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Walden University
2019

Abstract

African Americans' Perceptions of the Impact of the War on Drugs

by

Tammy Drayton

MA, Boston University, 2012

BS, Thomas Edison State University, 2010

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Criminal Justice

Walden University

February 2019

Abstract

The War on Drugs has been a contested issue in the United States for decades. Many believe that African Americans are targeted by the government and become victims of the penal system as a result of anti-drug policies. The purpose of this ethnographic study was to explore the impact of the war on drugs on African American men, women, and young adults from their perspectives. Racial threat theory provided the framework for the study. Data were collected through interviews with and observations of 30 African American participants who had experiences directly and indirectly with the War on Drugs. Participant were recruited through purposeful and snowball sampling. Results of coding analysis by way of NVivo revealed that that many African Americans experience mental health issues (specifically depression and anxiety) due to direct and indirect consequences of drug penalties. Findings also showed that fair sentencing is needed for African Americans, and that African Americans need to come together to impact social change in their communities. Findings may be used to promote drug policy reform, rehabilitation for African American offenders and their families by addressing the mental health challenges individuals face directly and indirectly due to the drug penalties; in addition to increasing the access to these mental health resources. Furthermore, political changes for decriminalization of marijuana and commuting sentences for those penalized for the drug are apart the social changes that would lessen the impact the War on Drugs has on African Americans.

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation posthumously to my mother, Jennis Lucille Drayton, who supported my journey of obtaining a doctoral degree. Her spirit lives on through me daily.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Megan Adair for encouraging me to pursue my doctoral degree and seeing the potential in me even when I doubted myself. In addition, I would like to thank my family and close circle of friends who cheered me on along the way. Jamie, Crystal, Tessa, Hannah, Gabriel, Michael, and Jason: I am forever grateful for the inspirational words and accountability you held me to throughout this process, as it enabled me to push through despite all of the obstacles life threw my way. Many thanks to my dissertation chair, Dr. Gregory Koehle, and committee member, Dr. Jessie Lee, for their mentorship and guidance throughout my doctoral studies. Lastly, I would like to thank all of the participants for welcoming me into their life and sharing their valuable experiences with the world. It is greatly appreciated.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Background

Current research has indicted how the war on drugs has negatively affected African Americans' financial status, immigration status, and voting rights while the prison industry has benefited. My study added to the current research by addressing the link between mental health issues among African Americans and the war on drugs. I examined the effect the war on drugs has had on offenders, significant others, and young adults who have had one or both parents incarcerated.

Problem Statement

The war on drugs was declared by President Nixon in 1971; however, in 1982 President Reagan spearheaded the war on drugs campaign at a time when extensive drug use and distribution plagued the United States. President Reagan formalized his political agenda that featured a harsh crackdown on drugs and crime by passing the Anti-Drug Abuse Act, which targeted drug users as a criminal population and substantially lowered the threshold for imprisonment (Patterson, 2015). President Reagan believed that drugs were a threat to the security of the United States and therefore engaged in this war to secure and seize control of the country (Cover, 2014). The war on drugs, however, predominantly affected African Americans because harsher sentences were imposed for the use of crack cocaine (Palamar, Davies, Ompad, Cleland, & Weitzman, 2015). More recently, the disparities between crack and powder cocaine sentencing in the United States have resulted in concerns about racist drug laws. (Palamar et. al 2015).

To receive the 10-year mandatory minimum prison sentence for possession of powder cocaine (predominantly used by the White population), the threshold was set at 1000 grams, whereas the threshold for crystallized cocaine (predominantly used by the Black population) was set much lower at 10 grams (Buchanan, 2015). The war on drugs has become a modernized method in which the government uses the penal system to oppress African Americans by way of mass incarceration (Cox, 2018). As a stigmatized legal status, incarceration hinders an offender's reintegration into society and often becomes a primary status for the evaluation of that person. In addition, state and federal laws limit access to voting rights, employment, and social services for previously incarcerated persons (Maroto, 2015). This stigma impacts offenders' families and children who succumb to financial restraints and an increase in violence and delinquency (Turney, n.d.). Poverty and crime continue to rise in the African American community as individuals are unable to provide for their families and loved ones (Batra, 2018). Children are more likely to engage in delinquent behavior, which can lead to a life of crime because of the absence of a parental figure (Porter & King, 2015). In 2012, drug offenses accounted for more than half (52%) of the federally sentenced prison population (Taxy, Samuels & Adams, 2015). Also, about three quarters of drug offenders in federal prison were either non-Hispanic black or African American (39%) or Hispanic or Latino (37%); nearly a quarter (22%) were non-Hispanic White offenders (Bureau of Justice and Statistics, 2015). According to the 2015 U.S. census, "Black or African American alone make up 13.2 percent of the population in the United States" (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). These statistics convey the racial disparities in the penal system and suggest that the war

on drugs is biased toward African Americans. There is a domino effect that occurs because of mass imprisonment, and this war has become a war on the Black community that has increased the poverty and crime rates in those communities (Newport, 2018).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how the war on drugs has impacted African Americans who have been convicted, as well as their family and friends. Findings may be used as a positive platform to advocate for freedom and liberty for people of this community. The goal of the study was to promote policy changes in regard to the war on drugs and the punishment it carries. Possible changes include reforming sentencing laws for crack and powder cocaine. Although this sentencing disparity was recently reduced by the U.S. Congress from 100:1 to 18:1 (Cockroft,2017), there remains a highly punitive legacy against crack-related offenses in the federal courts compared to offenses involving other drugs (Spohn, Kim, Belenko, & Brennan, 2014). This example highlights the discrepancies in the criminal justice system and suggests that African Americans are the focus regarding incarceration. Along with change in sentencing for drug policies, findings may be used to promote alternative punishment for drug offenders and to ensure that the punishment fits the crime. Delinquency also increases among young adults whose life becomes affected due to this war, and so it is important for services to be available to help children stay on the right path. This study addressed the perspective of members of the African American community to show how their lives have been transformed by the war on drugs. By highlighting the different ways African Americans are affected by the racial disparities that occur due to the war on

drugs, findings may be used to promote systemic change through new policies that are fair and consistent.

Research Question

How has the war on drugs impacted the lives of African Americans?

Interview Questions

The following questions were addressed to men (released offenders):

1. What were you arrested for?

2. How long were you sentenced?

3. How much of time did you serve?

4. How would you describe your life prior to being incarcerated?

5. What led you to lead a life of drugs?

6. What were your experiences like while being incarcerated?

7. What goals did you set for yourself upon being released from prison?

8. How would you describe your experiences once being released from prison?

9. What was the most challenging part of transitioning back into society?

10. How has incarceration affected you as an individual?

11. What are your views regarding the current drug policies in the United States?

12. How would you describe your current mental health since being affected by drug policies and penalties?

The following questions were addressed to wives and significant others:

1. How would you describe your lifestyle prior to your husband/significant other being incarcerated?

2. How long was your husband/significant other been incarcerated?

3. How would you describe your experiences when your husband/significant other was incarcerated?

4. What challenges have you faced during your husband/significant other's incarceration?

5. What were your experiences when your husband/significant other was released from prison?

6. What challenges have you faced since his release from prison?

7. How would you describe your mental health since being affected by drug policies and penalties?

8. What systemic changes would you like the government to implement to reduce the effect the war on drugs has had on your community?

The following questions were addressed to young adults:

1. How would you describe your life prior to your parent(s) being incarcerated?

2. How long were your parent(s) incarcerated?

3. What were your experiences like when your parent(s) were incarcerated?

4. What changes occurred once your parent(s) were incarcerated?

5. What were your experiences when your parent(s) were released from prison?

6. Describe the relationship between you and your parents when they returned home from being incarcerated?

7. How would you describe your mental health currently due to the changes brought on by the incarceration of your parent(s)?

8. What systemic changes would you like the government to implement to reduce the effect the war on drugs has had on your community?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study was Blalock's (1967) racial threat theory. This theory focuses on how the success and growth within the Black community serves as a threat to Whites and the power that they maintain socially, economically, and politically. Blalock's formulation of racial threat theory provides an explanation of the observed racial discrepancies in state responses to crime by emphasizing how racial composition influences discriminatory control practices (Brooks-Dollar, 2014). This approach provides historical insight of Blacks being oppressed when they unite and attempt to rise. After slavery ended, many blacks felt liberated and empowered. However, this was short lived as Jim Crow laws were implementing in which Blacks were segregated and were not granted the same privileges and Whites. The war on drugs has become a new method to continue oppression of African Americans. The government uses their system to create drug policies that are skewed to effect social control over the Black community in the form of mass incarceration. This creates a domino effect that forces families and children of those incarcerated into a life of poverty and delinquency. This also results in a less likely chance of the Black community rising and gaining strength, power, or control in society. (Alexander, 2010). Other researchers have used the racial threat theory to examine the oppression and control of blacks. Scholars have investigated the effects of racial threat on voter turnout, candidate support, policy support, racial attitudes, and social capital (Enos, 2016). These studies indicated that

oppression is not a new phenomenon; however, the approach has not been as bold as methods used in the past.

Nature of the Study

I used the qualitative research method. Qualitative researchers must suspend, or set aside, their perspectives and assumed views of the world (Taylor, Bogdan, & DeVault, 2015). The current study was designed to provide a voice for those unheard and living in an oppressive world. The qualitative approach provided the best method to describe the perceptions of African Americans and show how policies in the war on drugs have affected their lives.

To execute a qualitative study, I chose an ethnographic design. The intent of ethnographic research is to obtain a holistic picture of the subject of the study with emphasis on portraying participants' everyday experiences by observing and interviewing them and relevant others (Creswell, 2013). By using the ethnographic approach, I captured and interpreted the experiences of African Americans whose lives have been affected by the war on drugs in their natural setting. In an inductive study, the researcher develops a theory out of the descriptive and interpretive process; in a deductive study, the researcher tests a theory using an established theoretical framework (Rudestam & Newton, 2015). The theoretical framework for this study was based on racial threat theory, which states that Blacks were oppressed so they would not become a threat and have a great deal of power in society. Oppression is a form of social control.

The type of sampling that was used in this research was maximum research sampling. This strategy for purposeful sampling was aimed at capturing and describing

the central themes or principal outcomes that cut across participant or program variation (see Patton, 1990). In addition, snowball sampling was used to select participants. This enabled me to interview a different selection of people and use their responses to represent the Black community. I used a sample size of 30 African Americans, including 10 men who were previously incarcerated for nonviolent drug offenses, 10 women who had significant others who had been or were still incarcerated, and 10 young adults between the ages of 18 and 19 who had one or both parents incarcerated due to drugs. Narratives were collected over a 6-month period in the Northeast United States.

Assumptions

The following assumptions were associated with this study:

1. Participants may be hesitant in disclosing some personal information.

2. Participants will have some knowledge regarding the war on drugs.

3. The participants will be from an urban community.

Scope and Delimitations

African Americans who reside in an urban community were selected for this study. These individuals were required to have had an experience related to the war on drugs, which shaped their life. The minimum age of participants was 18 years; however, there was no maximum age requirement. The participants resided in the Northeast United States as this was a convenient method to reach and engage with them throughout the study.

Limitations

The limitation to this study was that although it focused on the study of African Americans, all were not able to be interviewed as it would be nearly impossible to interview every individual affected by the War on Drugs. Another limitation was I was unable to observe every urban community in the United States and the study was placed on one specific county. Also, participants under the age of 18 years were not selected for the study due to the sensitive subject matter and the difficulty in gaining parental consent.

Significance

The significance of this study was to educate the public of the hidden effects of the war on drugs that plagues the African American community. The goal was to describe how the war on drugs has affected convicted African Americans, along with their family and friends. This approach provided those affected with a platform to speak for themselves as opposed to relying on the government and society to share their truth. Findings may be used in the public policy and administration field to design policies to support African Americans rising above oppression and leading successful lives in society. Findings may also be used by law enforcement organizations to change their practices in targeting low-income areas where Blacks reside. Findings may be used to oppose mass incarceration and to advocate for positive change that is fair to the government and the Black community.

Summary

Chapter 1 presented the background of the study addressing the impact of the war on drugs on African Americans. The individuals affected by the war on drugs have not

been provided opportunities to share their experiences. Chapter 2 includes a review of the literature on the history of the war on drugs, how the deterrence theory supports the war on drugs, the Anti-Drug Act, crack versus cocaine, incarceration and the family structure, and the impact of incarceration on ex-offenders.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this ethnographic study was to provide a clear description of the impact of the war on drugs from the perspectives of African Americans. Data were collected from African American men, women, and adolescents who described how the war on drugs has affected their lives. The theoretical foundation of this study was based on racial threat theory. Arrests and incarceration of African Americans is based on drug laws and policies implemented by the United States government; therefore, the literature review begins with the history of drug policies in the United States. This literature review also includes the history of African Americans and their association with drug policies. After discussing the judicial system relationship and sentencing of African Americans, I examine the theory that supports current drug policies and the impact of these policies on African American offenders, significant others, and young adults. I also describe the method used for selected relevant literature.

Literature Search Strategy

The war on drugs has been discussed in criminal justice literature; however, this topic is addressed differently with the use of racial threat theory, which is primarily mentioned in African American studies. The strategy used to locate relevant research focused on understanding the connection between incarceration and the African American experience. This literature review was intended to promote understanding of the reasoning for current policies and the status of the African American community regarding drug laws and policies.

Strategies used to conduct online searches varied as I wanted to explore all avenues to locate the best possible literature. Having a clear understand of the drug policies and how African Americans are viewed by the judicial system is vital to understanding the impact of the war on drugs on the Black community. Online search strategies included using title searches, key word searches, phrase searches, and subject searches. I was able to locate useful information regarding current drug policies, sentencing laws, and the effects of incarceration. Online resources included databases in the Walden University library (Criminal Justice database& Criminological highlights), Sage publications, Legal Trac, and Google Scholar. I also used the Rutgers University library to obtain online and book resources to support this study. Court documents pertaining to the study topic were also vital in the literature search process to enhance the validity and reliability of the study.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study was racial threat theory. Racial threat theory was used to understand how African Americans have been oppressed due to the threat of them becoming more powerful and financially stable than their White counterparts. This theory also supports Black voices and the central focus of the study to share the manner in which Blacks have been oppressed and discriminated against by being incarcerated. Ethnographic interviews were used to explore African American participants' perceptions of the impact of the war on drugs. The incarceration phenomenon of Blacks is not new; however, it has evolved over decades and has been reinvented to hinder African Americans from being successful in the United States

(Aguilar, 2014). This section begins with a description of racial threat theory, ideas from key theorists, and examples of how racial threat theory has been used in previous studies.

Racial threat theory was created by Blalock (1967) who argued that by embracing the concept of racial threat, researchers promote the development of the theory, design research questions that are specific, and apply methods of inquiry that will provide a voice to African Americans. Racial threat theory is used to conduct research from the experiences of African Americans to contribute and expand the literature in public policy (Stolzenberg, D'Alessio, & Eitle, 2004). Exploring the perceptions of African Americans regarding the war on drugs was intended to fill the gap in understanding the impact of drug policies on this group of people.

Blalock (1967) described racial threat theory as a form of social control against Blacks to impede their economic and political influence. Measures of oppression against Blacks were apparent in the racial caste system, which was more popularly known as Jim Crow. However, as times evolved and this method became illegal, the war on drugs became a legalized method of oppressing Blacks.

Researchers have used racial threat theory as a framework to support their findings. For example, King and Wheelock (2007) provided a quantitative perspective on "individual-level and contextual correlates of punitive attitudes in the United States" (p. 1255). King and Wheelock found that populations that have a larger number of African Americans are more punitive and African Americans are viewed as threatening to economic resources. Kent and Carmichael (2014) used racial threat theory to examine segregation among Black and White people and to explain how segregation is used to

weaken the threat of African Americans by limiting contact between groups. Separating Blacks and Whites makes policing easier because it reduces the fear of interracial crime supports the aggressive tone needed to create social control.

Pickett (2016) used racial threat theory to explain the perception of Latinos being a threat by becoming a powerful political and economic group. Pickett found that the minority group threat exists and conducted a quantitative study to determine that aggressive policing is implemented to control Latino economic and political power. Pickett (2016), also discussed the possibility that perceived criminal threat, which he described as a threat-oriented ideology, may hasten and intensify dominant group members' counter-mobilization against noncriminal forms of threat.

The use of racial threat theory in research literature has evolved since its inception in 1967 by Blalock. Racial threat theory has been used to explain injustices not only among African Americans but other minorities in the United States. Since the emancipation of slaves, Blacks have attempted to rise above poverty and gain freedom, but over decades the neoslavery system has caused Blacks to be falsely imprisoned and to provide involuntary servitude to White landowners and entrepreneurs (Blackmon, 2008). As society changed, the war on drugs became a new method to control the threat of Black power as individuals such a Leroy Barnes (Kleiman & Hawdon, 2011) and Frank Lucas (Chepesiuck, 2015) built drug empires that spanned New York, Pennsylvania, and Canada and situated African Americans in a position of power. Although these men and many others like them were tried and convicted, the war on drugs became more apparent to the public as the racial disparities and mass incarceration of Blacks became noticeable.

History of the War on Drugs

The history of drug policies in the United States precedes the implementation of the war on drugs. The U.S. government's history of drug enforcement dates back to the 19th century; however, there has not been any agency that has regulated their policies. (Sacco, 2014). In the 20th century, the Harrison Act and The Marijuana Tax act of 1937 were implemented to regulate the use and distribution of drugs in the United States (Sacco, 2014). These attempts were unsuccessful, however, and over the next few decades the U.S. government passed legislation to criminalize drug abuse.(Sacco, 2014).

Although mentioned earlier by President Nixon when he was in office, it was President Reagan who implemented the War on Drugs by passing the Anti- Drug Abuse Act. This was created to end the cycle of drug abuse in America and to penalize those who violate with long prison sentences with hopes of deterring future drug driven crime in the United States (Elwood,2009). It was quickly realized by many however, that the War on Drugs became a race war since many African Americans being incarcerated and attention should be focused on actual drug related crimes as opposed to racial profiling (Banks, 2003). According to scholars the War on Drugs has been the longest undisguised war against black people in American history and has cost 2.5 trillion dollars over the course of 40 years (Agozino, 2011). It is also believed the War on Drugs domestically targets "surplus" populations and working collectively with others and using rehabilitative methods will be more effective in rectifying the drug problem here in the United States (Patten, 2016).

As previously noted, the Racial Threat Theory states that whites who are currently in power oppress African Americans for the fear of them becoming too powerful and becoming the majority rule. This concept is better understood by focusing on the War on Drugs and African Americans who are specifically targeted. Drugs war in America has been inspired by racist sentiments or ethnocentrism (Robinson & Scherlen, 2007). Analysis of the current state the War on Drugs has on America and its racial disparities is imperative to identify the direction needed to provide change to current policies and regulations. Figure 1 shows the vast increase in drug arrests since 1994 in the United States.

Federal drug offense arrests and individual drug offense suspects arrested, 1994–2014
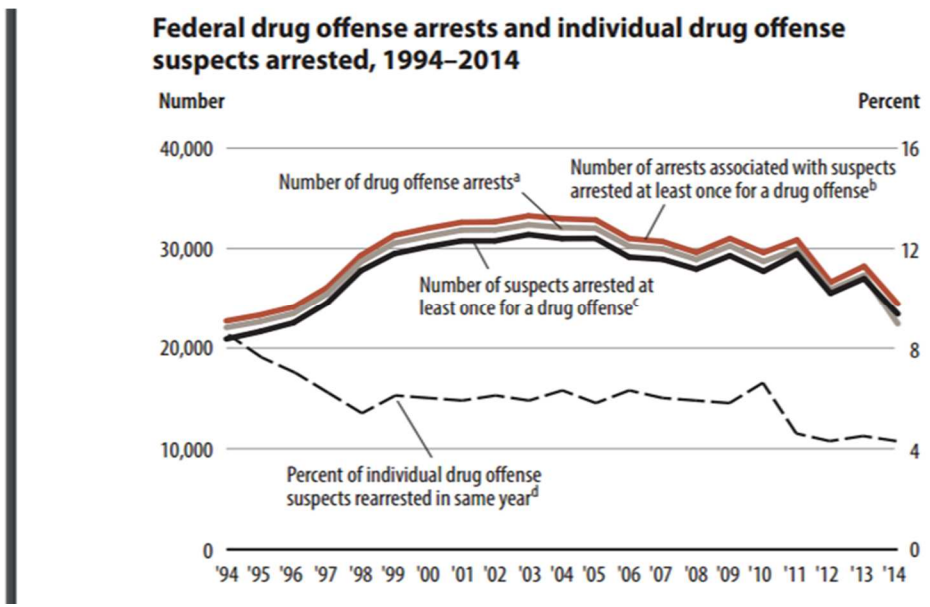
Figure 1. Drug arrests since 1994 in the United States.

Table 1 shows a comparison of race and arrest statistics for drug related crimes in the United States. (Bureau of Justice and Statistics). Data from the Bureau of Justice and Statistics was published in October 2015. The data exhibits that minorities (especially

African Americans) are the majority imprisoned in the United States despite only making up a portion of the population.

