uploaded the interviews, and the software analyzed, transcribed, documented, coded, and categorized all the information. Strategically, the data analysis was evaluated within the best form of triangulation to capture the repeated correlation phenomenon of each lived experience. The semi-structured interviews were analyzed through the Atlas.ti software helped me to explore and determine the reliability, validity, and trustworthiness of interpreting the feminist theory framework was conducive to addressing their specific challenges and what types of disparities indicated the most negative impact.

**Figure 1**

*Challenges Post-Release*



## **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

### **Credibility**

There was evidence of trustworthiness between the women and me. Women expressed their emotional trauma about being charged and convicted and serving their sentence, before being released from prison without any training, skills, or rehabilitative options, which enhanced my desire for each one to have complete openness without hesitation. To ensure trust, I explained why their experiences needed to be documented. I was kind and respectful to each participant. As I talked with many of these individual women, each one had a lot in common with the others; they all wanted the same thing, an opportunity to rebuild their lives. The influence of trust enabled them to discuss the problems to help improve clarity.

### **Transferability**

I encouraged a comfortable one-on-one discussion without any biased feelings. Mainly, there were no misinterpretations within societal barriers concerning their lived experience. According to the information that was discussed within the interviews, frequent barriers stayed consistent within welfare lifetime ban restrictions that were reported toward finding evidence that highlighted the reoccurrences of negative impacts in their lived experiences that involved family, children's trauma, and economic hardships, such as reentry, housing placement, and employment.

### **Dependability**

Regrettably, these women made a mistake. However, policy leaders are not allowing programs to be implemented as an alternative to recidivism. An opportunity to

redeem themselves or get access to rehabilitative programs must be considered to replace permanent penalties. Implementing rehabilitative programs post-release would help with reentry, housing, childcare, financial support, and employment. The interview opportunity gave each a voice that mattered openly without being judged.

### **Conformability**

The environment was basic to their main complaint. Conformability was understood to be consistent because their discrimination and punishment were the same, being significant within attitudes and beliefs toward those of everyone's challenges, termination under the welfare lifetime ban, and potential struggles for the rest of their lives under this policy law.

## **Results**

The four things that I have discussed have indicated similarities in the challenges that these women have endured. They have a strong impact on mental breakdowns, the likelihood of recidivism, change in emotional stability, and hindrance toward reintegration into society. Next, I discuss the breakdown analysis of the four themes.

### **Theme 1: Reentry**

According to the women I interviewed, the reentry process gave each person an opportunity to enter the program, but it was a slow process. A formerly incarcerated individual does immediately qualify, but funding is limited. Then a person must wait once the program money runs out. The waiting list became longer by the time one was contacted for an available spot. There is a need for more non-profits that could help concerning the lack of sufficient organizations within the community. The reentry

programs are geared to create opportunities for every individual who has been incarcerated, but most women get lost in the paperwork and pushed to the end of the list. In this category, most participants did not get called back or had more problematic issues because either the money was just not available, or someone else was ahead of them. Participants P1, P3, and P9 pursued eligibility requirements to enter the reentry program, but there was a long wait. However, these were the only ones who entered the program to help them with unmet needs. The process took at least one year, but each of P1 stated:

I was eligible for welfare programs; my child lives with me, and we live with a family member now. The housing situation is not great, but at least we are not living in the shelter. It is hard for me not being able to take care of my child or get a chance to prove that I made a mistake.

P3 said:

The college does offer assistance with certification programs if you can qualify for the reentry requirements, so I waited. Social services do not have any reentry programs at all. This is something that I do not understand why social services do not help formerly incarcerated people, but the government does not allow it, and they restrict you permanently.

According to P9:

The reentry programs were not specific to my case they are not easily accessible. You must go through a lot of paperwork get your record, get recommendation for your employer, probation officer, and pastor referral if you have one, and then

apply for enrollment, They choose you accordingly to what you have done a year after your release.

## **Theme 2: Housing**

The disparities of public housing placement for formerly incarcerated women post-release involved background checks, which negatively impact the outcome of receiving a place to stay after the three months of a Sister's House. The Women Center House does allow a woman who has been within the criminal justice system a place to stay. She is food and shelter, but once her time is up, she must leave and do things on her own. Unfortunately, not all women are given an opportunity to stay at the Women Center House because funds are limited, and the space is not available for every person who is released from prison. The process to live at the Women Center House basically is first-come, first-served, as long as there are not no pending charges.

During the interview process, participants who needed the Women Center House to provide a room for them to stay included P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, and P10. Essentially, that would only be for three months. The three-month stay helped them process being out on their own, away from the prison environment. However, they were not given jobs or permanent opportunities. The fact that the Women Center House is grant-funded from nonprofits' ability to get approved through the federal government application process places limitations on how much space can be offered and short-term stay. According to P1:

There was a nonprofit place that gave me three months of daycare help when I first got out, but that was all, and after that, I had to cut my work hours to part

time. If I could get in the daycare program, it would be a big help. It was two years ago. I have only tried to get into the welfare program once because they did not even want to hear anything that I had to say, once they found out I had been a drug addict and been charged with a drug felony.

