

2020

## Effects of Laws, Policies, and Rehabilitation Programs on African American Male Juvenile Recidivism in Southwest Georgia

Kizzie Donaldson-Richard  
*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Kizzie Richard

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Review Committee

Dr. Dianne Williams, Committee Chairperson,  
Criminal Justice Faculty

Dr. Jessie Lee, Committee Member,  
Criminal Justice Faculty

Dr. Darius Cooper, University Reviewer,  
Criminal Justice Faculty

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

Walden University  
2020

Abstract

Effects of Laws, Policies, and Rehabilitation Programs on African American Male

Juvenile Recidivism in Southwest Georgia

by

Kizzie Richard

M.Ed., Troy State, 2006

BS, Albany State, 2004

AA, AA Darton College, 2002

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Criminal Justice

Public Policy

Walden University

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## Abstract

The laws, policies, and rehabilitation programs of Georgia's juvenile justice system need to be revisited, especially given the documented rates of recidivism of African American male juveniles in southwest Georgia. The primary purpose of the juvenile justice system is to rehabilitate youthful offenders and to ensure that recidivism, defined as 3 or more arrests within 3 years after release, does not occur. Data have suggested that corrective behavior sanctions, rehabilitation programs, and lenient sentencing have escalated African American male juvenile recidivism rates, particularly in Dougherty and Tift Counties, Georgia. The purpose of this qualitative methodological study was to explore the perceptions and current experiences with Georgia's laws, policies, and rehabilitation programs of a representative sample population from these counties. Studying the lived experiences of the 24 participants suggested changes to current programs and guidelines that could reduce the number of recidivist cases among African American male juveniles. The theoretical framework supported a general qualitative study. The research questions specifically examined the effects of the 2013 Juvenile Reform Act (Ga. HB-242) on the lived experiences of African American male juvenile ex-offenders, who were older than 18 years but younger than 40 years, when seeking employment, education, and housing after incarceration. Data from interviews, ratings, and evaluations were coded and categorized for thematic analysis. The implications of this research are far reaching and can be used to position social change that will help revamp laws, policies, and rehabilitation programs that may reduce recidivism rates of African American male juvenile offenders in southwest Georgia.

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## Dedication

My journey was filled with many twists, turns, and hiccups that had to occur during this process so that I would recognize Him who made it all possible. To my Father and my Savior, Jesus Christ, words cannot express my gratitude. Without your grace and mercy, none of this would have transpired and come to pass. To my parents, the late Fred Donaldson and Sylvia Harris, thank you for all that you instilled in my upbringing that prepared me for life's challenges. Your motivation, dedication, and inspiration guided me and pushed me to achieve my biggest goal, which is the highest level of education, a doctoral degree. Although your physical presence is gone, your spirit lives on, and I love you both. To my husband (Robert Richard Jr.), Webster himself could not define the word or words to express how I feel about you and the momentum you provided. To my sons, Isaiah Donaldson (Whoop) and Robert Richard III (Trey), you guys were both exuberant and showed altruistic behaviors as I worked through this process. From assisting me with organizing my data into folders to helping one another while I worked intensely on my dissertation, you both are the best! To my sister/cousin, Deidre Slack (Dee), it is impossible for me to explain in a short sentence, or paragraph, the indebtedness that I owe to you for all you have done for me during my life's woes and accomplishments. You exemplify the true epitome of what support and love look like. You are someone who gives your time, support, and love gracefully. I know you are the vessels to my achievements, and to God I give the honor and praise for giving me YOU.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

### **Introduction**

Recidivism exacerbates juvenile incarceration rates in Georgia and the United States. According to the FBI Uniform Crime Reporting Program (2016) and the Sentencing Project (2018), African American juveniles accounted for 35% of all arrests, yet they made up only 15% of the youth population. The Georgia Council on Criminal Justice Reform (2017, 2018) revealed that 65% of juveniles released from Georgia's secured development campuses were recidivist (Boggs & Worthy, 2018). Data analyzed in Georgia's 2014 Center for Public Integrity Report indicated that its juvenile system had a rate of repeat offenders that was as high as the adult prison population (Walls, 2014). The criminal justice system affects African American males the most of all races (Boggs & Worthy, 2015, 2016, 2017). Recent research shows that African American male juveniles in Georgia are more likely to be adjudicated delinquent and, after confinement and reentry, to experience recidivism at much higher rates than male juveniles of other races (Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice, 2011). Also, the Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice (2016) reported that African American male recidivism rates continue to rise despite the enactment of the 2013 Juvenile Justice Reform Act (HB 242, Georgia Assembly, 2013-2014) and increased funding for juvenile justice programs designed to reduce overall recidivism. Although the number of youths in the juvenile justice system has decreased in Georgia, recidivism continues at a high rate, resulting in 65% of youth released from secure facilities in Georgia being identified as reoffenders in 2007 (Pew Charitable Trust, 2013). As an alternative to placement in secure facilities, such as Youth Development Campuses (YDCs) or Regional Youth

Detention Centers (RYDCs), different types of community-based supervision and diversion programs are needed and include juvenile probation, individual therapy, family-based therapy, life skills training, and risk and needs assessments (Boggs & Worthy, 2015, 2016, 2017; Pew Charitable Trust, 2003-2018).

Lawmakers in Georgia and throughout the United States appropriated \$5 million in 2014 to expand their evidence-based programs (EBPs) for juveniles with delinquent and reoffending behaviors, and there has been evidence of a reduction in recidivism rates as a whole (Georgia Council on Criminal Justice Reform, 2017, 2018). A critical contribution to Georgia's reduction in juvenile recidivism has been the implementation of the Juvenile Justice Incentive Grant Program (JJIGP). The JJIGP administers granted-funded EBPs on a county-wide basis that are designed to reduce recidivism rates as well as detention and confinement rates. The results are used as a guide to improve current laws, policies, and rehabilitation programs that serve juvenile offenders statewide and to gain the support of executive decision makers and activists in the state of Georgia (Pew Charitable Trust, 2013). The statewide implementation of successful EBPs is critical given that the data on juvenile recidivism issues in Georgia do not explain why African American male juvenile offenders as a subgroup continue to reoffend at such high rates compared with other adjudicated youth, particularly in southwest Georgia. I designed my research to address this issue

In this chapter, I present the background of the study, statement of the problem, my purpose in this study, the research questions, and the theoretical framework. I conclude Chapter 1 by exploring the assumptions, limitations, scope, and delimitations of the study.

## **Background**

Recidivism of juvenile offenders has been a topic of experiential research for some time (Peterson-Badali, Peterson, & Haqanee, 2015; Ryan, Abrams, & Huang, 2014). Policy makers in Georgia have refined and amended the state's 2013 Juvenile Justice Reform Bill since it was inaugurated (Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice, 2016). However, as a subgroup, African American male juveniles continue to engage in high rates of reoffending behaviors. The efforts of decision makers and practitioners in Georgia have failed to reduce the rates of those behaviors in this subgroup through rehabilitation and supervision programs. Although this is an issue statewide, the ripple effect of the failing system has a detrimental effect on some of the poorest counties of southwest Georgia, specifically Dougherty County (Albany) and Tift County (Tifton).

According to Community Tool Box (2018), an online resource to promote healthier communities, conditions such as poor outcomes from government investment (on a state level) and a lack of collaboration among policy makers in individual counties to effectively revamp laws and policies combine to contribute to high recidivism rates in Georgia. For example, there are opportunities for local and state stakeholders to invest in early interventions for juveniles starting as early as 3 years of age. Such programs are designed to develop children's prosocial behaviors and coping skills. However, in the most impoverished neighborhoods in Georgia, many juvenile justice administrators and community leaders struggle to proactively address factors that lead to confinement and recidivism and to implement evidence-based community programs for adjudicated youth; instead, the solution is often to build more out-of-home correctional facilities.

From the Reagan to the Clinton administrations, incarceration rates for nonviolent crimes fluctuated from 50,000 in 1980 to more than 400,000 by 1997, and the numbers continued to increase during the next decade (Drug Policy Alliance, 2018). According to the FBI Crime in the United States report (2017), Georgia had 7,304 arrests of juveniles younger than 18 years for drugs and property crimes. In addition to experiencing the effect of high incarceration rates, the African American community was significantly affected by the long and demanding sentences in response to the explosion of drug use, such as crack cocaine, which carried a harsh sentence for a nonviolent crime. The high rate of adult incarceration left thousands of youth living in single-parent homes, with relatives, or in other makeshift arrangements (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1990), creating a negative social and economic environment for the next generation. One rationale to explain Georgia's incarceration rate in the 1980s and 1990s was the ripple effect of youth involvement in criminal/recidivist behaviors.

In 1994, President Clinton signed the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act, which is commonly known as the "Three Strikes" law, with the intent of reducing crime. Georgia implemented the "Three Strikes" law under O.C.G.A. 17-10-7: (a) (b) (1) and (2) in (Justia US Law, 2010) which read:

- (a) Except as otherwise provided in subsection (b) of this Code section, any person convicted of a felony offense in this state or having been convicted under the laws of any other state or of the United States of a crime which if committed within this state would be a felony and sentenced to confinement in a penal institution, who shall afterwards commit a felony punishable by confinement in a penal institution, shall be sentenced to undergo the longest



period of time prescribed for the punishment of the subsequent offense of which he or she stands convicted, provided that, unless otherwise provided by law, the trial judge may, in his or her discretion, probate or suspend the maximum sentence prescribed for the offense.

(b)(1) As used in this subsection, the term “serious violent felony” means a serious violent felony as defined in subsection (a) of Code Section 17-10-6.1.

(2) Any person who has been convicted of a serious violent felony in this state or who has been convicted under the laws of any other state or of the United States of a crime which if committed in this state would be a severe violent felony and who after such first conviction subsequently commits and is convicted of a serious violent felony for which such person is not sentenced to death shall be sentenced to imprisonment for life without parole.

Justia US Law (2010) reported the following:

Any such sentence of life without parole shall not be suspended, stayed, probated, deferred, or withheld, and any such person sentenced pursuant to this paragraph shall not be eligible for any form of pardon, parole, or early release administered by the State Board of Pardons and Paroles or for any earned time, early release, work release, leave, or any other sentence-reducing measures under programs administered by the Department of Corrections, the effect of which would be to reduce the sentence of life imprisonment without possibility of parole, except as may be authorized by any existing or future provisions of the Constitution. (para. 1 and 2)

As a result of the implementation of President Clinton's "Three Strikes" law, juveniles were more likely to experience lengthy incarcerations, and African Americans males dominated that incarcerated population in the United States as a whole and in the state of Georgia. For example, African American males accounted for 13% of the nationwide population, but they make up 40% of the incarcerated group (Wagner & Rabury, 2017).

According to the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP, 2016, 2017), there were no changes in the number of juvenile offenses in Georgia. Nevertheless, in 2015, Georgia reported that 30,683 juveniles were arrested for both criminal and status offenses, whereas the United States reported an estimate of 921,600 juvenile arrests (Uniform Crime Reporting Program [UCR], 2016, pp. 7-9). A disposition breakdown indicates that 17,161 juveniles were referred to juvenile court, 5,758 were referred to adult/criminal court, and 3,383 were handled within the department. Most of those juvenile offenders were African American males (UCR, 2016).

According to Georgia's Department of Juvenile Justice Quick Facts (2017), 91.4% of juvenile offenders who were housed in secured YDC facilities in 2016 were males. Nevertheless, in (2018), 92.3% of the male juveniles in Georgia had committed status offenses that no longer had compulsory sentencing (Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice, 2018; Niles, 2018). Status offenses are offenses only juveniles can be charged with committing (Boggs & Worthy, 2018). Georgia's Criminal Justice Coordinating Council Three-Year Plan for Juvenile Justice (2015-2017) revealed that 23,279 males younger than 17 years were arrested in 2014 in Georgia with 520 males younger than 19 years housed in adult prisons.

This epidemic may be heavily influenced by the socioeconomic status of African Americans males in this population group. According to the Georgia Children’s Report (2017), in 2015, 1,185,000 children lived below the 200% poverty level. In 2016, the unemployment rate in Georgia was 5.4% and 15.7% of households in Georgia experienced food insecurity between 2012 and 2014. In response to these and other socioeconomic challenges, crime increased statewide. The Georgia’s Children’s Report (GCR) indicated that 55,000 teens between the ages of 16 and 19 years in Georgia were unemployed and not enrolled in school (GCR, 2017). In Table 1, I provide unemployment data for Georgia between 2014 and 2016 (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2014-2016).

Table 1

*Unemployment Data for Georgia, 2014-2016*

Year	2014	2015	2016
Number unemployed	338,590	285,343	264,209
Percentage unemployed	7.1%	6.0%	5.4%

*Note.* Adapted from The Annie E. Casey Foundation Kids Count Data Center.

According to Musu-Gillette, Zhang, Wang, Zhang, and Oudekerk (2017), many young African American males are suspended from school, become involved in fights, join gangs, and engage in delinquent behavior, which may result in criminal activities or reoffending behaviors. If the underlying issues of precriminal intent are not addressed during rehabilitation or supervision, African American male juveniles will be more likely to reoffend, engage in criminal behaviors, and become recidivist. Nevertheless, there is a

lack of research (a) addressing both the effects of existing laws, policies, and rehabilitation programs, and the likelihood that individual African American male juvenile offenders will reoffend in southwest Georgia; and (b) showing additional reforms needed to reverse the trend.

### **Problem Statement**

As I previously stated, Georgia's African American male juvenile ex-offenders have a high rate of recidivism following release from incarceration. According to the Pew Charitable Trust (2013), "More than 50% of adjudicated youth were readjudicated delinquent or convicted of a crime within three years of release" (para. 2). Moreover, 65% of juvenile offenders released from Georgia's YDC facilities were reported to be recidivists (p. 3). This problem is especially prevalent in the state's southwestern region, which includes some of its poorest counties, including Dougherty and Tift. Given the sobering data presented by Rovner (2016), an adjustment must be made to sentencing standards, rehabilitation programs, and ongoing post-incarceration support for juvenile offenders and their families to reduce the recidivism rates among its African American male youth. Focusing on one area helps to correct that individual problem. For example, data collected by Rovner between 2003 and 2013 revealed that African American commitment rates spiked from 38% to 40% despite the decrease in adjudication (Rovner, 2016). However, in the State of Georgia, policy makers decided that they would give juvenile offenders harsher sentences for the most violent crimes and rehabilitation for nonviolent crimes (Boggs & Worthy, 2017). This technique was considered as a way to curtail the State of Georgia's recidivism rates while having the intention of rehabilitating juveniles in the community for nonviolent crimes instead of placing them in detainment

facilities (Walls, 2014). In addition to the adjustments that were made (Boggs & Worthy, 2017), Georgia decided to implement some of the suggestions that policy makers brought back from the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI) Inter-Site Conference. The JDAI Inter-Site Conference is a juvenile justice reform conference hosted by The Casey Foundation for policy makers and practitioners (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2017). At this conference, an array of events take place, such as discussions about policies that received positive results and different practices used to help decrease juvenile detention (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2017). The JDAI philosophy was adopted to have a routine but yet functioning program in place to aid in Georgia's juvenile reform efforts (Boggs & Worthy, 2017). Research by Rovner (2016) showed that African American juveniles were more than four times as likely to be committed into juvenile correction facilities compared to their peers of other races. For example, data from 2014 revealed that 62.59% of those arrested in Georgia were male, and of that percentage, 28,031 were African American males (Georgia's Three-Year Plan for Juvenile Justice, 2015-2017).

Current literature fails to explain why African American males continue to reoffend at such high rates in Georgia, especially in the southwest region. According to Buckner's Recidivism Report (2011), 38.9% of African American male juveniles in the state of Georgia reoffend, which is much higher than the recidivism rate among any other race. My research focused on expanding the intuitive understanding of why African American male juveniles reoffend in southwest Georgia by assessing the lived experiences of African American males, older than 18 years but younger than 40 years, who were juvenile ex-offenders. The objective of this research was to investigate how

these lived experiences provide insight into African American male juvenile recidivism rates in Georgia.

### **Purpose**

My purpose in this general qualitative study was to examine the lived experiences of African American male juvenile ex-offenders who were older than 18 years but younger than 40 years, resided in southwest Georgia, and had a recidivism rate of three or more arrests within a 3-year period. The rationale for executing this study was to understand further the effects of existing laws, policies, and rehabilitation programs on their experiences following release and the reforms that are needed to reverse the trend.

### **Research Questions**

What are the effects of the 2013 Juvenile Reform Act (Ga. HB-242) on the lived experiences of African American male juvenile ex-offenders, who are now older than 18 years but younger than 40 years, when seeking employment, education, and housing after incarceration?