Table 1

Comparison of Race and Arrest Statistics for Drug-Related Crimes in the United States

Race	Percent arrested for drug in 2012
All	100
Black	38.8
White	21.8
Hispanic	37.2
Asian/ Pacific Islander/ American Indian	2.2

Deterrence Theory Supports Anti-Drug Act

The deterrence theory was used as a measure to support the Anti- Drug Act. This theory suggest that individuals would be less inclined if not completely discouraged to commit a crime due to the threat of being punished harshly (Worrall, Piquero, & Teneyck 2014). Incarcerating an offender is deemed as punishment as opposed to a preventative measure and has been used by the government to deter individuals from committing crime (Uniacke, 2015). Deterrence has become a method in which to implement social control however, there is no evidence that it has been effective especially since the prison population has increased since 1970 without reduction in the crime rates (Gottfredson, 2013).

The steps associated with criminal deterrence is to create or modify legislation to increase punishment, commit efforts to make punishments more severe and enhance the sentences (Apel, 2013). The Anti – Drug Act which embraced the title "The War on

Drugs" is used to deter individuals from committing crimes due to the harsh penalties and sentences they carry. The penalties include lengthy sentences for criminal penalties for simple possession, employing individuals under 18 years of age, carrying an unlicensed firearm if being convicted prior for a drug offense, increased penalties for those involved in criminal enterprises, manufacturing or transporting drugs by vehicle or via mail, forfeiture of property, deportation of individuals who are convicted and even the implementation of the death penalty for offenders who are habitual offenders (Congress, 1986).

Although many believe the deterrence theory is an effective method to reduce crime, there are those who are skeptical and others who are against the idea. The deterrence theory has been used in different methods over the years, however it is believed that the perspective of it needs to evolve in looking at the bigger picture in regard to assessing and analyzing the entire social and structural environment as opposed to solely the individuals (Kim, Pratt, & Wallace 2014). It is also believed that deterrence is does not provide plausible evidence to be used as a mechanism to control behavior and it is a method based on assumption (Charles & Durlauf, 2013).

Researchers has also indicated that the reasons why deterrence methods have failed is because the focus has been placed on narrow issues and assumptions that are unsupported. It can however be successful, if the obstacles that goes beyond the nature and deterrence effectiveness are addressed (Hanna, 2014). When assessing deterrence in relation to drugs, research has found that the effectiveness of deterrence is dependent on how severe the consequence, the likelihood of being detected are and ultimately if the

risk is worth the reward (Che & Benson, 2014). Therefore, if the price of smuggling or

dealing drugs is very high, individuals are more inclined to commit the act despite the

potential consequences associated with it. Hence the question remains up for debate as to

if deterrence is effective in the War on Drugs. It is apparent that there are harsh

consequences which come in the form of incarceration, however according to the Bureau

of Justice and Statistics "About two-thirds (67.8%) of released prisoners were arrested for

a new crime within 3 years, and three-quarters (76.6%) were arrested within 5 years"

(Bureau of Justice and Statistics) (Bureau of Justice and Statistics). These statistics

therefore provide those who oppose Deterrence methods with valuable data as to why

Deterrence has not been effective and to ultimately question the entire theory.

The ineffectiveness of the deterrence theory mentioned above can be deemed as

oppression of the African American community as it creates a pathway that leads to an

influx of incarceration for blacks by implementing harsher sentences. Black defendants

are more likely to be sentenced to prison and are given longer sentences in counties with

growing Black populations (Feldmeyer, Warren, Siennick, & Neptune 2015).Therefore,

the selection of the Racial Threat Theory used in this study highlights this modernized

form of oppression that is implemented by way of deterring individuals, as it becomes a

form of social control of blacks as opposed to preventing crime.

Crack Versus Cocaine Sentencing

According to the National Institute of Drug Abuse, Cocaine is a white powdered

stimulant drug that derives from the coca plant. It is mostly ingested through snorting or

by rubbing it one one's gum. Cocaine can also be injected into the bloodstream after

being liquified and the adverse effects include affecting the functionality of the brain

(National Institute Drug Abuse, 2017). Crack however, is a crystalized form of cocaine

that comes is the form of solid blocks. It is ingested by placing the crystals in a crack

pipe, heating the base and smoking it (Cheng, Wood, Nguyen, Montaner, & DeBeck,

2015). The long-term effects of crack include harmful changes to the cardiovascular

system, mental instability (psychosis, dysphoria) and ones' social behavior (Sur & Loh,

2015). Although crack is a diluted form of powdered cocaine, there is a variation in the

prices between both. The price of crack is dependent on the location it is bought;

however, the purity of powder cocaine is a determining factor in the price it is sold for

(Zhu, Wilson, Stimpson, & Pagán, 2014). Therefore, there is no specific price on crack or

cocaine and it ultimately varies by the state and country one lives in. The National Drug

Threat Assessment of 2016 which was conducted by the Drug Enforcement Agency

(DEA) found that "the average retail price per pure gram of cocaine increased 149

percent between January 2007 and March 2015 ($98 to $244) and gram purity

concurrently decreased 35 percent (67.1% to 43.6%) in this timeframe" (p. 92). However,

a gram of crack cost between $50 and $100 in the United States (Department of Justice)

(Department of Justice).

Judges used the sentencing guidelines to determine the length of time an offender

will serve for a drug related crime. The sentences however varied by the type of drugs an

individual was using and the ratio of sentencing from crack to cocaine powder users were

100:1. (Spohn, 2014). This is where the issue of race and disparities became apparent to

the public because more African Americans than whites were being sentence and for

longer period of times. (Larkin, 2014) also believed that the results for being arrested for using crack vs. cocaine has resulted in unfair sentencing for black drug traffickers vs. white. These sentences became controversial because laws were enforced mainly in urban communities, the prison population ratio of blacks to white were disproportionate, and African Americans received longer sentences for using crack than whites for trafficking powder cocaine. A report conducted by The World Drug report in 2010 stated that approximately 10.5 million people had used powered cocaine in 1982 (Chandra, Peters, & Zimmer, 2014). However, the mandatory minimum sentence for individuals arrested with 5 grams of crack cocaine was 5 years whereas those with 500 grams of cocaine received the same penalty (Cappellino, 2013). Therefore, this data supports the fact that African Americans were being targeted since they were mostly imprisoned for the use of crack. The prison inequality that began in 1986 due to the Anti – Drug Abuse Act has increased over decades and that black men are seven times more likely to be incarcerated than whites (Patterson, 2015).

The United States has an estimated number of 2.2 million of people incarcerated and half of that population make up individuals who were sentenced for drug offenses (Rogers, 2016). In addition to these staggering numbers, research has shown that in 198, drug offenses were at 41,000 and climbed to nearly half a million in 2014 (Rogers, 2016). According to Lynch & Omori (2014), Both black and Latino drug defendant were subjected to harsher sentences and that these sentences have been consistence in urban communities, especially during the rise of the "drug war". Researchers also viewed the sentencing among African Americans as extremely unfair and biased due to the chemistry

in both crack and powder cocaine being identical (Oleson, 2014). These findings support

the fact the theory of racism being linked to the war and Drugs and conveys to audiences

that despite the chemical design or affect the drugs has, sentencing has been linked to

who is using the drug as opposed to any other factor.

Buchanan (2015), mentioned a headline from the New York Times in 1914 which

was titled "Negro Coke Fiends". In this article, African Americans who used cocaine

were viewed as especially dangerous criminals and allowed them to endure bullets due to

their extreme strength and addiction to the drug. I provide this example from a historical

standpoint to convey that whichever drug was associated with African American and

their usage of it, they have always been perceived in a negative light. Fast forward to the

1980's and the most prevalent drug used among African Americans were crack cocaine.

This then became an excuse to target a specific community of people unfairly, despite the

usage of other drugs by whites and other races. Patten (2016) describes the War on Drugs

as a way to target "surplus populations" of minorities which included blacks, Mexicans,

and Chinese Americans. He believed that minorities were viewed as excess and this was

ultimately a method used by whites to reduce the number of people in the community and

take a new form of control.

Figure 2 below was retrieved from the National Institute on Drug Abuse and

conveys the number of deaths associated with from 2002 to 2015. This data represents

the number of men (3000 and above) and women (1000 and above), who died as a result

of using cocaine. (National Institute Drug Abuse, 2017). This government agency did not

present any detailed information regarding crack – cocaine as a cause of death and simply

merged all the data together. Yet, sentencing guidelines separate the uses of these two drugs and have harsher sentencing for crack over cocaine. This conveys the inconsistency in the government when crack cocaine and powder cocaine are the subject.

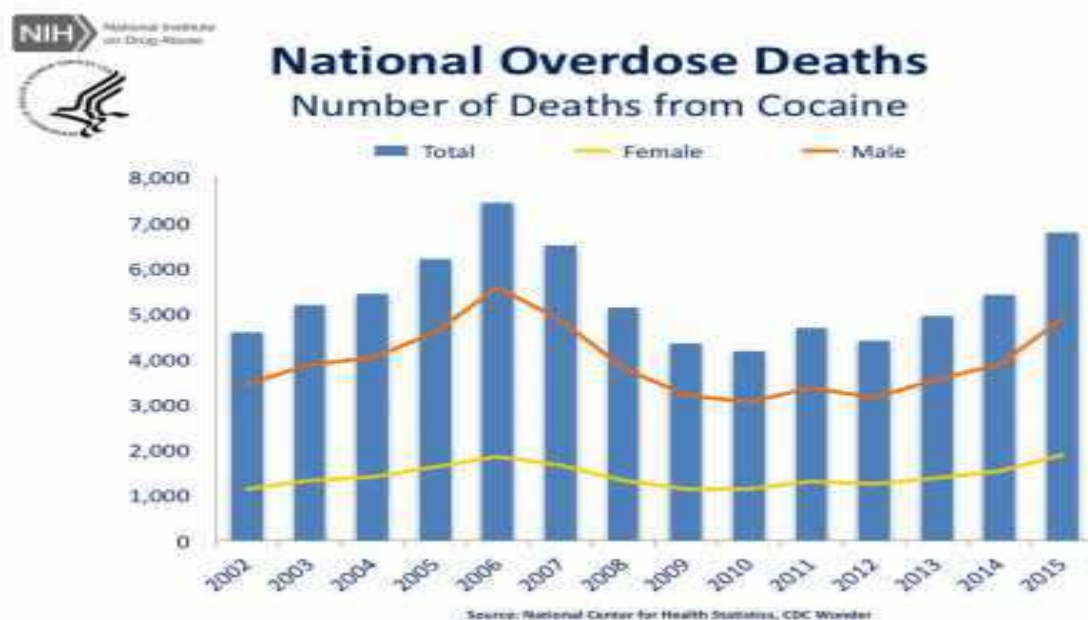*Figure 2*. National overdose deaths.

A national survey on drug use and health also conducted by the National Institute of Drug Abuse also indicate a comparison of crack and power cocaine in regards of who are more like to use it. "Trends in Prevalence of Various Drugs for Ages 12 or Older, Ages 12 to 17, Ages 18 to 25, and Ages 26 or Older; 2015 (in percent)". (National Institute Drug Abuse, 2017).

Table 2

Comparison of Crack and Cocaine According to Users

Drug	Time Period	Ages 12 or older	Ages 12 to 17	Ages 18 to 25	Ages 26 or older
Cocaine	Lifetime	14.50	0.80	11.70	16.60
	Past year	1.80	0.60	5.40	1.30
	Past Month	0.70	0.20	1.70	0.60
Crack	Lifetime	3.40	0.10	1.50	4.10
Cocaine	Past year	0.30	0.00	0.30	0.30
	Past month	0.10	0.00	0.10	0.20

Table 2 results states that over the course of one's lifetime, they are 16.60 percent more likely to use cocaine as opposed to crack cocaine which is a mere 4.10 percent. The data children are more there is a great percentage of minors who will indulge in the use of cocaine in their teenage years and their lifetime. Although statistics represent a great contrast in the number of people who use cocaine, the ratio of those arrested and sentenced for crack – cocaine is much higher than power cocaine users.

In 2010, President Barack Obama implemented the Fair Sentencing Act as a measure to reduce the disproportionate sentences for individuals using crack vs. cocaine. This act was created after meeting with men and women who suffered from drug abuse along with rehab coaches and individuals working towards alternative treatments. The purpose of it was to implement equal treatment while maintaining a strong justice system (Obama, 2017). Although this act passed the questioning of whether or not it applies to individuals who were incarcerated prior became an issue and ultimately the Supreme Court ruled against in Dorsey v. Unites States (Hudson, 2014). The D.C. circuit also ruled that offenders were unable to have their sentences reduced based on the "guideline range" which is the criminal history of the individual and the level of the offense along

with those who avoided the minimum sentence by assisting authorities (Divita, 2015).

Research in the literature has shown that not everyone does not agree with the current

sentencing guideline here in the United States and that judges should be able to override

the guidelines set by the sentencing commission when a mistake is apparent, and the

decision is fitting (Fish, 2015). It is also believed that the United States Sentencing

Commission is responsible for mass incarceration as they continue to impose harsh

sentencing guidelines for drug offenses and unwilling to give judges leeway in decision

making (Adelman,2013). Therefore, with all these issues interconnecting and African

Americans being the predominant race incarcerated, unfair sentencing is apparent and

clearly affecting this race more than others.

The attention given to crack cocaine and the unfair sentencing of offenders have

been overlooked by many. Although President Obama has made the effort to reduce the

sentencing ratio, there has more attention paid to other drugs and resources available for

those affected by addicted (Rogeburg, 2015). Rogeburg (2015), also added the harm

reduction movement has had the biggest effect on drug policy reforms and great

emphasis is geared towards policies that promote health and reduce the harmful effects of

drug use. For example, heroin has become a popular drug in the United States and the

predominant population to use this drug are Caucasians young to middle age who come

from a "good" background (non-criminal) (Monnat,2016). It has also become one of the

biggest drug issues among regions in the United States. To assist with the rapid amount

of deaths due to opioid addiction the government implemented the uses of naloxone

(commonly known as Narcon) by professionals including law enforcement to reverse the

effects of an overdose. In an article written by Chinook (2004) entitled "My spirit lives",

she shared how medical personnel used Narcon in addition to a defibrillator to restart her

heart. Although this is very beneficial to society, the government is seeking a way to

assist those who are suffering from opioid addiction, yet in the African American

community, preventative measures are not being taken. The answer is to simply

incarcerate individuals instead of finding a positive way to rehabilitate them.

Incarceration and the Family Structure

The declaration of the War on Drugs has since impacted family life of African

Americans. Prior research has depicted that the incarceration of an offender increases the

likelihood of them not accumulating wealth and succumb to long lasting consequences

that are negative (Maroto, 2015). Research has also indicated that offenders are more like

to return to prison within 3 years of being released due to limited opportunities and the

stigma associated with being incarcerated (Feist-Price, Lavergne, & Davis, 2014).

Although, many prisons provide educational programs for offenders, the certification

received is also stigmatized by businesses and therefore education becomes the most

documented need of offenders upon release (Pryor, 2013).

(Wildeman, Turney, & Schnittker, 2014) describes incarceration as a "hedonistic

consequences" that not only affects an offender happiness when in prison but long-term

and creates an instable family structure. Paternal incarceration can also affect the

household as is it can establish an environment for abuse between the caregiver and child

and also increase the likelihood of juvenile delinquency (Wakefield, 2015). Incarceration

also affects families because recidivism is likely to occur by the offender due to the lack

of employment, opportunities and challenges faced to create a better life for himself and

family (Mears et. al, 2016). Other studies have discussed incarceration and describes it as

"catastrophic" to the black community as it impoverishes it, increases the likelihood of

marriages and relationships failing due to financial retrains, negative behavior, the

disenfranchisement of civic right implemented by the government (De Giorgi, 2016).

These hardships combined can create an environment that becomes very challenging

where few can withstand and overcome.

Although marriage is a topic that is not so often discussed with incarceration it is

described by Heubner (2007) as an indirect form of social control geared towards

increasing positive behaviors among individuals. However, incarceration weakens

marriage because it reduces the number of resources and increases stress. This increases

greatly when the marriage was already fragile to begin with (Oldham, 2013). According

to Maroto (2015), accumulating wealth post incarceration is very unlikely. In fact, the

chances of home ownership and increase in one's network gradually decreases when one

is incarcerated. Therefore, this too can become overwhelming for the significant other

and cause a rift that is irreparable.

Incarceration of a spouse or significant other can also pose health risks to an

individual upon the offenders' re-entry into the community. Because the ex-offender may

not receive treatment once being released, there is a higher change of them engaging in

drug and substance abuse which can lead to infecting their partners with HIV or sexually

transmitting diseases (Hearn, Whitehead, Khan, & Latimer, 2015). (Knittel, Snow,

Griffith, & Morenoff, (2013), stated "Alternately, if the substance use decisions of

individuals who have been involved with the criminal justice system are affected by those experiences with the criminal justice system, then substance use mediates the relationship between criminal justice involvement and sexual decision-making" (p. 2713). Therefore, the consequences of incarceration go beyond the offender simply serving their time as it poses significant health risk to their significant other and determine the course of their life.

Incarceration also affects young children straight into their adult life. The literature has shown that parental incarceration can be deemed as parental loss for a child (Lerer, 2013). This experience can be very traumatic for a child and can define who they become in the future. Wilderman and Wakefield also discusses the link between a child's wellbeing and incarceration and their research has shown that there is an extremely high concentration of parental incarceration linked to children of African American decent (Uggen & McElrath, 2014). Incarceration also affects children and increases the chances of poor social attachments among children. The poor relationship develops with the incarcerated parents and stems to negative and unhealthy relationships with their peers (Miller & Barnes, 2015). Research conducted by Foster and Hagan (2015), found that 7.5 percent of African American children are most like to have a parent who is incarcerated and opposed to one percent of whites. They also found when comparing maternal and paternal incarceration that, paternal incarceration had a greater effect on the child which include aggressive behavior and how they negatively navigate through life. The literature continues to convey a link between The War on Drugs and African Americans seemingly

because the main individuals who are affected are indeed black and ranges from young to old.

Research conducted by Swisher et. al (2015), also conveyed that not only does parental incarceration affect children but paternal incarceration has a more severe impact on young adults and contribute to them going through issues such as depression, delinquency and engaging and displaying violent behavior. Children associated with parental incarceration who dwell in a single caregiver home are more likely to experience trauma as opposed to a child who is facing economic hardship with a similar single caregiver (Arditti & Salva, 2015). It is also found that young adults from paternal parents who are incarcerated mental health is affected along can display antisocial behavior and can also lead to a life of drugs and crime (James, 2015). Roberts et. al (2015), also found when comparing children who have been exposed to a parent being arrested to those who have not, that those exposed have increased levels of mental health challenges that vary by age. Therefore, the prior research has shown the importance of a male figure in the household and how the absence of it can greatly affect not only a child but specifically teenagers. They are at an awkward stage in their life that requires attention, guidance, and positive influences or else they can be on a path to destruction.

Impact of Incarceration on Ex-Offenders

Although the effects of incarceration extend to ones' family and loved ones, the impact it has on the offender themselves can determine the outcome of their lives and how they readjust to life after prison. Being imprisoned can drastically alter and damage someone's life as they are now associated with having a criminal record which increases

the likelihood of them being marginalized by the community, along with becoming socially disconnected from loved ones. (Rountree, 2014). In addition to this, individuals released from incarceration have a difficult time finding employment and gaining benefits associated with employment such as money and healthcare. Research has shown that ex- offenders do not receive adequate support for their healthcare needs (ex. Opiate use, Sexually Transmitted Infections, HIV), and can therefore further endanger themselves and others due to the lack of treatment (Erlyana, Fisher, & Reynolds, 2014).

Incarceration can also affect the psychosocial maturity of an individual. This means that ones' sense of responsibility, perspective and temperance come into question as they are unable to control themselves and their aggression along with logically assessing situations to seek the most positive outcome. This is highly contributed by confinement for long periods and is often seen in younger offenders (Dmitrieva, Monahan, Cauffman, & Steinberg, 2012). Hence researchers believe that the deinstitutionalization of prisons with an increase of treatment services for ex- offender suffering from challenges such as substance abuse, mental and primary healthcare (Frazier, 2015).

Although there is a plethora of stigmas associated with being incarcerated, financial hardship can affect an ex-offender the most. Being financially stable stems around receiving healthcare, being able to support oneself and their family by providing food, clothing and shelter and having access to legally obtain things an individual may want or need. (O'leary, 2013), states that having stable accommodations is an effective tool in reducing recidivism among ex- offenders. Of all the factors associated with the

lack of finances, finding secure housing is the most pressing matter. Many landlords are apprehensive in renting to an ex- offender and require large deposits if open to the idea. For an offender to benefit from The Homelessness Act of 2002, they must be considered a priority, unintentionally homeless and of some sort of connection to the location in which they desire to live (Mills, 2013). In most cases ex- offenders do not qualify still face many challenges if they do. Therefore, being economically stable provides a great benefit when re-entering society and the lack thereof results in hardships for the offender which affects their life and can result in them turning back to a life of crime as a means of survival.