P2 stated:

It was hard finding a job, and the women's home was only temporary for a few months, then you had to find a place on your own. So, I took a cleaning job, it was the only thing that I accepted without worrying about a hard background check that would have led to another job rejection. There were no financial assistance programs, only bags for hygiene and food donations.

P3 noted the following:

The programs were short-term, but they did provide a room and food for the time of your assigned stay, which was already decided once you entered the release program. The local women's shelter does supply you with a bed for three months, and that was how I got to eat every day, and the caseworker there helped me get the job at the hotel as a cleaning aide. I was able to live at the homeless shelter only at the beginning of my release. My two children live with my family members until I am able to get back on my feet, and it has been a year, not the progress that I had hoped.

P4 noted:

I was assigned a case worker, but she told me that same thing and gave a list of nonprofit organizations to try to see if they can give a room, this lasted for three

months. I am trying to remain positive, but if it was not for my family, I would not be able to survive or take care of my two children. The good thing is my children have been receiving welfare funding, and they are getting taken care of, but I am ineligible to receive.

P5 said:

The first post-release program lasted three months, but right now they give you that time free; there are no worries, but no referrals for job prospectives are given. I thought there would be work release job opportunities given after the three months was up. I wanted desperately to get a job on my own, but I am still living with my parents.

P6 related:

I got charged with a drug crime, and it has been hard on me not being able to find a job. It has only been a year, but it is the longest time for me. The first post-release program lasted three months, but right now, because they give you that time free, there are no worries, but no referrals for job prospectives are given. I thought there would be work release job opportunities given after the three months was up.

P7 stated:

I was able to find a job after the three-month period of leaving the women's house. A friend of the family owns a home care agency, and he hired me after a year of getting my driver's license to transport residents to their doctor's appointment. But when I applied for housing, I was not approved, and I have two

children to support. The reason had to do with a background check, but even though I was denied, I can request a review with a hearing officer. Because this is a government housing building, I have a right to request a hearing. At that time, I will be given a reason why and be told if I will be given a waiting period to get approved. The charge was five years ago, but was three years ago post-release, so I am not sure what will happen.

P8 told:

I was unable to get a job post-release, and that caused me to go into a state of depression. I was prescribed medication to help with my depression. I was not able to work, and I had a mental breakdown. For me, I am on a disability permanently. The housing situation that I am facing has to do with me not being able to afford it, and public housing right now is only open to single mothers; it does not help me because I do not have any children. I got food stamps because I have a disability diagnosis.

P10 stated the following:

I was sentenced to three years, but I was out on good behavior, so I was only there for a year, and that helped me. Post-release, there were no programs except for the women's house, where you got to go for three months if you did not have a place to stay. I took that time to see what they could offer, but it was only opportunities for food, clothing, and to connect with a church to help clear your mind. That was a good thing, but I was looking for a job connection and an apartment to move to

on my own. I have one child, so life was not too hard for us. She stayed with my parents so I could get myself together.

### **Theme 3: Employment**

The goal for each formerly incarcerated woman whom I spoke to was they wanted an easier transition post-release to find employment. I wanted to know more about their lived experience, so I asked each one individually how they were able to define work, or were they given an opportunity to sign up for jobs once they were released. All the participants reported having a high school diploma. Therefore, this information let me know they could complete the task of educational goals while obtaining a high school diploma. Unfortunately, a high school diploma is not enough today to work in specific jobs. Competitiveness is harder for women who have no upgraded job skills, and a criminal record makes life worse. Rehabilitation program grants would definitely help women post-release. Post-release job training is most important, and educational degrees and certificates can be offered to women while they are incarcerated long before their release date, so that they are able to find employment to take care of themselves and their children. It is important to have a college degree and recommendations for the employer to consider hiring an ex-felon. I got the same answers concerning their struggles and challenges that they faced looking for jobs with a criminal record. The participants stated that every employer does background checks, and it is easier and more accessible for them to request a criminal record and deny employment based on that information.

## Summary

In summary, this generic qualitative study allowed me to interview 20 formerly incarcerated women who desired change in their lives due to their lived experience after prison, which led them to be discriminated against in employment, housing, and reentry programs to rehabilitate themselves. The women had their own emotional problems that led them to commit a criminal act, but they did not deserve life sentences, which permanently disabled them from rehabilitating and being able to recover. The interviews that I conducted enlightened me to understand their frustration of not getting help, each woman faced challenges immediately within three years of being post-release. Even though the majority of the women were able to find secondary jobs, such as waitressing or a family friend, each was not able to get approved for welfare rehabilitative programs because of the welfare lifetime ban. Essentially, the reason for this qualitative research study was to help evoke policy change, find out more about recidivism, government welfare terminations, and community support systems. The welfare lifetime ban has negatively impacted women first coming out of prison, new policies can focus on creating programs for reentry, housing, and employment problems to fight recidivism. The gap in the literature has been explored, and the interview responses confirmed how their lived experience related to women's lack of access to policy intervention, discrimination, and denial of rehabilitative programs. In Chapter 5, I discuss the impact of social change, implications, and conclusions.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

