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Employer Attitudes and Beliefs About Hiring Post Incarcerated Offenders in Mississippi

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Walden University

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Ora Starks

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Walden University

2018

Abstract

Employer Attitudes and Beliefs About Hiring Post-Incarcerated Offenders in Mississippi

by

Ora Starks

MS, Criminal Justice, 1999

BS, Criminal Justice, 1994

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Human Services Program

Criminal Justice Specialization

Walden University

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Abstract

Ex-offenders continue to struggle to obtain jobs after incarceration with over half of the population not having gainful employment. Having no income has ripple effects, including not being able to secure stable housing or contribute to their family's wellbeing, which often leads them to return to engaging in criminal activity. The purpose of the study was to explore employers' beliefs and attitudes on hiring post-incarcerated offenders in the Delta Region of Mississippi. Using Heider's attribution theory as the conceptual framework, Marx's conflict and Becker's labeling theories were incorporated to assist in understanding ex-offender's challenges when attempting to re-establish their lives. Employing case study, a qualitative methodology, 7 local business owners participated in semi-structured interviews, centered on developing an understanding of the factors employers described as influencing their hiring decisions. Upon completion of interviews, the data were hand transcribed, prior to beginning the coding process and data analysis. Triangulation was the primary method used to establish the trustworthiness of the process and outcomes. Four themes emerged, including significance of charges, legal risk, prerelease programs, and work experience. Illuminating their unique perspectives can inform policy and decision makers of the barriers some business owners felt impeded their ability to offer ex-offenders jobs. The results of the study can also contribute to social change by raising awareness and informing communities, organizations, and academia of the challenges business owners face when making employment decisions regarding ex-offenders.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Moses (2014) documented the barriers ex-offenders encounter upon their released from prison. Issues such as obtaining employment, locating stable housing, and avoiding becoming involved in illegal drug activity impede their ability to integrate back into society successfully. The underlying problems included the lack of educational achievement, ineffective use of vocational options, along with the inability to overcome a multitude of addictions. Moses found the greatest obstacle was the inability to obtain and sustain employment, which would remediate the other issues.

Although the correctional system's priority focus is punishment, many have developed and implemented rehabilitative programs to assist detainees in attaining Graduate Equivalent Degrees (GED), vocational certificates, and other ancillary treatment programs to address previous addictions (Atkin & Armstrong, 2013; Moses, 2014). Correctional professionals acknowledged the limited timeframe of access to these services hampers their ability to prepare offenders for successful acclimation into their communities (Moses, 2014). Researchers indicated prisoners released from correctional facilities with educational or vocational achievements are also unable to access employment opportunities, which will sustain economic viability for themselves and their dependents (Atkin & Armstrong, 2013; Moses, 2014).

Background

Most ex-offenders return to their same neighborhoods that have high crime rates (Blesset & Pryor, 2013). Some communities lack the necessary tools to provide an adequate support system for prisoners to achieve successful reentry (Blesset & Pryor, 2013). In 2013, African Americans represented 60% of the prison population as legislators purporting to be tough on crime contributed to the stigma attached to ex-offenders as deviant and violent people (Blesset & Pryor, 2013). Based on the disproportionality of African Americans in postincarceration populations, Blesset and Pryor (2013) found these negative concepts affected them in greater numbers and increased their vulnerability to recidivate. Some of the effects associated with the different labels make it difficult for them to find a companion, vote, or receive financial aid for college (Bergen & Bressler, 2016).

Atkin and Armstrong (2013) underscored how post-incarcerated offenders face many barriers and difficulties affecting their ability to succeed when attempting to remain free of judicial constraints. Finding adequate employment is a major obstacle they confront as it is a requirement and necessity for them to sustain themselves outside of prison walls (Atkin & Armstrong, 2013). Researchers conducted a survey by the Urban Institute, which revealed 70% of ex-offenders believed employers would not be interested in hiring them because of their criminal record (Atkin & Armstrong, 2013). Also, researchers have found

companies had negative attitudes toward hiring ex-offenders (Swanson, Reese, & Bond, 2012).

Based on having a criminal record and labeled with negative terms, which stigmatizes them, ex-offenders struggle with obtaining employment as evidenced by receiving fewer callbacks upon applying for a job (Blesset & Pryor, 2013; Flake, 2015). There are no federal laws specifically protecting ex-offenders against discrimination by employers in their hiring practices (Pettinato, 2014). Although advocates have used Title VII disparate impact theory to assist minorities encountering employment discrimination, it does not include ex-offenders as a protected population (Pettinato, 2014).

Companies have become skeptical about employing ex-offenders because of the potential exposure to liability issues (Atkin & Armstrong, 2013; Bergen & Bressler, 2016; Swanson et al., 2012). Employers have significant concerns about assuming potential legal responsibility if they hire a convicted felon and are knowledgeable about past violent offenses revealed in their criminal record (Atkin & Armstrong, 2013; Bergen & Bressler, 2016; Swanson et al., 2012). Approximately 92% of employers inquire about the criminal history of applicants (Atkin & Armstrong, 2013; Bergen & Bressler, 2016). Although this does not reveal information relevant to their capabilities to perform job tasks, it becomes the basis for considering whether to offer an employment opportunity to the ex-offender (Pettinato, 2014).

In *Foster v Loft* (1998), a bar owner who was aware of the employee's history of criminal violence but decided to offer the person an opportunity to work for their company (Hickox, 2011). The employee, who was an ex-offender with a violent criminal history, assaulted a customer, which led to a negligent liability lawsuit against the bar owner (Hickox, 2011). In the case, *Haddock v. City of New York* (1975), the New York City Park Commission hired an individual, who as a juvenile and had a violent criminal history of rape, robbery, and assault (Hickox, 2011). They hired the employee to work in the park, and later the person raped a 9-year-old girl repeatedly in a maintenance shed (Hickox, 2011). Because the park commission hired a person with knowledge of their past violations a negligent hiring lawsuit ensued (Hickox, 2011). Cases such as this increase business owner's hesitancy to assume the potential negative legal ramifications associated with hiring ex-offenders (Atkin & Armstrong, 2013).

Problem Statement

Ex-offenders face barriers to reintegration into society because of the social stigma attached to them being formerly incarcerated (Raphael, 2011). The stigma also contributes to not obtaining gainful employment or establishing permanent housing (Raphael, 2011). They encounter problems, which escalate when the ex-offender has a history of addiction, distribution of contraband, and other felony convictions (Raphael, 2011). However, the most crucial element of successful reentry into the community is obtaining employment.

According to the Department of Justice, approximately 60-75% of ex-offenders are not able to secure employment within the first year after release from incarceration (Bergen & Bressler, 2016). In the state of California, approximately 80% of post-incarcerated offenders remain jobless for up to a year after their release (Raphael, 2011). The rates for African Americans not obtaining employment or considered for an interview upon checking the criminal conviction box on the application is much higher (Bergen & Bressler, 2016). Post-incarcerated offenders often struggle with admitting they have a criminal record on job applications because of the predictable results (Raphael, 2011). Researchers have also documented the number of offenders who qualify for jobs, but employers had doubts about employing ex-offenders because of their criminal history and refused to hire them regardless of the offense committed (Atkin, Gaylene, Armstrong, 2013; Esperian, 2010; Flake, 2015). The results of the survey of 48 businesses conducted about willingness to hire ex-offenders indicated only 10 were willing to hire an ex-offender (Atkin et al., 2013). Employers prepared to hire ex-offenders considered the type of crime committed. For example, they indicated a willingness to hire ex-offenders who had a criminal background of embezzling, car thief, and burglary (Atkin et al., 2013). They were not willing to employ offenders who had a criminal background of rape, murder, assault. Those who had been a victim of a crime or sued for liability of a crime occurring at their businesses were also not interested in providing jobs to

individuals upon their release from prison (Atkin et al., 2013). Additional concerns included the possibility of creating an uncomfortable working environment for the other employees, customers not utilizing or purchasing their services, and the potential employee's unfamiliarity with technology and other emerging innovations (Atkin et al., 2013).

Ban the Box

Legislators sought to remediate the avoidant behaviors and hiring practices by enacting laws such as *Ban the Box* (Von Bergen & Bressler, 2016). *The box* refers to requiring job applicants to document whether they have prior offenses, including felony convictions (Bergen & Bressler, 2016). Policy makers expected removing questions regarding previous criminal prosecution would facilitate employers offering ex-offenders interviews without the stigma attached to their prior misconduct (Flake, 2015; Von Bergen & Bressler, 2016). Consideration for a position is often contingent on the response to questions related to past illegal conduct (Bergen & Bressler, 2016). Currently, policy leaders advocating for expanding Ban the Box legislation hope to provide increased fairness in the job application process (Bergen & Bressler, 2016). Approximately 100 cities have embraced Ban the Box. However, this does not include regions in Mississippi (Bergen & Bressler, 2016). Mississippi lawmakers are not aggressive in pushing for a change in employer's practices of hiring ex-

offenders because they do not want to the perception of being weak on crime (Flake, 2015).

Exemplified by their employment rates and low earnings, the Bureau of Justice Statistics information recognized the limited labor market for post-incarcerated offenders (Aresti, Eatough, & Gordan, 2010; Raphael, 2011). Their ability to attain employment boosts their self-esteem, enables them to be more productive, and provide a financial safety net for their families (Raphael, 2011). Studies show ex-offenders who get a job are better able to resist engaging in criminal behavior and have decreased rates of recidivism (Aresti et al., 2010; Nally, Lockwood, Ho, & Knutson, 2014; Raphael, 2011; Skardhamar & Telle, 2012). Skardhamar and Telle (2012) reported stable employment for ex-offenders is necessary to support and maintain successful reengagement into the community for ex-offenders.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to explore employers' beliefs and attitudes on hiring post-incarcerated offenders in the state of Mississippi. I chose to conduct research in this state based on my tenure of employment in the Mississippi correctional system and awareness of ex-offenders' failure to secure jobs after incarceration. Being unable to locate information on Mississippi post-incarceration outcomes, also contributed to becoming interested in filling the gap in empirical research related to this topic. The findings can inform decision

makers involved in the creation of innovative programs for ex-offenders preparing for the workforce once they leave prison, as well as legislators implementing changes to existing policies.

Research Questions

To ascertain insight into the plight of post incarcerated offenders attempting to reintegrate into communities in Mississippi, I posed the following questions to potential employers:

RQ1. What are employers' perceptions of hiring ex-offenders with a criminal record?

Conceptual Framework

In conducting this study, I explored the beliefs, attitudes, and opinions of employers about hiring ex-offenders. A review of the literature revealed there was limited information available focusing on employer's attitudes and beliefs concerning hiring ex-offenders in Mississippi. I selected three constructs to support this area of inquiry, including the attribution, labeling, and conflict theories.

Attribution Theory

I used the attribution theory as the foundation of the conceptual framework to answer the research questions I posed in the study (Maruna & King, 2009). Heider (1958) was among the first to analyze the process of attribution. The theory of attribution is important because it focuses on an individual's

attitudes, opinions, and personality traits related to internal and external attribution (Maruna & King, 2009). According to Heider, internal attributions deal with individual's personal issues, which cause them to behave or act a certain way (Maruna & King, 2009). External attributions deal with an individual's behavior regarding an event they encounter (Maruna & King, 2009). Attribution plays a fundamental role in the decision-making process involved in the hiring of potential employees (Carless & Waterworth, 2012). During one-on-one interviews with business owners, I asked them to share their beliefs and attitudes regarding employing ex-offenders, while ascertaining the internal and external attributions related to their decisions.

Labeling Theory

Derived from the sociology of deviance and developed by Becker, the labeling theory focuses on how people in society label individuals or groups based on their behavior or culture (Hossein, 2010). The labeling theory was appropriate for this study due to the stigmatizing labels released offenders receive when attempting to return to society. Researchers documented how the labeling ex-offenders often causes them to conform to their imposed identity and begin to react to the characterization society has placed upon them (Asencio & Burke, 2011; Behravan, 2010).

Conflict Theory

Marx (1975) articulated the social conflict theory to define deviant behavior in society. The theorist examined different social classes and prioritized them based on economic inequalities. According to Marx, there are two social classes, upper and lower. Marx believed the theory of social change involved the competition between the lower and upper class, which brings about conflict and causes those of lower socioeconomic status to engage in deviant behavior. In some cases, those who participate in deviant behavior do so to obtain what they want by any means necessary. The social conflict theory was appropriate for this study because stigmatized offenders return to society as a particular subgroup of social inequality or lower socioeconomic status. Most ex-offenders become victims of social conflict stemming from discords with family, friends, and society. I provide additional information in Chapter 2.

Nature of the Study

I employed case study methodology to conduct this qualitative inquiry. Mikene (2013) and Yin (2014) defined case study research as exploring issues in a single or multiple case construct. The approach provided the best methodological paradigm because it offered me numerous ways to explore and discover the issues associated with the reintegration of ex-offenders, while also garnering the views of employers. I selected this qualitative approach because it supported acquiring in-depth and detailed information, by allowing me to create

openness for the participants to share and expound on their experiences, adding to the richness of the data collected (Mikene, 2013; Yin, 2014). In conducting semi-structured interviews with employers in the state of Mississippi, I utilized a general interview guide and follow-up questions, which provided flexibility to the inquiries while delving deeper into the issues I posed. Castillo-Montoya (2016) suggested the strength of the general interview guide was to ensure the interviewer stayed on task and collected similar information from each interviewee.