Summary

This research focuses on a national level as the phenomenon occurring with the War on Drugs impacts African Americans all over the United States. The Sociological analysis of this issue will provide a more in – depth explanation of what is occurring within communities across America and will be the starting point of which advocates, and members of the community can band together to create positive solutions that reduces or eliminates the use of drugs on the street without affecting one specific group or race. Therefore, this current research should prompt and inspire change in the legal system and their examination of mass incarceration from a cultural standpoint. Consequently, research examining the impact of the War on Drugs on Africans Americans that is administered by members of the community, additionally will contribute the knowledge of drug policies in the United States, the incarcerations of Black Americans and the repercussions that expands to the black community.

Additionally, chapter 3 will explore the research design used in this study and rationale,

ethnography, my role as a researcher and the issues of reliability and validity for my

proposed research.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative ethnographic study was to explore the perceptions of African American men, women, and young adults regarding how the war on drugs has impacted their lives. Researchers use a qualitative approach to share experiences and perspectives based on the participants who experienced the phenomenon (Taylor et al., 2015). Qualitative researchers suspend their assumptions, perspectives, and views to provide accurate data from participants and observations (Taylor et al., 2015). In this chapter, I explain the ethnographic approach I used, along with my role as a researcher, the rationale behind participant selection, instrumentation, data analysis, issues of trustworthiness, and procedures for an ethical the study.

Research Design and Rationale

The research question in this study addressed how the war on drugs has impacted the lives of African American men, women, and young adults and how its association with mass incarceration has become one of the crucial aspects in the demise of their community. From the perspective of racial threat theory, I analyzed how the war on drugs has been used as a method to systematically oppress African Americans to ensure that they would never obtain power or success. A qualitative approach was used to understand the consequences linked to paternal incarceration and the long-term impact on African American families (see Turney, 2014). There are different approaches taken in an ethnographic study. Examples include a critical ethnography, feminist ethnography, cognitive ethnography or an auto ethnography, however they all address a culture, members' views and beliefs, and their way of life. (Hammersley, 2018).

Ethnographic studies involve specific practices by the researcher. For example, the behavior of participants is studied in their natural environment as opposed to conditions created by the researcher. Data are collected through conversations, many of which are informal, and observations in the natural setting. The interpretation of the data includes understanding verbal descriptions and human interactions among participants (Hammersley, 2016). Prior researchers provided statistical data pertaining to mass incarceration using a quantitative approach. The goal of the current study was to conduct interviews and observations to understand the ways in which the war on drugs has impacted the African American community.

Two ethnographic approaches include an emic and an etic view. In an etic approach, the researcher creates viewpoints and classifies the participants based on his or her judgement. In an emic approach, the researcher gathers findings based on information and experiences detailed by the participants (Fielding & Fielding, 2013). The etic approach is often used to compare and contrast cultures, whereas an emic approach is used to refine results from an etic study by providing more in-depth and holistic data (Punnett et al., 2017). The emic method can reveal information that can lead to new research. Because the purpose of the current study was to examine how the war on drugs has impacted African Americans, I used an emic approach to provide detailed descriptions by participants. Additionally, I used critical ethnography directed toward adjustments in current drug policies to answer my research question.

To understand critical ethnography as it was used in this study, it is necessary to understand critical race theory (CRT). CRT was developed in the 1970s as advances

made during the civil rights era ceased and many activists, legal scholars, and lawyers believed that there was a regression in battling racism because subtler forms of racism were emerging within the community (Delgado, 2016). Tomas De La Garza and Ono (2016) describes CRT as an intellectual movement whose aim is to comprehend racism and the maintenance of White supremacy but also to provide a solution to the issue. CRT challenges racial hierarchy, and theorists who support this approach believe that the U.S. judicial system is designed to perpetuate White supremacy (Hawkins, Carter-Francique, & Cooper, 2016).

CRT provides a voice for people of color as they are oppressed (Cole, 2017). Capers (2014) asserted that "race permeates the back end of our criminal justice system" (p. 1). I used CRT within critical ethnography to examine the subject of racism with special emphasis on the penal system and how the war on drugs affects African Americans. This approach allowed me as member of the cultural group being researched to ensure that the participants' perceptions of the phenomenon were the focal point of the study. When conducting a qualitative study, it is imperative to understand the group being studied, and the critical ethnographic approach was used to examine how the war on drugs is used as a method of oppression.

Role of the Researcher

As the researcher, my goal was to interview African American men, women, and young adults about their association with the war on drugs and how their experience with it has impacted their life. I gained a deeper understanding of their challenges and the political, economic, and social stigma associated with the war on drugs. Kyvik (2013)

stated that there are six tasks associated with being a researcher: "(1) networking; (2) collaboration; (3) managing research; (4) doing research; (5) publishing research; and (6) evaluation of research" (p. 525). The practice of emotional intelligence by the researcher allows him or her to build rapport with the participants (Kyvik, 2013). This practice includes self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, open listening, and communication (Collins & Cooper, 2014). Researchers should consider the impact the study may have on participants and make decisions to minimize potential harm (Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, & Ormston, 2013). Protection of participants can be challenging; however, it is very important to the validity of the study. As the researcher it was my duty to be ethical throughout the study. Therefore, I feel an ethical obligation to highlight the unspoken phenomenon occurring in the African American community and present findings on the connection with the War on Drugs, mass incarceration of blacks and the long-term outcome it has on this community.

Community-based participatory research (CBPR) enabled me to conduct research on a sensitive issue. Problem solving must be approached on practice, organization, design, and policy levels. (Kemmis, McTaggart, & Nixon, 2013). CBPR is used to target children, adults, elders, families, and neighborhoods and is pertinent to community development (Kemmis et. al., 2013). I reside in the predominantly urban community that was studied and share the same culture. I saw to it that the voices of African Americans were the focal point of the study. Experiments such as the Tuskegee study have caused members of the African American community to distrust researchers and their motives. To rebuild this trust and acceptance, researchers should encourage community members

to be involved and informed on how the study is conducted (Hacker, 2013). My role as a researcher was to ensure the participants were comfortable throughout the process and maintained a sense of control over the study.

Because I reside in the community being studied and come from a similar culture, it was imperative that I remain impartial and not insert my personal feelings regarding incarceration of Blacks, drug policies, and the war on drugs. There is a balance of power when research is being conducted. The interviewer sets the tone for the interview based on design of the questions; however, the participants determine which data are revealed and the progression of the interview (Anyan, 2013). Challenges can arise as the interviewee may present questions to the interviewer relating to the topic (Anyan, 2013). In this case, the researcher should be prepared in having elusive techniques to maintain the integrity of the study and remain neutral in the data collection process (Anyan, 2013). Ultimately, the goal was to gather raw data from participants without creating bias as this will then affect the reliability and validity of the research. During this study biases surrounding the topic of race, what should be considered a legal and illegal drug and the debate over the length of sentencing for drug related crimes were presented. Therefore, I was ethically responsible not impose my beliefs throughout any portion of the study, and professionally evade questions that may be directed to me discussing my opinions or even being in agreeance with a participants' point of view.

Methodology

The method used to complete this project was through the critical ethnography process. Critical ethnographic studies seek to impart changes to a phenomenon that is

plaguing a specific culture and community. It provides a profound sense of understanding

that can only be brought to light by participants and their lived experiences (Creswell,

2014). Advocates for this approach believe that it contributes more to research as

opposed to simply a quantitative point of view of a study (Hammersley, 2013). Critical

ethnography has a political purpose that is linked to the point of views and experiences of

those apart of the phenomenon (Harvey, 2014). Ethnography primarily focuses on

understanding a culture and its meaning in their natural setting (Spradley, 2016).

Nonetheless, critical ethnography goes beyond studying cultures who are marginalized

and oppressed. Critical ethnography provides cultural awareness to mundane

phenomenon's and demands social justice for trivialized groups (Gordon, 2002).

Participant Selection

The selection of participants was from my personal contacts in addition to their

recommendation of individuals they knew who are experiencing the same phenomenon.

African Americans are men who have served their entire sentences or are on parole,

women, and young adults between the ages of 18 to 20 are the primary participants of the

study. 10 participants will be selected for each group and are the focus because past

research has indicated that this group has the highest drug related incarceration rates in

the United States and are most affected by current drug policies. Rosenberg (2016), states

that "literature demonstrates greater likelihood of Black involvement in the criminal

justice system through policing practices and sentencing policies for drug-related crime,

differences in sentencing practices and case processing, and the heightened disadvantage

Blacks face once they are removed from their communities, and upon return, as labeled

felons and drug offenders" (Rosenberg pp. 133). Hence, for this study, the participants selected will be solely African Americans as this will enable the focus to highlight their cultural and historical struggle associated with the American legal system.

Purposeful sampling was one of the criteria used to select key informants who have been impacted by the War on Drugs. It is widely used in qualitative research as identifies and selects cases that provides an abundance of information relating to the phenomenon (Palinkas, Horwitz, Green, Wisdom, Duan, & Hoagwood, 2015). Participant selection is often overlooked in qualitative studies; however, the selection of individuals is critical in determining the outcome of the study and how rich the information will be (Reybold, Lammert, & Stribling, 2013). The other criteria used to select participants was by way of snowball sampling. Snowball sampling is used in qualitative research as a non-probability-based convenience sample to which involves having original participants initiate linkages to potential participants (Griffith, Morris, & Thakar, 2016). Therefore, snowball sampling was practiced with the some of the men, women and young adult participants who met the requirements for being a part of the study which primarily meant that they were impacted by the War on Drugs, reside in an urban community and of African American decent. Hence, the selection of informants is as follows: African American men were chosen based on their criminal background and if they were incarcerated for a drug related crime. African American women, based on if they have a spouse of significant other that was incarcerated for a drug crime, and African American young adults were selected based on if they grew up in a household where one or both family member spent time in prison for a drug related crime. Understanding the events of

the informants' experiences in relation to the criminal justice system and the War on Drugs was vital, because they were exposed and impacted first handedly by the American criminal justice system and may experience prejudice and or racial discrimination as a result. Additionally, selected participants resided in an urban environment for the last 10 to 20 years. The observations and interviews associated with this study, studied participants in their natural setting to understand their way of life and how they cope and operate daily. It also focused on their personal accounts of experiences with the criminal justice system, interactions with individuals in their community, their mental health state, their lives pre - and post incarceration, and an in depth – look at the current challenges they face due to the current drug policies that plague them.

Noticeably, there were an unspecified amount excluded from the study along with some other ethnic groups in the United States. In ethnographic research, the researcher gets an up close and personal view of a specific group experiencing the phenomenon (Shover, 2012). Consequently, the whole African American community will not be used for this study as this would taint and invalidate the study due to broadening the parameters of the research. Therefore, African Americans in prison for crimes such as theft, rape, murder, and other heinous crimes were not a part of the study due to the nature of the crimes and the fact that it is not drug related. Ultimately, other ethnic groups were left out of this study as the goal was to provide a perspective based on racial threat involving blacks along with the impact of drug policies on specifically that group. Ergo, speaking to individuals of Hispanic decent, Asian Americans, White or Native Americans would have been proven futile to this study.

Instrumentation

Observations

The goal of this study was to use observations, interviews, field notes and audio-visual materials as tools to supply a voice for participants. The observation method that was being used for this study entailed a non-participant role. This role allowed me to view participants in their natural setting and observing their way of life, while being detached to enable me record and analyze the data more objectively as opposed to participating in events while observing (Takyo, 2015). The observation data is used as an auxiliary to the research as a method to confirm and compare to data retrieved from the interview process (Jamshed, 2014). Writing field notes in addition to permitted audio – visual recordings via cell phone can prove useful to the study as the observer can use the data as a reference in explaining the phenomenon.

I chose to use non- participant observation for this study to remain ethical, unbiased and objective throughout the research process. A participant observation would be intrusive to participants as it entails spending a significant amount of time with them in their personal space (Spradley, 2016). Therefore, a less invasive and less interrogative approach was used to observe participants. Several visits were made to participants to determine consistency among the data collected.

The observation process entailed travelling to see all thirty participants to spend time with them in their everyday lives. I initially conducted a descriptive observation to get a general review of their setting. I then narrowed my observation by accompanying them to activities and daily routines without actual participation and observe their

interaction with their family, friends, and people in their community. This was especially useful in gaining understanding of their way of life and assist in viewing the challenges they face. Lastly, I investigated their greatest interest and its elements along with their connection to it. My observations of participants concluded when I reached theoretical saturation. This process was conducted over a 6-month period; however, I was open to extending if there is additional data to acquire. For validity of the data, the use of audio footage from my cell phone was used in instances where it is deemed necessary to preserve the authenticity of the study. Ethical issues that may arise through the observation process included witnessing illegal behavior. In the event illegal behavior is witnessed, as the researcher I am ethically responsible to protect the confidentiality of the participant. It is highlighted on the informed consent forms provided to participants and should be strictly adhered to unless there is a threat for loss of life.

Interviews

Semi structured interviews allowed for me as the researcher to provide some organization regarding my research interest, however allowing flexibility to participants' and for responses to be unplanned and natural (Brinkmann, 2014). These semi – structed interviews produced by the researcher (see Appendix A) facilitates in providing intuitiveness idiosyncratic viewpoints of African Americans by contributing to notable data known about the criminal justice system, but from a solely Afrocentric perspective. Although a critical ethnography was implemented, it was however crucial, to leave room for open- ended responses when conducting an interview because the most vital information may not be available until a considerable amount of background information

is uncovered. Therefore, the initial base question focused on the participants' life prior to being involved in the criminal justice system. This allowed a comparison and contrast of the shift in their lives to be understood and to what capacity and to achieve this the Spradley (1979) model used.

A successful interview is one where the researcher is gains vital and valid information that enhances the study, however it is imperative that the researcher plan ahead and develop their technique along with a guide in which they will use to execute their interview (Doody, 2013). The Spradley model (1979) which consists of three steps will assist with the research becoming artificial and fixed during interviews. The first step is asking descriptive questions. Spradley (1979) stated "One key principle in asking descriptive questions is that expanding the length of the question tends to expand the length of the response" (pp. 85). Asking grand and mini tour questions provides the researcher of an in depth look of the participants knowledge regarding their environment and events along with assist with investigation of smaller aspects of a study (Spradley, 1979).

Secondly, structural questions are the second step of the Spradley model used for conducting interviews. Structural questions are tailored to the participant and should be used following a descriptive question as it requires an explanation to the previous question asked (Spradley, 1979). Lastly, contrast questions are suggested by Spradley (1979), to be used when conducting an ethnographic study. Spradley (1979), stated "contrast questions enable the ethnographer to discover dimensions of the meaning of which informants employ to distinguish the objects and events in their world" (pp. 60).

Each culture has specific terminology they use to describe things and their meaning. Therefore, asking contrast questions clarifies these and there eliminates assumption by the researcher. This model covered all bases used through the interview process and increased the validity and authenticity of the study.

The interview phase of this study included all thirty participants as well. However, due to participants residing in 5 different cities of Essex County New Jersey, some interviews were conducted via phone and in person. Informed consent is strictly provided in person to build rapport with participants and interviews will only conducted once this process is completed. Informed consent does not simply include providing information to participants. For it to be valid, the researcher must ensure that the participants understand what they're being educated about along with all aspects of the research, the processes and the risks involved (Schofeld, 2014). My informed consent form (See Appendix A) includes both the benefits and possible risks associated with the study as required by the United States federal regulations. The consent form communicates:

1. Declaration that the study requires research.

2. Reasoning of selection of the subject.

3. Disclosure of researchers identify and pertinent roles.

4. Clarification of purpose of research that is comprehensible to participants.

5. Explicit explanation of procedures.

6. Extent of subject's participation.

7. Statement that participants' involvement is optional.

8. Affirmation of no penalty for discontinuation or refusal of participation.

9. Explanation of anticipated risks or inconvenience.

10. Description of foreseeable benefits to participants and others.

11. Details regarding compensation for participation.

12. Explanation of maintenance of confidentiality.

13. Researchers contact information.

14. Individuals contact information regarding participants rights (Walden University Representative).

15. Statement regarding participants retaining a copy of informed consent form

16. Documentation for participants in a language comprehension able to them.

17. Statement regarding that no legal rights would be asked to be waived.

18. Indication that research is non-experimental

Both the researcher and potential participant will sign and date the consent forms in person. If the participant was unable to meet, their formed was able to be signed electronically via email by responding "I consent". All documentation was secured on a hard drive that is password protected. Being flexible and providing convenient methods of contact for participants is very important as I do not want to disrupt the flow of their everyday lives. Therefore, in addition to personal contact and via email, secure phone calls were established to reach participant throughout the research. Also, to ensure eliminate gaps in the interview questions, experts that included methodologist and community leaders will be used to verify to inclusiveness of the instrument.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Clarification of the data source is pertinent to effectively exploring and analyzing the research question through ethnographic interviews and observations that are culturally sensitive. Key informants in research provide in depth knowledge that is unavailable to researchers and their perspective on what is beneficial to their community should be carefully evaluated (Lewis, 2015). Eurocentrism has long been used to represents black culture and explain racism and minimizes oppression within the west (Shohat & Sham, 2014). This study greatly varied from a Eurocentric perspective as blacks were given a voice to narrate their experiences through their own eyes and not was is presumed by others who have not experience the phenomenon. Hence both the observations and interviews depicted accurate and valuable results from those impacted from the War on Drugs and not, outsiders who are making assumptions regarding their struggles.

Key informants are used as a representative for his or her affiliates within the black community as they are able to obtain access that wouldn't normally be obtained as an outsider. Also, to recruit additional participants, informants who agreed to the study recommended participants they believed shared experiences pertaining to the War on Drugs. After careful consideration of the information received from the initial informants, I determined which additional participants would be beneficial to the study. The potential participants were then be contacted by their associates who agreed to the study and asked if they would like to participate in the study anonymously. After confirmation, the potential participant was be contacted via phone, face to face, or email and presented with the consent form. Additional conversations were made to determine their availability to

begin conversing and were once again assured that the study was confidential and its purpose.

Along with the recruitment process, participants were reminded that participation is voluntary, and they can with draw from the process during anytime of the study. Building rapport is vital to the success and validity of the study, and to do so, I conversed with participants to arrive to a consensus on the researcher/participant relationship and what is wanted to come from the study. Along with building rapport actively listening, the transference of control to participants and pausing provided participants with a chance to become comfortable and trusting and thus increasing the accuracy of the study (El Asam & Samara, 2015). Being of similar cultural background as participants allowed for building of trust to be easier and as a result, I was able to retrieve more information that goes below the surface.

Data pertaining to the semi-structure interviews was collected in person, via e-mail, phone calls or video chats (skype and wats app). Various methods of collection were administered to cater to the needs and availability of participants without great disruption to their daily schedules. To ensure all aspects of the interviews were saturated, additional interviews are set in place. This increased the emergence of patterns among participants (Young, 2007). Field notes were also during interviews and while observing participants in their natural setting to ensure the maximum amount of data was retrieved. Audio recording facilitated the data collection process and was used to refer to data to secure reliability. As said earlier, all participants will be kept abreast of steps throughout the research. It is also very common for them to become upset throughout the process as

their lives are an open book. Therefore, contact for therapeutic services was be made available via contact sheet (Appendix B) to them as mental health issues are a serious concern and should be addressed. In the event a participant admits to illegal drug use, I inquired into the reason behind their usage for research purposes, suggest and provided resources for them to receive assistance in battling this issue. However, the confidentiality aspect of this was upheld as the information provided is uncensored and strengthens the research as opposed to the participant withholding information, which would have then distorted the information and validity of the study.

Data Analysis

As mentioned earlier, data for this study was collected using observations, interviews, and field notes. It was then be organized in the form or hard copy and on a hard drive to understand the phenomenon to assess emerging patterns. There is no specific method in which a researcher should analyze qualitative data, therefore the approach is dependent on the researcher and the technique most suitable for them to dissect and understand the data (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2013). The first step in data analysis is to understand the information retained.

To analyze the qualitative data for this study, I used coding (Saldaña, 2015). Coding uses a series of phrases, sentences, and words and provides labels to information retrieved (AlYahmady & Alabri, 2013). The data was coded electronically and stored using the computer software program NVivo. NVivo allows the researcher to develop themes and patterns from existing data gathered and increases the process of managing a great deal of data. It also eases the analysis process by managing data and increasing the

organization of transcripts, documents, and audio-visual material, manage ones' ideas, model visually by the use of graphs and charts and querying data (AlYahmady & Alabri, 2013).

To discover themes from the data gathered, I utilized Opler's (1945), strategy for unearthing them. They include understand that themes are an evident expression of the data, they are both subtle and apparent, it relates to how frequently a specific piece of data emerges, how prevalent it is among the culture being studied, the reaction of participants to the theme and the degree of which the context of the theme is controlled (Bernard, Wutich, & Ryan, 2016).In addition to this approach, the questions to participants were consistent, notating similar responses while conducting interviews and first broadly analyze the data and narrow it down to arrive to a conclusion.