### **Introduction**

Within this chapter, I discuss the purpose, nature, and significance of the interpretation of findings, limitations, and implications within social change, and I provide a conclusion to the study. The purpose was to explore formerly incarcerated women's lived experiences and challenges that prohibited them from being approved for public assistance, housing, and all crucial rehabilitative programs. To combat the high risk of recidivism, the study relates to policies that need to be implemented to help women have a voice concerning their struggles and rehabilitative programs to better prepare them for life after prison. Policymakers and stakeholders must have evidence that can help them better understand the importance of implementing post-release reentry programs. Formerly incarcerated women face many challenges and disadvantages. These research findings could help policymakers make decisions that help prevent them from potentially continuing criminal activity. Discrimination and mistreatment are concerning experiences within the lives of these women, mainly from government agencies that terminate or deny public assistance access, which causes an outcast among women who are trying to rehabilitate their lives within the economy for consideration of finding job opportunities.

Essentially, there are two main interpretations of social change once women are released from prison. The positive impact of social change is when they have learned their lesson and hope for a chance to never return to a place like that again. Women mentioned that living in prison was the worst place on earth. They wanted guidance on

how to become better mothers to take care of their children, but they were not assigned to a caseworker or rehabilitative program support group. However, the negative experience of the social change is when society does not accept someone who has experienced prison life or someone who has a criminal record that led to a felony. Women who return to society expect resources to be available for them to transition into redeeming themselves, but they are punished all over again after they have served their sentences. Not all women who commit crimes should be labeled as unworthy or incapable of changing. Everyone should be given an opportunity to change their life, especially when they have realized a mistake was made and they want to change. Rehabilitative programs can provide guidance needed to refocus and redirect problematic issues that were not addressed from misdiagnosed or traumatic experiences left untreated. Most of these women need one-on-one counseling for a situation that may have caused a traumatic experience from childhood or domestic violence in the home.

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

The interpretation of the findings is that women's lived experiences after prison life have been extremely difficult due to being unable to get approved through welfare assistance programs and reentry initiatives. Having access could help them get on their feet quicker and take care of their children without going through challenges and barriers that prevent them from being rehabilitated. Women who were released within the first 3 years stated that they felt pressured, desperately wanting to have opportunities within post-release programs. Research studies have indicated that if women who are at higher risk of recidivism are not given rehabilitative opportunities to enroll within the 3 years

post-release into reentry-to-society programs, they will not be able to become productive or gain an advantage to become better and compete in a world that are harder on people who have committed crimes. Essentially, women who participated in this study all agreed that welfare discrimination is problematic for them. A criminal record creates roadblocks for getting housing and approval for other programs that provide benefits to low-income families. Unfortunately, denied access slows the progress of being assigned early therapy and treatment to help keep them out of prison. Welfare reform initiatives are a must for formerly incarcerated women to achieve a successful transition back into the community. Nonprofit agencies do offer women self-sufficiency classes to learn how to become independent, but these programs are limited to government funding.

Currently, there are no mandated case management programs with restrictions that the government or welfare system has created to track and evaluate women's post-relief activity. However, some statistics show that recidivists and habitual offenders who are on the list repeat criminal behavior. Policymakers need to offer consistent monitoring that involves rehabilitative programs that require accountability. When this is enforced, recidivism rates will decrease through regular treatment plans.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The limitations of the study started with COVID-19 being one of the things that slowed recruitment down, but once I was able to reassure potential participants that we were still able to complete everything online or on the telephone, we were able to move forward with scheduling and interviews. Women of different ethnicities were selected to participate in the research study. I posted a recruiting flyer in homeless shelters, soup

kitchens, government agencies such as social services, nonprofit agencies, libraries, and courthouses to generate interest for potential participants to complete the research study. The participants were debriefed on why this research was significant to help them voice their challenges and document those problems to the policymakers, so they understood what women face post-release, especially during the three-year window. There were no issues with obtaining trustworthiness because I was able to talk openly with the participants to let them feel at ease knowing that I would tell their story without being biased or judgmental.

### **Implications**

The implication of social change occurs on different levels; it could possibly involve issues for drug court sentencing and requests for a plan of care, combined with integrating preventive treatment. However, when new policies are not created and enforced for existing and post-release individuals like these women, the risks of recidivism and habitual offenses become a reality within the community. Criminal justice systems need to help advocate for better options so that they do not see the same faces in the courtrooms and prisons. Research within the criminal justice system will make a difference in helping these women get the right treatment. Essentially, by the time they are released, perhaps there is a significant amount of progress. Policymakers implementing new policy protocol requirements would help create safer environments where people in society are not afraid of individuals being released from prison. Without preventive action, the community expects them to commit another crime against their personal property or hurt someone close to them. However, the implications of policy

change ideas are in the hands of the welfare systems and federal government overseers. If a plan is not in effect, social change for these women does not occur. Unfortunately, women end up back in prison because they did not get any help.