The primary research questions were:

RQ1: How do laws and policies issued by Georgia's judicial officials affect the high recidivism rates of African American male juvenile ex-offenders in southwest Georgia?

RQ2: What are the perceptions of Georgia's juvenile officials, African American male juvenile ex-offenders older than 18 years but younger than 40 years, and their mothers/guardians regarding rehabilitation programs in the State of Georgia?

### **Theoretical Framework**

I derived the theoretical framework that I used to guide this study from Sutherland's (1939, 1947) differential association theory. Differential association theory elucidates that when an individual engages in criminal behaviors, the frequency of the criminal behavior may vary depending on the individual's direct personal associations (Mowen & Boman, 2018). This theory provides a lens through which to comprehend the factors accounting for juvenile recidivism and the powerful effects on African American males when they associate with those who reoffend. The differential association theory has been cited as the most comprehensive theory concerning delinquency and juvenile engagement in criminal activities. Gray, Durkin, Call, and Evans (2015) studied juvenile marijuana use and found that 40% of this behavior could be explained by Sutherland's theory. According to Gary et al. (2015), behaviors, values, and norms are learned through direct interactions with peers and extended family. When there is a personal association with those who are involved in criminal or deviant behavior, the effects on mental attitude and value definition can increase the likelihood of the same negative behavior through the process of imitation and reinforcement (Gary et al., 2015).

The delinquent behavior of many African American males can be explained by this theory because of their life situations, which may include the lack of a positive male role model in the home environment. African American male juveniles may have witnessed criminal activity or may know a male of their same ethnicity who received a light sentence for a criminal offense (e.g., for selling drugs or stealing) and was released from jail after serving a short jail term. Young African American males who view these limited consequences of negative behavior might consider the benefits of the commission

of crime as being greater than the potential for punishment. This theory provides a lens for comprehending some of the factors that contribute to juvenile recidivism and the powerful effect on young African American males as they associate with those around them who reoffend.

Nuño and Katz (2018) suggested that the history of community characteristics contributes to deviant behavior. Evidence from their research identified three perceived benchmarks for communities with elevated rates of juvenile delinquency: poverty, a high proportion of ethnic minority populations, and a declining population overall, such as in Chicago, Illinois, and Georgia (Mowen & Boman, 2018; Georgia Council on Criminal Justice Reform, 2017-2018). Damm and Gorinas (2016) and Ouss (2011) suggested that offenders who associated with individuals who committed the same crime were more likely to reoffend. Likewise, a juvenile who associates with those who have committed or are about to commit a crime shares the thrill that comes from the negative behavior, which leads to peer pressure to commit or reoffend.

Sutherland (as cited in Kassem, 2017) offered the argument that there are nine propositions of differential association, and the first one suggests that criminal behavior is not predetermined by DNA. Second, personal interaction with others is a form of communication. Third, the central gathering where most learning takes place is in small intimate groups. Fourth, the techniques for committing a crime include the guidance of drives, justification, and perspective. Fifth, the way in which the drives and motives proceed shows knowledge of agreeing or disagreeing with the terms of the law. Sixth, being delinquent shows that a violation of the law was committed. Seventh, differential association will change the rate of the reoccurrence of something, the span of something,



the preference of something, and the potency. Eighth, mechanisms and noncriminal behavior provide an individual with an opportunity to gain by studying and exhibiting the behavior through an identical process as criminal behavior. The last proposition is the differential association expression of criminal behavior. Needs and values may not explain why criminal behavior exists, but both criminal and noncriminal behaviors reflect the needs and values of an individual (as cited in Kassem, 2017). To summarize, differential association theory can be used to explain aspects of an individual's procriminal behavior through engagement with a close associate whose behavior is deviant. It explains how criminal behaviors are learned and provides a rationale for procriminal behavior (Hanson, Harris, Letourneau, Helmus, & Thornton, 2018). Knowledge of deviant techniques learned from others can have a significant effect on behaviors exhibited and increase the motives for committing criminal acts.

### **Nature of the Study**

In this study, I used a general qualitative design suitable to providing a deep understanding of the individual experiences of those most affected by the problem. This design provided data that authentically represented the lived experiences of African American male juvenile ex-offenders, older than 18 years but younger than 40 years, who resided in southwest Georgia at the time of the study.

This approach aligns with the problem statement because I researched a wide range of sources to highlight the complexity of the high recidivism rates among African American male juvenile offenders. I used data collection methods that included interviews with current southwest Georgia juvenile officials, including judges, probation officers, counselors, and behaviors specialists. African American male juvenile ex-

offenders older than 18 years but younger than 40 years, who were previously in the juvenile justice system and reoffended; and the mothers of African American male juvenile offenders. I also used secondary source data from essential information sources including journals, magazines, newspapers, and blogs. A qualitative design is consistent with the goal of understanding ways to increase the focus on the individual experiences of those most affected. For example, some rehabilitation programs that are intended to reduce recidivism among delinquent male offenders have failed to deliver positive results, especially in the African American community. A qualitative design assisted in capturing an all-inclusive view of the sample populations residing in southwest Georgia. The data obtained contributed to findings and recommendations concerning the high recidivism rate of African American male juveniles offenders in southwest Georgia.

### **Definition of Terms**

1. *African American males*: African American males are defined in this study as young Black juveniles who were older than 18 years but younger than 40 years and were descendants of Black citizens of the United States.
2. *CHINS*: CHINS is the acronym for Child in Need of Services. Under Georgia Law (Justia US Law, 2010, O.C.G.A. 15-11-410 OR 15-11-411), CHINS means a child who is in need of care, guidance, counseling, structure, supervision, treatment, or rehabilitation after committing a status offense (Georgia Department of Education, 2014).
3. *Delinquent child*: A child adjudged to have committed a delinquent act (Justia US Law, 2010, O.C.G.A- 15-11-2 (6: B), which is “ (A) an act designed a crime by the laws of this state, or by the laws of another state if the act

occurred in that state, under federal laws, or by local ordinance, and the crime does not fall under subparagraph (C) of paragraph (12) of this Code section and is not a juvenile traffic offense as defined in Code Section 15-11-73; (B) the act of disobeying the terms of supervision contained in a court order which has been directed to a child who has been adjudged to have committed a delinquent act; (C) Failing to appear as required by a citation issued with regard to violation of Code Section 3-3-23.”

4. *DJJ*: This is the abbreviation for Georgia’s Department of Juvenile Justice. The DJJ provides services to young offenders up to 21 years old in Georgia who have committed illegal acts (Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice, 2016).
5. *First offender*: An individual who commits an illegal act for the first time (Leiber & Beaudry-Cyr, (2016).
6. *Incarceration*: Confinement to a secure facility for committing illegal activities (Fine et al., 2016, 2017).
7. *JJDPA*: This acronym stands for the 1974 Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act, which provided funding to states and established federal standards of care and custody for those involved in the juvenile system while providing safety and prevention mechanisms to the victims (The Coalition for Juvenile Justice, n.d.).
8. *Juvenile Justice Reform Act (Ga. HB 242)*: Enacted in 2013, this law addressed concerns regarding the disposition of juvenile cases, and changes were made in the juvenile code to provide a wider variety of community-

based detention and treatment options (Georgia State University Law Review, 2014).

9. Adult older than 18 years but younger than 40 years who was a *juvenile offender*: The Official Code of Georgia Annotated (OCGA) 15-11-2 (A) defined this term as an individual who commits an illegal act under the age of 17 but is now an adult in the state of Georgia (Justia US Law, 2010).
10. *Lived experiences*: In this study, a lived experience is something that is viewed through the lens of the person who encounters the experience and his or her perception of the outcome (Swanson, Tanaka, & Gonzalez-Smith, 2017).
11. *Nondelinquent behaviors*: Truancy, disobedience, running away, breaking curfew between midnight and 5 a.m., possessing alcohol, and ungovernable conduct, which is also known as a status offense (Juvenile Justice Geography, Policy, Practice & Statistics, 2016).
12. *Recidivism*: The act of being re-arrested or reconvicted for misdemeanor or felony offenses (Denney & Connor, 2016).
13. *Recidivist*: In this study, this term is used for someone who commits repeated offenses. A recidivist and a reoffender can be used interchangeably to describe an individual who commits a criminal act more than once (Fowler & Kurlychek, 2017).

## **Assumptions, Scope, Limitations, and Delimitations**

### **Assumptions**

My focus in this study was African American male juvenile ex-offenders who were older than 18 years but younger than 40 years, resided in southwest Georgia, and had reoffended. The information that I obtained from interviews of each participant provided insight into the factors that contribute to juvenile recidivism, specifically how existing laws and policies effect the likelihood that they will recidivate. I also asked open-ended questions of the professionals who served the juvenile offenders in an official capacity, with the expectation that those professionals would discuss their experiences dealing with African American male juvenile offenders in a context relevant to Georgia laws and policies. The research study allowed juvenile justice officials the opportunity to express their thoughts about the operation of juvenile justice programs and the effects of these programs on young African American males who tended to be repeat offenders. I also asked open-ended probing questions that allowed mothers to share what they believed worked for their sons and what did not. The mothers who agreed to participate were able to share their lived experience of how Georgia's programs could have been beneficial and provide suggestions that they believed would have assisted them and the state of Georgia with their sons' delinquency and with the problem of high recidivism among African American male juveniles. The data that I obtained provided additional information and direction for how to reduce the recidivism rates among Georgia's African American juvenile offenders while giving an alternative account of the interventions currently being used in rehabilitation and probation programs.

**Scope**

The scope of this study included individuals who were older than 18 years but younger than 40 who were previously incarcerated in the Georgia Juvenile Justice System and who reoffended within 3 years. In tandem with information that I gathered through the Georgia Open Records Act, which was amended in Justia US Law, 2010, OCGA 15-11-16, I interviewed juvenile court judges, juvenile probation officers, juvenile counselors, or rehabilitation specialists; mothers of African American juvenile male ex-offenders; and, African American male juvenile ex-offenders older than 18 years but younger than 40, who were juvenile ex-offenders in Dougherty and Tift Counties, in southwest Georgia. I investigated the history of Georgia's 2013 Juvenile Justice Reform Act (HB 242) and its refinements for an in-depth overview of juvenile reform.

**Limitations and Delimitations**

Because the primary subjects of this study were members of a protected class, I focused on African American male juvenile ex-offenders who were older than 18 years but younger than 40 years of age and who resided in southwest Georgia. This research was limited to juvenile justice officials and those who provided services to juvenile offenders, parents of African American males who were previous offenders, and African American male juvenile ex-offenders who were older than 18 years but younger than 40 years of age and resided in southwest Georgia. It was possible that those who participated in the research might have skewed the results of the information provided by sharing what they assumed I would like to know instead of giving an honest

assessment of their perceptions. I addressed this concern by probing for more clarity with additional follow-up questions.

### **Significance**

Juvenile delinquency has a ripple effect as it influences multiple government sectors, communities, and families throughout a geographic area. Georgia spends more than \$300 million yearly to operate their juvenile justice system (Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice, 2016). According to the Georgia Council on Criminal Justice Reform (2017), Georgia partnered with Evidence-Based Associates (EBA) to reduce the number of juveniles in out-of-home secure facilities and directed more than \$30 million to support evidence-based community alternatives with the goal of reducing juvenile recidivism (Georgia Council on Criminal Justice Reform, 2017). I elucidated how this research refined, revised, or extended the existing understanding of why African American male juveniles disproportionately reoffend in southwest Georgia. A qualitative examination of juvenile recidivism was significant for the state of Georgia to give a voice to African American male juvenile offenders and their perceptions of why they reoffend at such high rates in southwest Georgia (Patton, 2015).

This study is significant because of three different positive implications that could implement social change and combat reoffending behaviors not only in southwest Georgia but in the state of Georgia as a whole. First, I designed this study to increase awareness among the stakeholders who influence policies, laws, and rehabilitation programs regarding why African American male juveniles reoffend at such high rates in southwest Georgia. Second, the results of this study will serve as an instrument to motivate stakeholders in Georgia cities and counties to revisit current juvenile justice

policies, laws, rehabilitation programs, and punitive measures and to reassess whether they hinder or contribute to positive outcomes in the correction and treatment of delinquent behaviors. Finally, I identified federal program initiatives that can provide funding for EBPs to discover why recidivism rates continue to spike among the African American male juvenile population (National Research Council, 2014).

### **Summary**

Although there is a consent review of juvenile policies, laws, and rehabilitation programs, this topic is sensitive because it deals with children and their futures. This study provided research-based evidence for the effects of laws, policies, and rehabilitation programs on the likelihood of recidivism for African American male juvenile in southwest Georgia. For a clear understanding of the effects of Georgia laws, policies, and rehabilitation programs on African American male juvenile offenders, it was necessary to investigate the failed programs offered to African Americans males and those programs that have reported positive outcomes. Examining both ineffective and successful programs from the perspective of those most affected provides legislative and community leaders in Georgia with the knowledge needed to revamp and refine laws, policies, and rehabilitation programs that will better address the specific needs of troubled African American male juveniles.

In Chapter 2, I provide a historical overview of Georgia's juvenile system by examining topics on African American male juveniles, their delinquent acts, and current state juvenile justice sanctions. I overview existing literature on the challenges faced by African American male juvenile ex-offenders seeking employment, education, and housing after incarceration. Chapter 3 introduces the general qualitative design used for



the purpose of this study, which was to investigate (a) the effects of laws, policies, and rehabilitation programs on the lived experiences of African American male juvenile ex-offenders who were older than 18 years but younger than 40 years of age and who had reoffended following their release, and (b) the changes needed to reverse their high rates of recidivism in southwest Georgia.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### **Introduction**

*Recidivism* can be defined as a person's engagement in previous illegal behaviors (Brame, Mulvey, Schubert, & Piquero, 2018; Fowler & Kurlychek, 2017; Ortega-Campos, Garcia-Garcia, Gil-Fenoy, & Zaldivar-Basurto, 2016). The relapse may lead to rearrests, reconviction, and return to secure confinement. Terminology regarding recidivism, incarceration, and juvenile delinquency is often encountered in research on troubled African American male juveniles (Baglivio & Wolff, 2017; Feld, 2017; Fine et al., 2016, 2017; Western, 2006). African American male juveniles are reported to exhibit negative attitudes toward the judicial justice system, which makes them more vulnerable to criminal engagement (Augustyn, 2015) and disproportionate minority contact (DMC) with the justice system. Although Georgia lawmakers have worked to identify interventions to avoid out-of-home placement and help reduce recidivism issues, their efforts have often addressed only the mass incarceration rates of juvenile offenders and have failed to reduce their recidivism rates (Georgia Criminal Justice Coordinating Council, 2015-2017). My purpose in this general qualitative research was to examine the lived experiences of African American male juvenile ex-offenders in Georgia who were older than 18 years but younger than 40 and had a high recidivism rate.

African American male juvenile recidivism rates have continued to rise despite Georgia's 2013 reforms, laws, and policies; this is alarming given that rehabilitation was the primary issue addressed by the 2013 Juvenile Justice Reform Act (Baglivio, Wolff, DeLisi, Vaughn, & Piquero, 2016; Boggs & Worthy, 2016). Although Georgia has spent more than \$300 million to help address high recidivism rates, more than half of those

who participated in rehabilitation programs reoffended within 3 years of serving their detentions (Pew Charitable Trust, 2013). Because African American males face many challenges on returning to their communities following incarceration, it is crucial to understand the reasons for the high rates of African American male recidivism. Among the origins of recidivism are problems with existing laws, policies, rehabilitation, and skill-building programs that fail to successfully implement corrective treatment and positive outcomes regarding recidivism (Pew Charitable Trust, 2013).