Reliability, Validity, and Triangulation

The reliability and validity of any research is often questioned, with great emphasis on the instrument used by researchers used to the gather data (LoBiondo-Wood & Haber, 2014). When understanding validity, one must understand it consist of two components: internal and external validity. Internal validity questions whether the participants selection, the recording and analysis of data, while external validity surrounds the generalizability of the study and it can be transferred to other populations (Lakshmi & Mohideen, 2013). Therefore, for any research to be respected and useful, the credibility of the study must be conveyed by the researcher and data should be well – founded. Building trust with participants and checking for misinformation played a substantial role in overcoming issues with validity.

For a study to be valid, the sources of information must be reliable. In qualitative research, reliability is founded upon the consistency of the data that is presented (Leung, 2015). Refutational analysis, inclusive data usage, the comparison of data constantly, the inclusion of abnormal cases and use of tables were the proposed approaches by suggested by silver (2009) to amplify the reliability of a study. Issues of reliability can occur throughout many phases of the study which include data collection, data analysis, instrumentation. Therefore, it is imperative to plan to avoid these issues from occurring.

To attain both validity and reliability of this research, the incorporation of triangulation was included. Triangulation is used to develop a clear understanding of the phenomenon by assessing consistency of the data retrieved (Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, & Neville, 2014). Triangulation can be defined by using multiple methods of collection and analysis to ensure the credibility of a study (Hussein, 2015). Therefore, the data collection methods of observations, interviews, field notes and audio recordings via cell phone were used as tools to ensure that the data was consistent across the board when engaging with participants. Previous data on the topic of the War on Drugs were also included in the triangulation process to convey that findings are not of any bias, since I share a similar cultural background as participants. In addition to this triangulation, I found that an external auditor would be beneficial in assessing the accuracy of the study by assessing the process and product and therefore was be implemented.

Ethical Procedures

One of the main aspects of research and as a researcher is to remain ethical throughout the entire process. Ethical procedures protect the integrity of the research and the researcher against antagonist who may oppose the reliability and validity of the study (Mulvey, 2015). Being ethical requires one being honest and transparent and allowing the participants to be fully informed of all aspects of the study and to decide if they would like to be a willing participant. Vanclay et. al (2013), stated:

The identified ethical principles include: respect for participants, informed consent, specific permission required for audio or video recording, voluntary participation and no coercion, participant right to withdraw, full disclosure of funding sources, no harm to participants, avoidance of undue intrusion, no use of deception, the presumption and preservation of anonymity, participant right to check and modify a transcript, confidentiality of personal matters, data protection, enabling participation, ethical governance, provision of grievance procedures, appropriateness of research methodology, and full reporting of methods (Vanclay, Baines, & Taylor, 2013).

Informed consent forms were distributed to participants either in person or via email. These documents once signed were scanned, received in person or downloaded if received via email, and was then be saved onto an external hard drive that was password protected, in addition to being saved to in a secured electronic database. Physical copies will be destroyed furthermore to ensure participants privacy and to protect the integrity of the study. This all occurred once approval from the IRB was provided to move forward with the data collection process. Participants were also be reminded of their anonymity

and confidentiality during and after their participation in the research and their legal right to withdraw at any time they deemed fit.

The collected data was safeguarded and remained unsourced after the interviews were completed. To ensure anonymity of participants, they were assigned aliases by way of initials, at the beginning of process and doing so, the data could connect, and trends emerge while triangulating the sources. Erasing and destroying once the study has been completing is essential to maintaining confidentiality and anonymity of participants. To erase and destroy hard drives, Garner products offer several products which includes a TS-1 internal field checker, HD-3WXL, PD-4 destroyer and PD- 5 destroyer (Slahor, 2015). Also, to destruction of the hard drive should be done after 3 years to ensure the study and any opposition to has subsided (Nosek, Banaji, & Greenwald, 2002). Therefore, information surrounding the study will not be revealed unless written consent is provided by the participant.

Summary

By conducting a qualitative research through a critical ethnographic approach, I was able to effectively understand the impact of The War on Drugs on blacks in America and how life pre- and post - prison can steer the course of their live. Critical ethnographic interviews through an emic view along with the observation participants in their natural setting provided raw and authentic data that highlights the phenomenon through the eye of those experiencing it. In Chapter 4, I will discuss the observations the interview and its setting, participants demographic, the data that was collected, how it was analyzed and the results pertaining to this sensitive issue that is affecting blacks in America.

Chapter 4: Results

The goal of this study was to provide a platform in which members of the African American community who were impacted by the war on drugs could report their perceptions. The research question that guided this study was the following: How has the war on drugs impacted the lives of African Americans? This question related to all participants in the study and allowed me to examine their experiences as reported in their own words.

In this chapter, I present a detailed description of the findings. I also describe the demographics of the participants, the data collection process, how the data were organized, the data analysis process, and evidence of quality. The chapter concludes with a summary.

Participants

The focus of the study was perceptions of African Americans who resided in urban communities in the Northeast United States. The 30 participants consisted of 10 men, 10 women, and 10 young adults who were at least 18 years of age. The participants' background varied. Table 3 presents the demographics of each participants by their age, gender, residential area, highest education, and current occupation.

Table 3

Participants' Demographics

Participant	Age	Gender	Highest Education	Residential Area	Occupation
M.M.	35	M	Highschool	Orange	Waiter
M.S.	33	M	Highschool	Irvington	Warehouse Technician
M.T.	35	M	College	Patterson	Unemployed
S.H.	33	M	Highschool	Newark	Unemployed
N.S.	39	M	College	Newark	Train Conductor
M.G.	35	M	Highschool	Irvington	Unemployed
J.F.	35	M	Some college	East orange	Mechanic
H.A.	33	M	College	Irvington	Veterans Am
P.H	34	M	Highschool	East Orange	Unemployed
A.O.	33	M	College	East Orange	Engineer
J. B.	30	M	College	Newark	Nurse
K.B.	34	W	College	Orange	Teacher
R.P.	41	W	College	Patterson	Teacher
C.D.	34	W	College	Newark	Child Welfare
J.D.	30	W	College	Orange	Office Assistant
T.D.	35	W	College	Patterson	Unemployed
S.S.	35	W	College	Newark	Teachers' Aide
P.T.	42	W	College	Newark	Teacher
K.W.	39	W	College	Irvington	Morgue Technician
R.J.	18	M	Highschool	Orange	Unemployed
A.F.	19	F	Highschool	Newark	Home Health Aide
J.B.	19	M	Highschool	Newark	Sales Associate
A.O.	20	F	Some College	East Orange	Teacher's Aide
J.L.	20	M	Highschool	East Orange	Sales Associate
R.T.	19	F	Highschool	Patterson	Cashier
G.B.	19	F	Highschool	Irvington	Security
M.B.	20	F	Highschool	Patterson	Sales Associate
D.V.	20	M	Trade School	Newark	Construction worker
L.L.	20	F	College	Irvington	Retail

The purpose of the study was to understand how African Americans' lives had been impacted by the war on drugs; therefore, I did not include participants of other races (i.e., White, Asian, Hispanic, etc.) as it would have shifted the focus and affected the validity and reliability of the findings. I also chose to study participants in urban settings because there is a large African American population in these areas and high arrest rates for drugs.

Data Collection

The 30 participants were selected from my personal contacts and through contact referrals over the course of 6 months. The sampling I used for this study consisted of both purposeful and snowball sampling. This enabled me to extend the study and have a deeper understanding of the individuals who may have been unlikely to come forward and share their experiences. Participants NS, MG, and PH were referred by the other male offenders who were a part of my personal contacts. Participants KW, PT, SS and JD were introduced to me by my personal contacts who knew of others having similar experiences to what they were going through. The young adults JB, JL, RJ, and AO were contacted through two of my personal contacts, and GB, LL, DV, MB, RT, and AF were referred through the initial young adults who were interviewed through my personal contacts. The individuals who were my personal contacts provided the background and purpose of the study to friends or associates they knew, informed these people that they were a part of the study, and asked if the individuals would like to share their experiences as well. A level of trust existed with those from my personal contacts, and they highlighted this when asking others to participate in the study. Before interviews, all

participants were provided with consent forms to review and sign. Forms were collected personally by me and uploaded to a hard drive that is password protected.

For this study, the data was collected using an emic approach. An emic approach is used to describe participants' thoughts and actions primarily in terms of their self-understanding (Morris, Leung, Ames, & Lickel, 1999). The participants were provided with the choice of where they would like the interview to be conducted as their comfort was the priority throughout this process. Some participants opted for a video via Face Time due to scheduling conflicts, and in-person interviews were recorded using a recording application on an Android phone. The video chat interviews were also recorded on an Android phone while Face Time was conducted on an iPhone. TD, NS, and LL were the only participants who chose video chat. PH and JD declined being audio recorded as they expressed discomfort; however, they committed to being a part of the in-person interview and observation.

In-person interviews were conducted in different locations including the participant's home and an outdoor setting that was selected by the participant. Most of the participants were comfortable being interviewed in their home due to the sensitivity of the topic and to maintain their privacy. These accommodations were not difficult to manage, and I felt it was my duty as the researcher to ensure the participants were not further victimized or violated. In addition, privacy allowed the participants to be more forthcoming and frank with their responses. The presence of a third party during the interview might have interfered with the response process, possibly causing participants to misreport information (especially that of a sensitive nature) or to rely on others present

during the interview for answers to questions (Mneimneh Zeina, Tourangeau, Pennell, Heeringa, & Elliott 2015). Participants selected the location and duration of the interview. The participants were also made aware that there was no specific date or time and were encouraged to choose a date and time that would be convenient for them and would prevent unwanted disruptions. Participants PH and JD opted out of being audio recorded , but they answered the interview questions in person and allowed observations to occur.

Interview recordings were transcribed and transferred to a password-protected computer and saved on an encrypted hard drive by the researcher. This allowed me to refer to the interviews and ensure my notes matched what was said. Furthermore, the interview questions used for each group (men, women, young adults) were the same to enhance the validity of the study.

Data Organization

The data gathered through ethnographic interviews were organized through journaling and audio recordings. Audio recordings were also used as an additional resource to ensure that no details were missed, and I can review all the information given to ensure that I am analyzing valid information. The observations collected were organized through journaling as well. Journaling was very helpful through this process as it enabled me to reflect what was being told on paper so that I can refer to it later on, and clearly analyze what the participants was trying to convey. Journaling provides an opportunity to practice reflective thinking (Woodbridge& O'Beirne, 2017).

During the first few weeks, I reached out to the participants to determine if they would like to be a part of the study. I firstly focused on the men of the study who were past offenders. I felt this was the basis of the study as they were the ones who experiences the impact of the War on Drugs first hand and directly by way of incarceration. Along the way I was received referrals for additional men, women and young adults who was believed to benefit the study and I reached out to them as well. The participants for the study were grouped by Male (released offenders), Women (significant other) and young adults. This was done to highlight how each group is affected by the War on Drugs and the interview questions were tailored to their specific group and role.

When examining these groups, I began to focus on their responses to the descriptive questions which assisted in the clarification of the participant views on how the War on Drugs has personally affected their life. The question "How would you describe your current mental health since being affected by the drug policies and penalties? Was the gap in the study as many studies do not focus on how one's mental health can be affected by the War on Drugs. The responses to this question varied across the board but there were two main issues that were highlighted. Anxiety and Depression. Many of the participants spoke about being depressed and having to pick up the pieces to get themselves back together. Participants also highlighted that they had hit rock bottom and had to regain the strength to continue. The women participants especially spoke of this as they were left to fend for themselves and those that had children. 7 out of the 10 male offenders who were interviewed also highlighted that they experienced anxiety, depression or even both. The young adults in this study mental health focus were manly

those of anger as they had challenges and resentment toward their parent who was incarcerated.

Data Analysis

As discussed in Chapter 3, the data analysis plan was implemented with outcomes that provided a great depth of information. To focus on highlight trends with words and phrases I utilized the NVivo coding software to assist with the analysis process. NVivo is associated with implications of rigor, however in addition to using this approach, the researcher employed imaginative insight as they attempt to make sense of the data and generate understanding and theory. (Maher, Hadfield, Hutchings, & de Eyto, n.d). Therefore, to gain deep insight on understanding the phenomenon, I applied the NVivo software in addition to my skill as a researcher to make connections among the participants and understanding the trends that developed based on the observations and interviews that took place. I grouped participants as follows men (ex-offenders), women (significant other), and young adults. A great part of the interviews included audio recordings that occurred with the participants permission. This not only allowed me to have resources to refer to in detail, but I was able to utilize this in NVivo to uncover further themes that I may have missed by simply transcribing the notes. Themes that were present included "Depression, Anxiety, rehabilitation and voting". Social research update (2010) stated that "The software facilitates working with audio according to the same processes we are accustomed to with transcripts: systematic and rigorous analysis, enabling one to work through an entire interview without neglecting sections, annotating and memo-ing along the way etc. It also has the advantage of enabling the researcher to

move swiftly between codes and audio excerpts, keeping the researcher close to the original data". This ultimately enabled the research being conducted to be strengthened and fully assessed in all aspects to ensure the most accurate data would be presented to audiences.

Ethnographic Interview Questions and Feedback

As stated in chapter 3, the interview questions were implemented by using the Spradley (2003) model to assist with allowing the dialogue to run smoothly and allowing the participants to have the opportunity to provide their views freely and with less restriction. The questions were broken down into a series of descriptive, structural and contrast questions that differed for the men (ex-offenders), women (significant others), and the young adults who were between the ages of 18 to 20. All participants were also asked the same background questions to provide an understanding of their history and where they came from. The goal of the descriptive questions was to establish the understand of how The War on Drugs affected the participants and for them to give their own account of how it impacted their life. Initials were also used to address the participants (see. Table 3), and their responses are based on the those who shared responses that were similar in addition to specific key words. This was all based on the questions asked to each group.

How would you describe your life prior to be? This question was presented to the male participants who are ex- offenders, and there were many similarities among their responses. For example. N.S. who spent time in prison for Trafficking cocaine stated, that he was trying to find purpose and was trying to navigate through life without a father and

guidance. He added that he had a mother who was doing the best she could, but it was up to him to find his way.

N.S.'s views were repeated by many as these participants saw that they had a sense of duty to fend for themselves and make a way by any means necessary to ensure there was financial stability. J.F. stated "I grew up in a poor inner city and struggles with the other kids with a similar background". As S.H. puts it, "Life was rough growing up with a single parent and had to do what I had to do to make ends meet". When asked A.O. stated "I live the average life, I went to school but had to continue paying for school and did what I needed to. H.A. stated,

> "I felt like a charity case, I had the basics bed, roof and clothes. I did not grow up in love. I had the basic necessities but did not recall telling or giving love at home".

What were your experiences like while being incarcerated? There were two trends that emerged when the male (ex- offenders) participants were asked this question. It was split between some participants focusing on the challenge of being locked away and other participants used that time to learn new things whether positive or negative. AO. stated that he felt like a caged animal and it was a reality shock as everything was on a schedule. M.M. stated that it was rough because there was no freedom or preference and he was unable to do as he pleased. M.S stated that it was terrible being locked down for 23 hours, having no freedom, there was bad food and also the fights that occurred on a regular basis just made him not want to be there. In addition to those challenges.

Participants P.H., M.G. and S.H. highlighted that they missed their families and there was a disconnect as visits with them became lesser and lesser.

In contrast, J.F stated that it was a learning experience where he was able to get physically fit and learn lessons from other inmates which was beneficial. Another example of the variation to the other participants responses were N.S who stated, Incarceration was the cocoon stage where he had to be himself and was forced to learn about himself. M.T. view was that he learnt a lot however he stated, he was able to learn a lot of positive and negative things. Learnt survival skills and better ways to "hustle" from other inmates. H.A. also indicated that, he had a lot of time to work out and read books to expand his mind.

How would you describe your experiences once being released from prison? The primary themes when analyzing the responses for this question focused on the financial hardship associated with reentering society and the lifelong stigmas attached with being an ex- offender. Participants like A.O, M.T, H.A, N.S, P.H, MG, J.F and M.S. all highlighted the struggle associated with gaining employment and how the odd are against you once you are deemed an ex-convict. Thus, as stated by A.O, "I was free at last, but I had to adjust back to society which was difficult as I had a tarnished record. It felt like a handicap and I had a cloud looming over me everywhere I went". More so, as stated by H.A "I was happy at first and tried to do my best. Things were not expected as I thought. There was disillusion and having to have the background checks for jobs made it a struggle to gain employment" N.S. stated in his response to the question that "There were ups and downs. Having opportunities squandered, being turned down at job interviews

and understanding there would be certain things that I can't do anymore then showed me that this was a lifelong journey.

Describe the different ways incarceration affected you as an individual? This question was great importance as they allowed the participants to share a bit of who they are now and how incarceration has molded them into who they are today and their thought process behind things and life itself. One theme that was highlighted with 5 out of the 10 male ex-offenders was trust. P.H simply stated, "I trust less", Participants also said similar responses. For example, M. G. stated that trust was hard when he had to transition. J.F. stated that he was traumatized, do not trust others and learnt about crime due to being imprisoned. M.S. stated that "being incarcerated greatly strained relationships and I felt like an outcast and had difficult trusting people. S.H. shared that it is harder to trust people and did not elaborate further.

The other five male participants responded to this question differently and really highlighted the positive outlooks that one can get or arrive to from being incarcerated. For example, M.T. stated that his self-esteem took a hit and there were financial struggles however he learned how to survive and carried that with him in the future. M.M. shared his view on this question and responded by saying that the realization of no freedom motivated him to be a better person. A. O. response was similar as he stated that he learned not to take things for granted and to rise above the challenges and incarceration was a wakeup call. N.S. stated that he learnt to direct his actions towards positivity and was able develop spirituality, learned history and had a positive transformation due to being incarcerated. H.A. views on this question when asked was that incarceration was

enlightening, it made him aware of the system and learned how to be a soldier by having limited resources available to him.

How would you describe your current mental health since being affected by the drug policies and penalties? In this section I will first highlight the responses of the male participants although all 30 participants were asked this specific question. Mental Health is a very sensitive subject regardless of gender. I find it especially sensitive for men as it can be deemed as a sign of weakness, However, the men were open and transparent in expressing their current state. Through this process, I was able to discover that 7 out of the 10 male participants who experience depression, anxiety and some experienced both. M.S. stated that "Some days I am depressed especially when there was no employment. It will make you want to go back to your past life. It affected my family life greatly. P.H. stated "I get depressed when I see myself still on my mom couch". M. T. responded to this question by sharing that there is array of emotions he felt. They included anger, stress, frustration and depression which he felt sorry for himself. He added that every day is different, but depression is hard to avoid when there are kids to feed and a shortage of income. M.G. expressed that he was anxious and tried to stay positive and also felt depressed that he is unable to provide for his family and even considered re-offending to make ends meet but thought about his kids. A.O. also expressed anger towards the world at one point but there is a sense of lingering anxiety that stays with him. With respect to the struggle of anxiety, M.M stated "I worry about if you come across the cops. Seeing a cop car makes me scared and I am unsure of what can happen and what illegal stuff can take place to get me back incarcerated". J.F. shared similar sentiments and stated "I

straighten up when I see cop and not act like a criminal. Look straight ahead because there is a sense of fear". In contrast to those responses there were male (ex-offenders) participants who felt differently in regard to their mental health being affected by the drug policies and penalties. For example, S.H. stated that he is happy because he is free. H.A. stated, "I have enlightenment and am more inquisitive and that one man can't defeat the system".

N.S stated,

My mental health is that I am headstrong. I had an idea of what I was going to do while in there (prison); read, workout. This is chess and I strategically structured the situation. I prepared myself to heal while on the inside and while there was able to pull others out of their situation and mindset.

After asking the descriptive questions to the male participants who ae ex-offenders, I then focused on the structural questions to dive deeper into who they are as an individual and for them to reflect on their past decisions and who they are now.

What led you to a life of drugs? I asked this question to provide the participants with an opportunity to share their background and reflect on what led them to the life they lead today. Too many times, we as a society make assumptions on what led individuals to decisions they make. Therefore, this question provided the participant with a voice to share their own story and the way they interpret it. There were several themes that were developed from this question. They include financial struggle and loss or lack of a parent being present. 7 out of the 10 male participants discussed making easy money is what led them to a life of drugs and being able to financially attain things that they felt

they would not be able to otherwise. Participants like J.F., M.G, M.T. A.O., S.H, P.H., and M.S. believe that drugs provided fast and easy money that would assist them in achieving their goals. The goals for these participants however varied, however, their involvement in drugs was to have financial freedom. For example, M.T, stated "There was economic hardship and a lack of money. I was going to school and doing well academically and used drugs as an outlet to pay for school and also for myself". M.G. views regarding what led him to a life of drugs states that "Growing up on the projects was not easy and it was not easy to get jobs, so I used drug as an easy way to get out. J.F. stated "Drugs was the way of life. We used it for trade of good and services in my neighborhood to make money. It was what was available in my neighborhood".

The responses of some of the other male participants varied from the others listed above. For example. H.A. discussed feeling like a lost child and not having anyone as his parents were drug addicts. N.S. also highlighted living in the fast life and having fast money but added that the absence of a father in his life allowed him to find comradery among his peers and chose a path that glorified the fast money and lifestyle he was witnessing around him. M.M also added that he was trying to fit in with his peers.