The benefit would open the doors for more federal government funding to allow nonprofit agencies that have expertise in reentry programs for post-release individuals to provide consistent alternatives to obtaining food, job skills training, increase employment rates, and housing placement. There should be review into consideration that once women are released, they usually do not have any training or job skills, and there are no rehabilitative programs inside prison to assist them with transitioning into society with readiness.

### **Recommendations**

The recommendations for more studies are very important. Essentially, from Chapter 2 within the literature review, I suggest recommendations for future studies to include research to explore the connections among childhood trauma related to substance abuse in the home, drug convictions from either parent, policy initiative objectives, preventive methods, and injustice in drug sentencing. I would petition policymakers to allow this type of research to benefit women like this who need help. Implementing rehabilitative programs that offer evaluations before and after prison is the best strategy, especially within three years post release, evaluations should be conducted to provide more insight into creating policies. There is still a gap in the research on finding effective solutions to combating recidivism. To examine the gap more thoroughly, the criminal justice system needs to study why women are still getting into trouble at higher rates and

the struggles are still frequent, but the welfare lifetime ban is still intact permanently. Ongoing studies about recidivism could shed more light on why women are committing these crimes and suffering without being placed in rehabilitative programs that are crucial for winning against recidivism.

I recommend sentencing treatments that are combined with financial support and monitoring while in prison. This would provide employable skills, if needed, and incorporate mental illness evaluations and scheduled monthly visits from a caseworker. Women who have been through traumatic experiences can be rehabilitated, but they need guidance to help them throughout the process until they become strong enough. Recidivism is a topic that the community is not familiar with, so to get more information about what is going on in society, sponsors and stakeholders must be educated to care more about this research documentation and evidence from the women who have experienced life after prison issues.

### **Conclusion**

The best defense for combating recidivism is to conduct research and provide data that produces policy change initiatives. Policymakers must provide options for women who need these federal government programs for treatment and guidance to evoke a better meaningful lifestyle that is away from criminal temptations. Developing a framework within a social change system of rehabilitative program where policymakers can implement accountability for tracking post-release women's treatment plans to evaluate progress towards knowing what actually works best prior to and post release. Self-sufficiency training preparation classes must be incorporated to help women

transition back into society stronger and more aware of how to maneuver through life's challenges after prison. Without these tools, women will continue to have significant trouble with recidivism and criminal behavior. The key factors for advocating toward past and current recidivism are to educate the policymakers who have the power to remove the welfare lifetime ban and provide more reasonable alternatives that include extensive check-off requirements for being in a rehabilitative program, ongoing funding for mandated drug treatment therapy, mental illness evaluations with counseling, housing placement, and job readiness skill training.

## References

- Abbott, P., Magin, P., Davison, J., & Hu, W. (2017). Medical homelessness and candidacy: Women transiting between prison and community health care. *International Journal for Equity in Health, 16*, 130.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1609406918803824>
- Afkar, A., Rezvani, S. M., & Emami Sigaroudi, A. (2017). Measurement of factors influencing the relapse of addiction: A factor analysis. *International Journal of High-Risk Behavior Addict, 6*(3), e32141.  
<https://sites.kowsarpub.com/ijhrba/articles/56835.html>
- Alper, M., Durose, M. R., & Markman, J. (2018). *2018 update on prisoner recidivism: A 9-year follow-up period (2005–2014)*. U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics.  
<https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/18upr9yfup0514.pdf>
- American Sociological Association. (2018). *Code of ethics*. <http://www.asanet.org/code-ethics>. Accessed 17 January 2019.
- Arifin, S. R. M. (2018). Ethical considerations in qualitative study. *International Journal of Care Scholars, 1*(2), 30–33.  
<https://doi.org/10.31436/ijcs.v1i2.82>
- Auty, K. M., & Liebling, A. (2020). Exploring the relationship between prison social climate and reoffending. *JQ: Justice Quarterly, 37*(2), 358–381.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/07418825.2018.1538421>
- Bhatti, S. (2019). *The appeal of a repeal: Analyzing Virginia's self-sabotage of*

*successful re-entry for drug felons*. Richmond Publications International.

<https://scholarship.richmond.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1440&context=pilr>

Breuer, E., Remond, M., Lighton, S., Passalacqua, J., Galouzis, J., Stewart, K. A., & Sullivan, E. (2021). The needs and experiences of mothers while in prison and post-release: A rapid review and thematic synthesis. *Health & Justice*, 9(1), 31.

<https://doi.org/10.1186/s40352-021-00153-7>

British Sociological Association. (2017). *Statement of ethical practice*.

[https://www.britisoc.co.uk/media/24310/bsa\\_statement\\_of\\_ethical\\_practice.pdf](https://www.britisoc.co.uk/media/24310/bsa_statement_of_ethical_practice.pdf).