In this chapter, I have introduced current literature encompassing the subjects of African American male juveniles, current programs, recidivism, and the effects if any of the Juvenile Justice Reform Act on African American male juveniles in Georgia. In the next section, I outline the theoretical framework for this study, Sutherland's (1939, 1947) differential association theory. I also include the history of Georgia's juvenile system, the high recidivism rates of African American male juveniles, and other relevant literature related to this study. Also, in this chapter, I provide a rationale for the necessity of this study based on the literature and the correlation it has with positive social change.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

I conducted a literature review by investigating the internet database for scholarly materials published between 2013 and 2018. Also, I examined earlier research to aid in providing a broader view of this subject, such as Georgia government websites and Walden dissertations. Using Walden University's online resources, I used a variety of databases for this literature review including ProQuest Central and Criminal Justice, PsychINFO, PsychARTICLES, SAGE Premier, *Crime & Delinquency*, *Journal of Forensic Psychiatry & Psychology*, Google Scholar, *American Journal of Public Health*,

*Journal of Juvenile Justice, Journal of Criminal Justice, and Journal of Correctional Education.* The primary strategy that I used for this search was the use of keywords such as *African American male, recidivism, recidivate, juvenile, reoffending, social learning theory, labeling theory, former juvenile convicts, juvenile reentry, black male, juvenile offenders, males, men, Georgia Reform Act, status offense, juvenile laws, juvenile acts, sentencing, recidivist\*, Georgia Educational K-12, rehabilitation, and Georgia Juvenile Justice.*

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework that I used to guide this study was derived from Sutherland's (1939, 1947) differential association theory. Differential association theory elucidates that when an individual participates in criminal behaviors, the frequency with which the criminal behavior will occur may vary depending on the individual's direct personal associations (Mowen & Boman, 2018). This theory provides a lens for comprehending the factors accounting for juvenile recidivism, and the powerful effects on African American males when they associate with those who reoffend. The differential association theory has been cited as the most comprehensive theory concerning delinquency and juvenile engagement involving criminal activities. Gray, Durkin, Call, and Evans (2015) studied juvenile marijuana use and found that 40% of this behavior could be explained by Sutherland's theory. According to Gary et al. (2015), behavior, values, and norms are learned through direct interactions with peers and extended family. When there is a personal association with those who are involved in criminal or deviant behavior, the effects on mental attitude and value definition can

increase the likelihood of the same negative behavior through the process of imitation and reinforcement.

The delinquent behavior of many African American males can be explained by this theory because of their living status, which may include the lack of having a positive male role model in the home environment. African American male juveniles may have witnessed or known a male of their same ethnicity who received a light sentence for a criminal offense (e.g., for selling drugs or stealing) and was released from jail after serving a short jail term. Young African American males who view these limited consequences for negative behavior might consider what would happen to them if they were to engage in criminal activities based on their perceptions and observations of others who have committed such acts. This theory provides a lens for comprehending some of the factors that contribute to juvenile recidivism and the powerful effect on young African American males as they associate with those around them who reoffend.

Nuño and Katz (2018) suggested that the history of community characteristics contributes to deviant behavior. Evidence from their research identified three perceived benchmarks for communities with elevated rates of juvenile delinquency: poverty, a high proportion of ethnic minority populations, and a declining population overall, such as in Chicago and Georgia (Mowen & Boman, 2018; Georgia Council on Criminal Justice Reform, 2017-2018). Damm and Gorinas (2016) and Ouss (2011) suggested that offenders who associated themselves with individuals who committed the same crime were more than likely to reoffend. Likewise, a juvenile who associates with those who have committed or are about to commit a crime shares the thrill that comes from the negative behavior which leads to peer pressure to commit or reoffend.

Sutherland (as cited in Kassem, 2017) offered the argument that there are nine propositions of differential association, and the first one suggests that criminal behavior is not predetermined by DNA. Second, personal interaction with others is a form of communication. Third, the central gathering where most learning takes place is in small intimate groups. Fourth, the techniques for committing a crime include the guidance of drives, justification, and perspective. Fifth, which way the drives and motives proceed shows knowledge of agreeing or disagreeing with the terms of the law. Sixth, being delinquent shows that a violation of the law was committed. Seventh, differential association will change the rate of the reoccurring of something, the span of something, the preference of something, and the potency. Eighth, mechanisms and noncriminal behavior provide an individual with an opportunity to gain by studying and exhibiting the behavior through an identical process as criminal behavior. The last proposition is the differential association expression of criminal behavior. Needs and values may not explain why criminal behavior exists, but both criminal and noncriminal behavior reflects the needs and values of an individual (as cited in Kassem, 2017).

To summarize, differential association theory can be used to explain aspects of an individual's procriminal behavior through engagement with a close associate whose behavior is deviant. It explains how criminal behaviors are learned and provides a rationale for procriminal behavior (Hanson, Harris, Letourneau, Helmus, & Thornton, 2018). Knowledge of deviant techniques learned from others can have a significant effect on behaviors exhibited and increase the motives for committing criminal acts.

### **Brief Overview of Georgia Juvenile Justice System**

Changes in how the United States juvenile justice system dealt with juvenile offenders were codified in 1899 in Cook County, Illinois, with the establishment of the first juvenile court (State Bar of Georgia, n.d.). Before the early 1900s, the notion of a state reformatory for juvenile offenders in the state of Georgia was nonexistent, with the result that children and youth who committed delinquent acts or status offenses were subject to the same treatment as adults. Based on the Cook County model, the Georgia legislature provided an alternative for the treatment of delinquent children by establishing the legal basis for children's courts in 1906 (State Bar of Georgia, n.d.). The Georgia State Reformatory (later the Georgia Training School for Boys) opened in the same year. In 1911, Fulton County was the first county in Georgia to develop its juvenile court system in which juvenile cases received their final disposition and were heard by juvenile court judges.

According to the Georgia Criminal Justice Coordinating Council Three Year Plan for Juvenile Justice (2015-2017), African American male juveniles are arrested more than any other race or gender. In 2014, 28,031 African American males were arrested and placed under the care of Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice (Georgia Criminal Justice Coordinating Council Three-Year Plan for Juvenile Justice, 2015-2017). However, in Georgia, African Americans make up 50% of the prison incarceration rate and 30% of the juvenile incarceration rates (Niles, 2018; UCR, 2016). According to Hartney and Vuong (2009), African Americans are disproportionately represented when it comes to the criminal justice system. Their research showed that 13% of America's general population are African Americans, but African Americans comprise 28% of all

arrests, 40% of all incarcerations, and 42% of inmates on death row (Hartney & Vuong, 2009). Although data reveal a decrease in arrest rates, 2016 statistics revealed that Georgia's Juvenile System comprised 35% African Americans juveniles, but they accounted for 66% of its detention population (Georgia Criminal Justice Coordinating Council Three-Year Plan for Juvenile Justice, 2015-2017; The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2016).

Stakeholders in Georgia have engaged collaboratively in strategic planning regarding policies and laws to determine if any alterations and amendments should be considered in order to reduce juvenile incarceration without limitation of jurisdiction for juvenile cases (Boggs & Worthy, 2016, 2017). Although Georgia's juvenile court system oversees individuals under the age of 18, Georgia decided that the courts alone do not control the fate of the juvenile offender. To this end, the Georgia Juvenile Court Code was passed in 1971 (Brezina & Agnew, 2015; Justia US Law, 2010; State Bar of Georgia, n.d.). The State of Georgia Bar (n.d.) noted that Georgia's philosophy was "to protect the child and to avoid inflicting harsh punishment," but the changes in laws had a reverse side effect on the juvenile incarceration rates. Despite the decrease in the number of juvenile arrests made in Georgia, males dominated the arrest rates, and African American males accounted for more than 20% of the incarcerated population (Georgia Criminal Justice Coordinating Council Three-Year Plan for Juvenile Justice, 2014-2017). So, the question remains, why has the state of Georgia not made more progress with reducing the number of arrests or rearrest rates of African American male juvenile offenders?



## Juvenile Recidivism

Juvenile recidivism is the engagement in reoffending behaviors and is one of the main contributors to the increase in juvenile crime. The Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice recidivism report (2011) defined recidivism as “the adjudication for delinquent acts after a juvenile is released into the community while under DJJ supervision or after DJJ supervision.” The high rates of juvenile recidivism are alarming as they affect the quality of life for individuals and their communities (Mauer, 2011). Sanei and Mir-Khalili (2015) asserted that the social environment, such as the effects of poverty, could be contributing factors to recidivism. Additional contributors to juvenile recidivism include expulsion or dropping out of school, lack of access to educational opportunities, issues of living status (low-income housing areas), and elevated unemployment rates (Upadhyayula, Ramaswamy, Chalise, Daniels, & Freudenberg, 2015). Georgia documented that after a year of monitoring juveniles between 2009 and 2011, 33.5% of juveniles released into the community recidivated (Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice, 2011). During those 2 years of juveniles’ recidivism, the rates increased by 41%, and by the third year, there was a continuous increase of 45% (Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice, 2011). The Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice (2011) also documented that the increased rates noted were heavily influenced by the numbers of African American male juvenile offenders (pp. 14-17). According to the Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice (2011), the Delinquent One Year Recidivism Rates by Race reported that 24.5% whites, 38.9% African Americans, 32.6% Hispanics, and 29.7% other juveniles were recidivist after the first year, and 36.6% were male offenders. Given that juvenile recidivism is such a troublesome issue, executive leaders and

stakeholders in Georgia have continuously revisited laws, policies, and rehabilitation programs with the goal of reducing the high recidivism rates. As a result of those efforts, Georgia lawmakers enacted the Juvenile Justice Reform Act of 2013, which led to discussions about changing the age of criminal responsibility to 18 years with hopes that it would aid in the reduction of recidivism (Babar, 2018). The assumption was that expanding the age would take advantage of further brain development, which would alter the adolescent's behavior as physiological maturity increased. According to Babar (2018), juveniles are challenged by a proper sense of responsibility, and their brains are not fully developed to make rational decisions until they are older.

#### **Georgia Juvenile Justice Reform Act (Ga. HB-242)**

Senate House Bill 242, formerly known as Georgia's Juvenile Justice Reform Act of 2013, addressed several issues that raised concerns for stakeholders in Georgia (Just Georgia, n.d.; Pew Charitable Trust, 2013). The most pressing issues were the cost, the rate of recidivism, and the diversion of juvenile offenders from incarceration to more focused-based treatment for minor or misdemeanor offenses (Georgia Department of Correction, 2016; Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice, 2011, 2016; Georgia State University Law Review, 2014). Those focused-based programs were known as community-based programs.

Community-based programs were designed in Georgia so that the underlying problems contributing to delinquent behavior could be addressed within the juvenile's community environment. Those problems stem from a variety of life challenges that include but may not be limited to employment, educational learning, mentoring, and housing (Georgia Three-Year Plan for Juvenile Justice, 2015-2017; Juvenile Justice

Information Exchange, 2018). Georgia also provided services to aid in the transition of juveniles from incarceration back to their home communities. Those are just a few changes that Georgia lawmakers incorporated in their new Juvenile Code HB 242.

In 2016, juveniles between the age of 16 and 19 years had a rate of unemployment of 20.8% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). According to Trading Economics (2018), Georgia's juvenile unemployment rates between 2007 and 2018 averaged 33.62%. The teenage unemployment rate has been troubling, given that juveniles who are not engaged in prosocial behavior are more vulnerable to engaging in criminal activities. Because data showed that juveniles were not being productive with their time, the Georgia Council on Criminal Justice Reform (2014) implemented the "ban the box" policy. Georgia adopted this policy to avoid eliminating individuals with a criminal record from being hired, and the effect of this policy has proven to reduce recidivism. This reform was a significant step for African American juvenile males who had experienced challenges following incarceration and other issues as it related to securing employment.

Even decades after the 1954 landmark case *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, African Americans males have continued to struggle to receive a quality education. Blumstein's (1982) research suggested that there is a relationship between racial inequalities and school failure. Statistics have shown that African American male juveniles without a high school diploma are more likely to be arrested and subsequently to reoffend (Anderson, 2018). In 2001, George W. Bush signed the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), which among other provisions required educators to obtain a higher level of expertise for teaching in a specific subject area. The NCLB was a federal program that sought to measure student achievement, grant students the choice of public schools,

supplement services for those who attended a needs-improvement status school, provide the unsafe school choice option (USCO) for those students who had been victims of a violent crime or attended a school that met those criteria, and provide special education services to students who did not meet the state's proficiency level (including those in special education courses; Georgia Department of Education, 2018). The NCLB also provided schools with improvement resources if they did not meet annual yearly progress. Likewise, students with limited speaking and reading English language skills were provided with services under the NCLB, and they were required to achieve academic proficiency in both of those areas (Georgia Department of Education, 2018). However, on March 30, 2015, Georgia passed House Bill 91, which added provisions to the No Child Left Behind Act by allowing high school students an opportunity to obtain their high school diplomas without passing the standardized Georgia High School Graduation Test (Georgia General Assembly, 2015-2016). Badertscher (2011) revealed that 3,000 students did not graduate from Georgia's public-school system due to the Georgia High School Graduation Test.

Due to the pressure of some schools not meeting their Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), which was formulated by the NCLB Act to hold schools accountable for student achievement, some schools in Georgia failed to accurately report the state Criterion-Referenced Competency Test (CRCT) results. Some principals reported that they cheated because they feared being viewed as failures in their districts and by state stakeholders of Georgia (Governor's Office of Student Achievement, 2011). In 2009, supporting documents showed evidence of cheating within the Dougherty County School System (DCSS; The Governor's Office of Student Achievement, 2011).

The Dougherty County School System (DCSS) in southwest Georgia had an enrollment count of 16,350 students in the 2016-2017 school year (The Governor's Office of Student Achievement, 2017). The data presented covered one academic year from August 1, 2016, through May 18, 2017. Data from the Governor's Office of Student Achievement (2017) revealed that the DCSS comprised 89% African American males, and 96.3% of the African American males received sanctions for disciplinary issues compared to 2.2% of whites and 0.5% of Hispanics. The data showed that 14.5% of DCSS students received school suspensions, 9.4 % received in-school suspensions, and 0.2% were expelled from DCSS (The Governor's Office of Student Achievement, 2017). The Governor's Office of Student Achievement (2017) noted five disciplinary consequences that were issued to African American and American Indian/Alaskan Natives students only. Those consequences were detention, juvenile/court referrals, physical restraints, removal from class, and expulsion.

Tift County High School (TCHS) is also located in southwest Georgia. TCHS had an enrollment of 8,443 students from August 1, 2016, through May 17, 2017 (The Governor's Office of Student Achievement, 2017). These data showed that 50% of African American students enrolled in the TCHS received discipline sanctions, whereas 33.2% of whites and 14.8% of Hispanics were disciplined (The Governor's Office of Student Achievement, 2017). There was no variation in the discipline rates in both school districts (Dougherty County and Tift County). However, data from both school systems revealed that African American males were disproportionately disciplined in the two school systems, which limited their educational opportunities. School failures have been shown to place African American males at-risk and increase their vulnerability to illegal

activities and subsequent involvement in the juvenile justice system (Christian, 2009; Dexter, Wong, Stacks, Beeghly, & Barnett, 2013). Subsequently, research obtained from both school systems showed that students who presented academic deficiencies were more vulnerable to negative punishment (The Governor's Office of Student Achievement, 2017).

U.S. Census (2018) data indicated that the population of Georgia comprised 32.2% African Americans, and of that population, 24.1% were African American juveniles. However, Rural Health Information Hub (2002-2019) noted that 32.2% of African Americans lived in rural areas, especially in the South. Rural areas are known to have fewer options for affordable housing (United States Department of Agriculture Rural Development, n.d.). African Americans and others living in those areas are less likely to receive eligible services and housing-related resources from state and local governments due to lack of knowledge or opportunity to request such services. Therefore, undue stressors may be experienced by a resident of a rural area, which may lead to negative behaviors (Jaggers, Robison, Rhodes, Guan, & Church, 2016). Therefore, environmental factors (issues with housing, literacy, and poverty) that are often associated with living in rural areas may have a negative effect on the behavior of young African American males enrolled in rural schools and within their communities (Jaggers et al., 2016).

### **Juvenile Offenses (Status Offenses vs. Delinquent Acts)**

Juvenile negative behaviors have detrimental effects socially and economically within the state of Georgia. Juvenile Justice Geography, Policy, Practice & Statistics (JJGPS, 2014) reported that 3,295 juveniles were arrested in Georgia in 2014, and the

Georgia Criminal Justice Coordinating Council (2015-2017) revealed that 28,031 African Americans were arrested in 2015, and a vast number were male offenders (pp. 17-34). All of those male offenders in 2014 were referred to juvenile court for discipline (Georgia Criminal Justice Coordinating Council, 2015-2017). According to the State of Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice (2014), Dougherty County referred 777 African American juveniles while Tift County sent 206 referrals to juvenile court. Juvenile offenders are punishable based on the frequency and nature of the crime. Considerable interest was placed on safeguarding the child while enforcing Georgia's laws and policies.

The National Center for Education Statistics (2016) report indicated that Georgia's African American males' high school dropout rates in 2014 were 7.4% compared to 5.2% for their Caucasian counterparts. Also, between 2014 and 2016, the African American male dropout rate remained high despite the decrease in yearly reported numbers. Although the percentage dropout rate of African Americans appeared to be low in relation to public school attendance of 1,898,537 when African Americans comprised 704,006 in 2012 and 723,568 in 2016-2017, Georgia lawmakers concluded that delinquency behaviors needed to be addressed and curtailed to increase student achievement (Georgia's Office of Student Achievement, [GOSA], 2016-2017; Justia US Law, 2010; The National Center for Education Statistics, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017). Therefore, a new statutory designation, Child in Need of Services (CHINS), was enacted to distinguish status offenses from delinquency behaviors (The Georgia Department of Education, 2014).