What goals did you set for yourself upon being released from prison? The responses from the male (ex- offenders) n regards to this question was very similar across the board. Their responses focused on the betterment of themselves and making positive choices to elevate themselves in addition to simply not returning. Participants like M.G., J.F, S.H., M.T. and M.M. discussed making better choices and staying on the straight and narrow path and to apply the lessons learnt to achieve a better life and avoid being

imprisoned once again. More so, as stated by A.O, "Being incarcerated sparked an entrepreneurial mindset and trafficking taught skills that can be used for positive ways and to not accept limitations in life" Other participants like M.S., P.H, H.A and M.M. highlighted attaining a job, house and strengthening their familial bonds as goals for themselves upon release. N.S states,

> I created a 5year goal for myself upon release. They included finding a Queen that was suitable for me, encourage others to set goals and try to remain true to myself. Going to a Mets game, owning my own houses and business, playing the piano. I had a bucket list of things I wanted to accomplish. I still create yearly goals for myself and I try to tell people to create goals no matter how simplistic it may be.

What was the most challenging part transitioning back into society? The responses for this question had some similarities and variation. The similarities include the employment aspect and not being able to obtain it due to having a criminal record. H.A. stated "The hardest part was trying to find a job because overnight jobs were offered, but parole did not permit overnight work" M.S. views supports this statement further. When he stated that "People look at you differently and like a criminal not human". A.O. stated, "Getting people to recognize you for the new person you are and not your past was challenging".

However, some participants responses differed as their challenges focused on not re-offending and falling back into old habits. For example, M.G. stated "I was thinking of a way to not go back" Others like M.M. and M. T. highlighted the anxiety they had upon

their return to society and their interactions with law enforcement. S. H's response was also different from the others as he stated that,

> It's not waiting for someone to tell you when to go to sleep or when to wake up. I still got to look over my shoulder but it's not that bad. A lot of people look at me differently now. It's hard to say, "where's your boyfriend been"? and you have to tell people he's been locked up and so my relationship ended. Family members look at you different and overall nothing much really changed for except that.

Other participants responses like P.H. who stated that most challenging part was not knowing who to trust was not mentioned by others. While. N.S. stated,

> The most challenging part for him was "trying to establish everything that I once had and not getting caught up in trying to relive the past. I also had to start from the bottom and came home without clothes. That was my challenge. Also reading all of this information as far as history and culture and how do I apply it to a modern era. I would say those were more trying more than anything, but still remaining true to who I am and the experiences I went through.

These responses varied across the board and it was difficult to develop simply one trend as people come from different family backgrounds and may not have the support as some others who were incarcerated may have. I also want to highlight that some spoke about the anxiety about being immersed back into society. We all desire freedom in one form or another, however that freedom still has a price, and many are not left to think about the effects of one's mental health, and the effects that the legal system can have on an individual.

The next set of descriptive questions are geared towards the women (significant others) in this study. As mentioned earlier, these questions differed from that of the men and the young adults and their experiences with the War on Drugs occurred indirectly as they were not incarcerated. *How would you describe your lifestyle prior to your husband/significant other being incarcerated?* This question sparked similar responses with most of the participants as they shared that they had a good life and that there was additional income in the household which ultimately made family life easier and less strenuous. R.P even stated that,

> Life was pretty good. We were a team, we had dreams and aspirations. We wanted to get out of a neighborhood and life in a small town, you know, not too suburban but the city; for a better life, for him and for myself because he wanted to be lawyer, so we were going to pursue that

As C.D. stated,

> My lifestyle was pretty normal, I worked a regular 9 to 5 job but because of his lifestyle we were able to afford some extra stuff and I could just see a dress in the window and he would be like "Do you want it"? and I'd be like Oh yeah! There was some extra income and some extra things were able to do.

P.T. responded to this question by saying,

> It was good and the reason why I would say so is because I did not want for anything because his "job" that he was doing. We were driving, we could go shopping, living fly as they would say back then. He used to sell drugs so that's why I said we were living it up.

The overall consensus of this question presented similar responses, however there was one participant who responded differently as the lifestyle of the significant other ultimately affected their life and how to go about with their day to day life. As J.B puts it,

It was rough because of the things we used to do as far as dealing drugs. Like I use to have to be mindful of where I go and who I talked to. You know things like that and it affected me because I was always paranoid.

How would you describe your experiences when your husband or significant other was incarcerated? The primary purpose of this question was to understand how deeply these women were affected by the absence of their husband/significant other. The responses for this question had many similarities as well as these women shared the financial hardship experiences due to the partner not being in home and bringing in financial support whether it be legal or illegal. As K.W. stated "It was horrifying. How was I supposed to pay the bills by myself and take care of the family by myself? It was horrifying at the time". K.B. response to this question highlighted that, "he was the breadwinner and didn't mind paying the bills and that was a major help and now I'm stuck with providing for the things that I want and the things that my son needs. It just got really difficult. There were also trends in relation to this transition being difficult because children were involved. As S.S. puts it "everything was hard on me because of the bills and the kids". T.D stated It had been a struggle because of being unemployed and I have 2 young children to raise, so I had to depend on handouts" R.P describes it as,

First it was not too bad, but eventually it got harder because we just had a kid. My son was 1 when he got incarcerated, but I was handling everything on my own

and things then went downhill. The finances were a big issue because I had to use all our savings and we went from two income to one. With daycare and aftercare to pay for and we did not have people helping us like before so that was a bit difficult.

The other participant with S.S. as their initials from Newark though responses differed from the other participants as her the incarceration of her significant other took a toll on her entire life and how she functioned and interacted with others daily. She stated,

I would say that it was stressful, I felt like I was always under pressure trying to help him as far as sending him, money, I still had to go to work and take care of the kids in the school. Sometimes I would be so tired from up stressing and won if the lawyer was doing what he was supposed to do and what our options were and if he would go to prison or get off.

J.D. responded by saying "I felt alone, hated and left to pick up the pieces on my own" The overall theme that developed from the sub- themes of financial hardship and caring for one's family is hardship. These women whether they knew what their significant other was doing illegally was left to handle the challenges independently as they were not left with any other choice.

Describe what challenges you faced during your husband/significant other incarceration? The responses to this question was like the one previously presented above as the main trend among the challenges was based on finances and establishing independence. J.B., K.W., J.D, T.D., S.S, P.T., K.B., C.D. and S.S. all highlight the lack of finances in the home and the challenges of raising a child or children on a fixed

income, in addition to the additional bills one may acquire over the course of their life.
P.T. puts it as,

> His incarceration opened my eyes because now I had to be doing everything on
> my own. I thought about going back to college to finish my education and how do
> I go about doing it and be out there on my own.

J.B. stated,

> The challenges I faced was becoming my own woman. I depended on him
> financially and emotionally because I was so use to him being around all the time
> and taking care of me. Once he left, it was hard for me to be on my own and
> learning to be on my own two feet.

S.S. stated,

> I had no money! I did not have enough money for me. I worked but they said I did
> not qualify for much of anything because I worked and could not get assistance
> for anything. He was gone, and the money was not coming in so money was the
> main concern.

I would also like to highlight that 9 out of the 10 women participants who were affected by their significant others incarceration obtained college degrees before or after the incarceration and utilized that to provide a better life for themselves and their children. R.P. response differed from that one the other participants as it focused on the emotional toll, she experienced due to the absence of her significant other. She stated, "It took an emotional toll on me which led to frustration and depression where I needed to be medicated".

How would you describe your mental health since being affected by the drug policies and penalties? This question was posed to all participants; however, this section will highlight the responses of the women who were affected by the husband or significant other who was incarcerated for drug offenses. The two major themes that derived from this question were depression and anxiety. K.W. stated, "Depression took over many of times. Crying, suicide was thought about and I question the why of life". T.D. who was very emotional when asked this question stated,

> I had a break down and I ended up in a mental institution for a couple of months. They diagnosed me with depression. I had an overdose. My kids were taken away from me for a bit. It was really hard. I'm still taking counseling to cope, but it's really hard to depend on people.

K.B. stated,

> Am I strong yes, but I can't always be strong. When he was away, it took a toll financially and emotionally. I did not have anyone to talk to like my family because they knew the life he was living and the life I was living. I can honestly say, I struggled with depression because I was by myself. Some days it was hard to get out of bed. It took everything in me to get out of bed to do for me and my son. That feelings just never goes away, and I still have moments of it now.

S.S. discussed that,

> I would say I'm kind of depressed. They send people to jail and supposed to get them counseling but when they get out in the swing of things in the community. It's like they're black sheep. They talk a good game when you're int here and

don't help when you get out. This then affected me as I had to take on sole

responsibility for everything.

P.T. said,

At first, I was pissed at the government but then after really sitting down, I

realized I was depressed. I cried a lot because he was my rock and he was no lone.

Who was I to turn to. I had no one to turn to because some of my family members

did not agree with his line of work. I felt like I was at rock bottom.

As mentioned, depression played a great role in describing participants mental

health since being affected by the drug policies. There were also instances of anxiety

among some of the participants as well. J.D. stated,

I am still anxious to this day even though my husband came back. The pressure to

support was overwhelming and still is because it is difficult for him to find

employment and even if he does, the wages are very low. So, I am basically left

holding the family unit together.

C.D. puts it as,

I would just say the biggest mental health challenge would be the anxiety that

comes along with everything. Just wondering how he was doing in there due to

the things that occur in jail. The anxiety of the wait was also there because the

closer the time was for him to come out, the further it seemed. I didn't really have

time to sit and be depressed because I have a child to raise.

J.B. stated that she felt anxiety and added that "My social life with my friends was affected. I didn't want to go out with them and something to happen or someone notice me and see me and get my family into danger".

I then moved onto structural questions for the women participants who were affected by their husband/significant other being incarcerated. I began by asking; *How long was your husband or significant other incarcerated for?* Obviously, the responses for this varied due to the type of drugs and description of the charges their counterparts faced. The minimum sentence was 18 months and the maximum were 7 years.

What were your experiences when your husband/significant other was released from prison? There were several trends I noticed when analyzing the responses for this question. The one that stood out the most was stress. These women felt a great deal of responsibility and pressure in not only taking care of themselves and their children but now an additional person with limited finances. J.D. stated, "It was stressful. I had to pay for everything and everyone because finding a job with a record for him was difficult". K.B. response was similar as she stated that "It was difficult to support a family. My son, him and myself financially because he had difficulty in attaining employment. S.S. from Newark describes it as being stressful on the family. He couldn't do the same thing anymore and then it became hostile and volatile and he began to shut down. S.S. from East Orange stated "My experience was okay. It wasn't what I expected, and the stress came down on me because I have a kid too and had to carry the burden". P.T. responded by saying "It was not easy because he was now an ex- convict, so I was the main breadwinner and he too was depressed"

K.W. stated,

> It took a while because he's been gone for 6 years and I've been doing everything by myself for 6 years. So, I had to rehabilitate him into the new family structure, so it was very hard. It was hard for him to get a job and he could not go back to work. My job was not giving anymore overtime which was helping tremendously over the years. Being that he has a record now so his jobs are limited and the pay is small so it's still overwhelming.

Another commonality among some of the participants was them highlighting the strained relationships in the household upon their significant other return from prison. This stemmed in different ways. For example, J.B. stated,

> He wasn't the same person that he was before. He was a very happy person, once he came out he was mostly depressed because of the things he saw in prison as far as everything happening inside. Our relationship was very rocky because I actually wanted to elevate myself and he was not use to the new me and he was used to me depending on him and it was not the same anymore. Now I am able to voice what I like, what I didn't like, and he was not use to that.

C.D. stated,

> The relationship he had with our son was different because he had to get used to him all over again. They spoke on the phone when he was incarcerated but that was not the same. The relationship with us, there was a lot of resentment so when he came back the relationship was strained. Two years doesn't seem a lot, but it was.

T.D. view regarding this question was that,

> It was hard to accept him. I had mixed emotions because I was happy but then it
> was hard to trust him because I did not know if he would have gone back into the
> same streets hustling or if he would get taken away again but at the same time, I
> was happy because my kids were like "We have our dad back".

The descriptive questions for the young adults who ages ranged from 18 to 20 was also completed and varied from that of the ex-offenders and their wives/significant other. I started with background questions to get an idea of the geographical location of each participant and to know a little about them. I then dove into the descriptive questions and began by asking; *How would you describe your life prior to your parent(s)being incarcerated?* All ten of the participants responded with positive feedback when asked this question. They all expressed and described having what they deemed a good life with no major issues. For example, R.J. stated, "It was cool. My dad and I used to go the park and play football, his boys would come and play a little catch" A.F. "It was joyful, peaceful and it was good" A.O. stated,

> Everything was peachy. Everything was great. I got what I wanted, he came to
> school, went to family events, nothing irregular, everything seemed like how life
> was supposed to go.

L.L. added that they were not rich but lived comfortably when asked the same question. G.B. stated that "life was fine, he was not in the house every day, but he was there, we all lived in the same house" R.T. stated "Life was good, we weren't rich, I had toys clothes food and was doing a lot of activities in school" M.B. went onto to state that "It was

regular, nothing crazy, he was in and out, but I had some Christmases and Thanksgiving like how a family is supposed to be".

What your experiences were like when your parent(s) was incarcerated? This was asked to provide insight from the view of a young adult who was placed into a situation that they did not ask for but had to adapt to. The responses for this question varied as some of the young adults internalized what was happening around them and had to witness the parent in the home struggle to make ends meet and provide for the entire household. J.B. stated,

> Once my dad went in. It seemed like my mom was mad at me for my dad going to jail and it had nothing to do with me. He went in when I was 8 and my little brother was 2 and I felt that she spent more time with him and was mad at me for that time.

> J.L. stated "I kind of took on a little of responsibility for the two women that were raising me. I felt obligated to protect them" G.B. discussed that he (her father) was the sole person bringing in money in after things became hard where she had to move with family. R.J. states,

> I had a really hard time getting money, especially when it was just me and my mom. My mom was struggling an I figured I had to help out, so I started selling weed in the streets and I'm not going to lie. I did make money of that.

> Some of the other participants described it as a time that changed their life and who they were. For example. A.F. states, "It was very stressful, I got into a lot of trouble and hanging out with the wrong crowd. It was hurtful" A.O. states

It was saddening, and I didn't know what to do with myself, I had no guidance and no one to really speak to because my mom worked all the time and I was alone. I went with my friends a couple of times, they did things and I ended up following after them and I got pregnant.

L.L. states,

> Things changed, I started getting into trouble and fights in school and my mom and I weren't getting along and as I said it is because my father was not there, and we were really close so that had a really big impact when he wasn't in the house anymore. So, I started acting out and getting a bit rebellious.

Describe the relationship between you and your parent when they returned home from being incarcerated? All the participants highlighted some sort of change when their parent returned from prison. It ultimately deeply affected some more than others, however the overall theme that was discovered was that all the experiences were negative. For example, R.T. stated,

> When my mom came home from prison, I did not know who she was anymore and really had lost a lot of respect for her. She tried to come back into my world and lay down the rules and law and that was not going to work for me because she was stranger in my eyes"

J.B. stated, "He told me sorry for loss time. Our relationship wasn't the same as when I was younger. I raised myself, so I don't think it was father to son, it was man to man really". R.J. stated "I didn't know who she was anymore. You know she tried to lay down the law and the rules and it's not going to work, you know she was a stranger to

me". D.V. shared similar sentiments as he stated it was almost like getting to know a stranger all over again each time as his father would continuously return to prison. For a period of 12 years altogether.

L.L. stated,

> It took a bit getting used to because when he came out I was a bit rebellious, so he started to try to ground me and get me back on track and if was not there, so I started acting out and blaming him and making him know that he shouldn't be telling me anything because he was not there for so many years. So, it took a bit of working through, but we are trying to get our relationship back on track.

J.L. stated,

> It was a bit awkward where he did now know what was going on and at my age still thinking I was a kid and not realizing that I was forced to mature and grow a lot faster than I probably should of.

> *How would you describe your mental health currently due to the changes brought on by the incarceration of your parent (s)?* Like all participant, the young adults were asked this to determine their current mindset as incarceration of a parent can affect others in different ways. There was a mix of responses among the participants as some indicated that they are fine and would not consider their mental health affects by the incarceration of their parent. For example, M.B. stated "I'm fine, to be honest, I know what type of life he was in so I mentally prepared, so I would say I'm fine" R.T. "I mean I'm okay, I don't trust people easily, I'm just ready for anyone to go out of my life" J.L. responded by saying" It's a gift and a curse, it taught me a lot of responsibility and how to handle

things early. The curse is you're relied on by so many people heavily where it stresses you out" D.V. also shared his thoughts and stated that "I feel normal, never saw a psychologist but life seem as normal as it can possibly be". J.B. stated that mentally he is "straight" when asked to elaborate it's definition he stated "I grew up fast and I definitely fend for myself and don't depend on anyone to help me. I do know I need to talk to my dad and explain how hurt I was when he was gone. L.L. highlighted that it was more embarrassing when her dad came out but stated "you work through it over time so now it's not bad and I have friends that understood, and they helped me get through it".

Other Participants highlighted anger or depression when discussing their current mental health. For example, R.J. said "I feel angry and that he left, and I feel like people were after him and took I'm away from me. G.B. stated "For the most part I'm okay, I'm just still angry a lot so I'm still really just trying to manage my anger towards that. Now it's a little better because I did not understand why I was angry but now I know why I was angry. A.O expressed being bitter in a way. A.F. said her experience was that "it was very depressing as she did not know what to do and was going from house to house. It's mentally challenging still.".

The structural questions for the young adult participants were followed after the descriptive questions. The first question was; *How long was your parent(s) incarcerated for?* The participants in this portion of the study parent were incarcerated for a minimum of 3 years to a maximum of 12 years. This was a great deal of time lost in a child's eyes and is their responses to the other questions are reflective due to such a significant amount of time being lost in a parent- child relationship.

What changes occurred once your parent(s) was incarcerated? Participants went more in depth to share how their lives changed due to parental incarceration. Half of the young adult participants described themselves as being rebellious and engaging in poor decision making. For example, J.B. highlighted that he participated in gang involvement due to the absence of his father. R.T. stated "I went through the rebellious stage. Ii fought a lot and had to learn a lot of things that a mother is supposed to teach" R.J. describes his lifestyle of selling drugs and messing with bad people. A.O. also described the lack of male guidance and having no father figure and no one to model after which ultimately left to her getting pregnant at a young age.

M.B. stated,

> Once he went away, I felt a little bit of my protection was gone because while he was out, he was always hustling. I felt raw naked. My friends were "street". I hung around guys who were hustlers, I hung around girls who always wanted to date hustlers, I dated hustlers, it was all pretty much guys get the money and the girls are attracted to the money.

What were your experiences like when your parent(s) were released from prison? The participants were asked this to determine to overall dynamic of changes when their parent returned into their life. The responses varied for this as some participants highlighted the disconnect between them and their parent R.T expressed a disconnect between her and her mother upon her return home as they both had changed. M.B. describes it as sometimes it feels the same and other times it does not. R.J. acknowledged that him and his father is distant, and the deeper issues have never been addressed. A.F.

shared that her experience was weird, awkward and distant. D.V. described his father as being volatile to others outside and his interaction with his father was that of a stranger. L.L. indicated that it took a while for her dad to get a job and so he did not gain respect until that occurred. J.L also shared that his father wanted to hang out with him and they did now and then however it was awkward.

The other participants highlighted the financial hardship of having. G.B. reported that her father was able to get a job prior to leaving the halfway house however it was not low paying. A.O. discussed how the financial strain on her other occurred when her father returned as her mother was taking are of the bills. J.B. reports that his father tried to get a job, but he could not which affected the household financially.

The contrast questions for all 30 participants were the same and so I merged all the responses together to determine themes among them. *What are your views regarding the current drug policies in the United States?* The common theme among participants highlighted the unfair sentencing for African Americans and biases against them. Participants shared that they've noticed that blacks make up the majority in prison even though whites may commit the same crime or even worse and not be penalized. For example, C.D. stated,

> I think that it is unequal and unbalanced, and I feel like depending on the drug and the severity of the matter then that should determine the time, I don't feel like the law is equal when it comes to African Americans or minorities in general compared to Caucasians or some other race. I just think for somethings like heavy

drug crimes it should be like the gun laws; it should be a mandatory sentencing, that way race wouldn't be a factor.

N.S. puts it as,

> After doing a lot of research and understanding what is going on as far as these drug policies, even reading my own case and understanding, I can look back and say some of this stuff were created by the Clinton Laws which were tougher sentences for drugs. I realize by implementing those policies what demographic directly it affected, and they all look like me (African American). So now I understand why I got a sentence of 10 years suspended after a minimum mandatory of 3 years. Knowing I had a minimum amount that fit their requirement? So, you tell me that 5 to 15 grams is equal to a half a kilogram of cocaine? So, if I understand that correctly and I understand where crack is sold; you mean to tell me if someone is caught with a half kilo of cocaine who most likely is an upper fish so to speak, they will get the same amount of time as me.

