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Prisoner Reentry and Recidivism: Access to Reentry Programs and Reducing Recidivism for African American, Male Ex-Offenders

Tracee Leigh Harvey
Walden University

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Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Tracee Harvey

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Review Committee

Dr. Glenn Starks, Committee Chairperson,
Public Policy and Administration Faculty

Dr. Mary Brown, Committee Member,
Public Policy and Administration Faculty

Dr. Daniel Jones, University Reviewer,
Public Policy and Administration Faculty

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

Walden University
2020

Abstract

Prisoner Reentry and Recidivism: Access to Reentry Programs and Reducing Recidivism

for African American, Male Ex-Offenders

by

Tracee Harvey

MA, Empire State College, 2016

BA, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, 2006

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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May 2020

Abstract

Research has primarily been centered around the reentry process and programs available to those incarcerated in prison; however, those incarcerated in jails and the reentry programs available has been underrepresented in the field of study. The Jails to Jobs initiative is intended to combat the reentry barriers faced by ex-offenders by offering reentry services while incarcerated as well as transitional services upon release to address the barriers to reentry. However, the problem exists due to the effectiveness of the reentry programs and their ability to provide adequate services that address the needs of African American, male ex-offenders, and, in turn, reduce the recidivism rate. The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to explore the effectiveness of reentry programming as well as the reentry experiences of 11 formerly incarcerated African American men who were detained in a city jail in the northeast United States and participated in the new Jails to Jobs initiative. Using Weible and Sabatier's policy feedback approach as a theoretical framework, the research questions were developed to focus on exploring the impact of reentry programs on recidivism and the reentry experiences of African American men. Data were acquired through semi structured interviews with African American, male ex-offenders who participated in Jails to Jobs. Data acquired from the interviews were coded and categorized for analysis to find common themes. Taking into consideration the feedback from those who participated in the reentry program can shed light on future policy changes to the way reentry programs are implemented.

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my fiancé, who has always been there for me. He has been my biggest fan and support system throughout this process. When I completed all my coursework, he provided me with a dedicated work space to write my dissertation. I am so very thankful for the little things and the gestures of pure kindness. I am thankful for all his motivation and encouragement to keep going, even when I began to get frustrated. He has been a true blessing in my life and I do not think I could have done this without him by my side the entire time. He has listened to my ideas, helped me practice for my proposal defense, and the final dissertation defense; and provided vital feedback. I want to say thank you for being who you are and wanting nothing but the best for me. Thank you for your patience and understanding during this time. You make me a better person, and I don't think I would have gotten to this point without you.

Overall, just thank you for loving me the way you love me. Corinthians 13:4-7 states, "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres."

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

As large numbers of ex-offenders continue to transition back into the community from correctional facilities, policymakers and criminal justice practitioners continue to explore the ways to help reintegrate offenders into society and reduce the likelihood that they will return to illegal activity (Visher, Lattimore, Barrick, & Tueller, 2017). Although there may be steps taken to combat the barriers to reentry, the process of returning home after serving a sentence in a city jail in the northeast United States can be an arduous task for the African American, male ex-offenders. These individuals are now trying to navigate the reentry process with limited assistance from correctional facilities and reentry programs all while trying to adjust to life on the outside. Li (2018) found that ex-offenders are released from correctional facilities after receiving minimal preparation and inadequate assistance and resources, which makes their reentry into communities challenging.

Access to reentry programming and being prepared for the reintegration process is essential for African American, male ex-offenders. Reentry programming should be offered from Day 1 of incarceration and transitional services should be provided once released back into the community. Reentry services are a crucial component to reducing recidivism and ensuring that ex-offenders leaving the Department of Corrections' (DOC) custody are afforded the opportunity to work towards living productive and stable lives. "The city of New York is building a system in which every person who enters city jails will be provided with new tools and services that will help to promote a stable future"

(City of New York, 2017, para. 2). On a yearly basis, individuals are separated from their loved ones and communities while incarcerated in jails and prisons, then sent home and expected to make a successful reintegration into society (Dill et al., n.d.). Reentry programs that function in the community are set up to provide transitional services and address the various needs of the African American, male ex-offenders, ranging from educational, vocational, employment, health, housing, and several others (Berghuis, 2018).