According to O.C.G.A 2013, CHINS is defined as "a child adjudicated to be in need of care, guidance, counseling, structure, supervision, treatment, or rehabilitation"

(Widner, n.d.) as a result of committing a status offense. For a CHINS designation to take place in juvenile proceedings, the juvenile must commit the status offense before his 18th birthday (Widner, n.d.). Offenses that occur under CHINS are status offenses. Status offenses are nondelinquent behaviors that would not be charged if the offender were an adult. Examples of status offenses are truancy, unruly and ungovernable conduct, running away, misbehaving in class, wandering/loitering in the public place between 12 a.m. and 5 a.m., purchasing alcohol, or patronizing a bar (Justia US Law, 2010). These offenses can be found in the Georgia Annotated Code section O.C.G.A. 15-11-2 (O.C.G.A., 2010). The Judicial Council of Georgia Administrative Office of the Courts (2015) reported that Georgia handled 17,588 cases under CHINS in 2010.

Georgia juvenile courts have two operating systems, independent and dependent courts. An independent court makes a ruling in conjunction with the Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice (Georgia Criminal Justice Coordinating Council, 2015-2017). A dependent court depends solely on the state's final decision to take custody of the juvenile (Georgia Criminal Justice Coordinating Council, 2015-2017). In Georgia, a juvenile case can be addressed formally or informally in the court system. A formal disposition can be petitioned while an informal case is nonpetitioned. A petitioned case concludes when prosecutors take over a case and decide how they will handle the case. However, a formal adjustment according to the Judicial Council of Georgia Administrative Office of the Courts (2001 and 2018) results in the filing of a petition in which delinquency charges must be endorsed by the complaining witness (school officials, police, or the injured citizen; Georgia Criminal Justice Coordinating Council, 2015-2017, p. 23). An informal adjustment does not require a hearing, but the court



retains jurisdiction over the youth for 3 months; however, if the judge deems it necessary to expand that time from 3 months to an additional 3-month term, he or she will do so accordingly.

According to the Judicial Council of Georgia Administrative Office of the Courts (2001 and 2018), for an informal adjustment, the juvenile must admit to the charge(s), and it must be a first offense. This proceeding is used as a corrective alternative to detention for the child to improve his or her behavior. In 2010, Georgia handled 547, 985 formal cases and 506,951 informal cases and the majority were males (Georgia Criminal Justice Coordinating Council, 2015-2017). In 2010, data revealed that African American males had a detention rate of 66% although they only represented 35% of Georgia's juvenile population (Georgia Criminal Justice Coordinating Council, 2015-2017, p. 29). However, according to the Georgia Criminal Justice Coordinating Council (2015-2017), African American male juveniles committed 1,815 criminal infractions while Caucasians committed only 642 criminal infractions.

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Acts (OJJDP) was established in 1974. The OJJDP was one of the first federally assisted programs in the United States to address issues of juvenile justice and delinquency prevention (OJJDP, n.d., 2017). Juvenile delinquency is considered an act or acts by someone under the age of 16 years, and this number varies within each state (Brezina & Agnew, 2015). According to Justia U.S. Law (2010), a delinquent act under Georgia Code is "(A) an act designated a crime by the laws of this state, or by the laws of another state if the act occurred in that state, under federal laws, or by local ordinance, and the crime does not fall under subparagraph (C) of paragraph (12) of this Code section and is not a juvenile

traffic offense as defined in Code Section 15-11-73; (B) “the act of disobeying the terms of supervision contained in a court order which has been directed to a child who has been adjudged to have committed a delinquent act; (C) Failing to appear as required by a citation issued with regard to a violation of Code Section 3-3-23.” Published data show that of the 159 counties in Georgia, 23 reported data for juvenile offenses in 2015; however, of those who reported, 11,874 were petitioned delinquent reported cases and 3,708 were nonpetitioned reported delinquent cases (OJJDP, 2015).

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (2015) revealed that Tift County did not report any numbers for delinquents petitioned and nonpetitioned, but Dougherty County reported 495 and 121 cases, respectively. Delinquency has been a recurring problem among African American males in southwest Georgia due to the racial and ethnic disparities (Cho & Kogan, 2016). According to Georgia’s 2013 juvenile report, 7,872 African American males were housed in an RYDC and 1,402 were housed in a Youth Detention Center (YDC). An RYDC is a short-term holding facility for juvenile offenders who are awaiting trial. A YDC is a long-term facility for juveniles who were sanctioned by a juvenile judge, and the custody of the juvenile offender was remanded to the state (Georgia Criminal Justice Coordinating Council, 2015-2017).

### **Role of Juvenile Probation Officers**

Juvenile probation officers play a vital role in correcting negative behaviors of juvenile offenders. Using probation for corrective action has been around for some time and is used universally as a way to provide community-based correction (Department of Juvenile Justice, (n.d.). A probation officer’s role is to supervise those juveniles with negative behaviors so that they become confident and productive individuals. Probation

officers perform many tasks that may require them to leave their offices. For example, they may visit delinquent juveniles at school, home, or wherever they deem necessary to make contact with them or monitor their interactions (Klinge, 2013). OJJDP (2015-2016) reported that 850,500 juveniles attended court for delinquent acts. In addition, in 2015, OJJDP reported that males accounted for 70% of the delinquency cases in juvenile court and African Americans represented 36% of that percentage rate, but they were unlikely to serve their sentences to probation (Hockenberry & Puzanchera, 2018). The ultimate goal of probation officers is to provide services to first-time offenders and those who do not pose a threat to society (Georgia Criminal Justice Coordinating Council, 2015-2017; Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice, 2016).

### **Role of the Juvenile Judges**

Juvenile judges are also superior court judges. The role of juvenile judges in Georgia is unusual. Although superior and state court judges are known to make the final ruling of an individual's fate, they are known as traditional judges. However, juvenile judges go beyond the role of a traditional judge with their primary focus on facilitating rehabilitation and establishing collaboration among stakeholders (Teske, n.d.). Juvenile court is considered a hub for everyone serving at-risk youth. At this hub, on any given day, there is a collaborative gathering of those individuals; however, collaboration often will not transpire in juvenile court (Edwards, 2005).

In the 1980s, two epidemics spread throughout the United States. The first epidemic was caused by an influx of drugs, primarily crack cocaine, in communities across the country, which led to the implementation of zero tolerance policies known as the "War on Drugs." These policies emphasized harsh punishment over treatment for

drug abuse offense. The second problem was the identification of increased behavioral issues within the public schools (Heilbrin, Cornel, & Lovegrove, 2015; Teske, n.d., 2011). Some have argued that the two were interrelated. As a result of the drug epidemic, an entire generation of children was exposed to illicit drugs, and many were born to parents addicted to drugs. When those children reached grade school, they were identified as having attentional and behavioral issues. In the 1990s, those behavioral issues resulted in the adoption of the “zero tolerance” policies regarding discipline (Heilbrin, et al., 2015; Teske, 2011).

Behavioral problems in schools increasingly led to formal investigations that often ended in the juvenile justice system. Such problems were cited as contributing to the “broken window” theory (Voisin & Kim, 2018). The “broken window” theory in schools argued that when a juvenile’s life is chaotic and outside issues are not corrected, those problems are inevitable contributors to disorderly conduct in schools (Voisin & Kim, 2018). Zero tolerance policies were adopted by public schools as punitive disciplinary measures to deal with behavioral issues in the classrooms. However, instead of using the zero-tolerance policies as a preventative behavioral method within the public schools, those policies became the new norm for introducing youth to the juvenile justice system, especially African American male juveniles (Georgia Criminal Justice Coordinating Council, 2015-2017; Heilbrin et al., 2015). Minor infractions once handled by school administrators were now escalated into the juvenile court system as status offenses, and this, in turn, initiated a student’s juvenile record. However, it soon became evident that using punishment alone as a corrective measure to gain compliance with a student’s behavior actually lessened the chances for the student to succeed, and statistics

from the Georgia Criminal Justice Coordinating Council, (2015-2017) showed that African American male juveniles had been the main contributors to the juvenile justice system under those policies (Jones, Eaton, Livingston, & Cliette, 2018). As stated by Teske (n.d.), “the role of the judge is determined by the jurisdiction of the courts.”

### **Evidence-Based Programs in Georgia**

Scholars have researched recidivism with a focus on assessing laws and treatment programs as components of interventions strategies to determine what works and what does not work in the Georgia juvenile justice system (Georgia Criminal Justice Coordinating Council’s, 2015-2017). In Georgia, studies have shown that using confinement alone does not address the underlying problems juveniles face; instead, confinement focuses on delinquent behaviors rather than on the causes for those behaviors (Barnert, Perry, & Morris, 2016). Although there is an ongoing battle to gain control of juvenile incarceration and recidivism rates, Georgia continues to build on the latest evidence-based practices with the aim of making the necessary adjustments to achieve successful outcomes (Boggs & Worthy, 2015, 2016, 2017). The Georgia Criminal Justice Coordinating Council’s Three-Year Plan for Juvenile Justice (2015-2017) noted that Georgia counties had expanded their EBPs as a result of grants such as those administered by the JJIG programs. For example, Dougherty County’s court system selected the Functional Family Therapy (FFT) program for 62 youths, and in 2018 Georgia had a 35% reduction in out-of-home placement (OHPs; Georgia Criminal Justice Coordinating Council’s Three-Year Plan for Juvenile Justice (2015-2017, p. 79). FFT is a short-term family therapy intervention and juvenile diversion program that uses in-home therapy to address delinquent and recidivism issues (Celinska, Sung, Kim, &

Valdimarsdottir, 2018). Other programs include Aggression Replacement Training, Multisystem Therapy, Teen Peer Court, Thinking for a Change, Botvin Life Skills Training, Connections, mentor tutoring, and the Juvenile Accountability Block Grant Program (Georgia Criminal Justice Coordinating Council Three-Year Plan for Juvenile Justice, 2015-2017, pp. 79-83).

In FY 2015, African American male juveniles in Georgia represented 70% of those who were sentenced to felony commitment or were admitted to short-term placement (STP; Georgia Criminal Justice Coordinating Council Three-Year Plan for Juvenile Justice, 2015-2017, p. 77). During FY 2015, most of Georgia's funding was directed to out-of-home placement (OHP) programs (\$5M-2013, \$6,125,000-2014, \$7,370,000-2015) to decrease both STPs and felony commitments. The commitment was to decrease the number of African American males who come into contact with the Department of Juvenile Services and monitoring their community transitions into adulthood (Criminal Justice Coordinating Council's Statistical Analysis Center [SAC], 2015; Georgia Criminal Justice Coordinating Council Three-Year Plan for Juvenile Justice, 2015-2017, p. 77). Although many counties in Georgia have the OHP system in place and the number of criminal offenses has declined, African American male juveniles remain at the top of the list for the most offending juvenile demographic in Georgia. Therefore, it is imperative that effective EBPs and interventions be addressed to that subgroup to ensure a healthy youth population in Georgia and a future reduction in African American crime and recidivism rates.

## Summary

In summary, various researchers have examined crimes committed by African American male juveniles (Georgia Criminal Justice Coordinating Council, 2015-2017; OJJDP, 2018). During their incarceration, it was determined that a vast majority of African American male juveniles committed status or minor offenses that would not have been considered a crime if they were an adult (Boggs & Worthy, 2015, 2016, 2017). Research has shown that African American male juveniles are the most likely individuals to be punished for committing a delinquent act. In 2015, 8.96% of African American male juveniles under the age of 17 years had committed delinquent acts, which was 5.65% more than their female counterparts (Hockenberry & Puzanchera, 2018, p. 15).

The purpose of this general qualitative study was to identify a rationale for the lived experiences of African American male juvenile ex-offenders who were older than 18 years but younger than 40 years of age, resided in southwest Georgia, and were repeat offenders. This research also served as a voice for African American males and their disproportionate minority contact (DMC) with the juvenile justice system sanctions. This general study involved observing and evaluating the effectiveness of laws, policies, and rehabilitation programs in the state of Georgia regarding reducing recidivism and DMC among African American male juveniles. The focus of this study was to determine if the laws, policies, and rehabilitation programs work for African American male juveniles or if juvenile programs delay the inevitable, which is incarceration in the adult system. Also, it sought to determine if predictors from residing in rural areas with high rates of poverty and unemployment had an effect on the likelihood for African American males to recidivate at a higher rate than those living in suburban areas. Chapter 3 provides a

detailed discussion of the participant sample, specific instruments, data collections, and qualitative methodology used to demonstrate the effects of existing laws, policies, and rehabilitation programs on the likelihood of recidivism among African American male juveniles in southwest Georgia.



## Chapter 3: Research Method

### **Introduction**

In the previous chapter, I reviewed the literature relevant to my research questions. In Chapter 3, I introduce the research design and research rationale, sample participants, and strategy for screening in and screening out participants. In this section, I provide information that explains the research methodology, research design, and research approach, and outline the procedures used to interview participants. I also describe the methodology for this specific type of research.

My focus in this research was exploring the lived experiences of African American male juvenile ex-offenders, older than 18 years but younger than 40, with high recidivism rates (three or more arrests), while seeking employment, education, and housing following release from incarceration. I used data collection methods that included interviews with current southwest Georgia juvenile justice officials, including judges, probation officers, counselors, and behavioral specialists; African American male juvenile ex-offenders older than 18 years but younger than 40 years, who were previously in the juvenile justice system and had reoffended; and the mothers of African American male juvenile offenders. Chouldechova (2017) reported that Angwin et al. (2016) investigated a recidivism prediction instrument (RPI) known as COMPASS and, during their investigation, they discovered that African American males with no reoffending juvenile history were more likely to be evaluated as high risk, suggesting RPI bias. According to Chouldechova (2017), COMPASS is a primary tool used by evaluators to measure the risks of recidivism using 22 scales to make individual criminal justice

decisions, such as sentencing (p. 153). The significance of RPI bias for African American males is to review data regarding the court's dispositions.

The current study has social significance because there is limited research that explains why African American male juveniles have such high recidivism rates in southwest Georgia. This research differs because my focus was on the lived experiences of African American male juvenile ex-offenders, older than 18 years but younger than 40 years, who were juvenile ex-offenders with a high recidivism rate that resulted from three or more arrests. Campbell et al.'s (2017) findings suggested that the juvenile justice system disproportionately represents African American males, and this has been an ongoing issue for African American male juvenile offenders, particularly in their efforts to avoid recidivism and successfully re-enter the community following confinement. Overall, the research literature provided supports the likelihood of recidivism for African American male juveniles in southwest Georgia.

### **Overview**

In this chapter, I include a comprehensive synopsis of the procedures used in examining the likelihood for recidivism among African American male juvenile ex-offenders in southwest Georgia based on the "gap" measured. The gap measured in this study will determine if the effects of laws, policies, and rehabilitation programs on African American male juveniles has an adverse effect so that the issue of recidivism will not continue to be exacerbated in Georgia, especially in the southwest region. In the outline for this chapter, I reiterate the purpose and research questions. I provide a general overview of the appropriateness of the research followed by the chosen research design and the role of the researcher. The rationale addresses the instruments used, the ethical

protection of the participants, the procedures for collecting information, the data analysis procedures, the limitations of the study, and a recapitulation of the chapter.

My purpose in this general qualitative study was to examine the lived experiences of African American male juvenile ex-offenders, older than 18 years but younger than 40 years, who were juvenile ex-offenders and had reoffended three times or more. The rationale for executing this study was to analyze the effects of existing laws, policies, and rehabilitation programs on the experiences of participants regarding the likelihood of recidivism by comparing the gap between African American male juveniles' release dates to the dates of reincarceration compared to Caucasian males.

### **Research Questions**

What are the effects of the 2013 Juvenile Reform Act (Ga. HB-242) on the lived experiences of African American male juvenile ex-offenders, who are now older than 18 years but younger than 40, when seeking employment, education, and housing after incarceration?

The primary research questions were:

RQ1: How do laws and policies issued by Georgia's judicial officials affect the high recidivism rates of African American male juvenile ex-offenders in southwest Georgia?

RQ2: What are the perceptions of Georgia's juvenile officials, African American male juvenile ex-offenders older than 18 years but younger than 40 years, and their mothers/guardian regarding rehabilitation programs in the State of Georgia?

I used these questions to help further the understanding of juvenile justice officials, treatment providers, and other stakeholders of what, if any, negative influences

state-level policies have contributed to African American male juvenile's high recidivism rates in southwest Georgia. The findings of this research provided evidence to improve the current laws, policies, programs, and sanctions that were shown to affect the DMC of African American male juveniles and their high recidivism rates in southwest Georgia.