R.P. stated,

> I think it's definitely biased, it's like they're out to get the African American community. It's like if you catch a white male with some weed they get a slap on the wrist and it's a black male, it's 10 times worse and I don't think it's fair because it's marijuana as opposed to crack cocaine; and I know under the big umbrella they're all drugs, but to be honest with you, marijuana is medicinal, it's from the earth, it's health.

M.S. stated,

It's still the same as before, it's not fair because depending on the drugs you get locked up for. People with harder drugs are getting less times when people with a marijuana charge and it also depends on your race. In the black community, they give you more time, than a person that's not a minority. Minorities get a heavier sentence than others for the same drugs.

J.L. states "From what I understood in life, you can be put down for the most minor thing and at my age you see white kids get off for more harsh things" D.V. added "Incarcerating people for Minor drugs like marijuana should be taken off the books. Marihuana should not be prosecuted as hard as it is. Maybe cocaine and other drugs should but marijuana has not been proven to affect people mentally and it actually help people physically".

What do you think could be added or changed as a more effective approach to resolving drug policy issues? With this question I found that the two main trends focused on rehabilitation and fair sentences when participants were asked. This question was posed to highlight what the black community thought would be beneficial to improve the policies that they feel currently targets them. As per the rehabilitation theme that was the most prevalent when this question was asked, T.D. stated "rehabilitation and counseling, but it has to be continuous you can start them off at an early age when you see they are using and use those same persons when they're healed to help others, so you just continue the cycle". Another example in response to this question is when H.A. stated that's a different demon within itself but the attitude toward drug addiction, more so treatment than jail can make a difference". S.S. of East Orange simply stated that "Rehabilitation

for drug offenders" P.T. stated "If we were to take a different route of rehabilitating, that would curtail what is going on with the rise in drug use and trafficking"

S.S of Irvington stated,

> There's no partnership to help them through it. The system says okay were' gonna rehabilitate them, we're gonna give them classes and this and that, and that's great while they're locked up but once you go into the community What do you really have that will help to become citizens in the community who don't partake in illegal activity There is nothing to help them with re-entering the community. They say they'' help you while you are in the there and when you come out there's no resources. They don't' help you find a job or to teach you how to make your resume. Things like that, interviewing skills and what to say when you go on these interviews because the first things people will see is a time lapse in work and then they want to know why. So, I don't feel like they put into practice rehabilitating and helping people who were incarcerated.

M.T. stated,

> We should try to prevent and pinpoint the reason why people use. There must be a common trend somewhere and try to see if we can put things in place to prevent so we can get away from so many people thinking they have to use because trust me it is a coping mechanism for them.

As mentioned before, another theme that emerges focused on the far sentencing being added or changed to improve the current drug policies in the United States. For example, J.B. highlighted that sentences should be shorter for selling Marijuana because

some individuals get less time for more heinous crimes and it also depends on how an individual looks as well. D.V. stated "Many times these issues fall into the Judges hand and we're expecting an outcome that we're not going to get"

M.G. puts it as,

> Until they stop putting the majority of the drugs in the black community. There's more time when you get caught with drugs in a school zone and three quarters of the black community is in a school zone, so a person in the project will do more time than the person in the suburbs based on how the policy is set. So that's something that should be change. So, it does not matter where you at once you get caught you should be doing the same time.

What do youth think could be black Americans can do as a community to play a vital and active role in the policy making process? This question was posed to determine what African Americans thought would benefit their own community. So many times, their voices and opinions are not heard, therefore this question was presented to provide that opportunity, so audiences can understand and even receive ideas. Some participants shared that voting and Education is important in playing a vital role, however the common theme was blacks coming together in the policy making process. For example, J.B. one of the women participants stated,

> They need to come together. The black community does not come together, and I believe if we come together to try to make a change, things will be different. You have these celebrities and rapper that praise certain drugs and it's cool to smoke and you have mollies and all these different types of drugs you hear them rapping

about. To me, you have that platform, you should try to educate the younger kids

and African American people of your kind to let them know that this is what can

be done to your body and kind of force the government to see us in a different

light.

J.B. the young adult of Newark stated,

I think for one we have to know the law. I'm not as educated as the next man;

people with degrees but I do read a lot, as far as the paper and articles. I think if

we had knowledge of the law and it sounds cliché but stick together as a

community and come forth towards the power that be, and if the power that be see

that we are coherent with things we will be straight.

A.F. stated, "They got to come together, stop killing each other and start living a

positive life, so the next generation can see how we are all living". R.T. stated, "I think

they need to speak up, stay woke, not stay oppressed, we have more of an opportunity

now to speak up in society, so we should use our voice". J.L. stated "Be vocal and go

about it the right way. Be a part of the solution and not the problem"

Ethnographic Observations

As mentioned in Chapter 3, for the study I decided to conduct non-participant

observations to allow me to witness participants in their natural setting and observe how

their lives on a daily basis. The participants agreed ahead of time to be observed and

allowed me a day of my choosing to see what their lives look like. As a non-participant

observer, I was not able to interact with any of the participants of their friends or family,

but simply take field notes of what I observed. The observation was unstructured and

overt as I believe the participant would be more comfortable, open and trustworthy as opposed to sneaking around to get information on their family life. Participant observations were recorded in a journal as interacting with participants were not a part of the process.

I began observing the male participants and when reviewing the field notes found some similarities and themes instantaneously. One of the themes was the obvious poverty among some of the male participants and their continuous usage of marijuana. I will begin by sharing the field notes of M.T. who currently resides in Irvington New Jersey. Since M.T. is unemployed I had more flexibility in choosing a day to observe him in his natural setting.

> The researcher arrived at M.T.'s residence at 7am. Upon walking into the 2nd floor apartment the researcher noticed that there was a great deal of furniture and crammed throughout the home as if someone was moving in. M.T.'s wife kissed the two children, one (a girl) who appeared to be a few months old and the other who appeared to be no older than 4 years. M.T.'s wife other exited the home, dressed in nursing attire. M.T. then began getting showering, the little boy and dressing him in his school uniform. The little baby girl was crying uncontrollably and M.T. had to run back and forth between the bathroom and the bedroom to care for both children. M.T. then placed the baby in the car seat and continued showering the little boy. M.T then got the little boy dressed and fed him breakfast while he was now in the process of getting the little girl dressed. Once finished M.T. left the home with both children and dropped the little boy at school which

was approximately a 12-minute drive. M.T then escorted the little boy inside the school to his classroom with the baby girl in his hand. The teacher reminded M.T. that they little boy's money is due for the field trip which will occur the following day. M.T. indicated to the teacher that he was not aware and will speak to his wife as he did not have any money on him. The teacher was in agreement but followed up by saying that the little boy will not be able to attend if the funds are not received. M.T. returned to the house with the baby girl and continued to care for her throughout the day which included changing diapers, feeding, playing with the baby and taking a nap. Around 1pm M.T. wife called to check in and he informed her about the little boy needing money for the field trip. The phone was on speaker as he was changing the baby. The wife voice immediately raised in annoyance and she stated she did not have any additional money. M.T. then proceeded to tell her the baby ran out of diapers. M.T.'s wife starting cursing and using profanity and stated "Why didn't you tell me earlier? You waited till it ran out?". M.T. and his wife continued arguing back and forth with the use of profanity until she said that she will take care of it and hung up. M.T. then began uttering under his breath to which I was unable to understand and continued to take care of the baby girl. Throughout the course of the researcher observed M.T. rolling and smoking Marijuana joints and watching television and reading. M.T returned to the little boys' school at 3pm and brought him home. Around 5pm, M.T.'s wife came home and brought diapers. She kissed both the kids upon her return and found that the baby's diaper was wet. M.T explained that he couldn't

change the soiled diaper until she (the wife) came home and he did not have money. The wife and M.T. then began arguing about money and she stated that he needed to find a job because she was tired of taking care of "3 damn kids". M.T. then placed his shoes on an exited the home at which point the researcher followed.

When observing M.G. from Patterson New Jersey the experience had some similarities with that of M.T. as they both continues to use Marijuana and have new born babies. The field notes for M.G are as follows.

The researcher arrived at M.G. home at 2pm in the afternoon. The participant observed M.G smoking what appears to be Marijuana. The researcher was familiar with this smell from previous interactions with others in the past. The setting for this research began in M.G.'s basement apartment which he shares with a female who appears pregnant. The basement apartment had one room which was used as a bedroom and living room. There was also a bathroom in the apartment. The apartment was fairly neat however very small when housing a new born and two adults. The unidentified female asked M.G. if he can assist her with taking the laundry to the laundromat. M.G indicated he would, but he has to meet a "breddren". The researcher then followed M.G outside who then met with a man who drove up the driveway in a dark burgundy car. The researcher then observed an exchange between M.G and the unknown man. M.G. provided the unknown man with a small bag of Marijuana and shook his hand in exchange for money. The researcher did not know the amount of money received. The

unknown man then drives off. M.G pocketed the money and went inside, took the laundry bag and placed it into the vehicle and drive the unidentified woman to what one can assume is the laundromat.

P.H. non- participant observation took place at his mother's home where he resides. P.H. invited to researcher to observe him on that particular day as he informed the research, he has a scheduled interview. The researcher asked if the observation can begin at home and continued throughout the day as P.H attends the interview. The field notes are as follows:

The researcher arrived at P.H residence in East Orange New Jersey. P.H resided in a 1st floor apartment in an area that appeared very sketchy to day the least. There were men hanging around the neighborhood with no indication of coming or going. They were simply hanging out. Upon entering P.H. home I observed a very nice apartment that was well kept. The apartment was decorated with flowers and family pictures and was a clear indicator of others living at the residence. P.H. was smoking an unknown substance and then placed it down to fold the blankets and pillow that was on the couch. P.H. then went to the shower and got dressed. P.H. continued to smoke until exiting the home. He then ran back and sprayed a great amount cologne on himself. P.H. went to the bus stop, dressed in a bottom up shirt and slacks. P.H. took the bus and arrived a local grocery store "Shoprite". P.H. entered the store and then proceeded upstairs to conduct the interview. The researcher hung around the store until P.H. exited the interview. P.H. appeared very unhappy and was cursing when walking back to the bus stop.

P.H returned home, and the researcher observed him prepping and rolling Marijuana. P.H was relatively quiet and appeared annoyed as he watched television. A woman later arrived home and P.H said, "Hey ma". P.H. mother asked how the interview went and he responded by saying "whack". P.H. mom inquired as to what happened and which point P.H. stated he did not want to talk about it. P.H.'s mother then stated, "well you need to hurry up and move of my couch" They both then bickered back and forth for maybe 5minutes and then it ceased. P.H. spent the rest of his day watching television and eating.

The next observation that took place occurred at S.H. home in Newark New Jersey. S.H. is unemployed and lives at home with his mother and brother. Marijuana use continues to be a trend among the male participants and S.H. was no exception. The field notes are as follows:

The researcher arrived at S.H. home at 12.pm at S.H.'s residence. Upon entering the home which was a one family house. The researcher noticed that the house was in a deplorable condition. Everything did not have its specific place and there were clothes and shoes all around the first floor of the home. There were papers disheveled everywhere along with small roaches crawling and coming out of creases in the home. The researcher followed S.H. into the kitchen where he was observed making breakfast. There was also gym equipment (a work out bench and treadmill) visible, along with a washing machine and dryer. The researcher then observed S.H. roll and light some marijuana and then proceeded upstairs. While walking upstairs, there was clothes and shoes leading up the staircase. S.H. then

entered a room in which was filled with studio equipment, speakers, monitors and a recording booth. The room was unlike any other room in the house. The walls were painted in burgundy and there was very nice dimmed lighting around the room. The space was small but very neat and organized. Everything has its place with clean carpeting and furniture. S.H. placed his headphones on and began creating musical beats and rhythms with his keyboard and computer. S.H continues to do this for the next 4 hours and continued to smoke throughout that time. Around 4.15pm, a younger male who looked to be approximately in his early 20's was dress in a button up shirt, tie and slacks came into the room and stated, "Hey Bro". S.H. greeted the man and the man then stated, "Roll me one yo". S.H. then proceeded to indeed roll some additional marijuana and gave it to the man. S.H. then showed the music he was working on and the man stayed in the studio for the next 2 and a half hours providing feedback to S.H. S.H. then received a phone call from someone unknown and stated that he had to leave. The observation was over as S.H. indicated that the researcher was not able to attend where he was going due to other the individuals who he was meeting would not be okay with it. The researcher then ended the observation.

J.F. was the next participant to be observed. J.F resides in Patterson New Jersey and has a wife and triplets of a who are one and half year old. J.F. had similarities to the participants above whose field notes were conveyed as he had young children in his home and also continues to use marijuana recreationally in the home. The field notes for J.F. are as follows:

The researcher arrived at J.F. residence around 8 am. on the 4th of July. J.F.

resided on the first-floor apartment of a three-family home. The house was

relatively clean but small. There were two bedrooms. One of which was for J.F

and his wife and the other room had three babies (two boys and a girl) sleeping in

their cribs. There was a kitchenette and a full bathroom. The researcher observed

J.F. and his wife and 2 other friends spending time together. J.F. began grilling

outside while the triplets were still asleep. All parties were cordial and laughed

and ate without any major occurrences. The researcher observed J.F. at the side of

the house smoking. There was no one else around him. J.F. wife then came

outside looking for him and was calling him by his first name. J.F. quickly put out

what he was smoking and headed towards his wife. His wife then began raising

her voice and said, "I thought you stopped smoking weed". J.F. then said to his

wife that he was not smoking, and she does not know what she was talking about.

J.F wife began arguing with him for a while and then told him to go upstairs and

help with the babies as they woke up. J.F, wife was visibly upset and continued

mumbling under her breath. J.F. then began screaming at his wife and cursed at

her and stated that if she kept talking, he would give her something to talk about.

The guests turned their heads away as if they did not hear what was said and

continued to speak to each other. J.F. wife look scared and embarrassed at the

same time. J.F then brought the triplets to the back yard and told his wife to feed

them. The wife complied and J.F continued to engage with the other guests.

Drinking, some smoking, (of what the researcher smelt was marijuana) and laughter with the guests and J.F continued throughout the evening hours.

The observations of the other male participants differed from the ones listed above. There was no marijuana use witnessed or even smells associated with it. These men spent the majority of their time working and spending time with their family. For example, when observing M.M. I arrived at his home the day after his wife had their second child. M.M. came home from the hospital and began cleaning the house in preparation for his girlfriends' arrival home with the baby which was the following day. M.M. The majority of the day was spend watching M.M. clean his two-bedroom apartment from top to bottom in addition to taking care of his 3-year-old daughter who expressed excitement to him about the baby coming home and assisted throughout the day. M.M. finished cleaning the entire house 6 hours later with some help from his daughter and his mother then arrived to babysit while he returned to Mountainside Hospital. M.M. was observed the rest of the time while sitting with his girlfriend and spending with his newborn child.

When observing M.S. there were similarities to M.M. as he spent a great deal of his time with his family. I arrived at M.S. home on a Friday morning around 9 am. M.S. resided on the third floor. The apartment was small where the living room and kitchen was combined into one. There was also a bedroom, standing shower and toilet. M.S. began packing his clothes to do laundry. M.S. then went to the laundromat and sat and listened to music. Upon his return home, a woman who M.S. referred to as "Aunty" asked him to go to the supermarket and pick up a few items. M.S. complied and returned

home. There was a man working on a car in the backyard. M.S. then went over and assisted the man who he called "Uncle Nate". M.S. continued assisting for a few hours and then went upstairs in his apartment to shower. M.S then returned downstairs at which point there were many children in the back hard playing basketball, eating ice pops and there was chicken on the grill. M.S multitasked by help cook the chicken and playing with the children. M.S. drank Heineken beer throughout the time he was outside interacting with the children and the 7 adults that was present. M.S. continued to engage with everyone until around 9pm when he stated he was tired. M.S. retired upstairs for the night and the observation ended.

H.A. who reside in Newark New Jersey as well has a strong sense of family ties. When observed H.A. appeared happy and engaged with the people around him. The observation began by meeting H.A at his home. H.A. resided in a small one-bedroom apartment. I observed women's sneakers of a smaller size at the front door which gave the indication that a female lived in the home with H.A. The house was very neat with good lighting and H.A was observed at his des working on something. He made notes and took phone calls for a few hours from what was interpreted as clients due to the name of his job being exposed and him working from documents inside that particular folder. H.A. then changed and went to a backyard barbeque that was located in West Orange New Jersey. The field notes for that portion are as follows:

> The researcher observed H.A. arrived at a large back yard. H.A was immediately greeted by many of his male and female counterparts. H.A was provided a drink and began to engage in conversation. The number of people in the backyard grew

immensely to over 100 people. There was a mixture of both children and adults, laughing, playing and dancing to the rhythmic beats. H.A spent the rest of the evening hours into the night at the barbeque and engaged in laughter and alcohol beverages throughout the night. There was a sense of comradery and friendship in this environment and H.A. appeared to be relaxed and happy as he smiled and laughed with people of all ages until his time of departure which was 11.30pm.

When observing A.O., he too spent time with his family appropriately and there was nothing observed out of the ordinary. The field notes for A.O goes as such:

The researcher arrived at A.O. residence which he shares with his parents and fiancé. A.O. assisted by fixing breakfast for his parent who were up n age. His father was in a wheel chair and mother mobile, however she walked very slowly. The house was a 3bedroom single family home and was well kept. A.O. fed his family and then cleaned up the dishes used. A.O. worked on his laptop for an hour and a half and then proceeded to play a game of cards with his wheelchair bound father. There was smiles throughout the room and laughter. A.O. fiancé and mother sat and watched as the two men engaged in back and forth banter. A.O. spend the rest of the day doing household chores which included sweeping, vacuuming, making lunch and later spent time with his fiancé on the front porch sitting and talking about various topics.

N.S. was the last male participant to be observed and I was lucky enough to spend time with him both at work and at home. N.S. differed from the other participant as he

did not have a significant other who he is involved or live with. N.S begin his day by getting ready for work. The field notes are as follows:

The researcher accompanied N.S. to works for Amtrack which is a train company. The researcher observed N.S interact with many passengers on the train. Some of who were visibly rude and others friendly. N.S. was very patient and professional throughout the process. When finished working N.S. went home to his Newark New Jersey one - bedroom apartment. Upon entering the home, it was noticeable that only N.S. resided there. There was a picture of a young boy visible, however there were many artistic paintings highlighting black history. N.S. showered, ate and then spent the rest of his time reading throughout the rest of the time he was observed. The researcher left as N.S. indicated he was getting ready for bed.

The observations of the women participants had similarities as well. The women observed were the same participants who conducted the interviews. I was provided with an opportunity to see them in their natural setting and how they ensure on a day to day basis with the current situation. One of the early themes developed form the observations were that 9 out of the 10 participants were employed and all 10 participants had a college degree ranging from an Associate degree to Masters' degree in various field. There were 4 educators as well among the participants of women. P.T., S.S., K.B and R.P. When observing all 10 women, the main trend I found that they were all hard working both in the work and home environment.

The observation of R.P. began very early in the morning at 6.30pm. R.P. woke her son up who was very reluctant to get him ready for school. R.P. son appeared to have a

developmental disability and so she struggled with getting him to do things independently around the home. R.P. then took her son to the school bus that as blowing his horn outside and went to her job. The researcher arrived at. R.P.'s place of employment which was a school. The field notes are as follows:

> The researcher arrived at R.P. school where she teacher at 8.20am. R.P. greeted each child with a hand shake before the entered the classroom. There was a ratio of 22 children to 2 teachers which included R.P. R.P led the class throughout the day with various activities while the other teacher assisted students that was struggling. At around 2 pm. R.P. appeared exhausted and provided the students with a writing assignment which was explained. She then sat down and sighed in exhaustion. Later on, around 3.30pm R.P. prepared the students for dismissal. R.P then left the school and picked up a few items from the grocery store. R.P. was in a rush to get home to pick her son up from the school bus. R.P. then greeted her son and proceeded to assist him with getting settled. She then cooked dinner which consisted on bake potatoes and chicken, showered her son and prepared him for bed. R.P expressed exhaustion and then went to the computer to work on what was observed as a lesson plan for her classroom. R.P. then retired to bed.

The observation for P.T was similar as her day encompassed working a classroom as a teacher and tending for her son at home. The field notes for P.T. states,

> The researcher arrived at P.T.'s residence at 6.30am. The apartment was a one-bedroom apartment in a Highrise. There were 2 beds in the room and someone sleeping in one of the beds. P.T. woke her son up for school at 7am. Her soon

appeared to be early teens and was able to get ready independently, however he required ongoing prompting from P.T to hurry up so he would not be late for school. P.T then journeyed to work. P.T. caught the bus to get to her destination. P.T. taught a pre- kindergarten 4 class with a classroom size of 15. There were 2 teachers in the room which included P.T. and an additional teacher who came in for 30 minutes to work with one child. P.T spent her day teaching and giving directives and ongoing prompting to the little children. P.T then stated to the other teacher "Man I'm tired". While the children were napping, P.T went to lunch and then returned to the classroom to work on an afternoon assignment for the children. P.T. then left work and returned home. Upon her arrival around 4.30 pm, P.T. washed her hand, and proceeded to make dinner. P.T. asked her son to assist who was reluctant until she began yelling at him. P.T spent the rest of the night preparing and cutting pictures out for her class.