Nevertheless, African American, male ex-offenders are recidivating and returning to a city jail in the northeast United States and starting the reentry process all over again. With the reentry of nearly 700,000 ex-offenders, many of them being African American, their needs are not adequately addressed by appropriate programs resulting in poverty, homelessness, unemployment, substance abuse, inadequate medical and mental health, and, in far too many instances, a return to prison (Western & Sirois, 2018). In this study, I addressed the effectiveness of reentry programming, specifically the Jails to Jobs initiative implemented by a mayor in the northeast United States, and the reentry experiences of African American, male ex-offenders who have participated in the program while incarcerated and thereafter.

Background

African American, male ex-offenders have faced many barriers during the reentry process. Frazier (2013) found that information systems designed to address the needs of ex-offenders are an essential part in efficiently and effectively improving prisoner reentry by accessing an asset-based approach that focuses on community outreach and

networking. Frazier (2014) contended that there had been a decrease in prison program funding, which caused an ideological shift, and, in turn, services have moved away from the rehabilitative prison models providing fewer programs. Gill and Wilson (2017) described why evidence about the effectiveness of reentry programming is limited by providing data to illustrate how reentry programs are not accurately matched to the individual need.

Hall (2015) examined the contributing factors of recidivism and produced a systematic approach towards reviewing recidivism rather than relying on the conventional approach towards evaluating recidivism. Hall, Wooten, and Lundgren (2016) emphasized that post-incarceration policies hurt an ex-offender's ability to access jobs, housing, public assistance, and student loans, which effects successful reentry and recidivism prevention. Hunter, Lanza, Lawlor, Dyson and Gordon (2015) indicated that the connection between correctional facilities and community-based organizations is lacking because there is a limited amount of resources available that report how to advance and execute interventions that facilitate prisoner reentry. Miller and Miller (2015) indicated that the reentry process had left those reentering back into society with several unmet challenges that need to be resolved.

Miller (2014) found that there was a shift in rehabilitative reentry services and reentry programs that contributed to improperly preparing formerly incarcerated individuals. Morenoff and Harding (2014) indicated that there are two crucial questions to be asked when seeking to explain how mass incarceration is likely to create environments with increased criminal behavior, which in turn, alters the reentry process.

Those two crucial questions are “how has mass incarceration affected the social and economic structure of American communities, and how do residential neighborhoods influence the process of reintegration among returning prisoners” (Morenoff & Harding, 2014, p. 411). Valera, Brotzman, Wilson, and Reid (2017) offered an understanding of the importance of collaborative relationships among criminal justice agencies and reentry programs using constructivist grounded theory.

Problem Statement

According to Valera et al. (2017), essential reentry strategies should be implemented to successfully prepare those previously incarcerated individuals for release into the community. The reentry process and pre-release planning goals are to reintegrate individuals back into society by returning them to their previous communities, which are often impoverished. Research has primarily been focused on the reentry process and programming available to prison populations; however, the jail population and reentry programming available has been underrepresented in the field of study. There are roughly 8,500 people released from a city jail in the northeast United States each year and returning to the community (Yadin, 2018). In the past, African American men serving time in a city jail in the northeast United States have been faced with the difficult task of navigating the reentry process with minimal assistance from reentry programs. Overall, African Americans are more likely than White Americans to be arrested, and African American men are 6 times as likely to be incarcerated as White men (The Sentencing Project, n.d.). Consequently, African American men are incarcerated in state or federal prisons at a higher rate than White men, and during their lifetime, 1 in 3 African

American males can expect to be imprisoned compared with 1 in 17 White males (Hetey & Eberhardt, 2018).

Furthermore, upon being released, the ability of the African American, male ex-offenders to secure suitable programming that meets their needs has continued to be a barrier that ensures an unsuccessful transition into the community, in turn, increasing the recidivism rate. According to Muhlhausen (2015), there has been a significant debate over how effective corrections and reentry programs are, with some determining that a few programs are effective and others doubtful of these programs' abilities to reduce recidivism.