Methodology

After obtaining a list of companies from the Job Service Center, I used convenience sampling to identify five businesses in the Mississippi Delta region to participate in this study. Before initiating the interviews, I asked them to sign a consent and confidentiality form, which included permission to audiotape the sessions using a digital recording device to ensure I did not miss any of the information they provided (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). It was essential to use a recorder that is very reliable to avoid malfunctions (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). If the participants objected, I planned to utilize Livescribe for note documentation (Livescribe, n.d.). Livescribe is a smartpen that records audio information, which I could employ to recall details from the interviews (Livescribe, n.d.). I did not have to use Livescribe because the participants agreed to be audio taped. To ensure the confidentiality of the information obtained from each of the

participants, I stored the tape recordings and notes in sealed legal-size envelopes. and placed them in a locked briefcase. At the completion of all the interviews, I transferred the envelopes into a locked file cabinet, located in my home office. I describe this process in more detail in chapter three.

Definition of Terms

Criminal history record: Information collected and documented on convicted individuals (Myrick, 2013).

Ex-offenders: Individuals entering back into society with a criminal history after serving time in jail or prison (Nally et al., 2014).

Incarceration: Serving time in a state, county, and federal correctional institutions, for a crime, committed whether misdemeanor or felony (Rapheal, 2011).

Re-entry: The transition of offenders from correctional facilities into society (Martin, 2011).

Repeat offender: Ex-offender who continues to commit crimes and has multiple rearrests and incarcerations (Aresti et al., 2010).

Assumptions and Limitations

In conducting this research, I asserted certain assumptions. The first was the assumption employers who volunteer to take part in the study would have specific attitudes and beliefs regarding hiring previously incarcerated employees. By agreeing to participate, I also assumed the employer would discuss their

opinions on the topic in an honest and candid manner. The attribution theory focuses on an individual's attitude, opinion, and their personality traits based on internal and external motivation (Maruna & King, 2009). According to researchers, some employers are hesitant or skeptical about hiring ex-offenders who have criminal records (Myrick, 2013). With that in mind, I assumed business owners would share similar attributes, which causes them to deny employment to ex-offenders.

Suri (2011) discussed how convenience sampling as a form of non-probability sampling researchers employ due to the ease and accessibility of reaching a small population or sample group for inclusion in their study. Using this sampling technique could bias the results because of the limited number of participants I recruited (Suri, 2011). By utilizing case study research, I documented the various perspectives; however, they could be potentially misleading based on the lack of generalizability and transferability (Pearson, Parkin, & Coomber, 2011; Suri, 2011).

Scope and Delimitations

In conducting this research, I focused on engaging employers in the Delta Region in the state of Mississippi as the target population. Job categories for the businesses the employers operate included retail sales, food service, and factories. Because most ex-offenders have low-level education and skills, I decided to target unskilled labor markets (Nally et al., 2014). The participating businesses varied

in size and I did not approach corporate employers such as Fortune 500 companies.

Significance

The results of the study can enlighten ex-offenders on employers' hiring beliefs and perceptions regarding offering them job opportunities. I can also use them to inform communities, organizations, and academia of the difficulties surrounding post-incarcerated individuals successfully obtaining employment. In addition, state government officials can use the information to investigate how they could improve funding to correctional programs, specifically those that target preparing ex-offenders to compete in the job market upon release. With the intention of fostering an understanding of why employers have doubts about hiring ex-offenders, I can stimulate the generation of innovative ideas about job development for this population.

Nally et al. (2014) focused on offenders being unequipped with essential fundamental tools to obtain employment. The researchers suggested due to their level of education they were subject to recidivist behavior. People in the community should become aware of the hardships ex-offenders confront, specifically barriers to academic and vocational training. Providing information regarding employer's views can enlighten the public about their experiences. The outcomes may be of significance in assisting state government and legislatures in offering companies incentives to employ ex-offenders.

Summary

Upon release from incarceration, ex-offenders understand the importance of obtaining employment as it relates to becoming productive members of society. They encounter many obstacles along the way; the most significant one is locating jobs. Due to the influx of offenders released into local communities, their continued inability to earn income can lead to committing illegal acts and entering the revolving door of recidivism. If ex-offenders can obtain employment, they are less likely to return to prison, thereby decreasing taxpayers' obligation to support them in costly correctional facilities (Rapheal, 2011). In the next chapter, I focus on presenting reviews of salient literature on topics associated with this ongoing social concern. Along with factors related to educational attainment, re-entry, and rehabilitation programs, I include studies concerning barriers to employment for ex-offenders and discuss current trends and patterns of recidivism. Also, I highlight the conceptual framework used to undergird the study. Throughout Chapter 3, I offer methodological strategies, rationale, and the steps involved in the data collection and analysis. I also explain the ethical considerations undertaken during and following all research activities. In Chapter 4, I provide an overview of the individuals participating in the study followed by providing a data analysis of the cases. The final chapter will include the interpretations of the findings of the themes that were discovered along with the theories that undergird the study. Also, I discuss how this qualitative study can impact social change.

Chapter 2: Introduction

In 2015, there were 636,000 offenders released from incarceration in the United States (Bureau of Justice, 2015). Ex-offenders face barriers when attempting to reintegrate into society including the social stigma community members attach to them. A challenging labor market, lack of educational or vocational achievement, and a myriad of other contributing factors diminishes their ability to attain stable employment (Aresti et al., 2011; Raphael, 2011).

Post-incarcerated offenders often misrepresent themselves, excluding their criminal background and employment histories to obtain interviews or open opportunities to discuss their misdeeds directly with potential employers (Raphael, 2011). Those who have attained some formal education or vocational certification are unable to overcome the doubts and apprehensions employers have regarding the possible legal ramifications of having them in the workplace (Atkin & Armstrong, 2013). Without sustainable income, they become vulnerable to returning to criminal behaviors and illegal activities, which would likely result in them returning to prison (Nally et al., 2014).

The purpose of the study was to explore employers' beliefs and attitudes about hiring post incarcerated offenders in the Delta Region in the state of Mississippi. The outcomes of this research can be used to inform decision and policy makers about the employment and educational needs of the population, before release. Preparing offenders for the workplace by creating innovative

targeted programs could enhance their ability to attain jobs and realize income to meet their other needs, such as housing, food, and clothing. I also gathered empirical evidence to enlighten employers about the importance of hiring ex-offenders and assisting them in becoming productive members of society (May & Brown, 2011; Nally et al., 2014).

Literature Search Strategy

Using Walden Library, I researched and obtained scholarly peer-reviewed journal articles regarding the topic of interest, published in the last five years. The search engines used were Google Scholar, EBSCO, and ProQuest, and databases included Criminal Justice Periodicals, Socio-Index, Academic Search Premier, and Sage. To find material coinciding with the subject of the study, I queried numerous terms. The keywords included were: *corrections history, employment and offenders, Mississippi incarceration and employment, ex-offenders and employment in Mississippi, offenders and recidivism, attribution theory, conflict theory, labeling theory, offender barriers, education and offenders, criminal behavior, deviant behavior, offender reentry, Becker, Marx, Heider, offender barriers, employer hiring abilities, and employer business practices*. I also obtained in-depth information regarding theories from books and seminal data sources.

Throughout the search process, I encountered dead ends where no related articles were available, or the publications were dated. Although this assisted in

substantiating the gap in the literature, it also protracted the process of completing the search. I continued to add or modify terms and keywords until I accumulated enough information on the various aspects of the problem and the historical influences, which contributed to its proliferation.

Conceptual Framework

I chose to utilize three theories to support the core of the research; attribution, labeling, and the conflict. Developed by Heider (1958), the attribution theory was the primary conceptual framework undergirding the study (Eberly, Holley, Johnson, & Mitchell, 2011). Heider was among the first to analyze the process of attribution (Eberly et al., 2011). The theory of attribution was important because it focuses on individual's attitudes, opinions, and personality traits related to internal and external axioms (Eberly et al., 2011; Maruna & King, 2009). According to Heider, internal attributions deal with individual's personal perceptions that cause them to behave or act a certain way (Eberly et al., 2011). External attributions deal with an individual's behavior regarding a situation they have encountered (Eberly et al., 2011). Attribution does play a fundamental role in the decision-making processes, including those related to employer's choices of personnel (Carless & Waterworth, 2012).

According to Weiner (1986), attribution are guiding metaphors of interpersonal behavior (Ali, Ryan, Lyons, Ehrhart, & Wessel, 2016). One of the guides utilized would be individuals who act as judges of others and situations in

which they view people to be good or bad (Ali et al., 2016). Therefore, the researchers concluded, emotions drive people's decisions (Ali et al., 2016). I used the attribution theory as the focus of this qualitative study in which employers discussed their perceptions, beliefs, and opinions regarding post-incarcerated offenders.

Labeling Theory

Love (2015) asserted the labeling theory was a product of the theory of deviance. According to Becker, deviant behaviors consisted of different stages (Regoli, Hewitt, & Delisi, 2010; Shloaberg, Mandery, West, & Callaghan, 2014). First, a person commits a criminal act such as theft, burglary, or assault (Regoli et al., 2010). Secondly, someone catches them committing an illegal act or engaging in deviant behavior, (Regoli et al., 2010). Once captured, investigators review the person's criminal conduct focused on the actor (Regoli et al., 2010). In the third stage, once the spotlight is on the person, community members determine they are criminals (Regoli et al., 2010). In drawing conclusions, Becker believed labeling an individual contributes to continued maladaptive behavior and participation in the unlawful activities (Regoli et al., 2010). Individuals, who committed crimes or served time in prison, received the label of criminal or ex-offender when returning to society (Regoli et al., 2010). Labeling brings about stigmatization as to how people view or perceive the offender (Regoli et al., 2010; Shloaberg et al., 2015).

Based upon the employer's perception, those with criminal histories decrease the likelihood of consideration for hiring because of the label placed upon them (Swanson et al., 2012). They may feel individuals who have been in prison are at a higher risk of continuing to commit crimes (Regoli et al., 2010). According to Regoli et al. (2010), labeling can also begin when children are young based on deviant behavior witnessed from parents, friends, family, and classmates.

Researchers indicated labeling does not thrive throughout an entire society but primarily target minorities, those less fortunate, or people perceived as powerless (Inderbitzin, Bates, & Gainey, 2013; Moore, Meghan, & Morris, 2011). Stellmacher and Gollwitzer (2013) believed labeling ex-offenders could lead them to become career criminals. The labeling theory does not place a lot of emphasis on the criminal act itself but focuses more on the result of those receiving negative demarcations (Moore et al., 2011).

Conflict Theory

Inderbitzin et al. (2013) documented Marx's articulation of issues related to the class conflicts existing in capitalistic societies. The theorist believed capitalism would create problems between the upper and lower-class groups. Marx forecasted the upper class would capitalize on problems within lower class populations. Similar conflicts exist within relationships in the workforce, mirrored in interactions between the owners of companies and those they employ.

Marx predicted owners would find ways to pay employees lower wages to gain profit for the company. When considering the disparities between socioeconomic classes and ethnic groups, divisions bring about conflicts in society. Values and beliefs contribute to discord and according to Marx, criminality or deviance is the result of the competition between the groups.

According to Regoli et al. (2010), Marx and Engels reviewed laws in which the criminal justice system established for law enforcement and corrections would reign over the working class. The working class, having lost hope of creating a good life or reclaiming the life they once lived, would resort to a life of crime. Marx utilized another name for the group that turns to criminality, referring to them as the dangerous class or the parasite class who survive by committing theft, burglary, and other deviant acts.

Researchers documented the conflicts, which exists in the different classes and between divergent ethnic groups (Moore et al., 2011). Statistics highlight the disproportionality of African Americans who encounter criminal injustice (Erickson, 2014). The imbalanced results between the African Americans and other ethnicities could increase the clash between opposing races and classes (Moore et al., 2011). Inequality in the justice system benefits the strongest or most dominant group (Moore et al., 2011). The unequal treatment created the need for those facing poor outcomes to seek employment for the reasons of taking care of their necessities such as food, clothing, and shelter (Visher et al., 2011).

When labeled and cast out as ex-offenders, they find it difficult to obtain employment and resort to other ways to survive in society (Visher et al., 2011).

Employing Ex-offenders

I examined whether employers' attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions concerning ex-offenders influenced their choices regarding their hiring decisions. Researchers suggested a certain bias in the employment process (Atkin & Armstrong, 2011). According to Atkin and Armstrong (2011), it is essential for ex-offenders to obtain employment after incarceration. Ex-offender's inability to find jobs potentially places them at risk of re-offending, but also violating certain conditions placed on them by parole and probation officers (Fitzgerald & Vance, 2015).

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 established Equal Employment Opportunity laws to protect individuals from employment related discriminatory behavior (Von Bergen & Bressler, 2016). Legislators changed policies to decrease employer bias toward minorities and other marginalized groups, such as ex-offenders (Varghese et al., 2010). Stigmatization of business owners against ex-offenders is a massive barrier to them being able to have any hope of remaining in society (Atkins & Armstrong, 2013; Von Bergen & Bressler, 2016). Employers continue to be unwilling to employ individuals with criminal histories, especially those with felonies such as rape or murder (Atkins & Armstrong, 2013; Von Bergen & Bressler, 2016). I also included misdemeanors as a contributing factor

to employers' decisions to hiring ex-offenders. Company owners are not eager to hire ex-offenders if they have suffered or experienced victimization (Atkin & Armstrong, 2013). Employers who have been victims of crime by employing an ex-offender are more reluctant to take chances in future hiring decisions. Ethridge et al. (2014) suggested projection on the part of the employer, contributed to their willingness to hire ex-offenders. The person may believe they will become a victim if they confront or discipline the ex-offender (Varghese et al., 2010). Approximately 60% of ex-offenders remain unemployed due to an employer's fear of reprisal or harm (Varghese et al., 2010).