S.S who reside in Newark New Jersey as mentioned is an educator as well. She is a Teacher's aide for a kindergarten classroom and has a special needs child at home Her day is much similar to the other teachers mentioned above. It included getting her son ready for the baby sitter and going to work to work with the students in her classroom. S.S. however has an additional part to her day as on Tuesdays she takes her soon to the school of the blind in another city as he struggles with his sight, however not fully blind. The field notes for that day recaps that:

The researcher arrived S.S. one-bedroom apartment which she shares with her husband and young child. The house was very neat aside from the toys laying in

the living room. S.S. husband laid in bed as she dressed her son and drives him to the babysitter. S.S then informed the babysitter that she will be picking up her son at 11 to go to his therapeutic school. S.S. then drove to her job and spent time engaging with her students. She worked one on one with one student until it was time to leave. S.S> then drove back to the babysitter and picked her son up at which point they proceeded to drive to the school of the blind. While at the school. S.S., her son and the occupational therapist engaged in various activities that challenged the child. S.S then returned home with her son and saw her husband sitting on the couch playing a video game. S.S asked him if he had cooked and he responded by saying he was waiting on her. S.S. then began rising her voice in anger and stated, "I don't see why I have to do everything around here". The two began arguing as the little boy played with his toys. S.S. then began cooking dinner and slamming items on the kitchen counter. She was visibly upset. She then multitasked with cooking and playing shapes with her son on the floor in the living room. Her husband left the living room and remained in the bedroom during the rest of the observation.

When analyzing the observations of K.B. who resides in Orange New Jersey, it was found that she too had a daily routine like the other teachers of getting her son ready for school, educating of the young mind, throughout the day and returning home to ensure the home is taken care of. An excerpt from K.B. field notes highlight the balance of hard work she encounters.

After the researcher observed K.B. in her classroom setting stimulating the minds of these young learners. She then caught 2 buses to pick her son up form school before returning home. K.B. significant other came through the floor of the home shortly after her arrival and immediately asked "What's for dinner". K.B then responded with a witty response "Whatever you make" She then proceeded to ask him what he was doing outside today. K.B. significant other was unemployed, however he responded, "Looking for work". I wondered to myself if he gave that response due to my presence. K.B. then inquired if he was successful in doing so and he stated that something may be coming through however he has to wait and see. K.B then continued getting her son settled, fed him a snack and began working on a project for school. KB made her son a peanut butter sandwich later for dinner while she continued working on her assignment for work which included cutting many pictures out. There became tension in the room as K.B. significant other asked her if she really did not cook. K.B. expressed that she was tired and still has a lot of work to do. An argument erupted with the use of profanity by both parties (K.B. and her significant other), which resulted in him (the significant other) storming out the house and K.B. continued to work on the project she was completing.

C.D who also worked with children in a different capacity (Child Welfare) day also involves her managing the lives of herself, her child and her boyfriend. When observing. C.D. I found that her day usually began at 5.30 am as she took this for herself to go to the gym. She then arrived at work and encounters a slew of trials and situations which she must problem solve. They involve the young adult population she works with. C.D. then received an emergency call for one of the youths on her case load who

attempted suicide. She then drove an hour to the crisis unit where the youth was kept and

had to inquire to report back to her supervisor. Meanwhile, C.D. continued to received

phone calls from other youth's that are struggling with other issues. C.D. managed under

pressure very well, however it was visibly clear that she was exhausted and probably

overwhelmed. C.D. then returned home in the evening and stated to her son and

boyfriend who was present in the house "Don't ask me to do anything" C.D. then

proceeded to her bedroom and laid in bed with a clear exhausted look on her face.

K.W. who works as a Morgue Technician and resides in Irvington New Jersey was

observed. K.W. was observed on the day she had an interview for a new job and at home

for a period of time as well. The field notes for K.W. states,

> The researcher arrived at K.W.'s home at 7.30am and found that she was very
>
> well dressed in a pants suit. K.W. asked her husband if he could take their son to
>
> school because she is running late for her interview. Her husband who was also
>
> getting dressed appeared annoyed as his brow furrowed when K.W. asked. Her
>
> husband stated he was running late too. K.W. voiced raised and indicated that she
>
> is doing the interview to make more money for the family. The husband quickly
>
> hurried and exited the home with their son while slamming the door. K.W.
>
> attended the interview and was visibly nervous outside the interview room as she
>
> kept on shaking her legs. K.W. spent approximately 4 minutes in the interview
>
> room and then came off with a smile on her face. K.W. the went and ran some
>
> errands to the post office and grocery store as she did not work her current job.
>
> K.W. then went home and made dinner foe her family. K.W. heard on the

telephone sharing that she was offered the job and expressed excitement. K.W. husband and child returned home. K.W. shared the news with her husband who then stated, "Great now we're gonna have more money around here". K.W. rolled her eyes and spent the rest of the evening doing homework with her son and preparing him for bed. There was not a great deal of conversation between K.W. and her husband. Both parties were engaged on their cell phones for most of the evening. The family ate dinner together which had many awkward silent moments.

When observing J.B. who resides in Newark New Jersey, I had the opportunity to observe her at her place of employment and home. J.B. is a registered nurse who does private in-home nursing for children who are medically fragile. The field notes for J.B. are as follows.

The Researcher arrived at J.B.'s home at 6.am. J.B. was observed getting her baby dressed along with her older son. J.B. bedroom door was ajar, and the researcher observed a man sleeping. J.B. finished getting all the kids ready and exited the home. J.B. dropped her older son off to school and then proceeded to drop the baby off at the babysitter. J.B. then drove 45 minutes to get to her place of employment. J.B. tended to the child who she provides nursing services for consistently throughout the day and did not leave his side as he required constant supervision. This service began at 9.am until 7pm. J.B. was visibly exhausted and expressed it the patient's parent prior to her leaving. J.B. then drove back home at which point took an hour due to traffic and then began tending to her children at

home. J.B. inquired to her significant other what he did today, and he responded

that he picked up the kids from their respective places. J.B. was then asked if she

is making dinner. At this point J.B. became upset and walked away without

responding. J.B. then spent the rest of the night assisting the children with their

needs and then retired to working on her assignments for school. The older son

made his own dinner (a sandwich) and the baby fell asleep. J.B. significant other

left the home and informed J.B. he will be going to hang out with some friends.

J.B. was unresponsive and continued working on her school assignment.

S.S. of East Orange New Jersey was observed as well. S.S. works as a Rehab

assistant overnight and spent a great portion of her day sleeping during the time of her

observation as she appeared very tired. S.S. significant other had taken the kids out while

S.S. slept. S.S. then awoke and cooked and went into the community and ran errand

which included paying some bills and going to the beauty supply store. S.S. returned

home and engaged very little with her children. S.S. then showered, got dressed in her

work attire and proceeding to drive to work. Throughout the day S.S. continued yawning

and was disengaged from everyone around her. There was limited conversation among

S.S. and her significant other, in addition to the children.

J.D. who resides in Orange New Jersey and works as an office assistant. J.D. was

observed on a Saturday as she indicated the researcher would not be able to observe her

in her place of employment. The field notes are as follows:

The researcher arrived at J.D.'s residence at 9am. J.D. was observed packing

laundry bags and placing them into the car. J.D. significant other stayed in the

house with their daughter while J.D. drove to the laundromat and spent a few hours washing clothes for herself, her child and her significant other. J.D. then returned home and began cooking for the family. The family sat together and ate and had discussions on various topics. J.D., her significant other and daughter then drove to a friends' bar-be que. While there J.D. significant other was asked by some other male counterparts what he is doing now, and he responded by saying "You know, I'm working on a few things right now". J.D. appeared happy and was laughing and fraternizing with many people. Upon their return home. J.D. significant other highlighted the question he was asked about what he is doing now. J.D. responded by telling her significant other that it's no one's business and to say he is working. J.D. then sat quietly as if she was in deep thought.

T.D. who resides in East Orange is unemployed and lives with her two children and husband. T.D.'s children were on break from school and the setting of the observation took place at home.

The field notes are as follows:

The Researcher arrived at the T.D.'s home at 8am. T.D was observed making breakfast for her two children who appeared to be no older than 5 years old. The home was relatively clean, small and the children appeared to be in good spirits. T.S. husband was not present in the home at the time. T.D. made breakfast and then called the children to bring their note books and pencil. T.D. gave the older girl a spelling test to which she did very well. T.D. worked on letters with her

smaller son. T.D. then made lunch for the children and they took a nap. T.D. was

then observed applying for jobs on her laptop for the next few hours. The children

woke up and T.D. tended to them, made dinner and the family ate together once

her husband returned home. It is uncertain where the husband went throughout the

day as he was casually dressed. The family ate dinner and T.D. discussed the jobs

she applied for with her husband. Her husband responded and appeared interested.

Throughout the rest of the evening, T.D. and her husband watched the news and

discussed various topics of interest.

When observing all the women the themes that occurred include them being all

hardworking. They are the glue of their family. Another them that was displayed was

exhaustion. These women all have children and have to balance being the breadwinner of

the family and take most of the responsibility in caring for the family and ensuring things

run smooth on a daily basis.

I will now discuss the observations of the young adults. These individuals

highlighted the many different directions one can take in life and conveyed their current

outlook on life and how they choose to live it. I will begin by discussing R.J. observation.

R.J. is an 18year old from Orange New Jersey. He is unemployed, and his highest level of

education is high school. The field notes are as follows:

The researcher arrived at 9am to observe R.J. in the home he shares with his

mother and younger sibling. R.J. home although small was quite neat and well

kept. There were family pictured throughout the home and the environment felt

warm. A male was in the living room having breakfast while the researcher

observed R.J. asleep in bed. R.J. mother attempted to wake him up, however he continued to sleep for a next hour or so. R.J. then got up and fixed himself a meal. His parents had left the house and he was alone. R.J. then returned to his bedroom and proceeded to pull a show box out of his closet. The box contained a bag with Marijuana. R.J. then began placing smaller amounts of Marijuana in small bags and weighed it on a small scale. R.J. was on the telephone discussing how he will be meeting up with someone unknown to the researcher later. R.J. spent the rest of the time in the house, playing a video game (Fortnight) with others online. R.J. got dressed later in the day, took the small bags of marijuana he packed earlier and rode his bicycle a few blocks away from his home. R.J. went into a house that looked very sketchy as it had young men hanging out on the porch area. R.J. spent no more than 15 minutes inside and returned home. R.J. was observed counting money in his bedroom and the small bags he took was no longer with him. The researcher is left to assume that R.J. sold the small bag of marijuana in exchange for money. R.J. spent the rest of the day playing his video game.

A.O. who is 20 years of age resides in Orange New Jersey as well. She is a teachers' aide and attended some college. A.O also drives Uber to make ends meet as she school is closed for students and teachers. A.O. was observed in her new apartment that she shares with her boyfriend. The field note states,

> The researcher arrived at A.O. residence around 10am. A.O. was cleaning her home and listening to music. A.O. resides in a one-bedroom apartment of a beautiful high-rise building. A.O. apartment was very clean although she was

cleaning. Everything had its place and in order. A.O. then got an alert on her phone regarding an Uber request for pick up and she proceeded to leave the house and meet the passenger. A.O. spent the next 5 hours picking up passengers throughout different locations in new jersey. A.O. then returned home and cooked. She took a few phone calls but spent most of the evening sitting and watching television. A.O. boyfriend returned. He was visibly older than her and appeared to be in his mid-forties. A.O. prepared a meal for her boyfriend and they spoke for a little bit. A.O. retired to her room while her boyfriend sat on the couch watching sports highlights. The house was very quiet thereafter.

A.F. is a 19year old home health aide from Newark Jersey. She was observed at her home and in her community. The field notes for A.F. states,

The researcher arrived at A.F. home around 9.30am. A.F. resides with a male and two other females in the home. The researcher entered the 3rd floor apartment. Which had one bedroom and a living room which was turned into a makeshift bedroom. The apartment was filled with many storage bins, one can assume as a way of making everything fit in the home as there was many people in the small space. A.F. received a phone call which stated that she was not required to come to work for the next few days as per the patients' family request. A.F. became upset and began using profanity. A.F. and one of the other women began expressing frustration as the rent will now be short. A.F. then became upset, placed her shoes on and walked out the house. While walking A.F. made a phone call to someone unknown to the researcher asking for a loan in the amount of 3

hundred dollars. A.F. came of the telephone with a look of disappointment. A.F

then returned home and spent the rest of the day fixing her resume and she was

observed applying for 2 jobs and searching for others.

J.B. a 19year old male from Newark New Jersey was observed in his home setting

and at work. J.B. lives at home with his mother and father and indicated his associating

with the Bevin Blood gang whose meets regularly in East Orange New Jersey. The field

notes states,

> The researcher arrived at J.B. residence at 10am. J.B. lived in an apartment
>
> building in a high crime area of Newark New Jersey. J.B. was observed getting
>
> dressed in his work attire. J.B. then left the house and drove to south Munn street,
>
> in East Orange New Jersey. While there, J.B. was observed smoking an unknown
>
> substance with friends and engaging in conversation. J.B. then left and drove to
>
> the mall where he is employed as a sales associate. J.B. spent the day engaging
>
> with customers and making sales without incident.

J.L. is a 20year old male who resides in East Orange New Jersey. J.L. was

observed in his home and community. J.L. is also a sales associate at a local retail outlet.

The field notes are as follows:

> The researcher arrived at J.L. home at 11 am. The researcher observed that there
>
> were 5 additional people in the one family house. A male, young boy (mid-teens),
>
> a little girl and 2 women. Upon entering the home, the researcher observed items
>
> cluttered throughout the house. The items were packed up to the ceiling and the
>
> researcher has a difficult time, moving around to different parts of the home due

to the extreme clutter. J.L. room was upstairs in the attic and was observed trying

to clean his room. J.L. room was by far the least cluttered area of the home. J.L.

then spent some time with the little girl, ate and then proceeded to leave the home.

J.L. called his place of employment and informed them he is sick and would not

be able to make it to work. J.L. then left the house and drove to a friend's house in

Newark New Jersey. J.L. engaged with other men and women who were present

at this house and hung out, drank alcohol and smoked marijuana which he rolled

himself for the next few hours. J.L. was observed discussing his goals of owning a

restaurant and needing to make up the money to do so. J.L. friends were very

encouraging and discussed their financial hardship as well. After a few hours, J.L.

returned home and appeared very intoxicated and retired to bed.

M.B is a 20year old female from Patterson New Jersey. M.B. works as a sales

associate at the local Macys department store. M.B. observation occurred at home and in

the community as well. The field notes states,

The researcher arrived at M.B.'s residence on a sunny Saturday morning. M.B.

There were others in the 3bedroom apartment. A man, woman, little girl and

young baby girl. M.B. was observed tending to the baby ho appeared to be no

older than a few months old. M.B. fed the baby girl, changed her and played with

her for a bit. M.B. then asked the older women in the house if she could watch the

baby while she ran some errand. The older woman was compliant. M.B. then left

the home and proceeded into a car with another female occupant who was driving.

M.B. and the unknown female went to the nail shop and got a manicure and

pedicure and discussed the men in their lives and the problems surrounding it.

M.B. and her friend then drove to the Weequahic section of Newark New Jersey

and hung out in the park for a while. While at the park, all the individuals

including M.B. engaged in smoking and some drinking. Some participants were

smoking marijuana (which was concluded from the smell). M.B. engaged in both.

She then asked her friend to take her home as she is scheduled to work 6pm to

closing at her job. Her friend complied and M.B. went home. Upon entering the

home M.B. greeted the little baby at which time it was apparent was hers due to

older woman in the home stating "Come get you child" in a laughing manner.

M.B. Spent some more time with the baby girl and then proceeded to get dressed

in her work attire. M.B. phoned someone asking for a ride to work and was then

picked up and went to work.

R.T. is a 19year old female from Patterson New Jersey. R.J. is a cashier at a

Whole Foods and indicated that she has lived in Patterson all her life. The observation for

R.T. occurred primarily in the community as R.T. was not allowed to bring guest into her

home. The field notes for R.T. states,

> The researcher was outside of R.T.'s apartment building and then proceeded to
>
> follow and observe R.T as she went about her daily routine. It was approximately
>
> 9.am on a sunny Thursday. R.T. caught the bus to the division of motor vehicles
>
> (DMV) and spent a significant amount of time waiting to receive service and
>
> ultimately received a state ID. R.T. then left and bought some fast food to eat
>
> while speaking on the phone. After eating R.T. then caught the bus and went to

her job at Whole Foods. R.T. spent the rest of the day interacting positively with customers as she did a 4hour shift. When her shift was finished, R.T. then went to the parking lot and was observed kissing a man who appeared to be of significance to her. R.T then went into his car and drove off.

G.B. is a 19year old female from Irvington New Jersey. G.B. works as a security guard and her observation took place in her home. The field notes states,

The researcher arrived at G.B. residence on a Monday morning at 8am. The researcher observed a man and woman in the house who was getting ready to leave to go to a destination unknown to the researcher. G.B. had a decent interaction with both the man and woman, however they did not appear warm and close to each other. G.B. was observed fixing herself a meal and she texted and spent a significant amount of time of social worker. A few hours within the observation, there was a knock on the door at which point G.B. invited in 3 other people, 2 males and 1 female. The group had alcohol with them and they began watching television and drinking. The group inquired who the researcher was, at which point G.B. responded by saying "She's cool, she's my peoples" The group then disregarded the researcher and continued interacting with one another. The group coupled up (male and females) and was very affectionate to one another. One of the males was about to begin smoking and G.B. stated that the smell would stay in and her parents would be upset so he can do it outside. The male was compliant and asked G.B. to go downstairs with him. G.B. did so and the two was talking and whispering to the point where the researcher was unable to hear.

G.B. smoked only when offered by her male counterpart. The two then came back upstairs and hung out with the group for a while longer. G.B. then indicated her mother would be home soon and that everyone had to leave. The group of friends complied. G.B. then ensured the home was arranged and everything was in its place G.B. mother arrived home as she predicted and was unaware of anything that occurred.

D.V. a 20year old male from Newark New Jersey who works in construction was observed in both his work and home setting. The field notes states,

The researcher arrived at D.V. place of employment and observed D.V. working very hard. D.V. appeared to have good comradery with his peers and was focused on his task at hand. D.V. then finished work and proceeded to go into an old model car and drove to his residence. Upon entering the home, the researcher noticed the apartment had 3 bedrooms and was relatively untidy and filled with so many items. D.V. showered and the woman in the home asked him for some money. D.V. sighed and then proceeded to provide the woman with an undisclosed amount of cash. D.V. then stated, that he needed more help around here (the home). There was a male (older man) who sat at the table eating and did not say anything to D.V. D.V. went into his room and relaxed as he appeared very exhausted.

L.L. is a 20year old female from Irvington New Jersey who works in retail and is attending community college. L.L. was observed both in her home and community. The field notes for L.L. are as follows:

The researcher arrived at L.L. home on a Tuesday at 8am. Upon observing the home, the researcher found that L.L. lives in a 2bedroom apartment with her parents. L.L. The apartment was not very spacious, but it appeared comfortable for those who live in it. L.L. then proceeded to go outside and caught the bus to the college she attends "Essex County College". L.L. attended classes and late that day caught the bus once again. She stopped at her place of employment and began working her shift. L.L. appeared tired but continued to push through the work day. She was very pleasant to customers and displayed problem-solving skills many times.

After reviewing and analyzing the field notes for all the young adult participants, I found themes that includes poverty as many of them lived in small apartments that was very crammed and small. I also found that many of these young adults engage in marijuana use especially in social settings with their friends Another them that emerged was that most of the participants had employment despite their social drug use. These young adults have a better relationship with their peers than they do with their family and there is a disconnect in the family household as it is found that all the participants hardly engaged in conversation with members of their family.

Evidence of Quality

The goal of this research is to place participants and their experiences as the focal point in understand the many ways the War on Drugs affects the offender, their significant others and young adults who have had one or both parents incarcerated from a drug crime. Triangulation was used as evidence of trustworthiness to assist with ensuring

the reliability and validity of the study. According to (Abdalla, Oliveira, Azevedo, & Gonzalez 2018), "When a researcher looks at an object from a given perspective, he or she needs to think from at least another couple of viewpoints as perspectives capable of adjusting the right 'distance' and 'angulation' of concepts, thus, relocating him or herself definitively". This was able to be accomplished discussing with the participants the nature of the study and seeing individuals who fit the demographic and the knowledge requirements for participation. Personal biased were also avoided by presenting questions in a manner where participants were provided with an opportunity to present their thoughts and ideas as opposed to giving choices for them to choose from. My role as the critical ethnographer was to observe and provide a platform for others to share their insights and how they view the phenomenon that is occurring in their life. The consent forms also building a sense of trust between the researcher and the participant as they were aware of what was going to occur and were not blindsided or misinformed. The consent form depicted the purpose of the study, the procedures, the confidentiality (which was especially important to the young adults), along with the risk and benefits of the study. Participants were also presented with the Director of the Office of Research Ethics and Compliance Chair in the event they had questions or concerns about their rights. Participants were also presented with a participant check form to review to ensure they agreed with the notes taken.