Accessed 17 January 2019.

Bronson, J., & Carson, E. A. (2017). *Prisoners in 2017*. U.S. Department of Justice.

<http://www.bjs.gov/index.cfm?ty=pbdetail&iid=6546>

Brundage, S. C., & Levine, C. (2019). *The ripple effect: The impact of the opioid epidemic on children and families*. United Hospital Fund and Milbank Memorial Fund.

Burke, L., Collett, S., & McNeill, F. (2018). *Reimagining rehabilitation: Beyond the individual*. Routledge.

Butler, H. D., Solomon, S. J., & DeLisi, M. (2021). Time served in prison, in-prison experiences, and perceptions of procedural justice. *JQ: Justice Quarterly*, 38(7), 1519–1541. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07418825.2021.1985159>

Butts, J. A., & Schiraldi, V. (2018, March). *Recidivism reconsidered: Preserving the community justice mission of community corrections*. Program in Criminal Justice Policy and Management, Harvard Kennedy School.

[https://www.hks.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/centers/wiener/programs/pcj/files/recidivism\\_reconsidered.pdf](https://www.hks.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/centers/wiener/programs/pcj/files/recidivism_reconsidered.pdf)

Camplain, R., Camplain, C., Trotter, T. R., II, Pro, G., Sabo, S., Eaves, E., Peoples, M., & Baldwin, J. A. (2019). Racial/ethnic differences in drug and alcohol-related arrest outcomes in a southwest county from 2009 to 2018. *American Journal of Public Health* 110(S1), S85–S92.

<https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2019.305409>

Cho, A., & Tasca, M. (2018). Disparities in women’s prison sentences: Exploring the nexus between motherhood, drug offense, and sentence length. *Feminist Criminology*.

<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/>

Cochran, J. C., & Mears, D. P. (2017). The path of least resistance: Inmate compliance and recidivism. *JQ: Justice Quarterly*, 34(3), 431–458.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/07418825.2016.1168476>

Collins, C. S., & Stockton, C. M. (2018). The central role of theory in qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406918797475>

Comack, E. (2018). *Coming back to jail: Women, trauma, and criminalization*. Fernwood Publishing.

Congressional Budget Office (CBO). (2021). H.R.3372–One-Stop Shop Community Reentry Program Act of 2020. <https://www.house.gov/the-house-explained/legislative-branch-partners/congressional-budget-office>

- DeLisi, M., Drury, A., & Elbert, M. (2020). Criminogenic and desistance-promoting processes behind bars and post-release supervision: New evidence from federal offenders. *Crime & Delinquency*, 66(3), 309–336.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0011128719847453>
- DeRooy, K., Bennett, S., & Sydes, M. (2019). Women released from custody: Investigating risk factors and reoffending. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, 63(13), 2239–2263.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/030662419845778>
- Dunbar Winsor, K. (2021). Staying with the social project: A review of feminist criminology. *Social & Legal Studies*, 30(3), 469–488.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0964663920941156>
- Duwe, G., & Clark, V. A. (2017). Nothing will work unless you did: The predictors of post-prison employment. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 44(5), 657–677.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0093854816689104>
- Edwards, L., Jamieson, S. K., Bowman, J., Chang, S., Newton, J., & Sullivan, E. (2022). A systematic review of post-release programs for women exiting prison with substance-use disorders: Assessing current programs and weighing the evidence. *Health Justice*.  
<https://doi.org/10.1186/s40352-021-00162-6>
- Emerson, A. M. (2018). Narrative inquiry into shelter-seeking by women with a history of repeated incarceration: Research and nursing practice implications. *ANS. Advances in Nursing Science*, 41(3), 260–274.

<https://doi.org/10.1097/ANS.0000000000000216>

Finley, E. P., Huynh, A. K., Farmer, M. M., Bean-Mayberry, B., Moin, T., Oishi, S. M., Moreau, J. L., Dyer, K. E., Lanham, H. J., Leykum, L., & Hamilton, A. B. (2018). Periodic reflections: A method of guided discussions for documenting implementation phenomena. *BMC Medical Research Methodology*, 18(1) 53.

<https://doi.org/10.1186/s12874-018-0610-y>

Fleming, J., & Zegwaard, K. E. (2018). Methodologies, methods and ethical considerations for conducting research in work-integrated learning. *International Journal of Work-Integrated Learning*, 19(3), 205–213.

Fullmer, L., White, M., Green, K. M., & Accordino, M. P. (2022). Reentry readiness among women with mental health conditions: Implications for rehabilitation counselors. *Journal of Applied Rehabilitation Counseling*, 53(2), 105–119.