Researchers found over half of ex-offenders in the United States do not have gainful employment (Varghese et al., 2010). Many ex-offenders have little to no education, job skills, and were often unemployed before their imprisonment making it harder to obtain employment (Varghese et al., 2010; Von Bergen & Bressler, 2016). The chances of obtaining employment lessened after they established a criminal record (Von Bergen & Bressler, 2016). Researchers also reported race plays a part in the hiring process (Varghese et al., 2010). Ex-offenders of minority ethnicity or background remain at higher percentages of unemployed individuals in comparison to their Caucasian counterparts (Varghese et al., 2010). African Americans, regardless of criminal backgrounds, have higher unemployment rates than those of other ethnic backgrounds (Varghese et al., 2010).

Concept of Hiring Dynamics

Post-incarcerated offenders encounter multiple obstacles when entering back into the community (Ethridge, Dunlap, Boston, & Staten, 2014). Barriers they face include employment, housing, transportation, and health care (Ethridge et al., 2014). In order for an ex-offender to have a sense of belonging and obtain housing or even transportation, they must have a stable job (Ethridge et al., 2014).

According to Swenson, Rakis, Snyder, and Loss (2014), a criminal record can hinder ex-offenders from obtaining employment even though they have served their time in prison and desire a fresh start. However, employer's apprehensions included the potential deleterious consequences resulting if the ex-offender commits more crimes, thereby bringing negative attention to their business. An obstacle employers grapple with is the potential adverse effect hiring ex-offenders would have on their current customers and workers (Atkin & Armstrong, 2013). For example, the Massachusetts Office of Public Safety conducted a study and found business owners or employers were not willing to assume the liability and associated risks of hiring ex-offenders (Atkin & Armstrong, 2013). The researchers reinforced the concerns employers had concerning potentially losing their clients or having their employees feel uncomfortable at their place of work, creating a hostile work environment (Atkin & Armstrong, 2013). However, a study conducted in Florida found at least 40% of employers would be interested in hiring ex-offenders if they completed a

transitional program in which they completed specific job skill training and general work readiness (Valentine & Redcross, 2015).

D'Alessio, Stolzenberg, and Flexon (2015) reported on concerns raised about the employment application. Some organizations would like government officials to pass the *Ban the Box Law*, along with restricting access to ex-offender's criminal history. Many employers require a background check when seeking employment. In addition, on most applications, there is a question "Have you been convicted of crime"? Or, "have you charged with an illegal offense in the last seven years"? The existence of a criminal record lessens the chances of employers offering interviews and thereby obtaining employment. D'Alessio et al. suggested having a criminal record is a social stigma but also a person's race. Being a minority and having a criminal record eludes the dark cloud of both social stigma and employment discrimination for African Americans oppose to their European American counterparts.

The deleterious effect of criminal background screening of minority job applicants has caused the federal government to review parts of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission that included the sub-issue of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (D'Alessio et al., 2015). Legislators in some states asserted the criminal background check should only pertain to the job the individual is applying. The State of Rhode Island was one of the states who instituted Ban the Box (D'Alessio et al., 2015). Governmental officials saw recidivism and

employment as working hand in hand. Ban the Box would limit employers from questioning someone's history of criminal convictions, charges, and arrest on the employer job application (D'Alessio et al., 2015). The state of Hawaii was the first state to implement the Ban the Box legislation. Today, there are approximately 13 states who have adopted the Ban the Box legislation (Entin, 2015). Although only a few states have adopted the Ban the Box, there is hope more will join so ex-offenders would have an increased chance at employment.

Religious and civil right groups are attempting to convince employers to remove the question "Have you ever been convicted of a crime" on the application advocate for banning the box (Entin, 2015). They feel the question on the application contributes to discrimination against ex-offenders when it comes to employment. Applicants face disqualification regardless of their ability to perform the job tasks. Ex-offenders are unable to explain the circumstances leading to their incarceration, nor can they present themselves as rehabilitated and looking to establish a crime free life (Entin, 2015).

In 1998, after Hawaii adopted the Ban the Box legislation offenders received additional protections, increasing their equal standing when applying for employment (Entin, 2015). Although the legislation prohibited public and private employers from inquiring about the applicant's criminal history or convictions, they could request this information if they made a job offer (Entin, 2015). A study conducted in 2014 by Florida University's Criminal Justice Research

Department concluded Ban the Box legislation had a positive effect on ex-offenders receiving opportunities to work and therefore decreasing recidivism rates (Entin, 2015). Minnesota adopted the Ban the Box legislation in 2009, but only included public employment until 2013 when they amended their policy to include public and private sector employment (Entin, 2015). The employers could inquire about criminal history only if they choose the applicant for an interview or prior to making an offer of employment, except for candidates who expunged their arrests and convictions. Similar to Minnesota, in 2013 California adopted the Ban the Box legislation prohibiting state, city, and county agencies from inquiring about criminal convictions on employment applications but had exceptions including employment in law enforcement, school districts, and jobs related to the criminal justice system (Entin, 2015).

The Ban the Box statutes and legislation has proven to be effective in some states. However, advocates question the policy with respect to employing individuals who do not have a criminal conviction but receive biased treatment based on race, sex, and educational background (Saunders & Stacer, 2015).

Without the criminal conviction box on applications, the employers use other ways to be discriminatory, affecting people who may not have a criminal history (Saunders & Stacer, 2015).

Not all companies require a background check before hiring workers and could employ a sex offender or another violent offender, who unknowingly

presents a danger to customers and employees (Atkin & Armstrong, 2011). The justice system holds companies liable for any infractions or criminal conduct committed by their staff (Atkin & Armstrong, 2011). Legal ramifications cause concerns for those employers willing to extend opportunities to ex-offenders (Varghese et al., 2010). According to Cerda, Stenstrom, and Curtis (2014) ex-offenders who commit violent crimes are not interested in employing them opposed to those who commit non-violent crimes. In the study conducted by Cerda et al. (2014), approximately 90% of employers were not willing to hire ex-offenders with violent convictions.

Released ex-offenders who lack work skills, education, and have minimal communication skills, influence employer's hiring decisions. Qualifications or job experience is a key component when seeking employment. Ex-offenders lack of job skill training or previous work experience also plays a part in employers hiring decisions. Cerda et al. (2014) discussed how some ex-offenders had not acquired basic skills such as the ability to read write and communicate effectively especially when dealing with people in the workplace and customers. Most jobs also require thinking skills. These include how to problem solve, be open minded to learning new tasks, follow instructions, and make good sound decisions. Employers want staff to be able to think before reacting negatively to situations.

Moses (2014) conducted a study in Milwaukee, Missouri, which followed a group of 350 college-educated males, divided into groups of four, two African

American and two European American. They posed as an ex-offender, applying for an entry level job, and sought employment at the same businesses but at different times. Participants possessed similar characteristics including false work histories. The overall goal of this study was to see if they would get a call for an interview. Fifty percent of the European applicants did not receive a call back for an interview. However, the other 50% received call backs at rates similar to African Americans with no criminal history. Sixty-five percent of the African Americans applying for the same positions as ex-offenders did not receive a call for an interview.

Employment Related to Identity

Employment is an important part of an individual's identity as it reflects a person's ability to provide for themselves and their family (Latessa, 2012). It also becomes meaningful to an individual when they can see the progress and opportunities for advancement (Latessa, 2012). A person's employment status reflects who you are as an individual (Latessa, 2012). The ability to achieve and maintain a job can lead to society not looking at people as ex-offenders but those who have made changes and improving their prospects in life (Mears & Mestre, 2012). Based on employment, people can become contributing members of society (Mears & Mestre, 2012). Establishing gainful employment contributes to ex-offenders becoming optimistic about their futures, creating newly formulated identities based on taking advantage of the second chance offered to them

(Koschmann & Peterson, 2013; Mears & Mestre, 2012; Scott, 2010). Steady work is a deterrent to committing additional crimes, and sustaining life outside of prison bonds (Koschmann & Peterson, 2013; Mears & Mestre, 2012; Scott, 2010)

Recidivism

Ex-offenders released from incarceration often return to the cities or rural areas where they lived previously. Once released on probation or parole, they must abide by the terms and conditions of the contract (Wikoff, Linhorst, & Morani, 2012). For ex-offenders to start on the right track, they must have access to necessities including food, clothing, shelter, transportation, social security card, driver's license, or identification card (Wikoff et al., 2012). One of the conditions of probation or parole is the requirement to pay a monthly supervision fee. The inability to find employment makes it unlikely they will have the money to pay the fee to the parole or probation officer. Therefore, it is important ex-offenders to obtain and maintain employment to keep from returning to incarceration.

The geographic location where they return can also present other difficulties for ex-offenders. Ethridge et al. (2014) discussed how release into rural areas created different impediments when ex-offenders try to obtain employment. Sparsely populated regions have smaller communities and thereby smaller businesses, employing a limited number of individuals, making it harder for those with criminal histories. Also, rural communities often have limited or

no public transit or buses, an additional prohibiting factor for the ex-offender who needs transportation once they find employment.

Ethridge et al. (2014) reported on the limited number of job opportunities in rural communities. The majority of employment opportunities are in manufacturing, farming, and other entry level positions. Another detraction is the level of familiarity community members have about other residents. People reside in the area know the individuals who commit crimes in their neighborhoods. When an ex-offender applies for a job, the employer could possibly recognize them as having a criminal background or being a convicted felon, which would affect their hiring decision. Researchers documented approximately 60% of business owners in urban areas, where the majority of employment opportunities exists, were not willing to hire an individual with a criminal background. However, I was unable to locate studies focused on the association between rural or urban employers' willingness to hire ex-offenders.

Lockwood and Nally (2016) documented that African Americans experience a higher recidivism rate than other minorities because they normally return to their original neighborhoods where crime and poverty are still rampant. Declining urban cities where employment opportunities are not plentiful and lead to overwhelming crime rates, resulting in ex-offenders returning to incarceration (Lockwood & Nally, 2016). In some states, they have aftercare or re-entry programs for ex-offenders. The Department of Corrections has rehabilitative,

educational, and vocational programs to help assist offenders to attain skills, so they do not return to prison (Curtis et al., 2013). These programs, designed to help ex-offenders in adjusting back to society, often offer job training, instruction in academic areas, and provide assistance for substance abuse users (Lockwood & Nally, 2016).

Current Programming Efforts

In today's era of the criminal justice system, offenders can participate in rehabilitation and education programs, as well as alcohol and drug treatment services. Prisoners can also access vocational programs, general educational degrees (GED), opportunities to increase literacy capabilities, and other services provided by faith-based organizations (May & Brown, 2011). Available services are primarily voluntarily. However, some offenders are court ordered to complete certain programs before their release from incarceration (Fitzgerald & Vance, 2015).

Researchers Visher, Sherrill, and Yahner (2011) tracked recidivism rates of ex-offenders in Virginia, which resulted documenting the increased employability of offenders who completed the rehabilitation and educational programs during their incarceration. They were also less likely to recidivate. Ex-offenders who have job-skills training or formal education increase their opportunities obtain employment. Prisoners who do not participate in the educational, vocational, and rehabilitation programs while incarcerated, are very

likely to become a part of the recidivist population. If ex-offenders could enter society and obtain employment and financial stability, they will have a greater chance of not recidivating. Some employers may consider hiring ex-offenders if they have completed a transitional program because there is factual evidence of the outcomes achieved during rehabilitation.

Numerous state department of corrections has implemented rehabilitative and educational programs to help offenders have a smooth transition back into the community (Cook, Kang, Braga, Ludwig, & Obrien, 2015). These programs were based on the issues ex-offenders encounter when returning to the community. Often offenders develop a sense of loneliness, abandonment, and anger issues because of the current situation (Cook et al., 2015).

The Wisconsin Department of Corrections implemented a re-entry program for violent offenders. for offenders within six months of their release from prison (Cook et al., 2015). The program consists of different components, however, the focus was on abstaining from drugs, remaining free from gang activity, and employment readiness.

The Serious and Violent Offender Re-entry Initiative Program also provided millions of dollars in grant funds to help assist with the developing re-entry programs (Cook et al., 2015). Approximately 69 businesses received awards in varying amounts. The services provided included skill building, job

training, substance abuse treatment, parenting, and family team building (Cook et al., 2015).

Lockwood and Nally (2016) underscored the likelihood of ex-offenders who lack education to recidivate. According to the US Department of Education, there have been staggering increases in rates of high school dropouts. High school dropouts normally fall between the ages of 16-24 years old. Regarding ethnicity, the dropout rate is usually higher among African Americans oppose to European Americans.

The Department of Corrections has several forms of release, including parole, probation, early release, and house arrest. Studies have shown educational, and vocational training is more effective at reducing recidivism than life skills programs (Cho & Tyler, 2013). Participation in any rehabilitation program in a correctional institution can contribute to the ex-offended successfully reentering society. Walsh, Cho, and Tyler (2013) found offenders who participated in the Adult Basic Education and General Equivalency Degree programs reduced their percentages of re-arrest upon release. There was another study conducted in Florida to test if educational programs during incarceration decreased recidivism. The outcomes indicated a 5% reduction (Walsh et al., 2013).