Nevertheless, there is the need to know more about the effectiveness of reentry programming that is currently available to those detained in a city jail in the northeast United States. Presently, through a new initiative implemented by a mayor of the city in the northeast United States, every offender in the DOC's custody will be offered reentry services to help them secure jobs and opportunities in the community as well as 5 hours of programming each day while incarcerated to address vocational, educational, and therapeutic needs (City of New York, 2017). The problem exists due to the effectiveness of the reentry programs and the DOC's ability to provide adequate services that address the needs of African American, male ex-offenders and, in turn, reduce the recidivism rate.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to explore the effectiveness of reentry programming and the reentry experiences of formerly incarcerated, African American men who were detained in a city jail in the northeast United States and participated in the new Jails to Jobs initiative that provides reentry services for all while incarcerated. The findings of this study fill the gap by understanding the reentry process of ex-offenders who were in jail and the lack of understanding about where organizations and criminal justice agencies fall short after persons in custody are released back into society. In this study, I used a qualitative methodology that may help to inform reentry policy for jail populations and reduce recidivism rates. Qualitative interviewing allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of reentry programs for African American men in a city jail in the northeast United States by gaining their personal perspectives based on their experiences.

Furthermore, gaining an understanding of the reentry process and having access to a reentry program before being released lends itself to social change because it provides awareness into the issue affecting many African American men and generates knowledge that will translate into outcomes for policy change. The policy changes can likely alter the way correctional institutions and reentry organizations prepare incarcerated individuals to navigate the reentry process once released back into society. There are limited resources available that report how to implement interventions that bridge the move between correctional facilities and community-based organizations to enable reentry (Hunter et al., 2015).

Research Question

Research Question: To what extent is the Jails to Jobs program effective based on the reentry experiences of African American males who participated in the program?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical basis for this study was Weible and Sabatier's (2018) policy feedback approach because this framework addresses existing policies as inputs into the policymaking process and illustrates how existing systems fundamentally reshape the political environment (see Campbell, 2018). Weible and Sabatier's theory has been previously used to understand and explain how current policies influence the implementation of future policies and their functionality. Furthermore, because policy feedback theory addresses existing policies, it could be used to demonstrate how the collaboration amongst the administration, current policy, and politics led to the Jails to Jobs initiative implemented by a mayor in the northeast United States, which provides reentry programs for everyone the day they enter the facility.

Nature of the Study

In this study, I employed a qualitative method with a phenomenological approach. There were 10–15 previously incarcerated, African American, male participants, aged 25–50 years old, who were detained in a city jail in the northeast United States and participated in Jails to Jobs from January 1, 2018 to February 25, 2020 serving a year or less. The Jails to Jobs initiative was implemented to provide reentry services while incarcerated and upon release to those serving a jail sentence of a year or less (James,

2015). Jamali (n.d.) asserted that qualitative research obtains data through observations and describes those events and perspectives of the phenomenon to extract viable explanations. I used a purposive sampling method and conducted semi structured interviews with participants to understand their perceptions of reentry programming and its effectiveness through their real-world accounts. The interviews were recorded and later transcribed for data analysis to gain a real understanding of the phenomenon. A group of codes, patterns, and themes were produced from this analysis of the interviews.

Definitions

The following are definitions of the key terms used in this study:

Reentry programming: Programs that are designed to assist in the transition from incarceration to the community (Miller, 2015).

Ex-offenders: Prisoners released from jail or prison who return to the community (English, 2018).

Barriers: The considerable obstacles faced by ex-prisoners once they are released into the community (Cunningham, 2017).

Recidivism: One of the most fundamental concepts in criminal justice referring to a person's relapse into criminal behavior, often after the person receives sanctions or undergoes intervention for a previous crime. Recidivism is measured by criminal acts that resulted in rearrests, reconviction, or return to prison with or without a new sentence during a 3-year period following the prisoner's release (National Institute of Justice, 2019).

Reentry: A wide-range of programs and approaches that focus on offender behavioral modification through holistic treatment, which begins during incarceration and continues following release (Miller, 2015).

Assumptions

My first assumption was that African American, male ex-offenders would have a clear understanding of the interview process and provide truthful and accurate responses to the questions. I also assumed that qualitative interviewing would offer a comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of reentry programming for African American, male ex-offenders and the chosen methodology would inform reentry policy and help to reduce recidivism among African American, male ex-offenders.