<https://connect.springerpub.com/content/sgrjarc/53/2/105.full>

Gallagher, J. R., Nordberg, A., Marlowe, D. B., Zongrone, C., & Szymanowski, S. (2021). A qualitative interpretive meta-synthesis (QIMS) of women's experiences in drug court: Promoting recovery in the criminal justice system, *Journal of Social Work Practice in the Addictions*.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/1533256X.2021.1945870>

Gålnander, R. (2020). Desistance from crime—to what? Exploring future aspirations and their implications for processes of desistance. *Feminist Criminology*, 15(3), 255–277.

Golembeski, C. A., Irfan, A., & Dong, K. R. (2020). Food insecurity and collateral

consequences of punishment amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. *World Medical & Health Policy*, 12(4), 357–373.

<https://doi.org/10.1002/wmh3.378>

Haas, S. M., & Spence, D. H. (2017). Use of core correctional practice and inmate preparedness for release. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, 61(13), 1455–1478.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0306624X15625992>

Halpin, J. (2018). Ensuring basic living standards for all: Voter attitudes toward government assistance and social insurance programs in the Trump era. Center for American Progress. [Online]

<https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/poverty/reports/2018/03/07/447412/ensuring-basic-living-standards/>

Hamilton, A. B., & Finley, E. P. (2019). Qualitative methods in implementation research: An introduction. *Psychiatry Research*, 280, 112516.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychres.2019.112516>

Harmon, M. G., & Boppre, B. (2018). Women of color and the war on crime: An explanation for the rise in Black female imprisonment. *Journal of Ethnicity in Criminal Justice*, 16(4), 309–332.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/15377938.2015.1052173>

Keith, R. E., Crosson, J. C., O'Malley, A. S., Crompton, D., & Taylor, E. F. (2017). Using the consolidated framework for implementation research (CFIR) to produce actionable findings: A rapid-cycle evaluation approach to improving

implementation. *Implementation Science: IS*, 12(1), 15.

<https://doi.org/10.1186/s13012-017-0550-7>

Kinsinger, F. S. (2009). Beneficence and the professional's moral imperative. *Journal of Chiropractic Humanities*, 16(1), 44–46.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.echu.2010.02.006>

Lindquist-Grantz, R., Mallow, P., Dean, L., Lydenberg, M., & Chubinski, J. (2021).

Diversion programs for individuals who use substances: A review of the literature. *Journal of Drug Issues*, 51(3), 483–503.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/00220426211000330>

Link, N. W., & Hamilton, L. K. (2017). The reciprocal lagged effects of substance use and recidivism in a prisoner reentry context. *Health & Justice*, 5(1), 8.

<https://doi.org/10.1186/s40352-017-0053-2>

Luallen, J., Edgerton, J., & Rabideau, D. (2017). A quasi-experimental evaluation of the impact of public assistance on prisoner recidivism.

[https://sites.utexas.edu/idvsa/files/2020/05/Luallen2018\\_Article\\_AQuasi-ExperimentalEvaluationO.pdf](https://sites.utexas.edu/idvsa/files/2020/05/Luallen2018_Article_AQuasi-ExperimentalEvaluationO.pdf)

Martin, B. T., & Shannon, S. K. (2020). State variation in the drug felony ban on temporary assistance for needy families: Why the modified ban matters.

*Punishment & Society*, 22(4), 439-460.

<http://doi.org/10.1177/1462474519894982>

Maruna, S. (2017). Desistance as a social movement. *Irish Probation Journal*, 14(1), 5–20.

- McKendy, L., & Ricciardelli, R. (2019). Women offenders under community supervision: Comparing the profiles of returners and non-returners to federal prison. *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, 10, 875.  
<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyt.2019.00875>
- Miller Ventura, H. (2021). Female reentry and gender-responsive programming.  
<https://nij.ojp.gov/topics/articles/female-reentry-and-gender-responsive-programming>
- Mowen, T. J., Stansfield, R., & Boman, J. H. (2019). Family matters: Moving beyond “if” family support matters to “why” family support matters during reentry from prison. *The Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 56(4), 483–523.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0022427818820902>
- Nagelhout, G. E., Hummel, K., de Goeij, M. C. M., de Vries, H., Kaner, E., & Lemmens, P. (2017). How economic recessions and unemployment affect illegal drug use A systematic realist literature review. *International Journal of Drug Policy*, 44, 69–83. ISSN 0955-3959.  
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0955395917300877>
- National Institute of Justice. (2022). *Recidivism*.  
<https://nij.ojp.gov/topics/corrections/recidivism>
- Nightingale, A. J. (2020). *International encyclopedia of human geography* (2nd ed.). North Carolina General Assembly 2020.  
<https://www.ncleg.gov/Sessions/2019/Bills/House/PDF/H511v7.pdf>