Curtis, Dertis, Shippen, Musgrove, and Brigman (2013) reported on how recidivism rates pose problems for a department of corrections when over half of

the offenders released from incarceration return within three years. The number of ex-offenders returning to incarceration places a strain on the correction department's budget. They must provide medical care, clothing, food, and housing to offenders. Often individuals enter the correction system with pre-existing medical conditions that go untreated when they are living in society. The department's mandate to treat their illnesses can become expensive for their budgets as well.

Researchers documented how employment contributes to decreasing rates of recidivism (May & Brown, 2011). State, city, and county officials throughout the United States face the challenge of reducing recidivism and incarceration, to lower taxpayer's burden (Koschmann & Peterson, 2013). Therefore, it is imperative for ex-offenders to obtain employment to decrease the number of ex-offenders who reenter the criminal justice system both from an economic and social service perspective (Koschmann & Peterson, 2013; May & Brown, 2011). Having jobs also assists in building character, self-confidence, and self-esteem (May & Brown, 2011).

The re-entry programs assist in transforming the socio-psychological strength of ex-offenders and offer them a pathway to become self-sustaining (Hong, Lewis, & Choi, 2014). Cognitive and noncognitive interventions are self-sufficient interventions used to assist ex-offenders establish their independence. The cognitive interventions help increase positive mental and emotional abilities

while non-cognitive interventions support enhancing character deficits (Hong et al., 2014). Combining both interventions provides a socio-psychological transformation, which is known to contribute to successful reintegration (Hong, 2014). Offenders who participate in interventions, which builds their self-esteem and trust in themselves, have better outlooks on their ability to re-integrate (Hong et al., 2014).

Family and Social Support

When individuals grow up as a child, parents are the protector and the provider (Taylor, 2015). In the times of trouble or experiencing things in life, the parents are the ones you can lean and depend on. Become a product of the criminal justice system, offenders' encounter many challenges when entering back into society including issues related to the involvement of family and social supports (Beichner & Rale-Hemp, 2014; Taylor, 2015).

Social support is another part of improving ex-offender's opportunity to sustain themselves during and after the reintegration process (Bedell, Wilson, White, & Morse, 2015). Ex-offenders who have the support of their family or friends are more apt to remain positive and focused regarding re-establishing themselves in the community (Taylor, 2016). Family and friends can offer them advice and direction in their efforts to find work and other services necessary to sustain themselves and their desire for a crime free lifestyle. There is a positive association between returning to a supportive environment and decreasing

recidivism (Taylor, 2016). Offenders who receive more family contact during incarceration have lower recidivism or criminal arrests and are likely to have a successful re-entry oppose to those who were not receiving contact while incarcerated (Mowen & Visher, 2013).

Researchers Morenoff, and Harding (2014) underscored the importance of family support to offenders during incarceration as well. Offenders who have the support of their family gives them a sense of hope to not give up. They look forward to seeing their family, children, and friends during the time visitation is available at the correctional facility. Family support also helps some of them refrain from getting in trouble while incarcerated because it can cause them to lose privileges such as visitation, commissary, and access to make telephone calls.

Taylor (2016) reported parents separated from children often resume their duties as the primary caregiver upon release. Children separated from their parents at an early age creates barriers, which could be devastating to their emotional stability. While they serve their sentences, their children often reside with a relative, normally a grandparent, aunt or uncle, or close family friend. Depending upon where they reside could make it difficult to travel to visit the mother or father on a regular basis, and they may not be able to see them on a regular basis, if at all. Therefore, it becomes even harder to re-establish the parent-child relationships when they return from a period of incarceration.

Family members or close family friends who take care of the incarcerated parent's children will often be there for them upon their release from prison. They can play a vital role in assisting the ex-offender with re-entry issues, along with helping to re-establishing a bond with their children. Most ex-offenders look forward to rebuilding a relationship with their child(ren) after incarceration (Taylor, 2016). Offenders who have the support of the family during incarceration reported having a brighter outlook on their future. The path to reintegration is easier for those who have had constant contact while they were serving time. There are also some programs provided at half way houses to assist offenders with life skills, employment opportunities, and re-establishing relationships with their families. Those experiencing sentences longer than two years require assistance in readjusting to societal changes (Fraizer, Sung, Gdeon, & Alfaro, 2015). For example, in Florida, there are programs offered through church ministries, which help offenders establish a healthy relationship with their family. (Taylor, 2016).

Berg and Huebner (2011) reported family support as a vital component in the reentry process of ex-offender. Researchers discussed how offenders on probation or parole often reside with family members because following their release from incarceration; do not have a home or other housing options. Family ties can provide a strong connection to the community and have a positive effect on ex-offenders' behavior, by offering emotional support when they become

discouraged or lose hope. Ex-offenders with strong bonds with their family are more self-assured and have higher levels of confidence in their ability to remain in the community successfully.

The family is also important to ex-offenders because they can help or provide opportunities for them to find job opportunities in their community (Berry & Huebner, 2011; Morenoff & Harding, 2014). They can hire them into family-owned businesses or provide linkages to friends or associates willing to offer them employment (Berg & Heuber, 2011). Familiarly with the family or ex-offender can mediate the stigma and labels holding them back from achieving their goals (Berg & Heubner, 2011).

Studies have shown the social support of parents decreases in their abhorrent behaviors and have few or no rule violations causing reincarceration (Taylor, 2016). The aged graded theory of informal social control suggests ex-offenders who spend time with the family have less time to spend with their friends who may still indulge in criminal behavior (Taylor, 2016). When citizens in the community see the family treat the ex-offender with open arms, they are more willing to accept them into social circles (Taylor, 2016).

Taylor (2016) conducted a study with the Urban Institute Returning Home, which interviewed 400 male offenders during and after their incarceration. They tracked the success rate of those who received support from their families during the re-entry process. The study documented different areas of family

support on scales from 1-4. Resulting mean scores of 3.5 indicated family support helped with obtaining a variety of necessities such as housing, alcohol and drug treatment, and employment. The results showed relationships or family ties to their relatives reduced the likely hood of an offender reoffending. On the other hand, the lack of family support had no significant effect on them obtaining employment.

Offender Reentry

As they enter back into society, ex-offenders must have a plan along with a positive attitude (Scott, 2010). In 1996, former President Clinton signed a bill entitled Work Opportunity and Reconciliation Act into law (Cabage et al., 2011). The bill allowed communities to expand and build faith-based programs to provide a place of refuge, hope, and new beginnings for ex-offenders (Cabage et al., 2011). Faith-based programs became another component to successful re-entry (Dodson, Cabage, & Klenowski, 2011). Ex-offenders who participate in these programs developed a relationship with a higher power, which has shown to contribute to building their level of confidence, hope, belief, and self-esteem (Dodson et al., 2011). In 2008, former President Bush signed the Second Chance Act, which provided funding for prisoner re-entry programs to assist with locating job opportunities for ex-offenders and thereby reducing recidivism (Zweigm Yahner, & Redcross, 2011). The act also included fostering mentorship, enhancing drug treatment programs along with establishing

partnership/collaboration with faith-based organizations, correctional agencies, and other community organizations. Re-entry program statistics show a 20% reduction in recidivism rates based on aftercare activities, which assists the ex-offender in re-establishing themselves in their local communities (Potts & Palmer, 2014).

According to Harley, Cabe, Woolum, Whitiker (2014) ex-offenders have few rights. However, there are different laws and acts designed to protect all individuals. One of the acts established was the American Disabilities Act (ADA) that designated protection for individual's civil rights, including ex-offenders (Harley et al., 2014). Some ex-offenders re-entering to the community have disabilities, which could be mental and physical, or associated with an addiction (Harley, 2014). Often society sees ex-offenders as a vulnerable group because they are not a significant part of the workforce based on discrimination. Having a disability is one issue that affects an individual in the workplace, and relates to employers hiring attributes (Harley, 2014). The vulnerable population experiences additional life challenges such as having the social stigma of being an ex-offender, along with a criminal record (Harley, 2014). In combination or separately, many have argued for considering them as disabling conditions.

Postrelease Services

In order for re-entry to be successful for ex-offenders, there must be a discharge planning process along with community collaboration (Fraizer et al.,

2015). In some correctional institutions, they may have a program called the discharge planning and pre-release program. The discharge-planning program normally deals with the physical and mental health treatment. This program consists of the discharge planning coordinator collaborating in partnerships with mental health, health care clinics, alcohol, and drug counselors. They come together and assess the needs of the ex-offender before transitioning back into the community.

A major treatment need for ex-offenders is alcohol and drug abuse. In some cases, when an individual is sentenced to prison the judge may order them to attend the alcohol and drug treatment program while incarcerated. However, those who do not go through treatment during incarceration will struggle of trying to maintain drug-free once released (Fraizer et al., 2015). According to the Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse, approximately 50% of offenders suffer from some type of alcohol and drug addiction (Fraizer et al., 2015). Bedell et al. (2015) reported approximately 80 to 90% of ex-offenders' struggle with substance abuse and addictions. Approximately three-fourths of ex-offenders released from prison will still need to attend some form of treatment and/or mental health program (Fraizer et al., 2015). When individuals enter prison, some of their mental and physical problems go undetected, unless the offender advises the correctional personnel upon entering. Approximately 56% of state offenders struggle with mental illness (Fraizer et al., 2015).

Healthcare

Since ex-offenders find it difficult to obtain employment, they also struggle with obtaining the proper health care needs. Depending on the type of criminal conviction, an ex-offender may not be eligible for public assistance. Community outreach programs, which include health care, are growing throughout communities. Ex-offenders who unable to obtain healthcare or public assistance suffer from untreated diseases or diagnosis that could result in severe illness or even death. Outreach services in communities extend to those less fortunate individuals who are in desperate need of obtaining health care services because they suffer from illnesses such as HIV, hepatitis, diabetes, cancer, and sexually transmitted infections. Ex-offenders obtaining proper health care can be able to get the social support to maintain a healthy way of living, allowing them to be around their family even longer and raise their children.

Offenders who are HIV positive may not want to go to a local clinic where they reside and prefer clinics and hospitals outside of their communities. The ex-offender can choose from the list or decide to use the provider that is a part of the discharge planning team (Fraizer et al., 2015). Prior to release from prison, the assigned prison staff schedules the offenders first appointment. If they need assistance with alcohol and drug treatment along with mental health treatment, they also receive a list of agencies and have the opportunity to utilize one of the providers on the discharge planning team.

When ex-offenders reenter society, medical care or treatment could become a problem because of the barriers such as cost and stigma (Fox et al., 2014). Ex-offenders who enter back into society without the proper care and treatment could become sick within two weeks. The post incarceration transition clinics offer options to service provision for ex-offenders re-entering society (Fox et al., 2014). These pop-up clinics are often located in community health care centers, which provide services such as primary care, referrals, and access to social services. However, some offenders may not be willing to go due to the social stigma or their concerns about how people perceive them. The clinics are affordable and often free due to being income based or having a lower socioeconomic status. However, there is a need for more community clinics, especially impoverished societal areas. (Fox et al., 2014). The overall goal after release is to ensure they have the resources to assist them with a smooth transition back into the community.

Housing

Ex-offenders seek stable housing upon release back into the community. However, along with employment discrimination, finding housing can be a problem (Harley, 2014). Rental units, especially those under federal mandates, deny housing for post-released individuals if they have certain criminal charges or felonies. There are restrictions preventing ex-offenders from living in public housing, including convictions related to manufacturing or distribution of drugs or

other illegal substances, sex offenses causing registry, or if they engaged in illegal or criminal activity on or near the property of residence. When ex-offenders return, they rely on public resources or services that can help them comply with the terms and conditions of parole or early release. Because of laws currently in place, ex-offenders find it increasingly difficult to establish themselves in housing and find employment to support attaining their basic needs.

Fraizer et al. (2015) discussed an alternative housing component for discharge planning where residential directors of halfway houses provide shelter if the ex-offender does not have an approved post-release address. Half-way houses are short term living residents that provide different programs to ex-offenders such as substance abuse and mental health treatment, along with referrals to job skill training. The overall goal is to assist the offender with a smooth transition back into the community with hopes for them to maintain a healthy way of living.

It is important to have prisoner re-entry programs in place in receiving communities (Valentine & Redcross, 2015). The federal government has provided funding to assist with initiatives such as Serious and Violent Offender Initiative along with Prisoner Re-entry initiative and the Second Chance Act of 2008. Regarding employment, transitional jobs demonstrated efficacy when ex-offenders return to society (Valentine & Redcross, 2015). Correctional facilities have re-entry or pre-release programs. The program staff reviews the offender's

status within a year of release from prison. Based on the educational and vocational skill they attained while incarcerated, the counselors will seek employment through collaboration with employers within their community (Valentine & Redcross, 2015). Most of the jobs are entry-level but will provide the ex-offender an opportunity to gain work experience in hopes of maintaining long-term employment. However, due to the large prison populations many cannot access or take advantage of pre-release programs. Pre-release programs offer counseling, educational services, and assistance with finding employment while incarcerated (Valentine & Redcross, 2015). The pre-release community programs known as the pre-release work centers allows the offenders to go to work daily. A collaborative effort between the community and corrections assists offenders in transitioning back into the community (Valentine & Redcross, 2015). Therefore, it is imperative to provide the necessary help in prison and outside of prison to help them become a better person and give them a chance at life and hope of succeeding after incarceration.