### **Research Design**

A general qualitative design was chosen as the most appropriate method for this study. This approach aligns with my purpose in this research and reflects the full range of sources that highlight the complexity of high recidivism rates among African American male juveniles. I conducted interviews with current southwest Georgia juvenile justice officials, including judges, probation officers, counselors, and behavior specialists; African American male juvenile ex-offenders, who were over the age of 18 but less than 40; and the mothers of African American male juvenile ex-offenders. This solicitation included the opinions, attitudes, and behaviors of the sample taken from southwest Georgia. I also used secondary data from essential information sources including peer-reviewed journal articles. A qualitative design was consistent with understanding ways to enhance the effectiveness of Georgia's juvenile system on an individual level to reduce DMC and high rates of recidivism among the target population.

A general qualitative method and a phenomenology method complement each other by describing how humans experience the effects of whatever the study is seeking, in this case, the lived experience of African American males when dealing with laws, policies, and rehabilitation programs. Both methods aim to set aside biases about individuals' experiences and feelings (Patton, 2015). A general qualitative method and a phenomenology method both allowed me to investigate an in-depth situation of those

who have lived through certain encounters. Both methods can use in-depth interviews of small samples of participants to give an even spread across the range of participants (Patton, 2015). After interviewing several of the selected participants, I was able to generalize the experiences that each participant shared.

I selected a research design based on contributor factors of Patton's (2015) qualitative inquiry method. Seven contributors and three kinds of qualitative data are essential to the interpretation of this research (Patton, 2015). Patton's (2015) contributors and data are listed below:

1. *Illuminating meaning*: Understanding the true meaning based on the experience of the person who interprets the action.
2. *Studying how things work*: By examining the outcome of those involved through evaluation of the phenomenon results.
3. *Capturing stories to understand peoples' perspectives and experiences*: The conclusion of a well-documented occasion from beginning to end.
4. *Elucidating how systems function and their consequences for people's lives*: A complex system that involves the effect it has on those involved.
5. *Understanding context: how and why it matters*: Understanding their surroundings for analysis and contextual sensitivity.
6. *Identifying unanticipated consequences*: Intentions, observation, and imagination vary depending on the circumstances.
7. *Comparing cases to discover important patterns and themes across cases*: Understanding the similarities and differences through contrast and analysis of the diversity of the intended goal.

8. *Interviews*: Open-ended conversations about a person's lived experiences through face to face or phone consultation.
9. *Observations and fieldwork*: Field notes of individuals' experiences and evaluation the process of different interactions.
10. *Documents*: The collection of data with spoken language to gather information.

According to Gergen, Josselson, and Freeman (2015), using a qualitative strategy adds in-depth richness to research data collected comprehensively. I elected to utilize a general qualitative strategy to investigate the complexity of African American male juvenile experiences and the effects of Georgia's juvenile justice system from the perspective of my participants. By using a general qualitative strategy, I was able to develop themes and patterns through the data that helped answer if juvenile justice laws, policies, and rehabilitation programs influenced the recidivism rates of African American male juveniles in southwest Georgia. Using this strategy was conducive to a more vivid picture of understanding the individuals who were the most involved. According to Creswell (2018), quantitative research involves simulations, laboratory, and field experiments, which is not what I was trying to achieve in this research. For this study, a general qualitative approach was most appropriate because it allowed me the flexibility needed to collect the data from individuals most affected by the issues investigated. Also, this general qualitative strategy provided the opportunity to conduct flexible interviews. Having flexibility allowed me to modify questions while interviewing if needed. Those interviews enabled the participants to freely express themselves and aided in guiding the open-ended questions of this research to fulfill the intended goal of the study.

### **Role of the Researcher**

As the researcher of this study, I provided a blueprint that I used to lay the foundations for this research, which was intended to collect as much relevant information as possible from the participants. Next, I analyzed and interpreted the information collected. During the investigation, it was imperative that I follow the protocols and ethical standards for protecting the rights of each participant. The participants in this study were adults who agreed to participate. There were no breaches of confidentiality or coercion of any kind to gain pertinent information. Efforts were made to ensure that there were no repercussions for the participants' involvement. A signed consent form was distributed to each participant after he or she was briefed on what this research entailed and any possible risks to the participant. Each participant had the option to exit the study at any time without questions and receive copies of everything discussed and signed. When sending information via e-mail, I encrypted the email as well as included a unique password to be used only by the participant and me. Each participant received a specific password to assess his or her documents accurately. I locked any other pertinent information in a safe box stored at a secure location. As a precautionary approach, I avoided interviewing anyone I knew on a first-hand basis. Finally, I redacted all names and other identifying information to preserve the identity of each participant, and I replaced names with code numbers. I did not conduct any advance research activities with potential interviewees in this research before gaining approval from the research committees and Walden's Institutional Review Board (IRB).

### **Population**

According to National Criminal Justice Reference Service (n.d.), a population is defined as a collaborative group having similar characteristics to infer the specifics of a study. For this study, I aimed to identify a sample population with a minimum of 10 participants. My goal was to recruit a diverse group of participants to interview who resided within the southwest Georgia region. The participants consisted of 11 juvenile justice officials, including two judges, six probation officers, and three counselors/behavior specialists; six African American male juvenile ex-offenders older than 18 years but younger than 40 years; and seven mothers/guardians of African American male juvenile ex-offenders. Those participants who volunteered from Dougherty County and Tift County shared their experiences regarding the laws, policies, or programs that might have contributed to African American male juvenile recidivism rates in southwest Georgia. At the time of the study, each participant had experienced or witnessed the effects of the 2013 Juvenile Justice Reform Act, if any, on African American male juvenile ex-offenders, over the age of 18 but less than 40 years, when seeking employment, education, and housing after incarceration. Also, participants had the opportunity to share their knowledge of the effects of current sanctions by judicial officials, if any, that they felt contributed to the high recidivism rates of African American male juveniles in southwest Georgia.

### **Identifying, Contacting, and Recruiting Participants**

I drew the participants in this study primarily from two areas in southwest Georgia: Dougherty County and Tift County. I used several random sampling strategies to recruit participants. First, through the Georgia Open Records Act, I requested records



of African American male juvenile ex-offenders who were older than 18 years but younger than 40 years, lived in Dougherty County or Tift County, and had a pattern of recidivist behaviors. Next, I scheduled appointments with juvenile officials (judges, counselors, and probation officers) in both counties to introduce myself and my research. At that time, I did not divulge any information about future questioning. However, I requested approval for their participation followed by an email. I posted flyers in strategic areas in Dougherty and Tift Counties that African American males and females were known to frequent, such as hair salons, barber shops, nail salons, game rooms, race tracks, and so on. According to Wise and Cantrell (2018), distributing flyers is a useful technique to introduce the study to participants before the actual interviews. I used this technique as a guide to help collect in-depth data about the participants being investigated. In addition, I conducted an intense filtering of all respondents to ensure the best fit for persons who met the criteria of being willing to share their lived experiences dealing with African American male juveniles and their recidivism rates in southwest Georgia. Those selected received an email and phone call thanking them for their time and inviting them to meet in a public place where the participants felt at ease and safe (e.g., Starbucks, libraries, restaurants, or cafés, to name a few) for all meetings and interviews, follow-up interviews, and opportunities for them to view and correct transcripts of the interviews. At these locations, the participants had an opportunity to meet the researcher and learn more about the study. This personal meeting led to the ultimate decision of whether an individual would participate in the study.

### **Data Collection**

I conducted semi-structured open-ended interviews for this general qualitative research. According to Rubin and Rubin (2012), the in-depth nature of a qualitative interview is to ask open-ended questions so that the interviewees have the flexibility to express their thoughts and concerns about the issue at hand. Having a flexible interview format eliminated asking the interviewees fixed questions and allowed opportunities for unasked questions to be answered indirectly. Using this interview technique provided rich and detailed information to address the research questions (Patten, 2015).

During the interview process, I used a small audio recorder to capture information that was not initially obtained or documented and took additional notes in a spiral notebook. With the approval of each participant, an assistant took notes as well. I shared the results, risks, and benefits of the study with each participant. The notes/codes based on each interview focused on expression, setting, movements, and tone of the person being interviewed. At the end of the interview, I gave participants crisis hotline information to assist them if needed. Later, I transcribed data collected in the interview process using coding.

During the interview process, I asked the judicial officials and the African American males who were juvenile ex-offenders to speak to their lived experiences either as officials dealing with African American male juveniles or as African American juveniles who were affected by juvenile justice laws, policies, and rehabilitation programs. According to Facchin and Margola (2016) and Rubin and Rubin (2012), it is vital to gather pertinent information about each participant's encounters. Therefore, I

asked participants to describe what challenged them the most when dealing with the experiences of African American male juveniles in the juvenile justice system.

The philosophy for any research is to guide the study with a technique that will evaluate the quality of the research (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). I ensured the accuracy of my results by double-checking the data with reviews and identifying any sources that caused the data to be inaccurate. Acknowledging the possibilities up front allowed the opportunity for adjustments to be made (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Also, open-ended questions assured quality and shaped this research in such a way that would reveal if the effects of juvenile justice laws, policies, and rehabilitation programs influenced the African American male juveniles' recidivism rates in southwest Georgia.

## Chapter 4: Results

### **Introduction**

My purpose in this general qualitative study was to examine the lived experiences of African American male juvenile ex-offenders who were older than 19 years younger than 40 years, resided in southwest Georgia, and had a recidivism rate of three or more arrests within 3 years. This study addressed the lack of understanding of these African American male juvenile ex-offenders. The questions that I used to pilot this research were RQ1: How do laws and policies issued by Georgia's judicial officials affect the high recidivism rates of African American male juvenile ex-offenders in southwest Georgia? and RQ2: What are the perceptions of Georgia's juvenile officials, African American male juvenile ex-offenders older than 18 years but younger than 40, and their mothers/guardians regarding rehabilitation programs in the State of Georgia? I used the general qualitative research question to provide the participants with the freedom to provide further information in response to the questions being asked. Also, I used open-ended techniques to capture additional insights into why African American males recidivate.

The questions that I asked of the participants were open-ended and were aligned to answer the research questions. With permission of all participants, I audio recorded the in-depth interviews. The participants were two juvenile judges, three behavioral specialists/counselors, six juvenile probation officers, seven African American female parents, and six African American male juvenile ex-offenders older than 18 years but younger than 40 who resided in southwest Georgia and had a recidivism rate of three or more arrests within a 3 years. I also used content analysis to analyze the rich, descriptive,

and saturated data related to why the participating African American male juvenile ex-offenders had a recidivism rate of three or more arrests within 3 years.

The analyzed data aligned with the research questions and showed similar coding classifications explaining why African American males had a recidivism rate of three or more arrests within 3 years. I used NVivo 12 Pro to aid in coding the data, which assisted with recognizing patterns, themes, and phrases, and provided common wordings such as *single-parent household*, *finances*, and *drugs*. NVivo 12 Pro is a software data management tool that controls and imports a variety of shared files, content, and social media information for strategic use. The similarities among patterns and classifications of the data helped to elucidate why African males recidivated at such a high rate within 3 years.

In Chapter 4, I provide an overview of the setting, participants' demographics, and relevant characteristics, and I describe specific codes, classifications, and themes that became apparent during the study. I established trustworthiness as evidence was outlined in the study. The research questions introduced in the study guided the supportive evidence addressing the data.

### **Setting**

I conducted the individual components of the study in public locations such as a public library conference room, the back-porch areas of personal homes, and office areas (Courthouse, Counseling, and Probation). Upon IRB approval (approval number: 06-25-19-0567431), all interviews proceeded as scheduled. Before each interview session, there were mechanisms in place to avoid interruptions (e.g., signs posted and front desk notifications by a secretary were sent to staff, unless it was an emergency). All locations

were equipped with central air and were spacious and comfortable. I interviewed 24 participants in the course of a 10-week period.

### **Research Questions**

I designed the research questions to collect the perceptions of juvenile judges, juvenile counselors/behavior specialists, juvenile probation officers, African American females who had a son incarcerated, and African American male juvenile ex-offenders who were older than 18 years but younger than 40, resided in southwest Georgia, and had a recidivism rate of three or more arrests within a 3-year period. I recruited all participants from Dougherty County and Tift County Judicial systems, and the data revealed that the parents/guardians and the African American male juvenile ex-offenders came from neighborhoods with the lowest socioeconomic status in both counties.

The participants initially consisted of 36 African Americans and four Caucasians; however, I selected only 24 individuals for interviews. The remaining 12 participants did not meet the age criteria. Seven participants were female parents/guardians of African American male juvenile ex-offenders, 11 participants were staff members (four were Caucasian) who had worked in some capacity with African American males, and six were African American male juvenile ex-offenders who met the criteria for the study. Each participant gave an account of his or her perceptions regarding how laws and policies issued by Georgia's judicial officials may have affected the high recidivism rates of African American male juvenile ex-offenders in southwest Georgia. Also, participants provided their opinions on the rehabilitation programs offered to African Americans in the State of Georgia. Last, I provided participants the opportunity to express their opinions about the effects of the 2013 Juvenile Reform Act (Ga. HB-242).

The research questions used to guide this study were RQ1: How do laws and policies issued by Georgia's judicial officials affect the high recidivism rates of African American male juvenile ex-offenders in southwest Georgia? and RQ2: What are the perceptions of Georgia's juvenile officials, African American male juvenile ex-offenders older than 18 years but younger than 40, and their mothers/guardians regarding rehabilitation programs in the State of Georgia?

The information in Table 2 includes an overview of participants and their backgrounds or roles as pertains to this research.

Table 2

*Participant Demographics*

Participant code	Role	Years in position	Age (years)	Race/Gender
26782	JV probation officer	1	N/A	B/M
31721	JV probation officer	10	N/A	B/M
10007	JV probation officer	4.5	N/A	B/M
1012 AB	JV probation officer	25	N/A	B/M
07036	JV probation officer	19	N/A	N/A
21-25-10-02-00	JV probation officer	11.9	N/A	N/A
01113	Behavioral specialist & JV counselor	17	N/A	B/F
3000	JV counselor	6	N/A	B/F
17534	Counselor	4.5	N/A	B/F
31707	JV judge	19.5	N/A	B/M
30303	JV judge	7	N/A	W/M
03172	Parent/guardian	N/A	57	B/F
3-13-77	Parent/guardian	N/A	63	B/F

1234	Parent/guardian	N/A	56	B/F
0614	Parent/guardian	N/A	58	B/F
54321	Parent/guardian	N/A	39	B/F
01968	Parent/guardian	N/A	50	B/F
4267432876	Parent/guardian	N/A	45	B/F
32876	Male juvenile ex-offender	N/A	43	B/M
79621	Male juvenile ex-offender	N/A	25	B/M
83321	Male juvenile ex-offender	N/A	33	B/M
67200	Male juvenile ex-offender	N/A	38	B/M
23297	Male juvenile ex-offender	N/A	35	B/M
11979	Male juvenile ex-offender	N/A	39	B/M

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*Note.* B = Black, W = White, M = Male, F = Female, AA = African American.

### **Data Collection**

Before I initiated the data collection process, I posted flyers in strategic areas in Dougherty and Tift Counties that African American males and females (mothers/guardians) were known to frequent, such as hair salons, barbershops, nail salons, game rooms, and racetracks (see Appendices A, B, and C). After several calls or follow-ups, I scheduled a consultation with each potential participant. During the interview, I established rapport with each participant (Creswell, 2018). Building a short-term relationship with the participants allowed them the opportunity to ask me questions about my research. I made sure to project a sense of transparency during these meetings. By sharing part of my personal story on the topic with the interviewees, I was able to make them more comfortable, thus allowing our conversations to flow easily.



Communicating in relaxed and free environments, such as the public library of their offices, allowed me to collect a wider variety of background data from my participants that strengthened the depth of this research. I collected all data by asking open-ended interview questions (see Appendices D, I, and J). The individuals I interviewed using these questions were six African American male juvenile ex-offenders, 11 staff members, and seven African American female participants who were parents/guardians of African American male juvenile ex-offenders. I designed the interview questions to gain an in-depth response that reflected each participant's perceptions. Each participant shared his or her lived experience regarding the effects of laws, policies, and rehabilitation programs on African American male juvenile recidivism in southwest Georgia. Participants responded with a phone call to the posted flyers.

Participants received a phone call from the researcher thanking them for their participation, and I scheduled interview dates. The collection of data began after the Walden University IRB approved the appropriate documents to be used for the study. During the initial interviews, the researcher read the consent form and provided a copy to each participant. The total of 24 participants was more than anticipated. Having more participants provided a wider range of in-depth knowledge about the research focus. Each participant who agreed to participate signed the consent form. I interviewed each participant once and required a signature before the interview. Aligning with IRB requirements, each participant was given a Crisis Hotline Information letter along with a copy of the consent form. I scheduled each interview for 60 minutes, but the time frame varied based on the participant's individual responses to the open-ended questions.