- Nyirenda, L., Kumar, M. B., Theobald, S., Sarker, M., Simwinga, M., Kumwenda, M., Johnson, C., Hatzold, K., Corbett, E. L., Sibanda, E., & Taegtmeier, M. (2020). Using research networks to generate trustworthy qualitative public health research findings from multiple contexts. *BMC Medical Research Methodology*, 20(1), 1–10.  
<https://doi.org/10.1186/s12874-019-0895-5>
- O’Kane, P., Smith, A., & Lerman, M. P. (2021). Building transparency and trustworthiness in inductive research through computer-aided qualitative data Analysis software. *Organizational Research Methods*, 24(1), 104–139.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1094428119865016>
- O’Neill Hayes, T., & Barnhorst, M. (2020). *Incarceration and poverty in the United States*.  
<https://www.americanactionforum.org/research/incarceration-and-poverty-in-the-united-states/>
- Paresky, M. L. (2017). Changing welfare as we know it, again: Reforming the Welfare Reform Act to provide all drug felons access to food stamps. *Boston College Law Review*, 58(5), 1659–1697.  
<https://lawdigitalcommons.bc.edu/bclr/vol58/iss5/6>
- Perrin, S., Bertrand, K., & Langlois, E. (2021). Avoiding the stigma. A qualitative study of socially included women’s experiences of drug use and dealing, health services and the police in France. *International Journal of Drug Policy*, 87.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.drugpo.2020.102850>

Peterson, J., Pearce, P. F., Ferguson, L. A., & Langford, C. A. (2017). Understanding scoping reviews: Definition, purpose, and process. *Journal of the American Association of Nurse Practitioners*, 29, 12–16.

<https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1609406918803824>

Pettus, C., Veeh, C. A., Renn, T. R., & Kennedy, S. C. (2021). The well-being development model: A theoretical model to improve outcomes among criminal justice system-involved individuals. *Social Service Review*, 95(3), 413–468.

<https://doi.org/10.1086/715852>

Polomarkakis, K. A. (2017). Drug law enforcement revisited: The “war” against the war on drugs.

<https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0022042617697017>

Reidy, T. J., Cihan, A., & Sorensen, J. R. (2017). Women in prison: Investigating trajectories of institutional female misconduct. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 52, 49–56.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcrimjus.2017.07.013>

Rosenberg, A., Groves, A. K., & Blankenship, K. M. (2017). Comparing Black and White drug offenders: Implications for racial disparities in criminal justice and reentry policy and programming. *Journal of Drug Issues*, 47(1), 132–142.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0022042616678614>

Sankofa, J. (2018). “You miss so much when you’re gone”: The lasting harm of jailing mothers before trial in Oklahoma. Human Rights Watch and American Civil

Liberties Union.

<https://www.hrw.org/report/2018/09/26/you-miss-so-much-when-youre-gone/lasting-harm-jailing-mothers-trial-oklahoma>

Sawyer, W. (2019). Who's helping the 1.9 million women released from prisons and jails each year? Prison Policy Institute.

<https://www.prisonpolicy.org/blog/2019/07/19/reentry/>

Sentencing Project. (2018). *Amicus brief in support of ending North Carolina felony disenfranchisement lawsuit.*

<https://www.sentencingproject.org/publications/amicus-brief-in-support-of-north-carolina-felony-disenfranchisement-lawsuit/>

Sered, S. S., & Norton-Hawk, M. (2021). Beyond recidivism and desistance. *Feminist Criminology, 16*(2), 165–190.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1557085120951849>

Shanahan, E. A., Jones, M. D., & McBeth, M. K. (2018). How to conduct a narrative policy framework study. *The Social Science Journal, 55*(3), 332–345.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.soscij.2017.12.002>

Sheely, A. (2020). State supervision, punishment, and poverty: The case of drug bans on welfare receipt. *Punishment & Society.*

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1462474520959433>

Skorstengaard, J. L. (2018). Coming back to jail: Women, trauma, and criminalization (Book review). *Studies in Social Justice, 12*(2), 416–418.

<https://doi.org/10.26522/ssj.v12i2.2040>

Smith, S. A., Mays, G. P., Collins, T. C., & Ramaswamy, M. (2019). The role of the community health delivery system in the health and well-being of justice-involved women: A narrative review. *Health & Justice*, 7(1), 12.

<https://doi.org/10.1186/s40352-019-0092-y>

Smoyer, A. B., Elumn Madera, J., & Blankenship, K. M. (2019). Older adults' lived experience of incarceration. *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation*, 58(3), 220–239.

<http://doi:10.1080/10509674.2019.1582574>

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2019). Key substance use and mental health indicators in the United States: Results from the 2018 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (HHS Publication No. PEP19-5068, NSDUH Series H-54). Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

<https://www.samhsa.gov/data/>

Surmiak, A. (2020). Should we maintain or break confidentiality? The choices made by social researchers in the context of law violation and harm. *Journal of Academic Ethics*, 18, 229–247.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10805-019-09336-2>

Tahar-Djebbar, A. (2022). The Bill Clinton rationale for welfare reform: Examining implications of race, class, and gender using documents. *Journal of Urban History*, 48(2), 399–424.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0096144220948812>

Tuttle, C. (2019). Snapping back: Food stamp bans and criminal recidivism. *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy*, 11(2), 301-27.