Summary

Based on the literature reviewed, it is evident ex-offenders encounter many barriers upon their release from incarceration. The major obstacle ex-offenders deal with is obtaining employment. Correctional systems offer educational and rehabilitation programs to offenders residing in their facilities to assist with successful reentry. However, ex-offenders continue to encounter

hindrances in obtaining gainful employment. Focusing on the influence of employer's attitudes and beliefs in the hiring process of ex-offenders, I used a qualitative, case study approach to explore the perceptions of employers regarding employing ex-offenders. In the following chapter, I present specific information on the methodology I employed, along with how I recruited participants, collected, and analyzed data, along with ethical considerations to assure the integrity of the outcomes.

Chapter 3: Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore employers' beliefs and attitudes about hiring post-incarcerated offenders in the state of Mississippi. I chose the state of Mississippi based on my tenure of employment in the corrections department, which reveals the struggles of ex-offenders attempting to obtain employment after incarceration. Upon failed searches for empirical evidence of the difficulties ex-offenders confronted, as an agent of social change, I decided to dedicate my dissertation to uncovering potential contributing factors, which ultimately opens the door to opportunities for remediation of their challenges. I was not able to locate information on Mississippi's post-incarceration employment rates, nor did I find information regarding how the perceptions of employers influenced hiring decisions for ex-offenders. The information gathered can inform the creation of innovative programs and potential needs to change or alter existing policies. Development or implementation of programs and changes in policy can play a huge part in preparing offenders for the workforce. In addition, enlightened employers can consider revisiting their previously held beliefs regarding employing ex-offenders attempting to join the workforce (May & Brown, 2011). Without providing a sound basis for ex-offenders to be productive citizens in society, they will likely recidivate (Nally et al., 2014).

Primarily, the attribution theory was the focal point of the study. It focuses on an individual's attitudes, opinions, and his/her personality traits (Maruna &

King, 2009). Attribution plays a fundamental role in the decision-making process with on the hiring of potential employees (Carless & Waterworth, 2012). The outcome of this study can be used to inform ex-offenders, community members, policy makers, and academia about the employers' perceptions of hiring ex-offenders. To conceptualize the data employers offered during their interviews, I incorporated theoretical concepts embedded in the labeling and conflict theories.

Research Design and Rationale

Atkin and Armstrong (2013) indicated post incarcerated offenders face many barriers and difficulties affecting their ability to re-enter their communities successfully. Obstacles include histories of criminal prosecutions, lack of educational achievement, and unstable housing. To mitigate these issues, correctional institutions offer vocational, educational, and rehabilitation programs to offenders during their term of incarceration. In addressing a gap in the research and resulting societal problems regarding the inability of ex-offenders to find and maintain stable employment, I interviewed local business owners to ascertain the perceptions they hold regarding this population, which may be influencing their hiring decisions. The research question utilized for the study is: What are employer's perceptions of hiring ex-offenders with a criminal record?

There are five major qualitative research designs, which include case study, narrative, grounded theory, phenomenological, and ethnography. In conducting this study, I choose to utilize case study methods. Narrative analysis

consists of stories where an individual share their personal experiences (Bailey, Ellis-Hill, & Jarrett, 2014). Because this focus of the study is on a broad population, it was not an appropriate methodological approach (Bailey et al., 2014). Grounded theory was not a selection because my intent was not to search or establish a theory (Reiter, Stewart, & Bruce, 2011). I did not intend to describe shared events or phenomena, thereby disqualifying the use of phenomenology (Reiter et al., 2011). Finally, ethnography was not a selected because I did not plan to explore a cultural phenomenon for an extended period of time (Hall, 2011).

A case study was the selected research tradition for the qualitative study. Researchers use it to explore different events and answer the how and why of a phenomenon or situation (Yin, 2014). Utilizing the case study methodology promotes flexibility and the ability to use multiple data collection methods, which can include interviews, direct observations, audio-recordings, and physical artifacts (Yin, 2014). The methodology provided the best approach for me to explore and discover issues attached to the reintegration of ex-offenders while gathering the views of employers.

Trustworthiness

According to Houghton, Casey, Shaw, and Murphy (2013), in qualitative case studies, the researcher must establish rigor based upon credibility, confirmability, dependability, and transferability. In establishing credibility, I

used triangulation. Triangulation is a part of validity that is important in qualitative research. Using the data collected from the participant interviews, note taking, and audio recording, I reviewed the information to find common themes within the different categories (Houghton et al., 2013). Confirmability and dependability share similarities by using strategies of audit trails and reflexivity, which details the stability and accuracy of the data collected (Houghton et al., 2013). I established an audit trail by gathering and documenting all the data, documents, and audio tapes I use to establish a check and balance system (Houghton et al., 2013). This establishes confirmability. Transferability applies to identifying whether the researcher's findings remain consistent when applied to other populations (Houghton et al., 2013).

Role of the Researcher

Houghton et al. (2013) advised qualitative researchers to be committed to spending a lot of time in the field. The recruitment and interview process requires a significant amount of time interviewing and collecting data. Making these connections, however, contributed to the quantity and quality of information I incorporated into the analytical outcomes. As an observer-participant, I conducted the study in a professional manner, assuring there were no conflicts of interest or personal relationships with any of the participants (Calderon, 2011).

Methodology

Throughout the investigation, I illuminated the experiences of business owners faced with a decision regarding the employability of ex-offenders from their unique perspectives. The population utilized for this study were businesses operating in the Delta region of Mississippi. Job categories used for this study included retail sales, food service, and factories. Because ex-offenders tend to have low-level education and training skills, I focused on unskilled job categories (Nalley et al., 2014).

I employed convenience sampling as it provided easy access for reaching the small populations or sample groups (Acharya, Prakash, Saxena, & Nigam, 2013). This method has low credibility due to the accessibility to participants based on minimal criteria, causing it to lack generalizability or transferability (Acharya et al., 2013). The use of restricted populations can alter the outcomes of the study (Acharya et al., 2013). However, in qualitative research, there are no strict guidelines for the use of sample size or population, as long as they are justifiable (Suri, 2011).

There will be five businesses/employers recruited to volunteer and participate in the study. The criterion included having experience with employment decisions regarding the hiring of ex-offenders. Businesses selected employed ten or more individuals, either full or part time. Gender, age, or ethnicity were not considerations. However, I excluded ex-offenders, minors, and

other vulnerable groups from participating. I provided a copy of the interview guide, consent form, letter to the business, and telephone script to Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) and requested an expedited review. Once approved, I emailed the recruitment letters and called potential referral sources.

The primary source for identifying potential business referrals was the Job Service Center, located in the Mississippi Delta. However, they were not able to provide sufficient information due to confidentiality reasons and so I obtained listings from the Mississippi Business Directory and Mississippi Better Business Bureau. Following the collection of businesses fitting the study criteria, I contacted them to see if they had experience in hiring ex-offenders. I requested those who respond positively to participate in the study. Before the beginning of collecting data, I contacted the businesses by telephone or email explaining the importance and the reason for the study and used these companies to request volunteers to participate. I collected 20-25 names of potential participants, expecting some will not volunteer, and others may drop out during the data collection process. If the initial recruitment efforts did not yield enough participants, I repeated these efforts until I reach a sample sufficient to reach the goal of saturation.

Instrumentation

I used an interview guide during the meetings. According to Castillo-Montoya (2016), interview guides ensure the investigator does not deviate or get off course and establishes consistency throughout the course of the interactions. I asked the same general questions to each participant. Based on different responses from the individuals, I posed follow-up questions to encourage them to offer additional information to their answers. I divided the interview inquiries into several categories, all directed at collecting information responsive to the overarching research questions (see Appendix A). Using the interview guide was also significant in assuring I managed my time wisely and did not impose an additional commitment of time from the participants (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). Volunteers could select alternative methods for conducting the interviews including JoinMe.com, Gotomeeting.com, SKYPE, or other internet resources. I determined how long to stay in the field by asking volunteers the same questions and monitoring the results to ascertain if I heard the same things, thereby ensuring I achieved data saturation (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

There were difficult challenges for ex-offenders who return to rural communities. The rural population is smaller than urban cities, which bring even greater challenges in obtaining employment (Ethridge, Dunlap, Boston, Staten, 2014). In rural communities, the transportation systems are not as available in comparison to urban cities where public transportation is readily accessible

(Ethridge et al., 2014). Also, smaller communities are more family oriented and hold true to their values and beliefs (Ethridge et al., 2014).

Data Collection

After collecting contact information for the referents from the businesses, I reached out to them via email, mail, or telephone to explain the goal of the research, time commitment, along with the voluntary and confidential nature of the study. I reviewed the consent process with those who agreed to participate, and later mailed the form to the participants for examine before attending the meeting. Those who selected to use an internet platform for their interview received the consent document by email. I asked them to execute and return the form from their personal email to my personal email account. The process is consistent with Walden University's virtual consent requirements. We then agreed on a convenient time and date to conduct the meeting.

I contacted the participants a day before to meeting to ensure their availability. Upon initiating the interview, I introduced myself and remind them the interview could last from 45 to 60 minutes. Together, we reviewed the consent form, which included the purpose of the study, issues of confidentiality, and debriefing process. After executing the consent document, I asked their permission to audio record the meeting and memorialized their consent prior to beginning any tape recording. The digital recording ensured I did not miss any of the information provided by the participants. Smiley (2015) suggested the need to

use a reliable recorder to avoid malfunctions. If the participants had objected to the audio recording, I could alternatively utilize live scribe for note documentation. Livescribe is a smart pen that consists of recording information heard during interviews (Livescribe, n.d.). The participants did not object to being audio recorded. Therefore, I did not have to utilize the Livescribe pen.

After introducing myself again, I taped the participants giving verbal permission for the interview and to audiotape. I gave each participant time to respond to the questions without pressure and observed their behavior throughout the interview to see if the participant had any feelings of discomfort or distress. If an emergency occurred or participant needed to take a break for a moment, I planned to stop the interview and note the break in the recording. Once the participant returned, I would resume recording and notate the time. At the end of the interview or prior to the participant ending the session, I demonstrated my appreciation by offering a \$15 gift card.

Data Analysis

I collected and analyzed the data until I established saturation (Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, & Fontenot, 2013). Data saturation occurs when the researcher no longer hears or sees a new pattern or obtains additional information during the research process (Marshall et al., 2013). Upon completion of interviews, I transcribed the data by hand and began the coding process. I created a coding log to categorize several themes I identified throughout the process. During the

coding process, I also used the log to explore important information collected from the data. Once codes emerged, I collected them into groups reflecting the identified patterns, and then attach names based on thematic content. Coding involves recognizing a significant element and highlighting it before the process of interpretation.

Upon completion of the coding and thematic identification, I analyzed the outcomes to assure they respond to the overarching research questions. I reviewed their alignment with the problem and purpose, thereby filling the gap in the literature identified previously. The outcomes should provide significant information on employers' beliefs and attitudes on hiring post-incarcerated offenders.

Ethical Procedures

I received my certification for Protecting Human Research Participants from The National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research. The training assured I was aware and obligated to conducting the research in a way, which did not create harm to any participant and proper protections were in place if they experienced distress because of the interview process. Although minimal discomfort could occur, based on the topic and questions, I do not expect anyone will experience negative feelings or reactions. However, in the event if this did occur, I would have offered each participant a list of local free or low-cost mental health providers.

To alleviate ethical concerns, I excluded participants who work within my profession. I offered each participant a \$15.00 Walmart gift card to show appreciation for the participant's time. However, I did not use this to incentivize or persuade the participants to join the study. If they chose not to continue the interview, they would still receive the \$15.00 Walmart gift card.

Pseudonyms replaced participants and businesses names to maintain confidentiality. I stored the information obtained from each of the participants by audio and written notes in legal size envelopes, seal it in front of the participants after the interview is completed, and placed in a locked briefcase. Also, I advised them I stored their information in a locked file cabinet, where I have exclusive access for five years, and will destroy the data, consistent with Walden University's policy. As part of the informed consent, I discussed the ability of Walden's IRB or my dissertation committee to access the information. Before initiating the interviews, I asked the participants to review and ask them to sign a consent and confidentiality form (see Appendix A) (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). Once they executed the document, I requested permission to audiotape the sessions, and if the participants objected, I would have utilized live scribe for note documentation as described earlier in the chapter (Livescribe, n.d.). I did not have to use Livescribe due to all the participants agreed to be audio recorded.

Summary

Post incarcerated offenders struggle with living in society. They face many barriers such as employment, housing, health care, and alcohol/drug addiction. The barriers could affect the ex-offender's success or failure. Their biggest struggle is obtaining employment (Atkin & Armstrong, 2013). In exploring the topic of employment in more depth, I presented a detailed description of how I collected the perceptions of employers in the Mississippi Delta region, regarding the influence of potential employee's prior criminal history on their hiring decisions. I also included an overview of the data collection and analysis process I used in conducting the research, as well as my role as the researcher. In addition, I highlighted the importance of maintaining the confidentiality of the participants and described the ethical conduct I would employ. In Chapter 4, I describe the outcomes of the data collection and analysis and provide a detailed description of the processes undertaken to assure the integrity of the results.

Chapter 4: Introduction

The purpose of this case study was to explore employers' perceptions of hiring post incarcerated offenders. Ex-offenders face barriers to reintegration into society because of the social stigma attached to them being formerly incarcerated (Raphael, 2011). The stigma also contributes to not obtaining gainful employment or establishing permanent housing (Raphael, 2011). They encounter problems, which escalate when the ex-offender has a history of addiction and other felony convictions (Raphael, 2011). However, the most crucial element of successful reentry into the community is obtaining employment. The research question I posed was, what are employers' perceptions of hiring ex-offenders with a criminal record? In this chapter, I describe the interviews with seven participants, followed by providing a data analysis of the cases.