Triangulation Analysis

To achieve triangulation for this study, interviews, observation and field notes from those observations were used to paint an accurate picture of the participants

personal experiences and how they go about their lives on a day to day basis. Throughout the process I made every effort to take copious notes in order to maintain accuracy of the study. Participants were also provided the opportunity to review the field notes from the observations and approve the details written. The "Participant check form" (See Appendix D) was utilized in this process. The triangulation process also allowed me to uncover if there were any discrepancies, or irregularities in the information that was presented. Using 30 participant from 5 different cities in Essex County New Jersey also became another form of triangulation as I was able to compare and contrast participants responses to determine if a trend is indeed present. This occurred through the coding process of NVivo in addition to assessing the responses from the interviews and observations.

Primary Research Question and Findings

The findings of my ethnographic interviews and observations assisted with answering the central research question: How has the War on Drugs impacted your life? The research conveyed that the incarceration of an African American male has lasting effects on how one lives their life and the decisions they make going forward. This research also highlighted African American views on the Criminal Justice System and their lack of belief in it as they primarily feel like targets. The critical interviews were the source of data to understand the phenomenon from an African American who is experiencing the impact of the War on Drugs.

The interviews substantiated that African Americans do not believe in the criminal justice system and deem it unfair as it mainly affects their race. The interviews

were also able to highlight that many people whether it be the offender or their loved ones, experience mental health struggles due to incarceration and the long-term effects of it even when being released from prison. Depression, anxiety and anger was a common theme among participants and although mental health has not been a great concern in the past, this study has shown the great need to address it as it is prevalent in todays' society. This study also highlighted the strength of women to push forward despite the odds 9 out of the 10 women participants went onto to achieve college degrees and sustain their family during a tumultuous time in their lives. The observation was also a source of data that conveyed the poverty, the daily challenges to survive and the continuous drug use by past offenders and the young adults. By merging both interviews and observations, a clear picture was painted on how the War on Drugs has caused the African American community to continue to be stagnant and, in some instances decline as growth is difficult to attain when the cycle of poverty, mental health and drug use continue to plague their community.

Participants proposed a variety of way to ameliorate the drug policies so that it is not biased and provide an authentic chance for positive change. Firstly, it is recommended that fair sentencing be exhibited among all races, and blacks not be the main targets. Secondly the participants recommended rehabilitation for offenders as opposed to simply incarceration. Rehabilitation can include the education of drug use and its' harmful effects, in addition to rehabilitating the offender when they are released from prison as immersing them back into society can take a toll on them mentally, which ultimately affects their family life.

Participants also highlight the importance of voting and exercising that right as many believe that if they do not vote it simply does not count. One participant stated, "we don't support each other so doing that we'd have more minorities within parliament that would be able to speak up for our right and things that are important to us". Education was also discussed by participants as a tool for blacks to play an active role in the policy making process. But the main theme focused on African Americans coming together to make this change occur. Participants admitted that they do not see a lot of support among their own race and this plays a role in why there is not a great deal of success.

Summary

Using the Spradley model provided an organized manner to uncover how the War on Drugs has impacted the lives of African American here in the United Stated. The Racial Threat Theory which describes white Americans as seeking ways to maintain social control was also confirmed as the mass incarceration of an individual stems to others around them and creates a cycle of poverty and ongoing challenges in one's life. The drug policies and harsh prison sentences for black men and women in America as my participants discussed is unfair and targeted to specifically the black community. This as my participants suggested that there is need for reform of the drug policies as Marijuana is legalized in some states, yet many blacks still receive harsh penalties for either using or selling the drugs. Chapter 5 will discuss some noteworthy suggestions to create a solution that can be a step to having positive drug reform in the United States.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

This study was conducted to provide a platform for African Americans affected by the war on drugs to explore how it impacted their lives. Ethnographic interviews and observations were used as the primary method of data collection to understand the phenomenon. The purpose of this study was to encourage and empower others to advocate for social change whether they are part of the African American community or not. In addition, the goal was to allow participants to be part of the brainstorming process and allow them to share their ideas on how social change can occur. The central question that drove the study was the following: How has the war on drugs impacted the lives of African Americans?

The Spradley model was used to examine the participants' point of view by way of descriptive, structural, and contrast questions. Additionally, nonparticipant observations were conducted to support the interview questions and enable the participants to be seen in their natural settings. The key findings were that mental health awareness and assistance are needed by those affected by the war on drugs as well as fair sentencing for African Americans. The findings also showed that African Americans believe they need to come together to impact social change in their community.

Interpretation of the Findings

My interpretation of the data is based on the observations and interviews that occurred throughout the study. By establishing rapport with the participants and creating a level of comfort, I was welcomed to not only ask deep and personal questions but to witness the activities participants engage in daily. By observing the participants, I was

able to notice expressions, gestures, and in some instances, risky activities that allowed me to interpret the challenges they are facing and how they cope with it daily. The goal of the interviews was to avoid inserting my beliefs or values and to provide participants with a safe place to share their feelings and opinions.

During the interview process, many of the participants appeared relieved to share their story and were eager to do so. When asked about their mental health, participants were thoughtful as they gave their responses. Mental health is stigmatized in U.S. society, so having the participants share this openly was refreshing as it allowed the study to be authentic and to convey the struggles participants were experiencing. The interview process also revealed that the male ex-offenders grew up in poverty and sold drugs to survive and take care of their family. The most popular drug participants were imprisoned for was marijuana. The interview process also revealed that participants felt that a target had been placed on them because they were African American and that fair sentencing should be implemented regardless of the drug or the person's race.

Studies have shown that Blacks are adversely affected by the war on drugs. People of color in urban areas have been the primary target when it comes to fighting the war on drugs. In some states, 90% of prison admissions of Blacks were for drug offenses. (Provine, 2011). Over half of those in prison have no history of violence or high-level drug selling and most offenders are small-time dealers or drug users (Provine, 2011). Findings from the current study indicated that not much has changed since those studies; findings also highlighted the extensive and lasting effect the war on drugs has on the offender, significant other, or young adults who were children when they experienced this

phenomenon. The side effect of targeting Blacks in an effort to fight the drug epidemic is not only the financial strain that perpetuates recidivism, but also the mental health struggle associated with the phenomenon. Having an incarcerated family member negatively affects the physical and mental health of nonincarcerated female partners and children. Incarceration is a destabilizing force within families; it interferes with the maintenance of romantic unions and effective parenting and makes it difficult for families to provide emotional and social support to each other (Fornili, 2018). Although Whites and African Americans experience mental health issues at the same rate, there is a history of misdiagnosis, overmedication, and inadequate attention to cultural and societal influences in the etiology of and interventions for mental illness (Curtis-Boles, 2017).

Regarding mental health, the two predominant illness mentioned by participants were depression and anxiety; these illnesses were prevalent among the male ex- offenders and women who were significant others. Although the percentage of African American men with depression is lower than that of Whites, there are disparities in the utilization and treatment of Blacks suffering from this illness (Hudson, Eaton, Banks, Sewell, & Neighbors, 2018). Holden et al. (2015) found that financial stressors and being the head of the household contributes to depression among African American women. This is consistent with my findings as the women participants who were significant others reported depression due to financial stressors and being forced into taking on the roles of both parents as their husband or significant other was incarcerated.

The symptoms of anxiety include autonomic hyperarousal and may include heart racing, sweating, shortness of breath, and trembling in addition to cognitive symptoms

such as thoughts of impending doom (Carter & Sbrocco, 2018). These symptoms are consistent with the descriptions given by male ex-offenders who experienced anxiety both in and out of prison. The fear of being targeted by law enforcement impeded their daily life and affect their ability to grow and be successful. Carter and Sbrocco (2018) also found that African Americans experience race-related stress that directly affects their expression of anxious pathology. Being a Black male in the United States is challenging. However, this study also reflects that being an ex-convict can increase anxiety and impede growth and development.

When I asked participants what they thought could be done to address drug policy issues, their main responses were effective rehabilitation and fair sentencing. In relation to fair sentencing, having marijuana decriminalized was discussed as well as commuting the sentences of offenders incarcerated for this drug because of legislation in states that have legalized marijuana. Since the 2016 elections, 28 states and the District of Columbia have legalized marijuana use for medical use, and eight states have legalized it for recreational use. More than half of Americans can now access medical marijuana, and roughly 20% of the U.S. population lives in a state where recreational marijuana is legal (Brilmayer, 2017). The community is well aware of the changes in legislation that is made by the government, however despite these changes, they have not been in favor of the black community and it is evident in the fact that many of the individuals are still incarcerated and live completely changed for a drug that has been now legalized in some states and has the potential to be legalized nationwide in the future.

Limitations of the Study

The limitations of the study included the fact that every ex- offender, significant other or young adult in the United States were not able to be a part of the study. This study was also limited to the urban area of Essex County New Jersey and not nationally. Additionally, children under the age of 18 were excluded from the study due to the challenge in receiving parental consent as well as the concern of exposing young children to a sensitive subject. This study was also limited to a qualitative approach as a quantitative approach would not have allowed participants the opportunity to express themselves and share their truth.

Recommendations for Action

As indicated in Chapter 2, the war on drugs has caused economic hardship and disconnect in Black families. Findings from the current study indicated that this is still an issue along with mental health struggles. The analysis of the data from this ethnographic study led to the following recommendations for action.

The first recommendation for action will be to decriminalize Marijuana and commute sentences for non- violent offenders who have been charge with this crime. During my interview with M.T. he said, "The moment it is decriminalized it does not bar you from slipping back right into society" in addition I have also found that the majority 8 out of 10 participant who were interviewed were incarcerated for a non-violent drug offense surrounding Marijuana. This data conveys that African American men are being incarcerated in mass number for a drug that is now legal in some states. If it is indeed harmful to one's life, then why would it be legalized in some states across the nation?

Mitchell (2016), states that many state and local law enforcement agencies, which make the vast majority of drug arrests, appear to still operate under the policies and practices adopted under in the 1980s and the clearest evidence of this is the sustained high rate of drug arrest in the United States, particularly for low-level drug offenses, typically involving marijuana possession. (pp. 185).

> D.V. stated,

> I think incarcerating people for minor drugs such as Marijuana should be taken of the books. Marijuana should not be prosecuted as hard as it is. Maybe cocaine or other drugs should be, but Marijuana has not been proven to affect people mentally, actually help people physically.

> Another recommendation is to truly implement fair sentencing for all offenders. This recommendation ties into the decriminalization of Marijuana which will in turn affect one's sentencing and incarceration. Although, the Fair sentencing Act implemented by President Obama reduced the crack to cocaine ration to 18: 1, it is still deemed unfair, especially as most of the arrest occurs in urban communities and target African Americans. C.D. describes fair sentencing in her interview as:

> Just making things equal across the board, Like, somebody who has money or of a different class should not be able to get off because they have a good a lawyer. I feel like what's "good for the goose should be good for the gander" It's not because okay some of us are African Americans and we don't have the good lawyer or can't afford it, we're gonna get sometimes what it seems to be like more time or just charged in general, rather than somebody that's not. I think it should

be across the board equal. Like if you have a certain amount of say cocaine and crack; that it should be equal in sentencing and not because one is cocaine and one is crack.

Therefore, if fair sentencing was implemented regardless of race, gender or even social class, it would paint a different picture of the prison population as it will truly reflect the participants who are committing drug crimes and not stigmatize one social group, in this case which is African Americans. Cockroft (2017) stated "Fair Sentencing Act does not contain language that explicitly and unequivocally requires that the new mandatory minimums be applied retroactively. Thus, a narrow reading of the Fair Sentencing Act would mean that individuals sentenced under mandatory minimums that the law acknowledged were, at the very least, perpetuating a racially discriminatory system, would have to serve out those sentences" (pp.325). Therefore, the implementation of this Act, acts a smoke screen as the incarceration blacks is still skewed which then affects the offenders and their family lives moving forward.

The last recommendation suggests proper rehabilitation for offender and the option available to their family as well. Rehabilitation has many facets to it as the evidence of the study highlight that incarceration affects many and not simply the offender. Rehabilitation can firstly be an alternative to incarceration as drug offenders need assistance in understanding the reason why they use drugs (if they are not distributing to others) and how to move forward without the need for it. Therefore, rehabilitation of these offenders should include a court mandated program that provides

therapeutic services for individuals to attend to overcome this addiction. This will not only assist them upon their return to society but reduce the recidivism rate.

For those offenders who do not meet the requirements to participate in the therapeutic rehabilitation program outside of prison, there should also be a rehabilitation program in prison that prepares them to deal with the hardship that comes along with incarceration and education and preparedness to re-enter society. The study conducted highlights that many of the offenders suffered from anxiety and depression while in prison and when they returned to their community. They were not prepared for the changes that they encountered which ultimately led them to struggling with mental health issues that took a toll on them and their family.

Lastly, in terms of rehabilitation, it should be extended to the offenders' immediate family as well. The study highlighted that the women and significant others of offenders imprisoned due to drug crimes suffered and is still suffering from the effects of anxiety and in most cases depression. Many would think once you incarcerate an individual that the issue is solved. However, the people linked to these offenders are forgotten and have to move on with their lives. The study also showed that the young adults harbored anger due to the incarceration of their parent and exhibited behavior that is not conducive to their growth and development. It was also observed that some of these young adults engage in drug use themselves and can end up on the same path as their parent did. comparing African Americans to their white counterparts, they are disproportionately affected by mental illnesses, in part, because of certain barriers that affect their mental health care access and utilization (Chang & Downey, 2012). Some

studies (Anderson, 2013) have suggested that African Americans are disproportionately at risk for mental illness due their overrepresentation in socially marginalized groups (i.e., prison, foster care, and child welfare systems; impoverished and homeless communities; and victims or witnesses of violent crimes) (Kawaii-Bogue, Williams, & MacNear, 2017).

Therefore, of the government was to implement a free mental health program that families of incarcerated individuals can utilize, it can assist with creating a more positive environment and family structure if the incarcerated individuals return home to their family, provide coping skills for the family to navigate through the trying time of their loved one incarcerated and pave the way to reduce the further crime and engagement of young adults with drugs as they will be open and educated on a more positive approach on how to live their life.

Recommendations for Further Study

This Critical Ethnographic research allowed for the Racial Threat Theory to focus on the impact of the War on Drugs on African Americans. The data collected with culturally sensitive interviews and observations allowed African Americans to be the core of the research. This research allowed the discovery of mental health in the African American community to be highlighted, however I believe further studies that of possibly a quantitative approach can further highlight the number of African Americans suffering with mental health can be uncovered in addition to providing effective strategies on how they can develop coping skills to manage this illness. Part of finding a solution is having a full grasp on the problem and assisting people with acknowledging the fact that mental

health is not to be overlooked or ashamed of. In a sense my normalizing this, I believe

that more people will be open to discussing their struggle with it and seek assistance

without feeling judged or restricted.

Implications

The data collected from both the interviews and observations of the research

conveys how extremely useful this study is. It has shown that much has not changed in

the past 20 years and that the African American community is highly affected by the War

on Drugs. It has also shown that mental health issues are at an extreme high in these

communities and goes unaddressed. The Racial Threat theory which discusses whites'

social control of blacks evident in the research as the control goes beyond incarceration

but extends to economic suffrage and what is now apparent mental health issues.

Therefore, rehabilitation for all and subsequent research on mental health in the black

community and how to undertake them will be a step in the right direction to ensue

positive change and growth, in addition to reducing the number of African American

incarcerated in the penal system.

The participants of this study holistically agreed that both political and change

among themselves in the African American community is required to impart the change

that is needed to break free of the mental and economic oppression that has been

bestowed on the black community due to the current drug policies. Thus, the most

significant social change proposed within the culmination of this research is for political

leaders to work together with the community to provide resources for rehabilitation for

offenders and families with specific attention to their mental health struggles, in addition

to creating fairness in the criminal justice system that is non-biased by race nor class.

Additionally, if the African American community unite and play an active role in the

policy making process by way of voting and education, they too can be on a path to

advocate and increase the changes of drug legislation and ultimately create social change.

Conclusion

As stated earlier, the goal of this ethnographic study is to provide the platform for

African Americans to share their experiences with the War on Drugs and how it affects

them. The data collected showed there is indeed an impact on the black community due

to the drug policies, some of which has been discussed in the past such as poverty, lack of

employment and now the mental health of the offenders and their families as a result of

the War on Drugs. Michelle Alexander who write the book entitled "The New Jim Crow:

Mass Incarceration in the age of colorblindness" (2010) said,

Jim Crow and mass incarceration have similar political origins...both caste

systems were born in part, due to desire among white elites to exploit the

resentments, vulnerabilities and racial biases of poor and working-class whites for

political or economic gain. Segregation laws were proposed as part of a deliberate

and strategic effort to deflect anger and hostility that have been brewing against

the white elite away from them and toward African Americans. The birth of mass

incarceration can be traced to a similar political dynamic. Conservatives in the

1960s and 1970s sought to appeal to the racial biases and economic vulnerabilities

of poor and working-class whites through racially coded rhetoric on crime and

welfare. In both cases, the racial opportunists offered few, if any, economic

reforms to address the legitimate economic anxieties of poor and working-class whites, proposing instead a crackdown on the racially defined "others." In the early years of Jim Crow, conservative white elites competed with each other by passing ever more stringent and oppressive Jim Crow legislation. A century later, politicians in the early years of the drug war competed with each other to prove who could be tougher on crime by passing ever harsher drug laws- a thinly veiled effort to appeal to poor and working-class whites who, once again, proved they were willing to forego economic and structural reform in exchange for an apparent effort to put blacks back "in their place.

Understanding this phenomenon supports the Racial Threat Theory, as the War on Drugs has become a way to ensure that African Americans simply do not rise to the occasion and continue of a journey of hardship, as the incarceration of the black man (who in many cases are the backbone and support of the family), limits the chances of their family overcoming adversity. Physical and mental enslavement is the end product of current impact of the War on Drugs in the United States. It is with hopes that the experiences and sentiments shared by participants will assist with inspiring others in the black community and political leaders to create positive social change.

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Appendix A: Critical Ethnography Interview Questions

1. Hello _____. I thank you for having the opportunity to meet with you
to conduct this interview. As discussed previously, this discussion is strictly confidential
and so I ask that you be open and frank throughout the process as this is a safe and secure
environment. Do not hesitate at any point to inform me if you feel like you need a break.
Let's begin.

2. As mentioned before, I am interested in understanding the impact of the War on Drugs
has on black Americans who were either incarcerated, or closely involved with someone
who was incarcerated due to the current drug policies.

Central Question

How has the war on drugs impacted the lives of African Americans?

Background questions

1. When were you born?

2. Which location did you grow up in?

3. How long did u live in this location?

4. What was the predominant cultural group in your area?

5. Where do you reside now and for how long?

6. What is your current occupation?

7. What is your highest level of education?

8. What were you arrested for? (men participants only)

9. How long were you sentenced? (men participants only)

10. How much of time did you serve? (men participants only)

Men – (released offenders)

<u>Descriptive questions</u>

11. How would you describe your life prior to being incarcerated?

12. What were your experiences like while being incarcerated?

13. How would you describe your experiences once being released from prison?

14. Describe the different ways incarceration affected you as an individual?

15. How would you describe your current mental health since being affected by drug policies and penalties?

<u>Structural questions</u>

16. What led you to lead a life of drugs?

17. What goals did you set for yourself upon being released from prison?

18. What was the most challenging part of transitioning back into society?

19. How has incarceration affected you as an individual?

<u>Contrast questions</u>

20. What are your view regarding the current drug policies in the United States?

21. What do you think could be added or changed as more effective approach to resolving drug policy issues?

22. What do you think black Americans can do as a community to play a vital and active role in the policy- making process?

Wives/ Significant Other

Descriptive questions

23. How would you describe your lifestyle prior to your husband/significant other being incarcerated?

24. How would you describe your experiences when your husband/significant other was incarcerated?

25. Describe what challenges you've faced during your husband/ significant other incarceration?

26. How would you describe your mental health since being affected by drug policies and penalties?

Structural questions

27. How long was your husband/significant other incarcerated for?

28. What were your experiences when your husband/significant other was released from prison?

Contrast questions

29. What are your view regarding the current drug policies in the United States?

30. What do you think could be added or changed as more effective approach to resolving drug policy issues?

31. What do you think black Americans can do as a community to play a vital and active role in the policy- making process?

Young adults (18-20 years)

Descriptive questions

29. How would you describe your life prior to your parent(s) being incarcerated?

30. Recount what your experiences were like when your parent(s) were incarcerated?

31. Describe the relationship between you and your parent when they returned home from being incarcerated?

32. How would you describe your mental health currently due to the changes brought on by the incarceration of your parent(s)?

<u>Structural Questions</u>

33. How long were your parent(s) incarcerated?

34. What changes occurred once your parent (s) was incarcerated?

35. What were your experiences like when your parent (s) were released from prison?

<u>Contrast Questions</u>

33. What are your view regarding the current drug policies in the United States?

34. What do you think could be added or changed as more effective approach to resolving drug policy issues?

35. What do you think black Americans can do as a community to play a vital and active role in the policy- making process?