Following the reading of the consent form, each participant signed the form. I gave a copy of the signed form to participants for their records, and I kept the original forms for my records. Also, during the interview sections, I took notes in my note pad and on loose-leaf paper, using black/blue ink. I noted each participant's behavior, body language, tone, and movement. With the approval of each participant, I used an Olympus digital recording device to capture an audio record of the conversation. The interview questions varied based on their background categories (African American ex-juvenile males, African American mothers/guardians, judges, probation officers, behavioral specialists/counselors). Probation officers, behavioral specialists/counselors, and judges were asked nine interview questions while the remaining participants were asked five questions (see Appendices D, I, and J). The questions for the African American male ex-juvenile participants were designed to elicit their perceptions of why they continued to recidivate, how policies were enforced, and if rehabilitation programs worked. I allowed each African American male ex-juvenile participant adequate time to disclose his lived experience. Every participant seemed to exhibit a level of comfort with me and appeared open to freely sharing information during our sessions.

At the conclusion of each interview, I placed all documents in a file that I grouped based on each participant's job title or role in the study, and I secured the recording device in a locked safe box in my locked briefcase. I took all documents and recording devices to my home to ensure that I followed proper protocol for storage and privacy security. I will store the data collected for 5 years in a safe location, and after the fifth year, I will destroy all research according to established guidelines.

### **Data Analysis**

As a qualitative inquirer, I recruited participants who had encounters with African American males in the capacity of the juvenile court system (juvenile probation, juvenile judge, behavioral specialist, or counselor), female parents/guardians, and African American males who were older than 18 years but younger than 40 years of age who resided in southwest Georgia and had a recidivism rate of three or more arrests within a 3-year period. The saturation of data was met after interviewing 24 participants who shared similar encounters. I transferred all the transcribed interviews to the NVivo 12 plus software for thematic analysis (Saldana, 2013). I based the categories in Table 3 on descriptive words or phrases that emerged from the data.

Table 3

*Emerging Themes*

- 
- Theme 1: Rehabilitation (Before and After)
  - Theme 2: Georgia Regulations
  - Theme 3: Role Models
  - Theme 4: Learned Behavior
  - Theme 5: Accountability/Responsibility
  - Theme 6: Lack of Parenting Skills and Support
  - Theme 7: Lack of Community/Resources Programs
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### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

A written representation of the in-depth fieldwork was executed in the transferability of the research data. The written representation provided the context that established the all-inclusive credibility and dependability of this research. The outcomes of this study represented transferability for similar research in the future. Several conclusions that can be drawn from this research are that (a) it would benefit African American male juveniles who are incarcerated to learn and practice the coping strategies that the participants described, and (b) the stakeholders would be able to make better decisions when deciding what would be classified as a juvenile crime and how the sentencing phase will be implemented. Stakeholders can ensure that laws, policies, and rehabilitation efforts are fair, meaningful, and consistent, and that the punishment aligns with the crime. Also, Georgia's Juvenile Court System could benefit from this research by employing intervention strategies that may reduce juvenile recidivism. The information collected from this study can be used to assist in the reduction of recidivism rates of African American male juveniles in southwest Georgia. The research also contributed to the limited existing literature on the effects of laws, policies, and rehabilitation programs on African American male juvenile recidivism in southwest Georgia. All protocols described in Chapter 3 were employed to ensure that the data collection, trustworthiness, credibility, and analysis processes were safeguarded.

### **Dependability**

Utilizing Walden University's outline template to form an infrastructure to this research allowed me the opportunity to collect data from human subjects concisely and accurately. Every process sought from Walden's guidelines needed to be followed

carefully to ensure that the quality of the overall research was trustworthy. Employing a strategic skill set gave me the opportunity to identify and execute the overall goals of this research.

### **Confirmability**

According to Patton (2015), confirmability is established when the results of the participants are corroborated by others to exclude the perceptions of the researcher. As described in Chapter 3, the data collected were clear and concise. I derived the results strictly from the data collected in the study. I used observations to capture the body language and expression of the individual participants as they shared their perceptions of their lived experiences involving African American male juvenile ex-offenders. Also, I continuously verified results from the data as I collected it to ensure confirmability.

### **Results**

The data in this research shed light on why some African American male juvenile ex-offenders may have high recidivism rates of three or more arrests within a 3-year period. I based the examination of this data on RQ1, How do laws and policies issued by Georgia's judicial officials affect the high recidivism rates of African American male juvenile ex-offenders in southwest Georgia? and RQ2, What are the perceptions of Georgia's juvenile officials, African American male juvenile ex-offenders who were older than 18 years but younger than 40, and their mothers/guardians regarding rehabilitation programs in the State of Georgia? Ravitch and Carl (2016) stated the importance of confirming that the research questions and methods are aligned with the research goals. I used the information presented by Ravitch and Carl in the design of this research by giving each participant the same questions based on their individual

categories. Participants revealing their deep lived experiences exposed some previously unexamined factors in their lives that affected their choices positively or negatively.

### **Gaps in the Results**

The gaps identified during this research study were based on the literature review and participant responses. However, I noted and explored professional relationships between the staff and offenders that were formed after sentencing (Dean, 2014). Counselors could have scheduled sessions with juvenile male offenders to allow them to share their perceptions or concerns about what happened and why. Teachers also could have allowed juvenile male offenders the opportunity to open up about any other troubling issues. Dean (2014) stated that lack of understanding, interpersonal issues, and social relations are factors that may contribute to a juvenile's behavior.

Rehabilitation programs offered to juveniles also revealed a gap. The lack of understanding of the background of a client can cause a delay in receiving proper services. For example, every African American male (AAM) participant came from a broken home, and some situations were worse than others. A broken home is a home where the father and mother are no longer together. However, understanding the root cause of juvenile delinquent behavior is often more important than the behavior itself. When counselors or therapists are treating the deviant behavior, which is the surface of the problem and not the root, the behavior will continue. Every client cannot be rehabilitated using the same methods. For example, if Alan committed theft because he was hungry, and John committed a robbery to join a gang, the offense may be the same but the reasons for doing so are different. Therefore, the counseling services provided

should be individualized. Counseling and rehabilitation programs should be matched to individual history and choice making if positive results are to be achieved.

The effects of interpersonal and social skills were vital between the birth parents and the AAM juvenile ex-offenders in this study. Many of the study participants felt that this bond was weakened because of a lack of love and discipline. For example, every AAM juvenile ex-offender participant in this study lacked the involvement or presence of his biological father in his life at some point. According to the AAM juvenile ex-offenders, this led to a conflicted understanding of manhood and how to approach life's challenges. Because they were missing a positive father figure, who could have helped them to mature and cope with life challenges, some of these boys developed aggressive tendencies; they felt that being defensive was their only choice for survival. Also, the relationships formed during court processing left a positive effect on one of the juvenile ex-offender participants. Participant 83321 explained how the behavior specialist took time to talk to him at his level of understanding. Communicating with an individual at his level of awareness and knowledge is important for enabling comprehension, establishing expectations, and achieving desirable results. Participant 11979 discussed in his interview how the laws were not made to help African American males, but they were designed to keep them down. The example that he gave was that "lawmakers know that some African Americans have limited income to provide for their family adequately."

The juvenile ex-offenders who lived in the most socioeconomically deprived areas were the main offenders and recidivists. If the government is already providing living assistance to this subgroup, why is the same consideration not given for sentencing, such as lower restitution rates? How do lawmakers expect AAM juvenile ex-

offenders to make restitution payments when their parents cannot afford basic living expenses? This targeting of African American juvenile offenders in turn creates situations and circumstances that are likely to foster recidivist behaviors.

Nevertheless, there were patterns, themes, and relationships that became apparent during the interview process. The themes emerged when participants shared similar lived experiences. The systemic coding procedures I used to reveal the themes of this study were as follows.

### **Themes of the Study**

#### **Theme 1: Rehabilitation (Before and After)**

The theme of Rehabilitation (Before and After) emerged throughout the interview process. All participants described rehabilitation as ineffective due to a lack of appropriate programs offered to AAM juveniles before and after incarceration. Because of their limited resources, AAMs are less likely to receive the same services as their more affluent counterparts. Also, a lack of understanding of African Americans and their backgrounds can cause a delay in receiving proper services. As already noted, every AAM participant in this study came from a broken home, with some situations being worse than others. Counselors or therapists need to seek the root cause of deviant behavior or the behavior will continue. This means that counseling or therapeutic services need to be matched to the particular problem that it intends to correct or address. Likewise, rehabilitation programs should be individualized according to personal history and the reason why the crime was committed if positive results are to be achieved.

Staff participants and African American mothers addressed the importance of rehabilitation, but some reported that they did not observe any changes in their sons after



rehabilitation programs were completed. Also, the mothers mentioned how some counselors recommended to the judge to have their son psychologically evaluated to explore possible factors that contributed to the behavior. Participant 12121 stated, "While my son was in jail, it was recommended by his doctor for him to take medication (Ritalin or Adderall) to help with his hyperactivity and for him to focus. This recommendation came after several incidents at home, in school, and while detained." Participant 1007 described rehabilitation as "just a good ole finger-wagging technique [to say that] something was done, but not to correct the behavior." Participants 42674 and 0614 both indicated that "incarceration was not a good form of rehabilitation to correct the negative behavior; incarceration made that behavior worse." They felt that incarceration made the behavior worse because of the new mindset their sons developed while they were detained.

According to staff participants, juveniles who receive rehabilitation services tend to have limited lasting success rates. When the juvenile returns to the same environment, the old behavior tends to resurface due to the lack of services for everyone involved with the child (Inderbitzin, 2005). This has a detrimental effect on recidivism rates, especially among African American male juveniles.

## **Theme 2: Georgia Regulations**

The topic of Georgia Regulations emerged as a common theme among staff participants. Based on their perceptions, the laws worked for some but not for all. According to Staff Participant 01113, "Recidivism rates among African American male juveniles are higher than their Caucasian/Hispanic counterparts." Unanimously, it was agreed that the programs offered in Georgia did not provide in-depth services to African

American male juveniles. The example that was given was that delinquency, violence, and recidivism continue to rise in the African American male juvenile's community. However, the lack of services was not addressed and temporary solutions were offered, which left the problems unsolved. The majority of the staff participants stated that current laws and policies were ineffective. Staff Participant 21-25-10-02-00 noted, "Depending on the judge's race, religious belief, and victim's race or status quo in the community, the law is very ineffective, causing the sentencing to be harsh."

According to Staff Participant 10007, "Laws are designed to provide rehabilitation, but they are not geared to rehabilitate. Incarcerating juveniles for thirty days is a vacation for many and not a deterring factor, which poses great concern for correcting negative behavior." Participant 32876 stated, "I felt that the laws in Georgia failed me." He described that when the crime was committed, he was a child and should have been charged accordingly. "I believe that the judge wanted to make an example out of me. Those folks (the jury) weren't even thinking about giving me a second chance as they say." Participant 1012AB observed, "We have an 80% recidivism rate in Dougherty County. The programs in this area are too weak in the sentencing phase. We went from a 90-day boot camp to 30 days, and 5 years of being incarcerated to from 1 to 5 years. The method being used has no structure. It allows the kids to be catered to with no deterring factor to correct the negative behavior."

### **Theme 3: Role Models**

The area in which an individual life may influence his or her perception of a role model. Most individuals think of a role model as a person who inspires someone, while others may think of a role model as someone with a lavish lifestyle. In fact, 85% of the

AAM juvenile ex-offender participants looked up to drug dealers and gang members as role models. The theme of drug dealers and gang members emerged from the interview question, "What types of people in your neighborhood did you see as role models when you were a child?"

Participant 32876 responded, "As role models, I saw drug dealers. They seemed to have it together, and they always had money." According to Participant 79621, "I saw my brother's (gang members) as role models. They had my back when no one did."

Participant 83321 observed, "I saw drug dealers and gang members as role models. When I did not have, they had. When I needed motivation, they gave it to me. I did not have a father in my life, so I looked up to the gang to guide me." Participant 23297 stated, "I saw every day workers on the block. They were getting it in. The nice clothes, cars, and they always had money."

According to Participant 11979, "I saw gang members and drug dealers as role models. When I was tired and could not sleep at home because my uncle wanted to fight, they let me sleep at their house. They encouraged me to attend school. They even took the time for me to express my feelings or get something off my chest. They taught me how to get money and how to get nice clothes for school. They also made me feel accepted and did not judge me because of where I lived and what I did not have. I felt protected and secured, knowing that my gang members were there for me. When I got locked up, they put money on my book and made sure that I was taken care of while I was locked up. My grandma did not have. She did the best that she could with her limited income. My gang was my family." Participant 67200 responded, "No one was a role model for me."

Staff participants and African American mothers discussed the importance of having a role model in the lives of juveniles. However, the mothers mentioned how having a role model was not necessarily a good thing because not all role models were suited for that title. Staff participants stated that a role model should be someone inspirational who has good character. Other participants noted that having a role model in place could reduce negative behaviors. Positive role models build rapport that allows juveniles the opportunity to communicate and develop social and moral training through observation and association.

#### **Theme 4: Learned Behavior**

Learned behavior was another theme that emerged from all participants' interviews. Learned behavior gains strength when a reaction by the recipient acknowledges it. This means that when negative behavior is presented, it should not be reinforced with a negative comment; instead, it should be addressed with positive feedback. For example, when disciplining an unruly child at home, the disciplinarian (e.g., parent/guardian) should remove something the child likes in order to correct the negative behavior. Participants provided their perspectives on possible factors involving learned behavior that influenced African American male juvenile recidivism. For each participant in this research, learned behavior in the form of external pressure had a lasting effect on the choices made by the juvenile offenders (Hoffmann & Dufur, 2018).

Participant 32876 stated that he felt “pressured from his friends at a time when criminal behavior presented itself.” Likewise, Participant 79621 expressed, “I wanted to fit in so being pressured to join was not hard because that's what I wanted to do at the time.” He discussed how criminal activities “occurred all around” him. Participant 83321

indicated that he “felt pressure to do the things that I did because I was tired of seeing my mother struggle. I thought maybe if I do this, I could help, but I knew if I was caught, then there would be a consequence that I have to go through.” Participant 23297 “felt pressure to do the things that my friends did because I had no limits for myself what I will and what I will not do. I was wild and wanted to fit in.” Participant 11979 stated, “I felt pressure at times when I saw my friends in action to join the gang. I was already perceived to be a ‘bad child,’ so what I did had no repercussions. No one cared about what I did or where I was. At least that's what it seemed.” According to Participant 67200, “I did not feel direct pressure; however, I learned from the best: myself and error.”

All staff participants and African American mothers unanimously agreed that learned behavior had an effect on juvenile recidivism, especially among African American males. Participants noted that learned behavior occurred through association, observation, and consequences, which were relevant to the high rates of recidivism among African American males.

### **Theme 5: Accountability/Responsibility**

People do not want to be held accountable for someone else’s actions or even for their own actions. However, taking responsibility is essential for growth. The theme of accountability and responsibility emerged when the participants discussed their perception of accountability and responsibility of African American male juveniles. Some noted that being able to admit to their wrongdoing was the first step toward change. Participant 83321 said, “Although no one wants to get caught if I did (which I did), then I would have to deal with it accordingly,” However, most of them did not care about being

caught. Participant 1179 said that he did his time and made a complete turnaround. He explained how he was no longer in a gang but returned to his community to help other young boys like him. Also, he discussed his role as a pastor, an insurance agent, and, most of all, as a father. Participant 1012AB expressed that “accountability lies in the individual and what he wants to get from the program offered.” According to Participant 26782, “Punishment is not stiff and swift enough to deter negative behavior.” Participant 83321 said, “If I did it, then I will accept da punishment.” He stated that maybe if he were good at breaking the law, then just perhaps it would not have been his turn to be arrested. Besides, accountability and responsibility are like chess. When you make a move, it better be a good one, because that one move can cost you everything.

#### **Theme 6: Lack of Parenting Skills and Support**

There is a significant link between parenting skills and family support. This connection was so troublesome that substantial concerns led to developing the Functional Family Therapy (FFT) program in Georgia. FFT is a program created to provide therapy to families of at-risk juveniles, especially those with recidivist behaviors. This program covers a broad range of services that meet specific criteria to aid in correcting negative behaviors. Family support is noteworthy as it contributes to recidivism reduction. Attacking this issue with a holistic approach helps to identify what treatment works and does not work. All staff participants said that it was paramount to have parental involvement. Parental involvement is needed because parents have a significant effect on children, whether positive or negative, and a lack of parenting skills adds to the problematic behavior.