Setting

I conducted interviews in January and February 2018. The study took place in the Delta Region of Mississippi in the offices of the business employer. To respect the businesses privacy, I assigned each business pseudonym or code name. Each interview was scheduled on a date and time that was convenient for the participant. The interviews lasted between 30 to 45 minutes in length. As an observer-participant, I conducted the study in a professional manner, assuring there were no conflicts of interest or personal relationships with any of the participants (Calderon, 2011).

Participant Demographics

The seven participants were all in positions to hire for their employer. They served as supervisors, managers, and assistant managers of the business. Each company employed 10 or more people. I did not include Fortune 500 companies due to ex-offenders obtaining primarily low-level education and being unskilled labor jobs.

Participant 1

Business Red was the first assistant manager of a retail store where they are employed. After two years with the company, business red earned their promotion six months ago. Although the headquarters were in Charlotte, North Carolina, the need for more retail stores in the area attracted the company to open in the Mississippi Delta area. I interviewed the participant in the manager's office at the company and the audio recorded meeting lasted 35 minutes.

Participant 2

Business Purple is employed as the human resource manager of a manufacturing company. Because most of the manufactures in the Mississippi Delta have longevity, the owner, based in Cleveland, Mississippi, decided to locate in the Mississippi Delta region, where they employed Business Purple for over 18 years. The participant became the department manager four years ago.

The audio recorded interview took place in the manager's office at the company and lasted 45 minutes.

Participant 3

Business Green is an assistant manager of a large grocery/retail company. The business opened in the Mississippi Delta to provide job opportunities in a smaller community Headquartered in Arkansas the company employed the participant for 17 years, of which six have been in their current position. The interview was audio recorded and took place the manager's office at the company, lasting 35 minutes.

Participant 4

Business Orange is an assistant manager at a distribution warehouse. The owner geographically chose to open a business in the Mississippi Delta because of its central location between four different states. Business Orange came to the company 17 years ago and in their current position for the past six years. I audio-recorded the interview, which took place at the manager's office at the company and took 40 minutes.

Participant 5

Business Yellow is an assistant manager of a chain restaurant. Employed with the company for 10 years, the participant has served in their current capacity for four years. The owner chose to expand their business from Memphis, Tennessee to the Mississippi Delta region after a chain of hotels located within

the area. The audio recorded interview took place at the manager's office at the company and lasted 30 minutes.

Participant 6

Business Gray is the manager of maintenance company. Having been employed with the department for 21 years, they held their current position for five years. The headquarters, based in Cleveland, Mississippi, established a location in the Mississippi Delta area to provide maintenance and upkeep of the roads throughout the city and county. I audio recorded the interview in the manager's office at the company. The exchange lasted 30 minutes.

Participant 7

Business Pink manages a retail store and has served in that capacity for three and a half years, including 14 months in their current position. The headquarters located in Houston, Texas selected the Mississippi Delta region because of the location in a smaller community. The intent was to provide a cozier personal experience for shoppers. I audio recorded the interview in the manager's office at the company. The meeting lasted 35 minutes.

Data Collection

I conducted the face-to-face interviews in the managers' office at each site. To ensure privacy I asked to close any open blinds, windows, or doors. Also, before starting the interview the manager advised staff not to disturb them until the meeting was complete. I used an interview to guide me during the

collect data process (see Appendix A). In creating the interview guide, I assured the inquiry was responsive to the overarching research question: What are employers' perception on hiring ex-offenders with a criminal record? After reviewing the informed consent document, which included how I would maintain confidentiality and permission to audio record the interview, I begin to pose the interview questions. At the end of interview, I offered the participants a \$15.00 Walmart gift card to demonstrate my appreciation of their volunteering their time, which they all accepted.

I transcribed the data verbatim from the audio recordings and saved the transcriptions in a password protected file on my lap top computer. My lap top computer is stored in my home office in a locked file cabinet. No one else has access to the file cabinet. During the data collection, I intended to conduct five interviews, however because I did not feel I had reached saturation of the data, I continued (Marshall, 2013). I ended with a total of seven interviews, the point where no new information emerged (Marshall et al., 2013). There were no unusual circumstances encountered in the data collection process.

Data Analysis

I employed case study methodology to conduct this qualitative inquiry. Mikene (2013) and Yin (2014) defined case study research as exploring issues in a single or multiple case construct. To negate research bias, I excluded anyone

with whom I have a working, friendship, or kinship relationship. Also, I did not identify any discrepant cases during the data analysis process.

Upon completion of conducting the interviews I transcribed the data verbatim by hand and then began the coding process. A coding log was created to categorize several themes that was identified throughout the process. During the coding process, I used a coding log to explore all the information collected from the data. I listed words that would form the codes before the categories emerged. Once the codes emerged, I collected them into groups reflecting identified patterns, and then attach names based on thematic content. Coding involves recognizing a significant element and highlighting it before the process of interpretation. Listed below in table 1 are the codes emerged to formulize the 28 categories.

Table 1

Codes and Categories

Codes listed to form categories**Misdemeanor (code)**

Something Minor-Category

Less Serious Crime-Category

Minor Charge-Category

Less time to service-Category

Petty Theft-Category

Code (Felony)

More serious charge-Category

More time to serve-Category

Code (Violent Crime)

Rape-Category

Murder-Category

Workplace Violence-Category

Code (Liability)

Risk losing job-Category

Responsible-Category

Cause Problems-Category

Code (Hurt the Business)

(table continues)

Company sales dropping-Category

Company losing money-Category

Code (Lawsuits)

Hurt other people (customers/staff)-Category

People lives in danger-Category

Code (Rehabilitation)

Therapy-Category

New beginning-Category

Second Chance-Category

Restoring-Category

Code (Alcohol & Drug)

Addiction

Substance Abuse

Code (Vocation/Education)

Programs-Category

Reentry-Category

Code (Work History)

Jobs-Category

Previous Employment-Category

Job skills-Category

I used the framework method to establish the themes. By using this approach, I constructed a matrix based on the developing themes. In using this form of matrix, I identified the emerging themes of significance of charges, legal risk, pre-release programs, and work experience. Establishing these themes provided insight into factors, which contributed to the employers' perceptions or what influenced their decision to hire offenders with a criminal record. The thematic content analysis was resourceful for acknowledging patterns and emerging themes within the data. Developing emerging themes provided answer to the research question. Table 2 listed demonstrates the themes and codes I established in the analysis conducted for this study.

Table 2

Framework: Codes and Themes

Theme	Codes
1. Significance of the Charge(s)	Misdemeanor Violent Crime Felonies
2. Legal Risk	Liability Lawsuits Hurt the business
3. Pre-Release Programs	Rehabilitation Treatment Alcohol & Drug Vocation/Education
4. Experience	Work history Previous Employment Job Skills

Evidence of Trustworthiness

As the researcher, I ensured I remained professional throughout the process. I used triangulation as a form of credibility by the data collected from the interviews, note taking, and audio recording. Carter, Bryant-Lakosius, Sicenso, Blythe, and Neville (2014) documented how triangulation is used in

qualitative research and consists of different methods of data collection. I chose the triangulation method of using individual interviews. Individual interviews are one of the frequently used methods in data collection of qualitative research. The interviews allowed me to gather in-depth information from the participants. I also used a guide, which allowed me to have structured and controlled interviews (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). According to Castillo-Montoya (2016) interview guides ensure the investigator does not deviate or get off course and establishes consistency throughout the course of the interaction. To assist in establishing confirmability I used an audit trail. Upon reviewing the transcriptions and notes I identified the themes which are listed in Table 2. To establish confirmability, I looked and compared the codes and themes multiple times, adjusting as needed. For example, when I was identifying and comparing one of the original themes, significance of change, I reviewed codes in the categories and changed it to significant of charge. Dependability works hand in hand with confirmability (Houghton, 2013). The steps I used in the data analysis and the data collection process could be followed by other researchers who would arrive at the same/similar findings. In the data collection I depended on digital recording to ensure I would not miss any information. as oppose to just taking notes.

As stated previously, using individual interviews to collect data collection in qualitative research, increases dependability. To establish confirmability, I looked and compared the codes and themes multiple times to ensure the data

analysis was correct. The basis for dependability and confirmability rests on consistently and repetitively using information from the audit trail (Houghton, 2013). Due to sample size, location, and population, the outcomes of the study cannot be transferred to other population. Another limitation rested in the location of the businesses because the Mississippi Delta region is considered a rural area, in the southern portion of the country. The nature and variety of the businesses presents another barrier to transferability. Company hiring personnel worked in manufacturing, retail, and food/restaurant industries. Along with the exclusion of Fortune 500 companies, the array of businesses would be difficult to replicate.

Results and Findings

During this process of the data collection of interviewing participants, I identified codes and categories from the transcriptions. Once identified, four themes emerged from the coding process: significant of charge(s), legal risk, pre-release programs, and work experience (see Table 1). I discovered the first theme significant of charge(s) as it related to how employers viewed the seriousness of the crime committed by the ex-offenders. For example, Business Purple was concerned about violent or more serious crimes while Business Gray focused on the type of charge, and Business Green the severity of the charge. The second theme, legal risk, reflected the concern participants expressed regarding potential law suits, being sued, or what actions they might take to put employees at-risk of

harm. Business Purple and Pink considered the danger they could present to staff or patrons of the business.

The pre-release programs are offered at correctional institutions for offenders. They have the opportunity to gain skills, training, and education prior to returning to their communities. For example, Business Pink and Yellow agreed inmates who take advantage of programs while incarcerated could increase their ability to find employment once released. The last theme, work experience reflected the jobs the prisoners held throughout their careers or lifetime. The history informed the employer what kind of job skills they possessed based on previously held positions. Two of the participants Business Purple and Orange viewed employment history as influencing their hiring decision.

Theme 1: Significance of the Charge(s)

Upon release from incarceration, ex-offenders understand the importance of obtaining employment as it relates to becoming productive members in society. They encounter many obstacles along the way, the most significant one is finding employment. Due to the influx of ex-offenders released into local communities their inability to earn income can lead to committing illegal acts and entering the revolving door of recidivism. If ex-offenders can obtain employment, they are less likely to return to prison, thereby decreasing taxpayers' obligation to support them in costly correctional facilities (Rapheal, 2011). In the criminal justice system there are two types of charges, felonies and misdemeanors.

Misdemeanors are less serious offense than a felony and often carry no jail time and are punishable by a fine (Baugh, 2011). Examples of misdemeanors are petty theft, simple assault, public intoxication or reckless driving. Felonies are serious crimes, which often result as serving one or more years imprisoned. Society views felonies as serious or violent crimes (Baugh, 2011). Some examples of felonies are murder, rape, burglary, arson, kidnapping, or shootings.

Participants expounded and reflected on the theme significance of charge in regard to their feelings or beliefs of hiring ex-offenders. In the data analysis I found the majority of the participants or businesses would consider hiring ex-offenders. However, they would have concerns or not be willing to employ an ex-offender who had a violent charge, serious charge, or felony conviction.

Business Red offered:

People do make mistakes and possibly deserve a second chance depending the seriousness of the crime that was committed. A felony is a more serious charge. If you have been convicted of robbing a bank, raped someone, money laundering, or even stole money, I would not feel comfortable at all hiring. In retail management, I don't think you should be able to work around that type of environment.

Business Purple said they have hired ex-offenders but consider their criminal background. They shared:

Uh, we're good on that. However, we do look at crimes out of anger or even a drive by shooting, shooting up someone whole house, something like that. That's where we are looking at knowing if the crime of passion that happen. So that's one thing we look at considering the person, but if somebody they kill their whole family, or shoot up someone house because the person offended them, then we would think twice about considering to hire. The reason why is because a violence in the workplace is big, so we don't want it potentially coming into the workplace and doing a mass shooting or terroristic act like that. So, we definitely look into that.

Business Green said it depended on if they have a minor or serious charge. They added:

To judge people, we should not be doing so but it happens. You would have to be the deciding factor based on how you feel. I would feel it's kind of hard to say because I can say it goes back you know there is a difference from something minor and you do have to think about that because people do change, but you just have to take a chance. You are not supposed to judge people. I think it is kind of hard to consider to hire an ex-offender with a more serious charge.

Business Orange felt there should be no difference in hiring process as those considered

to be law abiding citizens.

I have found that some ex-offenders can be your hardest working employees. I think it is a good opportunity to give them a second chance to get back in the working world and working. I mean if you because I feel like an idle mind, you know, it's a lot easier to go astray on to a backwards path. So, you know, they would have something to do with their time. I like the fact we do give both misdemeanors and felonies an opportunity for employment. All applications are ran for a background check and if one raises a red flag due criminal charge etc. then the application is forwarded to higher management to render a decision to hire or not to hire.

Business Yellow held the belief of treating everyone the same.

You should treat people the way you want to be treated. I also believe in second chances because we all have made a mistake or two in our life. I try not to be bias in my hiring decision. However, if someone apply for a job and it is discovered they have a serious or violent charge we would refer the application to corporate or higher management to make the decision to consider for employment.

Business Gray added:

I believe that some people can make a change but when you are a manager you have to make good sound decisions when hiring. Criminal

charges/convictions can affect your hiring decision because if you have someone who has been convicted of murder or a violent crime I would be hesitant to hire them.