<https://www.aeaweb.org/articles?id=10.1257/pol.20170490>

United Nations. (2022, January). International Narcotics Control Board. Publishing production: English, Publishing and Library Section, United Nations Office at Vienna.

U.S. Department of Justice. (2022). *Justice Department announces new rule implementing federal time credits program established by the First Step Act.*

<https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/justice-department-announces-new-rule-implementing-federal-time-credits-program-established>

White House. (2022a). *Incarceration to employment: A comprehensive strategy to expand employment opportunities for formerly incarcerated persons.*

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Incarceration-to-EmploymentStrategy.pdf>

White House. (2022b). *National drug control strategy*. National Institute on Drug Abuse.

The White House Executive Office of the President Office of National Drug Control Policy.

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/National-Drug-Control-2022Strategy.pdf>

Williams, J. M., Spencer, Z., & Wilson, S. K. (2021). I am not your felon: Decoding the trauma, resilience, and recovering mothering of formerly incarcerated Black

women. *Crime & Delinquency*, 67(8), 1103–1136.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0011128720974316>

Wolkomir, E. (2018). *How SNAP can better serve the formerly incarcerated*. Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.

Yukhnenko, D., Wolf, A., Blackwood, N., & Fazel, S. (2019). Recidivism rates in individuals receiving community sentences: A systematic review. *PLOS One* 14(9), e0222495.

<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0222495>

Zinger, I. (2020). Indigenous peoples in federal custody surpasses 30% correctional investigator issues statement and challenge. (Report). Correctional Investigator of Canada.

## Appendix A: North Carolina First Step Act

*North Carolina First Step Act (HB 511, Rep. Grange) The North Carolina First Step Act creates a “safety valve” that allows courts to depart from the mandatory minimum for some drug trafficking offenses, and instead impose a sentence that is within the state’s structured sentencing guidelines based on the classification of the offense (e.g., Class C, D). The bill was passed by the North Carolina General Assembly on June 17, 2020, and takes effect on December 1, 2020.*

## Appendix B: Recruitment Flyer

**VOLUNTEERS NEEDED!**

**Research Study Pitt County Residents Only**

**Requirements**

**Scan QR Code**

- Are you between the ages of 18-40.
- (20 Women Needed). All Races African America, White, Latina, Chinese, etc ....
- Have You Been Denied Public Assistance Due to a Felony Drug Conviction? Welfare ineligibility?

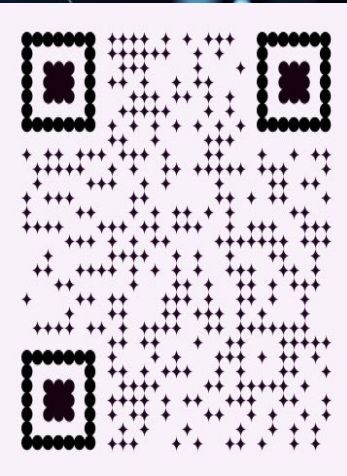
Welfare Lifetime Ban Restricted.  
 Drug Felony.  
 Lost Civil Rights.  
 Rehabilitative Government Programs Termination.

Incentive  
 Must be Selected.  
 Must Be Willing to be Interviewed.  
 Walmart Gift Card Worth \$25.00 After Each Interview

**All individuals will be notified if you are selected.**

**Must Have Email Contact information**

**Complete Survey Questions**



### Appendix C: Interview Questions

Thank you for allowing me the time to ask you a few questions concerning your experience with the welfare reform lifetime ban. This will only take about an hour and 30 minutes of your time. All information obtained during the interview will be kept confidential.

1. Tell me about your lived experience after being incarcerated? For example, have you been able to find a job post-release? Were there any programs upon release that help with housing, employment, or financial stability and obtaining food? Explain the outcome.
2. Have you applied for public assistance? If yes how many times? What happened during the application process? Did the social worker offer any post-release programs? If yes or no, did the programs offer transitional methods such as job placement? Explain the outcome.
3. Were you denied Work First Opportunities because of your criminal record? If yes or no what were their reasons? Explain the outcome.
4. Have you been able to find any other support organizations that are not connected to welfare programs. If yes or no how long did the support last or was it just a one-time voucher. Explain the outcome.
5. How many times have been denied welfare assistance because of your felony drug conviction within the past 3 years? Were there any referral programs offered?
6. What types of rehabilitative programs have been offered to you since your released? If yes, when and did they help you with being self-independent programs? Tell me about your experience.
7. Since being ineligible for the welfare work force programs have you and your children been able to obtain food or money for rent or housing programs? Please explain each hardship that negatively impacted your family. Did you and your child have to live in a homeless shelter at any time post-release? When and why?
8. Did you seek reentry programs through the local community college or social services welfare department? What were their requirements to become approved?
9. What changes would you prefer to see happen with welfare reform lifetime ban? Please explain your goals, employment issues, educational setbacks, housing rejections and financial concerns.

10. Do you have any questions for me? If yes, please feel free to ask or express your feelings about the interview process.