According to the lived experiences of African American mothers/guardians, they were dissatisfied with their son's behavior and tried to seek help with discipline, but resources were limited. Participants 42674 and 0614 both stated that they reached out to their churches, probation officers, and schools for assistance, but received minimal support. The only help that they received was after the arrest of their son during the reactive approach of probation. Being on probation until the court date provided some help while they waited for court proceedings. Unlike these parents, there were some who lacked the desire to be involved with their son's treatment. They made excuses as to why something failed rather than helping to correct the negative behavior after it occurred. Participant 01968 discussed how her daughter gave up custody of her son. She stated, "I am currently raising my grandson. My daughter could not deal with his behavior and his joining the gang. Therefore, she gave him to me to raise. These young parents should appreciate the support of their family members. They don't want the responsibility. They want to have fun and lay there and make these babies." Although all parents have difficulties with raising children, raising African American male juveniles is a challenging task, especially in low socioeconomic neighborhoods. Single parents experienced compounded issues, including lack of coping skills and lack of experience. Staff Participant 93113 stated, "African American male juveniles might have the desire to take the right path. Still, due to his maturity level, he is unable to stand boldly and face home and society challenges. A weak mind can lead to a life full of damaging outcomes."

Participant 23297 stated, "I had got to the point in my life when he was committing crimes with no care or worries. He also said that he knew what he was doing was wrong, but he took the risk anyway. He stated it was all about survival for him and

his family.” Staff Participant 31707 shared, “I had one case where the parents were arrested for selling drugs, and their male juveniles did commit the same act.” According to Staff Participant 31721, “Parents should be held accountable for the actions of their child’s behavior if it is proven to be from the results of lacking parenting skills because those parents could attend parenting classes. Parenting classes should be mandatory, and government assistance should play a role in enforcing that those identified parents attend those classes.”

### **Theme 7: Lack of Community Resources/Programs**

Lack of community resources and programs tends to harm kids, especially African American male juveniles who live in neighborhoods with low socioeconomic status. Displaying signs of highly impulsive behaviors and limited academic achievement in elementary grades is an indicator that potential adverse behavior problems may arise. Staff Participant 21-25-10-02-00 stated, “African American males are not given support promptly and are expected to show positive results in 2 weeks or 30 days, which is not realistic,” Staff Participant 07036 noted that “juveniles need more drug treatment facilities. The program that they offer for drug treatment is AAA programs.” According to Staff Participant 31721, “There should be programs offered after release to help juveniles’ transition effectively in their community.” Staff Participant 1012AB stated, “If there is no structure in the home and the child is not properly supervised or taught values and ethics, that’s setting the child up for failure.” Likewise, if a community lacks structure and resources, and its children lack supportive community programs, then the community has set the children up for failure. Young parents were often uneducated and lacked parental skills. When law enforcement became involved in the home as it related



to discipline, parents were deterred. Some parents felt hopeless and powerless because of the fear of possibly being arrested for disciplining their children. Staff Participant 26782 observed, “Single parents should have support while they are working to prevent juvenile delinquency.” Participant 1007 said, “Most of the juvenile sociologists and counselors are part time, and part-time goals are ineffective, and the full-time staffers cannot provide effective services because the juvenile is confined for 30 days.” According to Staff Participant 01113, the main programs that juveniles lack are those that address mental health. Given that the majority of the African American male juveniles studied experienced mental disorders, the lack of mental health services is a serious barrier to rehabilitation of AAM juvenile offenders.

### **Summary**

Chapter 4 provided a comprehensive overview of the setting of the study, demographics of the 24 participants, data collection techniques, the procedures used to deal with data analysis expertise, evidence of trustworthiness, and an all-inclusive outcome of the data collected. The findings of this research revealed a variety of perceptions about the recidivism rates of African American male juvenile ex-offenders who were older than 18 years but younger than 40 years of age, resided in southwest Georgia, and had a recidivism rate of three or more arrests within 3 years. Several themes revealed the contributing factors in this study. Some of those included single-parent households, financial challenges, ineffective rehabilitation programs, and drugs. The findings of this research acknowledged the responses to questions that were introduced. The outcomes of this research supported that recidivism is a significant issue, especially among juveniles in the African American community. However, the blame is not just

with the offenders. Lawmakers also share some responsibility as well for the recidivism epidemic.

Chapter 5 will provide a recapitulation of the study findings, advice for Georgia's stakeholders, implications for social change, suggestions for future research, and limitations of this research.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

### **Introduction**

My purpose in this general qualitative study was to examine the lived experiences of African American male juvenile ex-offenders who were older than 18 years but younger than 40 years, resided in southwest Georgia, and had a recidivism rate of three or more arrests within 3 years. I sought to examine why this demographic group had a recidivism rate of three or more arrests within 3 years and aimed to fill the gap in this research area. The relationship between AAM juveniles and the process of rehabilitation has not been clearly delineated, according to Dean (2014). The lack of efficiency in existing programs has contributed to their ineffectiveness in deterring African American male juveniles' contact with the criminal justice system. This research was significant because it addressed the perceptions regarding why African American male ex-offenders have such high recidivism rates.

In Chapter 5, I will provide an all-inclusive summary of the study, which will include the interpretation of the findings, the study's limitations, the recommendations for additional research, the recommendations to stakeholders in Georgia, the implications for social change, and the conclusion.

### **Research Question**

I designed the following question to collect the perceptions of juvenile judges, juvenile counselors/behavior specialists, and juvenile probation officers; African American females who had a son who was incarcerated; and African American male juvenile ex-offenders who were older than 18 years but younger than 40 years of age, resided in southwest Georgia, and had a recidivism rate of three or more arrests within a

3-year period. I drew all participants primarily from Dougherty County and Tift County judicial systems and from neighborhoods with the lowest socioeconomic status in both counties. The initial participants consisted of 36 African Americans and four Caucasians; however, I selected only 24 individuals for interviews. Seven participants were parents/guardian of African American male juvenile ex-offenders, and 11 participants were staff members (four were Caucasian) who had worked in some capacity with African American male juvenile offenders who met the criteria for the study. Each participant gave an account of his or her perception of how laws and policies issued by Georgia's judicial officials may have affected the high recidivism rates of African American male juvenile ex-offenders in southwest Georgia. In addition, participants provided their opinions on the rehabilitation programs offered to African Americans in the State of Georgia. Finally, I gave participants the opportunity to express their opinions about the effects (if any) of the 2013 Juvenile Reform Act (Ga. HB-242).

To recruit participants, I posted invitational flyers requesting volunteers in strategic areas in Dougherty County and Tift County (see Appendices A & B). Research questions that I used to guide this study were RQ1: How do laws and policies issued by Georgia's judicial officials affect the high recidivism rates of African American male juvenile ex-offenders in southwest Georgia? and RQ2: What are the perceptions of African American male juvenile ex-offenders older than 18 years but younger than 40 and their mothers/guardian regarding rehabilitation programs in the State of Georgia?

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

Each participant shared his or her lived experiences regarding African American male ex-offenders' recidivism rates in southwest Georgia. The findings revealed that

Georgia rehabilitation programs need revamping. The lacking component in Georgia's rehabilitation programs is found in their design. The rehabilitation programs do not focus on the reasons why the crimes were committed; instead they focus on the crimes by group. For example, if a juvenile is an alcoholic, he is required to attend a drug rehabilitation class. Instead of a drug rehabilitation class, he should participate in a program designed to address the core causes of juvenile substance abuse, which are not being addressed in existing programs, raising the risk of relapse. To provide rehabilitation, it is necessary to determine what led to the continuous pattern of negative behavior and, once this is accomplished, then rehabilitation can take place to address those patterns. In addition, the recidivism rates reflect Georgia being too lenient when punishing juveniles for criminal acts. For example, Participant 1012AB stated, "We have an 80% recidivism rate in Dougherty County. Therefore, sentencing juveniles for 30 days as a form of punishment after committing a crime is a slap on the wrist." Research by Boggs and Worthy (2015) found that mild punishment hinders the goal of correcting reoffending behavior. This research suggested that the sentences issued should carry as much weight as the crime that was committed.

Previous researchers have indicated that it was paramount to determine why African American males had such high recidivism rates in Georgia, and whether Georgia was equipped to meet the requirements for reducing those numbers. African American male juvenile ex-offender shared their perceptions of how important it was for Georgia to revisit its laws and programs to determine their effectiveness. Participants reported their aspirations that Georgia will devise a plan to meet their expectations. Participants described how living in impoverished neighborhoods increased their risk for

incarceration. Most of the most common responses included rehabilitation, role models, learned behavior, accountability, parenting skills, and community resources. It was apparent that punishment was not equally distributed among race/gender because African Americans juveniles comprised only 34% of the total U.S. population of 10.52 million people in 2018 (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2018).

Existing rehabilitation programs that did not meet the needs of participants decreased the success rates for reducing African American male juvenile recidivism. These findings may lead to an adjustment in Georgia's juvenile justice laws and policies. According to Anderson (2016), African Americans male ex-offenders' recidivism rates will remain an issue as they return to poverty-stricken communities. Provided within this chapter are my recommendations for this research.

### **Recommendations for the State of Georgia Juvenile Justice System**

Although rehabilitation is a critical component for the reduction of recidivism rates among all juveniles, it should be specialized to address the core reasons behind the criminal acts that were committed. Currently, rehabilitation programs in Georgia focus on the behavior contributing to the detention of the juvenile instead of the core contributing factors. The core contributing factors are the risk factors behind the reason the criminal act was committed. For example, the lack of structure, mentors, and parental involvement, and the presence of poverty-stricken communities, are some core reasons why African American male juveniles are vulnerable to committing criminal acts. This vulnerability leaves African American male juveniles without a sense of direction and at risk for incarceration and recidivist behaviors. The results of this study identify several recommendations to reduce recidivism among African American males.

**Recommendation 1**

The rehabilitation programs for African American male juveniles should include male-on-male consultation. A male can provide guidance and answer questions that a young male has about manhood, which is something a female cannot contribute. Having more African American males in a counselor/probation positions could decrease African American male juvenile recidivism rates among Georgia's highest recidivist group.

**Recommendation 2**

Georgia should revamp their laws and policies as it relates to juvenile offenders. Current policies are outdated and ineffective, and do not provide the desired consequence for the crime that was committed; an example is detaining a juvenile for 30 days with the expectation of making a change in juvenile behaviors. Current policies have failed the state as well as the juvenile offenders. Policies today allow juveniles too many opportunities before being detained. To be detained, there is a specific criterion that must be met. Those criteria are determined by Georgia's juvenile point system, which is monitored by the juvenile courts and probation.

**Recommendation 3**

Juvenile laws in Georgia should be re-visited so that the discretion of judges is restricted as they hand down disposition orders. Current laws allow judges to sentence using a variable scale that poses an opportunity for discrimination to occur instead of having a specific nonadjustable sentence. For example, an African American male who committed the crime of robbery could be detained for 3-plus years while his white counterparts are likely to get less time. As a result, the variable scale contributes to the

recidivist rates of African American males. To reduce this current problem, the number of years or months should be established as a fixed punishment sentence.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

All future studies should examine the juvenile justice system as a whole.

Although this study focused on African American males, there is a need to reduce juvenile recidivism in the State of Georgia. Also, future studies should address what led to the recidivist behavior and how to prevent such behavior before it happens. Last, future studies should investigate the lived experience of lawmakers with their perceptions of Georgia's juvenile justice laws and policies. It would be beneficial to compare and contrast different regions of Georgia to examine the similarities and dissimilarities of lawmakers' perceptions of Georgia's juvenile laws. When replicating this general qualitative study, the findings may differ. By revisiting Georgia's laws, policies, and rehabilitation programs along with the core cause of juvenile recidivist behaviors, more recommendations can be made for decreasing the recidivism rates.

### **Implications for Social Change**

As stated, juvenile recidivism among African American males is a paramount issue that needs to be addressed by the State of Georgia. By probing this research through in-depth interviews, I gained understanding of each participant's perceptions from the responses given. Opening up about their experiences resulted in constructive change. The information discovered and the suggestions provided during the data collection may positively affect social change by disclosing the influence of risk factors for juvenile recidivism. My research regarding social change was endorsed by each participant,



including the ways in which revamping laws, policies, and rehabilitation can help reduce African American male juvenile recidivism rates in Georgia.

Georgia's judicial officials in this research shared their professional experiences working with African American male juvenile delinquents and recidivists. They addressed the risk factors that affect recidivism among African American male juvenile ex-offenders who were older than 18 years but younger than 40 years of age and resided in southwest Georgia. Participants also shared their points of view on strategies that could be executed with goals to reduce African American male juvenile recidivism rates. Likewise, the results from this research can aid policy makers in modifying and implementing treatment programs that would reduce the risk factors for recidivism among this subgroup. Georgia's Department of Juvenile Justice could collaborate with all entities (school, courts, probation, counselors, behavior specialists, the police, the churches, and families) to devise plans geared toward counteracting the risk factors of juvenile recidivism.

### **Conclusion**

As stated previously, recidivism is a problematic issue that Georgia finds challenging to address. Although the number of juveniles detained have decreased, the number of reoccurring offenses has not. The adjustments that Georgia implemented lacked forethought to resolve the problems, which expanded in another direction: high recidivism rates. The purpose of this general qualitative study was to explore the perceptions of juvenile staff, female parents/guardians of African American male juveniles, and African American male juvenile ex-offenders who were older than 18 years but younger than 40 regarding their opinions of Georgia's laws, policies, and

rehabilitation programs. Although the discernment of each participant varied, the message delivered provided possible alternatives that Georgia can implement to decrease juvenile recidivism rates.

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Appendix A: Invitation Flyer for Ex-Offenders To Participate in Research Study

INVITATION FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE JUVENILE EX-OFFENDERS,  
WHO ARE OLDER THAN 18 YEARS BUT YOUNGER THAN 40 YEARS OF AGE,  
TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY

You are asked to take part in a criminal justice research study as a part of my doctoral program. This study will allow African American male juvenile ex-offenders to express their opinion freely about their arrest. This research will search for individuals who are older than 18 years but younger than 40 years, live in southwest Georgia, and have more than three or more arrests in a 3-year period.

**Requirements to Participate:**

- ✓ African American male
- ✓ Older than 18 but younger than 40 years of age
- ✓ Three or more arrests within 3 years
- ✓ Served jail/prison time, probation, or parole
- ✓ While incarcerated you participated in programs that would help you return to your neighborhood.

If you meet these requirements and would like to be interviewed, please contact Kizzie Donaldson-Richard (doctoral candidate). During the telephone call, you will be asked questions to see if you qualify for the research study. If you are eligible and decide to participate, you will be asked to meet me face-to-face or via phone to conduct an interview. The interview will last 1 hour and will give you the chance to share your opinions and feelings about your experience with the juvenile justice system. This information will be checked with you for accuracy via phone or face to face, whichever is most convenient. There may be possible benefits if you take part in the study; for example, a \$10 Visa gift card will be given in exchange for your participation.

**Note: I will be recruiting 8-16 qualified participants and the first 16 who qualify will be considered for the study.**

Appendix B: Invitation Flyer for Mothers To Participate in Research Study

REQUEST FOR MOTHERS

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN A CRIMINAL JUSTICE RESEARCH STUDY

My name is Kizzie Donaldson-Richard. I am a graduate student at Walden University. I invite you to take part in my research study, which concerns the opinions of African American mothers about their sons being arrested three or more times and the effects it had on his life.

Research is always voluntary!

**Would the study be a good fit for me?**

This study might be a good fit for you:

- If you would like to share the untold story of your parental involvement in the justice system and the effects of the juvenile justice system on you and your son's life.

**What would happen if I took part in the study?**

If you decide to take part:

- You would provide valuable detailed information about your experiences with laws, policies, and rehabilitation programs that helped or did not help correct your son's behavior.
- It is possible that your opinions and experiences can provide support and guidance to mothers who are experiencing similar situations.

There may be possible benefits if you take part in the study.

- \$10 food or nail gift card.

**To take part in this research study or for more information, please contact me.**

Appendix C: Invitation Flyer for Staff Members To Participate in Research Study

REQUEST FOR GEORGIA JUVENILE OFFICIALS

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN A CRIMINAL JUSTICE RESEARCH STUDY

Hello, you are invited to participate in a research study that is part of my doctoral degree program in Criminal Justice. The purpose of this study is to examine the lived experiences of African American male juvenile ex-offenders who have recidivated.

You can take part in this research study:

- **If you provide ANY services to African American male juvenile offenders in an official capacity for the courts.**

If you meet these requirements and would like to participate, please contact Kizzie Donaldson-Richard (doctoral candidate). During the telephone call, you will be asked some questions to see if you are qualified for this research study. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to meet with me face-to-face for an interview. This interview will last 60 minutes, giving you the chance to share your experience of supervising African American male juvenile offenders. The information provided will be verified for accuracy after the interview has taken place.