Business Pink shared their thoughts on employing ex-offenders:

...could be possibility considering their criminal background because you have serious charges and none serious charges. Criminal charges it would affect my hiring decision because if you have someone who is convicted of murder, I would be hesitant to hire them because I would not want to be fearful or my staff fearful of working around them. However, drug offenses or charges are more of a crime of opportunity and less serious.

Ex-offenders face numerous barriers when returning to society and the most challenging one is obtaining employment. They often struggle to find jobs for a myriad of reasons. Some of the employers I interviewed had concerns about hiring ex-offenders due to lawsuits as discussed within the following theme.

Theme 2: Legal Risk

Businesses employing ex-offenders could raise some concerns that could possibly affect them if something negative occurred. Employers have significant concerns about assuming potential legal responsibility if they hire a convicted felon and are not knowledgeable about past violent offenses revealed in their criminal record (Atkin & Armstrong 2013; Berge & Bressler 2016; Swanson et al., 2012). The findings of the legal risk showed employers considered employing

ex-offenders based of the type of crime they may have committed that could possibly result in hurting other employees. Their actions could result in the business being sued. This theme is elaborated more in the quotes of the participants listed below.

Business Red commented:

Legal liability is definitely something to consider if you hire someone who has a serious conviction. As a manager you are responsible for everyone you supervise while at work. I feel like that will be putting me at risk. Like I will have to watch over my back and other people's back. So that will make me responsible for other people. I feel like that would put other people at risk.

Business Purple believed you should always be cautious of who you are hiring.

They stated:

You do not want to put your life or someone else's life in danger. You also do not want to risk losing your job for making the wrong decision. I would be very cautious with it unfortunately if they are so bad they could hurt someone else and that would put you at risk of a law suit. The company could possibly be sued and you as an individual as well depending on the severity of what happened.

Business Green reflected on whether their criminal history would be a deciding factor when it comes to considering someone to hire. They added:

It would be hard to hire someone who has a violent or serious charge because you never know they may have flashbacks. Then we will be held accountable, especially if we knew of a previous charge/conviction such as if they had raped someone, why would you hire them? So that will be a big risk to hire someone like that and risk getting sued.

Business Orange had thoughts of legal liability not being a big concern because during their years of employment did not recall any lawsuits.

Cooperate office will handle in legal liability concerns. Legal liability has not been a concern from my standpoint. I assume that cooperate would probably look at it if it is a liability issue and there is just straight forward guideline though. With considering serious offenses/charges, I am not sure if someone with a capital murder charge can be hired. In this case, cooperate will make the final decision because no company want to be at risk of ever being sued.

Business Yellow had a different opinion of the previous participants. They believed people in life make mistakes but should be given a second chance. "We will be taking chances but we will have to take a step of faith that they don't cause any problems or harm to other employees or customers." Business Gray had similar thoughts as Business Yellow. The participant believed in giving second chances and people who make mistakes can possibly change. "Being sued is something I would have to consider and I would have to do some monitoring of

the ex-offender in hopes of nothing would happen to bring on a lawsuit.” Business Pink shared thoughts of liability concerns on the employer/supervisor and the employee (ex-offender).

Liability could definitely be a concern when hiring because you do not want to jeopardize your job or others and their life as well. If the liability is on the ex-offender it would not be a concern. However, if the liability is on the company or manager of experiencing a chance of a lawsuit it would be a concern and take into consideration.

Liability is a concern for business owners. While some employers believe in second chances others expressed a concern for the employees, customers, and maintaining employment with the company. They did not want to put the company at risk because of a hiring decision gone bad. The next theme describes the views of the participants on the importance of ex-offenders taking advantage of programs while incarcerated that could be beneficial to them when released from prison.

Theme 3: Prerelease Programs

Current literature suggested offenders have the opportunity to participate in rehabilitation programs, education, and vocation programs while incarcerated (May & Brown, 2011). Those who take advantage of programs while incarcerated could increase their opportunities when they return to the community. The findings of this theme highlight the views of the participants and

how they believed it was good to take advantage of programs while incarcerated. However, some believed it was not a consideration when making hiring decisions.

Business Red shared:

It is really not a big concern if you have participated in educational or pre-release programs. Well I will look into it, but we don't look into all your educational level; so it really doesn't matter if we feel you're good for the position and don't have anything negative in your background you are hired.

Business Purple added:

I feel it is good if they take advantage of programs while they are incarcerated. They can add those programs to their resume when released from prison. Well approximately it would be the skills that could help them when looking for a job by them taking advantage of the opportunity it will show they possibly have interest in employment.

Business Green had similar views as Business Purple and advised it could show they have interest in possibly doing better in life the second time around.

If they went that far to know going back to different programs and do this and better themselves and go back to school and obtain skills, they are trying to show you they are trying to better themselves and possibly make a change.

Business Orange expound on how offenders taking advantage of programs while incarcerated can help them in the long run.

Anytime someone takes a vocational program it is like an extra skill that they have so at that point, you know, it would be the same as someone who, you know, went to a local college and taken up the same as a vocational course. It will be an added bonus toward their experience and you know it can help their hiring chances but it's the same standard.

Business Yellow felt programs offered at correctional institutions could be a plus and beneficial to offenders. "It would increase their chances higher if they have experience in which the skills obtained will increase hiring potentiality after incarceration." Business Gray had a similar view as Business Yellow and stated offenders taking programs while incarcerated is not a big concern when it comes to their hiring decision. "Any individual apply for a job will be treated like everyone else in regard to being considered for employment." Business Pink thought it was good if ex-offenders take advantage of programs offered while incarcerated. "If they take advantage of the program that would be resourceful to them. It would allow them to be marketable and possibly an opportunity to land employment".

Overall, the programs offered to offenders while incarcerated can assist them with re-entry and obtaining gainful employment. Completing programs and earning certificates demonstrates a willingness to work once they are free. Most

participants were interested in their work history or what skills they possessed, which was for some, a deciding factor in offering them a job once released. I discuss a related theme, work history or work experience, below showcasing the views of the participants.

Theme 4: Work Experience

While this study was about employers' perceptions on hiring ex-offenders, the findings of employment history may or may not play a role in whether an ex-offender would be considered for a job. Employment history is a question found on most applications but it remains unknown how critical of a role it plays in being hired. The results of this theme showed the participants viewed work history as a key part of their hiring decision. Business Red said:

Work history can play a part in hiring unless you want to give someone an opportunity with no work experience. I feel work history is important because you will be able to provide a list of skills or places you have worked that may be beneficial in being considered for employment.

Business Purple felt employment history could affect whether or not ex-offenders would be considered for a job opportunity. "In our company work experience weighs quite a bit in being considered for employment. Our company prefers experienced employees." Business Green discussed how having a work history can be effective when job searching.

With history, you know like we, we look into like different jobs that they have done; different positions they held down. If you are applying for a cashier position, but then on your work history you have never worked as a cashier, you know it's kind of hard, not saying that they may not catch on how to do the job if hired. We do provide a level of training to all employees or those considered for employment. So, I feel like if we hire them and provide training, looking at their background, but their work history plays a part too but you want to put down the right people in the right position. But, they might put on the job application; they want to work in maintenance but did not do any cleaning in prison or jail so would you give them the opportunity as a maintenance person. Therefore, work experience in particular when applying for a job could make a difference.

Business Orange expound in depth about employment history. They added:

Their company looks at the gap in employment history not just alone employment history. So, from experience with interviewing I would say I have run into scenarios if a person has a 40-year gap in work history it would raise concerns. I would look at what happened during this time in a person life. Often the feedback during the interview with a gap in employment would give different answers such as due to incarceration or being ill. Employment history or having work experience weigh a part on

if a person may or may get the job or even being considered. Having a gap in work history could be a negative view.

Business Yellow said an individual having work experience could be an asset when applying for different jobs in the workforce.

I feel work experience play a big role when you are applying for a job. In most times, the employers look for those who have experience over those who do not. I prefer if you would have work experience.

Business Gray did not feel employment history weighed heavily when deciding whether to hire an ex-offender.

On a scale from 1-10 employment history would weigh as a five. It depends on the type of job you are applying for if your employment history would be a big concern. So, in the end the final decision is up to the manager. Business Pink said they felt work history can be an extra boost on your application when seeking employment but education can sometimes outweigh it. If the good outweighs the bad, for example, a drug offense with a bachelor's degree in business management, I am going to jump on it. I think it is a case by case situation.

Overall, the participants viewed ex-offenders who have experience work experience such as trade or other job skills or history of employment could weigh on their hiring decision. However, their charge is a leading factor in obtaining employment according to the participants.

Summary

Throughout this chapter, I presented an overview of the data collection and the steps taken to analyze the data. The participants utilized in the study revealed their perceptions on hiring ex-offenders with a criminal record. The study findings supported my identification of themes, which emerged from the study, highlighting their reasons for and against employing ex-offenders. I presented the themes derived from data analysis and provided excerpts from participant interviews to illustrate the outcomes.

Also included in the chapter is a discussion of the procedures I used to establish trustworthiness. In conducting the study, I took steps to ensure credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. I present a discussion and interpretation of my findings in Chapter 5, which I detailed in Chapter 4.

Chapter 5 Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this study qualitative case study was to explore employers' beliefs and attitudes about hiring post-incarcerated offenders in the state of Mississippi. This qualitative case study consisted of semi-structured interviews using an interview guide to gain insight from participants on how they feel about or their beliefs regarding hiring post incarcerated offenders. There were seven business employers who participated in the study. Each business employed 10 or more individuals.

The guiding question was, what are employers' perceptions of hiring ex-offenders with a criminal record? The four themes emerged from the transcribed interviews included, significance of charge(s), legal risk, prerelease programs, and work experience. These themes paralleled to other findings on employing ex-offenders who had a criminal record (Atkins & Armstrong, 2013; Swenson et al., 2014; Varghese, Hardin Bauer, & Morgan, 2010; Von Bergen & Bressler, 2016). Based on the findings of the study, I illustrate how employer's thoughts of employing ex-offenders and the majority their responses were parallel to each other. I use the results to expose the need for ex-offenders to be prepared to enter society by participating in programs prior to release, such as earning GED or learning a trade or skill, which could increase their employability when exploring job opportunities. Securing their financial future could change the life of an ex-offender because it lowers the risk of recidivating. Willing employers could

contribute to social change for individuals and the community at large. My analysis of the data also highlighted the need for future researchers to investigate the need to bridge the gap between the community, policy makers, and corrections.

Interpretation of Findings

Significance of Charge(s)

Atkin and Armstrong (2013) underscored how post incarcerated offenders face many barriers and difficulties affecting their ability to succeed when attempting to remain free of judicial constraints. Finding adequate employment is a major obstacle they confront as it is a requirement and necessity for them to sustain themselves outside of prison walls (Atkin & Armstrong, 2013). Based on having a criminal record and labeled with negative terms, which stigmatizes them, ex-offenders struggle with obtaining employment as evidence by receiving fewer callbacks upon applying for a job (Blesset & Pryor, 2013; Flake, 2015).

Becker believed labeling an individual contributes to continued maladaptive behavior and participation in the unlawful activities (Regoli et al., 2010). Individuals, who committed crimes or served time in prison, receive the label of a criminal or ex-offender when returning to society (Regoli et al., 2010). Employers continue to be unwilling to employ individuals with criminal histories, especially those with felonies such as rape, murder, violent crimes (Atkins & Armstrong, 2013; Von Bergen & Bressler, 2016).

Participants of this study revealed an ex-offender charge could weigh on the employers hiring an ex-offender. The comments of the participants revealed they are not willing to employ ex-offenders with a criminal history of violent charges or felonies. For example, Business Red stated somebody who was convicted of rape, burglary, or manslaughter would be a major concern because of the severity of the offense. Simple misdeeds, like misdemeanors were viewed as different. Some described them as mistakes they felt the person would not repeat. They were not comfortable hiring people who committed more serious offenses.

Legal Risk

According to Swenson, Rakis et al. (2014), a criminal record can hinder ex-offenders from obtaining employment even though they have served time in prison and desire a fresh start. An obstacle employers grapple with is the potential adverse effect hiring ex-offenders would have on their current customers and coworkers. Business Purple said they are very cautious of hiring ex-offenders because unfortunately they could hurt someone else. Business Green expounded on how hard it would be to hire an ex-offender because you never know if they will repeat their former illegal behaviors and not be held accountable. Business Red commented on the risk they might feel because of their need to feel secure. They objected to becoming responsible for other people's conduct. They shared, "I will feel like that would put other people at risk". Not all companies require a background check before hiring workers and could employ a sex offender or

another violent offender who unknowingly presents a danger to customers and employers (Atkin & Armstrong, 2011). The justice system holds companies liable for any infractions or criminal conduct committed by their staff (Atkin & Armstrong, 2011).

Prerelease Programs

There is an array of programs available to offenders while incarcerated such as educational, alcohol and drug, and rehabilitative programs. They also have access to vocational programs, general education degrees (GED) opportunities to increase literacy capabilities, and other services provided by faith based organizations (May & Brown, 2011). The array of services varies and are primarily voluntarily. Visher et al. (2011) tracked recidivism in regard to ex-offenders who participated in educational and rehabilitation programs prior to being released revealed they had a better opportunity of gaining employment and lower percentages of recidivism. The finding illuminates the importance for inmates to gain knowledge and skills that could possibly assist in landing a job opportunity. The participants comments reflected their view of how participating in programs while incarcerated could be an illustration of resourcefulness. They expressed how it demonstrated their attempts to better themselves and become marketable in society when seeking employment.

Work Experience

Employment is an important part of an individuals' identity as it reflects their ability to provide for themselves and their family (Latessa, 2012). It becomes meaningful to an individual when they can see progress and opportunities for advancement (Latessa, 2012). The ability to achieve and maintain a job can lead to society not looking at people as ex-offenders but those who have made changes and work to improve their prospects in life (Mears & Mestre, 2012). Those who employ ex-offenders revealed how they fund offering ex-offenders opportunities to work, find it beneficial. Before being incarcerated many had employment, which could help them with future employment once their finish their sentences (Latessa, 2012). Comments from participants in the present study suggested ex-offenders having work history or experience undergirds their decision to hire them. Business Purple revealed they prefer individuals who are experienced, and Business Yellow revealed having experience is highly recommended.

The thematic results mirrored many of the issues presented in the literature review, confirming the outcomes in the current study. Final results included how ex-offenders who have a criminal record struggle to obtain employment, especially if they have a felony or violent charge. Atkins and Armstrong (2013) along with Von Bergen and Bressler (2016) found employers continue to be unwilling to employ individuals with criminal histories, especially those with

felonies such as rape or murder. The legal risk of hiring ex-offender could cause lawsuits and place innocent victims at risk such as employees and customers. According to Atkin and Armstrong, 2013, Bergen and Bressler, 2016, and Swanson and Bond (2012), companies have become skeptical about employing ex-offenders because of the potential exposure to liability issues. In the case *Foster v Loft* (1998) in Massachusetts, a bar owner who was aware of the employee's history of criminal violence, decided to offer the person an opportunity to work for their company (Hickox, 2011). The employee, who was an ex-offender with a violent criminal history, assaulted a customer, which led to a negligent liability lawsuit against the bar owner (Hickox, 2011).

Correctional pre-release programs prepare offenders for reintegration into society. Researchers Visher, et al. (2011), tracked recidivism rates of ex-offenders in Virginia, which resulted in documenting the increased employability of offenders who completed the rehabilitation and educational programs during incarceration. Work experience is a plus for ex-offenders who previously had jobs involving vocational job skills. It increases their marketability when trying to obtain employment. Potential employers view ex-offenders who have job-skills training or formal education more favorably (Visher et al., 2011).

I used Becker's labeling theory, Marx's conflict theory, and Heider's attribution theories as the conceptual frameworks for the study. The attribution theory developed by Fritz Heider is of significance to this study because it focuses

on individuals attitude, opinions, and personality traits related to internal and external axioms (Eberly, Holley, Johnson & Mitchell, 2011). Internal attributions deal with individuals personal perceptions that cause them to behave or act a certain way of demonstrating behaviors regarding a situation they may have encountered (Eberly et al., 2011). Attribution does play a fundamental role in decision making process including those related to employer's choices of personnel (Carless & Waterworth, 2012). The attribution theory aligned with the findings of the study regarding employers' perceptions or beliefs of individuals. The labeling theory developed by Howard Becker is known to be the theory of deviance (Love, 2015). According to Becker, deviant behaviors consist of three different stages (Regoli et al., 2010; Shloaberg, Mandery, West, & Callaghan, 2014). First, a person commits a criminal act such as theft, burglary, or assault (Regoli et al., 2010). The second stage is when someone catches them committing an illegal act or engaging in deviant behavior. The third stage occurs once the spotlight is on the person, leading community members to determine they are criminals (Regoli et al., 2010). Having such a label criminal record could lessen their chance of obtaining employment. The detriment of being labeled as an ex-offender with a criminal record underscores the views purported in Becker's labeling theory. Stigmatization of business owners against ex-offenders is a massive barrier to them being able to have any hope of remaining in society (Atkins & Armstrong, 2013; Von Bergen & Bressler, 2016).

According to Inderbitzin et al. (2013), Marx believed capitalism would create problems between the upper and lower-class groups, resulting in conflicts. Marx theorized the upper class would capitalize on problems within the lower-class populations (Inderbitzin et al., 2013). Similar conflicts exist within relationships in the workforce as mirrored in interactions between the owners and those they employ. If ex-offenders are not able to obtain employment they often result back to criminal activities or behaviors which can create conflict within society. Since ex-offender's number one barrier is obtaining employment. Ex-offenders seek employment as reasons of taking care of their necessities such as food, clothing, and shelter (Visher et al, 2011). According to Marx individuals who are not given a fair chance in life or an opportunity could convert back to deviant behavior to survival (Visher et al., 2011). In comparison to this current study as aforementioned the findings showed employers are not willing to hire ex-offenders with a criminal record especially those of a violent nature. If they are not able to obtain employment it increases the likelihood they will revert to deviant behavior (Visher et al., 2011).

Limitations of the Study

I targeted unskilled labor markets because most ex-offenders have a low-level education and skills (Nally et al., 2014). This is one of the limitations of the study as some prisoners may have earned higher educational levels or be have advanced technological training. The participating businesses varied in size, but I

did not use cooperate employers such as Fortune 500 companies. The restricted size limits the transferability of the results. The geographic location, the Mississippi Delta region, is considered as rural area. This constricts the outcomes from being applied to urban or suburban populations as well as regions who are primarily agrarian.

Recommendation

Given the themes which emerged from the data analysis, I would offer the following suggestions for future researchers. If conducting another study on employer's perceptions of hiring ex-offenders, the researchers could consider cities where greater numbers of businesses exist or target a demographic such as an urban area. This study would measure the perceived notions of better job opportunities for ex-offenders from more populated areas, as oppose to limited job opportunities in rural communities. Any change in demographics could provide different results. In conducting this qualitative study, I interviewed business owners/supervisors instead of ex-offenders. I interviewed business owners of retail sales, fast food chain restaurants, manufacturing, and distribution warehouses, in which these jobs did not require a very high level of education such as a college degree. Others who have similar inquiries and focus on the ex-offender as a population could provide better insight into factors contributing to ex-offender success or failure after incarceration based on their perspectives and experiences.

Implications

The impact on social change resulting from this study can be used to enlighten ex-offenders on employers hiring beliefs and perceptions regarding offering employment opportunities. Community leaders, correction and legislature officials, along with academics can glean a better understanding of the difficulties surrounding post incarcerated individuals successfully obtaining jobs. D'Alessio, Stolzenberg, and Flexon (2015) suggested having a criminal record is a social stigma. D'Alessio et al. (2015) reported on concerns raised about the employment application. Social change efforts could be directed at influencing government officials to pass the Ban the Box laws along with restricting access to ex-offenders' criminal history. By passing the Ban the Box laws it would allow ex-offenders a fair chance of getting an interview and possibly obtain employment before being stigmatized or labeled. A study conducted in 2014 by Florida University Criminal Justice Research Department concluded the Ban the Box legislation had a positive effect on ex-offenders receiving opportunities to work and therefore decreasing recidivism rates (Entin, 2015).

The second social change would deal with the correctional programs. Participants in this current study believed ex-offenders who participate in pre-release programs show they want change or better their lives once they return to the community. Their achievements could allow them to access more resources and leverage when seeking to obtain job opportunities. Visser et al. (2011)

tracked recidivism rates of ex-offenders in Virginia, documenting the increase employability of offenders who completed the rehabilitation and education programs during incarceration. By using this information correctional departments can develop effective programs and support for correctional officials to advocate for investing money to provide job skill training programs to increase the marketability of prisoners released from their facilities. The participants shared the advantages of ex-offenders having work histories or job skills. They expressed how formerly incarcerated applicants who have job skills training or formal education increase their opportunities to obtain employment.

The third social change would be working towards bridging the gap between corrections and the community. Based on the outcomes I retrieved from the data, correction facilities should establish better post release services. The department of corrections could invite business owners from the community and services providers to participate in job fair events, which heightens their visibility for extending public service. The event could be for offenders prior to being released from incarceration. By doing so, those in the community could connect with the department of corrections officials and contribute information about potential future employment opportunities for inmates. Also, ex-offenders will be able to show those businesses participating in the job fair their job skills, education, along with rehabilitative programs they have completed to prepare them to re-enter society. According to Frazier, Sung, Gideon, and Alfaro (2015),

in order for re-entry to be successful for ex-offenders there must be a discharge planning process along with community collaboration.

Presenting employer's views on hiring ex-offenders allowed me to show how they view the population, including whether they consider education, training skills, or criminal records in their hiring decisions. There is still much to be learned from the perspectives of businesses owners/supervisors who participated in this study. They shared similar views on hiring ex-offenders with a criminal record. If people in the community and the government and correctional officials would come together to identify the problems with a willingness to make a change in the laws, it could positively affect the lives of the ex-offenders as well as the broader community.

Conclusion

This qualitative case study illuminated the perceptions of employers hiring ex-offenders. I was driven to conduct this study because of my twenty-three-year tenure with the Mississippi Department of Corrections. I have seen many offenders released from incarceration and some would return within six months to a year. Witnessing their constant return to prison sparked my interest to investigate why so many ex-offenders were recidivating. Conclusions based on the study findings emphasize the unwillingness of employers to hire ex-offenders who have a criminal record of violent charges or felonies. I have learned that is still much work to be done to better prepare ex-offenders for society because they

are faced with obstacles such as obtaining employment, and securing stable housing. The findings can be used to initiate the positive social change efforts for lawmakers, the community, and correction officials to bridge the existing gap and develop strategies to better equip ex-offenders with the essential tools to obtain employment to support their successful reentry back into society.

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Appendix A: Interview Guide

This research is about employers' beliefs and attitudes on hiring post incarcerated offenders. The goal of this research is to discover (1) What are employer's perceptions of hiring ex-offenders with a criminal record?

The following is a detailed line of questions that comes from the interview protocol that will be utilized with the businesses/employers interviewed. The questions for the interview will focus on employing ex-offenders and explore their beliefs and attitudes of hiring abilities.

Introduction

I will interview four to five businesses/employers concerning their beliefs and attitudes on hiring post incarcerated offenders. The participants will be businesses within the Mississippi Delta Region.

Starting the Interview

I would like to talk with you in-depth about interest and/or concerns about hiring post incarcerated offenders and along with your experience of hiring ex-offenders.

Background

Interview's Note: I will use this section to collect demographic information from the businesses, using the questions of demographics as an ice breaker to get the interviewer and employers comfortable with each other and to set the stage of the process.

1. How many staff does your business employ?

2. Could you tell me how long you have been in business?
3. Could you tell me why you chose to open a business in Mississippi?
4. Where is the headquarters located for the business?
5. What is your occupation?
6. How long have you maintained employment in the business?
7. How long have you worked in your current position?
8. Have you knowingly hired an ex-offender within the last year?
9. Do you have a family member who faced conviction of a crime or served time in jail/prison?

Employment Dynamics

The following questions deal with hiring process.

1. How does an applicant apply for a job with your company?
2. If an applicant has an application on file, how long will it remain active and how is the process explained to the applicant?
3. If applicants apply for a job with your organization, and they have been convicted of a crime before, do you allow them the opportunity to explain? If so, what is that process?
4. Does your company have a policy in effect of hiring ex-offenders or not discriminating? If so, could you explain in detail?

5. Does your organization require a background check on applicants who interested in employment with your company? If so, what will you base your hiring decision on if the applicant has a criminal record?

Employment of Staff/Ex-Offenders

The following questions will deal with opinions, attitudes/beliefs on hiring ex-offenders.

1. How do you feel about employing ex-offenders who has been convicted of a misdemeanor?
2. How do you feel about hiring ex-offenders as potential employees?
3. How do you feel, or what is your opinion/belief about ex-offenders being given a second chance?
4. If your company hires ex-offenders, tell me what has been your experience working with them?
5. How do you feel about employing ex-offenders who have been convicted of a felony?
6. How do you feel about hiring an ex-offender who has been discharged from probation?
7. If you ever knowingly employed any ex-offenders, what were some of your concerns?
8. If your organization has been prosperous or productive over the years and beneficial to the community, how do you feel about protecting your reputation and client base regarding hiring ex-offenders?

9. How do you feel about legal liability of hiring or not hiring ex-offenders?
10. How does the type of conviction or level of violence of a crime affect your hiring decision?
11. What would increase your level of comfort of employing ex-offenders?

Education Attainment Level

The following questions deal with opinions and beliefs/attitudes hiring ex-offender.

1. How does level of education play a part in the hiring decision of an ex-offender?
2. Some ex-offenders have the opportunity to complete a transitional employment program that is considered as a re-entry or post release program; if an ex-offender has completed any of those how would it play a part in your hiring decision of an ex-offender?
3. Most correctional institutions offer educational, vocational training, and rehabilitation programs; if an ex-offender had completed any of the programs, how will it affect your hiring decision?
4. How does an ex-offender's employment history weigh on your hiring decision?
5. If you ever knowingly employed any ex-offenders, what were some of your concerns?

Incentives

The following questions deal how employers feel, opinion, belief about hiring ex-offender for government/tax incentives.

1. How does a government incentive affect or play a part in your hiring decision?

2. Is a government incentive or tax break enough to change your mind or views on hiring ex-offenders? If yes/no, why/why not?
3. If your company hires ex-offenders and receive government incentive, do you feel by hiring them you are helping your business? If so, in what ways?
4. If your company hire ex-offenders and receive government incentive/tax break, do you feel you are helping your community? If so, in what ways?
5. In respect to liability concerns, how do you feel about employing ex-offenders in exchange for a government tax break?