*Thank you for your support and participation*

Appendix D: Interview Protocol for African American Male Juvenile Ex-Offender

Participants

Full Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Code Number: \_\_\_\_\_

**Interview Protocol for African American Male Juvenile Ex- Offender Participants**

I am grateful for your participation in this research and interview. The purpose of this interview is for you to share your feelings and opinions about your re-offending behaviors as a juvenile that caused you to be arrested three or more times within a 3-year period. I am interested in your experiences; there are no right or wrong answers, so feel free to tell your story.

Your identity and the confidentiality of your answers will be secured and protected. At any time, you can stop the interview process without questions.

**Questions for Participants**

Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Arrest: \_\_\_\_\_ Dates re-arrested: \_\_\_\_\_

What rehabilitation program (s) were you a part of:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Personal Background Information**

Are you originally from southwest Georgia?

How long have you lived here?

Do you have misdemeanor or felony charges?

How many years of education do you have?

### Interview Questions

To begin the interview, I will ask the African American male juvenile ex-offenders, older than 18 years but younger than 40 years, general open-ended questions.

1. What types of people in your neighborhood did you see as role models when you were a child? [E.S. #3]
2. Was what you went to jail for better or worse than what you know/think others did around you? [E.S. #2, 3]
3. Did you ever feel direct peer pressure from your friends or elders? [E.S. #2, 3, 4]
4. Among your friends, were you considered a leader because of your willingness to break the rules or potentially commit a crime? E.S. # 2, 3] How were you “schooled” to the streets?
5. Were you ever afraid of getting caught? Did you ever reach a point where you didn’t care about getting caught? [E.S. #5, 6,]



## Appendix E: Crisis Hotline Information

### **If you or someone you know is feeling or experiencing the following:**

- Suicidal thoughts
- Withdraws from friends and family
- Self-harm
- Depression
- Stress/anxiety, agitated or unable to sleep
- Feels hopeless
- Mental health issues
- Encounters dramatic mood changes
- Increase in drug & alcohol use
- Feels rage or uncontrolled anger
- Developmental disabilities
- Physical abuse
- Emotional abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Feels trapped, like there is no way out
- Relationship issues

Confidentiality: Any disclosure of information will remain secure with the crisis counselor. However, if you are at immediate risk of causing serious bodily harm to yourself or others, please contact **EMERGENCY SERVICES by dialing 9-1-1**.

## Appendix F: Consent Form for Staff

CONSENT FORM FOR STAFF MEMBERS TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH  
STUDY**Introduction and Purpose:**

My name is Kizzie Donaldson-Richard. I am a doctoral student at Walden University completing my Ph.D. in Criminal Justice. I am inviting you to take part in my research study to share your opinions, observations, and interactions with African American male juvenile offenders in the Georgia criminal justice system.

**Background Information:**

The purpose of this study is to examine the lived experiences of African American male juvenile ex-offenders, who are older than 18 years but younger than 40 years of age, reside in Southwest Georgia, and have a recidivism rate of three or more arrests within a 3-year period. To participate you must:

- Have provided services to juvenile offenders in an official capacity (i.e., Juvenile Judge, Probation Officer, Counselor, or Behavioral Specialist)
- Have experience in the Georgia Juvenile Justice System

**Procedures:**

If you agree to participate in my research study:

- An interview will be requested. This interview can take place at the public library in the conference room or via phone.
- A follow-up on the initial meeting will be requested (face to face or via telephone); this meeting will last 60 minutes.
- The interview will be audio-taped and will also take 60 minutes.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Participation in this research study is voluntary. If you decide to take part in this study, you are free to withdraw at any time.

**Benefits:**

To effects laws, policies, and rehabilitation programs to reduce African American male juvenile's recidivism rates in Southwest Georgia.

**Risks/Discomfort**

Please note that you are free to decline to answer any questions or you can stop the interview at any time. As with all research, there is a possibility that confidentiality might be compromised; however, I am taking every precaution to minimize that risk.

**Confidentiality:**

The information contained in this research study is private. If the results of this study are published or presented, individuals' names and other personal information will be removed. To protect your privacy, I will store the information in a locked cabinet. If the information is stored electronically, it will be password protected and stored in a safe box. Only code numbers will be used in this study. I am the only researcher who will know the first and last names of each participant. Upon completion of my research, all information will be kept for 5 years in a safe location, and after the fifth year, all research used will be shredded. Everything described above will be done to protect the privacy of this research study information.

**Compensation:**

A Visa gift card valued at \$10.00 will be provided for participating in this research study. However, if the participants decide to stop the interview mid-way through, he/she will be given the gift card anyway.

**Rights:**

**Participation in this research study is voluntary.** You are free to decide not to take part in the research study. You may stop the interview at any point and for any reason.

**Questions:**

If you have any questions about this research, please feel free to contact me. If you have any questions about your rights or treatment as a research participant in this study, please contact the Walden University's Research Participant Advocate.

**Consent**

A copy of this consent form and Crisis information will be provided to you for your records. If you wish to participate in this study, please sign and date below. The approval number for this study is **06-25-19-0567431** and it expires on **June 24, 2020**.

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Participant's Name (please print)

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Participant's Signature Date

## Appendix G: Consent Form for Ex-Offenders

### CONSENT FORM FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE JUVENILE EX-OFFENDERS, WHO ARE OLDER THAN 18 YEARS BUT YOUNGER THAN 40 YEARS OF AGE, TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY

#### **Introduction and Purpose:**

My name is Kizzie Donaldson-Richard. I am a doctoral student at Walden University completing my Ph.D. in Criminal Justice. I am inviting you to take part in my research study to share your feelings and opinions about your experiences in the justice system and to provide your thoughts. I am interested in learning about repeated behaviors that caused you to be arrested three or more times within a 3-year period. There are no right or wrong answers, so you will be free to tell your story.

Your identity and the privacy of your answers will be protected. At any time, you can stop the interview without any questions.

#### **Background Information:**

The purpose of this study is to give a voice to the opinions of African American male juvenile ex-offenders, who are older than 18 years but younger than 40 years of age, reside in Southwest Georgia, and have a repeat offense rate of three or more arrests within a 3-year period. To participate, you must meet the following description:

- ✓ African American male juvenile ex-offender
- ✓ Who are older than 18 years but younger than 40 years of age
- ✓ At least three or more arrests within 3 years
- ✓ Served jail/prison time, probation, or parole
- ✓ Attended rehabilitation programs while incarcerated

#### **Procedures:**

If you agree to be in my research study:

- An interview will be requested. This interview can take place at the public library in the conference room or via phone.
- A follow-up on the initial meeting will be requested (face to face or via telephone) this meeting will last 60 minutes.
- The interview will be audio-taped and will also take 60 minutes.

#### **Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

This research study is voluntary. If you decide to take part in this study, you are free to stop at any time.

**Benefits:**

African American males' personal experiences with re-offending behaviors could help another African American male avoid the repeated cycle in the justice system.

**Risks/Discomfort**

Please note that you are free to refuse to answer any questions and you can stop the interview at any time. As with all research, there is a possibility that personal information might be revealed, but I am doing everything to prevent that risk.

**Confidentiality:**

The information contained in this research study is private. If the results of this study are published or presented, individuals' names and other personal information will be removed. To protect your privacy, I will store the information in a locked cabinet. If the information is stored electronically it will be password protected and stored in a safe box. Only code numbers will be used in this study. I am the only researcher who will know the first and last names of each participant. Upon completion of my research, all information will be kept for 5 years in a safe location, and after the fifth year all research used will be shredded. Everything described above will be done to protect the privacy of this research study information.

**Compensation:**

A Visa gift card valued at \$10.00 will be provided for participating in this research study. However, if the participant decides to stop the interview mid-way through, he/she will be given the gift card anyway.

**Rights:**

**Participation in this research study is voluntary.** You are free to decide not to take part in the research study. You may stop the interview at any point and for any reason.

**Mandated Reporter**

I will keep your responses confidential with one exception; because I am a certified police officer, I am required to report anything that looks like it might be child abuse or neglect.

**Questions:**

If you have any questions about this research, please feel free to contact me. If you have any questions about your rights or treatment as a research participant in this study, please contact the university's Research Participant Advocate.

**Consent**

A copy of this consent form and Crisis information will be provided to you for your records. If you wish to participate in this study, please sign and date below. The approval number for this study is **06-25-19-0567431** and it expires on **June 24, 2020**.

I \_\_\_\_\_ consent to the use of audio recording during this process.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix H: Consent Form for Mothers

### CONSENT FORM FOR MOTHERS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE JUVENILE EX-OFFENDERS TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY

#### **Introduction and Purpose:**

My name is Kizzie Donaldson-Richard. I am a doctoral student at Walden University completing my Ph.D. in Criminal Justice. I am inviting you to take part in my research study to allow you to share your opinions and feelings about Georgia's juvenile justice system and the effects it has had on you and your son.

#### **Background Information:**

The purpose of this study is to examine the lived experiences of African American male juvenile ex-offenders, who are older than 18 years but younger than 40 years of age, reside in Southwest Georgia, and have a repeat offender rate of three or more arrests within a 3-year period. You may participate if the following is true:

- ✓ You would like to share the story of your experiences as a parent of a male juvenile offender and the effects of the juvenile justice system on you and your son.
- ✓ You are an African American female who has a son who has reoffended in the justice system.

#### **Procedures:**

If you agree to be in my research study:

- An interview will be requested. This interview can take place at the public library in the conference room or via phone.
- A follow-up on the initial meeting will be requested (face to face or via telephone) this meeting will last 60 minutes.
- The interview will be audio-taped and will also take 60 minutes.

#### **Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

This research study is voluntary. If you decide to take part in this study, you are free to stop at any time.

#### **Benefits:**

There are no direct benefits to you for participating in this study. However, your participation may provide greater insight that might help the Juvenile Justice System

develop policies and procedures that may help other mothers with hope of improving their experiences with the Department or preventing reoffense by their children.

**Risks/Discomfort:**

Please note that you are free to refuse to answer any questions and you can stop the interview at any time. As with all research, there is a possibility that personal information might be revealed, but procedures are in place to reduce the risk that personal identifiable information is revealed.

**Confidentiality:**

The information contained in this research study is private. If the results of this study are published or presented, individuals' names and other personal information will be removed. To protect your privacy, I will store the information in a locked cabinet. If the information is stored electronically it will be password protected and stored in a safe box. Only code numbers will be used in this study. I am the only researcher who will know the first and last names of each participant. Upon completion of my research, all information will be kept for 5 years in a safe location, and after the fifth year all research data will be shredded. Everything described above will be done to protect the privacy of this research study information.

**Compensation:**

A Visa gift card valued at \$10.00 will be provided for participating in this research study. However, if the participant decides to stop the interview mid-way through, he/she will be given the gift card anyway.

**Rights:**

**Participation in this research study is voluntary.** You are free to decide not to take part in the research study. You may stop the interview at any point and for any reason.

**Mandated Reporter**

I will keep your responses confidential with one exception; because I am a certified police officer, I am required to report anything that looks like it might be child abuse or neglect.

**Questions:**

If you have any questions about this research, please feel free to contact me . If you have any questions about your rights or treatment as a research participant in this study, please contact Walden University's Research Participant Advocate.



**Consent**

A copy of this consent form and Crisis information will be provided to you for your records. If you wish to participate in this study, please sign and date below. The approval number for this study is **06-25-19-0567431** and it expires on **June 24, 2020**.

I \_\_\_\_\_ Consent to the use of audio recording during this process.

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Participant's Signature    Date

## Appendix I: Interview Protocol for African American Female (Mothers) Participants

Full Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Code Number: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Interview Protocol for Mothers of African American Male Juveniles**

I am grateful for your participation in this research interview. The purpose of this interview is to allow you to tell me about your experiences with the Department of Juvenile Justice and the waiting phase before the hearing, the sentencing, the custody, the release, and the re-arresting of your son. I am interested in your opinions and feelings about Georgia laws, policies, and rehabilitation programs and whether they helped your son's case. There are no right or wrong answers, so feel free to tell your story.

Your identity and the confidentiality of your answers will be secured and protected. At any time, you can stop the interview without any questions.

#### **Questions for Participants**

Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Single or Married to your son's father/Someone else: \_\_\_\_\_

How long were you involved in a relationship with your son's father: \_\_\_\_\_?

#### **Personal Background Information**

Are you originally from Southwest Georgia?

How long have you lived here?

How many years of education do you have?

#### **Interview Questions**

To begin the interview, I will ask mothers of African American male juvenile offenders general open-ended questions.

1. Did you ever feel like you were competing with the streets to raise your child? [E.S. #2, 3, 7, 8]
2. Would things have been different if you lived in a different (more affluent) neighborhood? [E.S. # 9, 3]
3. What types of role models did your son have growing up? [E.S. #2, 3, 8]
4. How has incarceration helped or harmed your child? [E.S. #1, 2, 3, 4, 8]

5. What role does faith / spiritually play in your home? Raising your child/children?  
[E.S. 9]

## Appendix J: Interview Protocol for Staff Participants

Full Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Code Number: \_\_\_\_\_

### Interview Protocol for Staff Participants

I am grateful for your participation in this interview. The purpose of this interview is to understand your experiences working with African American male delinquents. I am interested in your feelings and opinions; there are no right or wrong answers, so feel free to tell your story.

Your participation in this interview will be confidential. I will have used code numbers to protect your privacy. At any time, you can stop the interview process without any questions.

### Questions for Participants

How many years have you held your position? \_\_\_\_\_

What program(s) do you typically recommend for African American male juveniles who are delinquent?

Programs may include job training, mental health disorders, substance abuse, anger management, and educational training.

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### Personal Background Information

What degree(s) do you hold and what type?

Do you have any additional training, and if so, what type?

### Interview Questions

To begin the interview, I will ask Staff Members general open-ended questions.

1. What is your perception of current laws and policies on programs (i.e., job training, mental health disorders, substance abuse, anger management, and educational training) that are offered to African American male delinquents before re-entering society? [E.S. #6]
2. What is your perception of the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of Georgia's current laws and policies when sentencing African American male offenders and explain your answer? [E.S. #6]
3. Based on your expertise, in your opinion, how do African American male juveniles learn their criminal behavior's? [E.S. #4, 1, 2]
4. Are there programs in place to re-educate and retrain individuals who commit crimes to become productive citizens? Have those programs accomplished what they intended to do or do they help create an opportunity for African American males to learn other criminal behaviors? [E.S. #4, 1, 2]
5. In Georgia, minors between the ages of 13 and 17 are sentenced as an adult for committing one of the Seven Deadly Sins (murder, rape, armed robbery with a firearm, aggravated child molestation, aggravated sodomy, aggravated sexual battery, and voluntary manslaughter). What is your perception regarding transferring juveniles to adult court and does this have an effect on Georgia's high juvenile re-offending rates? Explain your answer. [E.S. #4, 1, 2, 5, 8]
6. Based on your knowledge, training, and experience, what barriers do African American male juveniles in Southwest Georgia face when seeking education and housing after incarceration? [E.S. #4, 1, 2]
7. In your opinion, what effects, if any, did the 2013 Juvenile Reform Act have on African American males when seeking employment? [E.S. #4, 1, 2]
8. Are some children made worse by incarceration? [E.S. #4, 1, 2]
9. If you had a magic wand, how would you fix the problem of recidivism? [E.S. #9]

**In closing, is there any additional information you would like to share?**

## Appendix K: Request for Letter of Cooperation

Dear,

My name is Kizzie Donaldson-Richard, and I am a doctoral student at Walden University. I am currently working on my dissertation entitled, "The Effects of Laws, Policies, and Rehabilitation Programs on African American Male Juvenile Recidivism in Southwest Georgia."

The purpose of this study is to examine the lived experiences of African American male juvenile ex-offenders, who are older than 18 years but younger than 40 years of age, reside in Southwest Georgia, and have a recidivism rate of three or more arrests within three years.

I am requesting a letter of cooperation from your organization to recruit judges, juvenile probation officers, and counselors/behavior specialists for participation in my study. The recruiting of those officials listed above is necessary to examine the outcomes of African American male re-offending behaviors. I am also requesting contact information for those who elect to participate, including names, phone numbers, and e-mail addresses.

I agree that I will schedule appointments for interviews based on the availability of each participant and at his or her convenience. Also, it is understood that I am solely responsible for the data collection of my study. The collection of data will remain confidential and will not be disseminated to anyone without the approval of Walden's IRB.

This electronic correspondence will serve as an acknowledgment for my records as an acceptance of participation. Thank you in advance for your assistance.

Respectfully submitted,

Signature Undisclosed.