Scope and Delimitations

In this study, I interviewed African American, male ex-offenders, aged 25–50 years old, who had participated in Jails to Jobs, a new initiative that provides reentry services to all while incarcerated in a city jail in the northeast United States. The interviews allowed for exploration of the effectiveness of reentry programming and the reentry experiences of African American, male ex-offenders as they relate to the impact reentry programming has on recidivism rates amongst the population. People of all other races and genders were excluded from this study. The focus was to understand where correctional facilities and reentry programming fall short when it comes to providing transitional services to those leaving a city jail in the northeast United States and returning to the community (i.e., the effectiveness of the programming and how ex-offenders navigate the reentry process).

Limitations

I identified multiple limitations in this study examining Jails to Jobs, a reentry initiative implemented explicitly for jail populations and excluding prison populations. The first limitation was that the sample population was limited to African American, male ex-offenders who had only participated in the Jails to Jobs initiative implemented by a mayor in the northeast United States and excluded all other genders and ethnic groups. Another limitation was that the program was very new, having been implemented in 2018, and it may take more time to determine its effectiveness; therefore, future research may need to be conducted to determine if the program is truly effective. Another limitation was that the sample size was small, the population was limited to a specific time frame based on the implementation date of the program, and the sample used was representative of African American ex-offenders who reside in the northeast United States. Lastly, the findings have the potential to be influenced by the participants' fearfulness of responding to interview questions related to their reentry program and its effectiveness in a way that may discredit the organization in charge of the programming.

Significance

Although prisoner reentry has taken center stage in correctional research and policy discussions, there has been little emphasis on reentry among jail populations (White, Saunders, Fisher, & Mellow, 2012). Therefore, I conducted this study to address the gap in the literature by understanding the reentry experiences of African American men, aged 25–50 years old, who had received reentry services while incarcerated in a correctional facility in the northeast United States. The relationship between correctional

employment programs and recidivism was also examined. According to American Correctional Association (2017), offenders should be granted unbiased consideration for employment opportunities, and the public correctional policy on employment of offenders states correctional institutions ought to execute and advance programs that will offer offenders assistance with preparing for, seeking, and retaining proper employment in the community. The findings of this study provide insight into improvements for the current initiative to ensure that there is adequate follow-through between participants and reentry programs, which might help reduce potential recidivism.

Summary

The reentry experiences of previously incarcerated, African American, male ex-offenders may provide insight into the effectiveness of the initiative Jails to Jobs, which provides reentry services while in jail and upon release into the community. This knowledge regarding the effectiveness of reentry programming may provide alternatives to how reentry programs provide services to ex-offenders. It is vital to gain a comprehensive understanding of where reentry programming and correctional facilities fall short in providing reentry services to African American, male ex-offenders who are returning to the community. It is crucial for reentry programs, specifically Jails to Jobs, to examine the effectiveness of the initiative based on the experiences of African American ex-offenders to promote changes that could affect recidivism rates and how well the ex-offender transitions back into society. In Chapter 2, I will provide a review of the literature that explores various viewpoints regarding the reentry process for African American, male ex-offenders.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The effectiveness of Jails to Jobs, a reentry initiative implemented by a mayor in the northeast United States for those incarcerated in a city jail in the northeast United States, is unknown, specifically concerning how African American, male, ex-offenders navigate the reintegration process, which includes securing employment, housing, and education among other resources, and if it has any impact on their chances of recidivating. In the United States, African American males are far more likely to be impacted by incarceration; African American males are systematically inclined to receive longer jail and/or prison time for lesser offenses compared to Caucasian men (Hall et al., 2016). This explains why it is important to identify programs and services that improve criminal justice outcomes for ex-offenders (Visher et al., 2017). In the past, African American ex-offenders have been tasked with the responsibility of navigating the reentry process with minimal assistance upon leaving a city jail in the northeast United States. Miller (2015) found that due to the unmet challenges faced by ex-offenders, state and local jurisdictions have implemented reentry programs to assist those leaving a correctional facility and returning to the community by providing transitional services. The purpose of this study was to explore the effectiveness of reentry programming and the experiences of African American, male ex-offenders who participated in Jails to Jobs.

Transitioning from a city jail in the northeast United States back into the community, African American, male ex-offenders are faced with many barriers that hinder the reentry process and can increase recidivism rates. Furthermore, successful

reentry requires substantial community support systems and holistic services, both of which are absent in urban communities to which most ex-offenders return (Visher & Travis, 2011). Due to these types of barriers, it is essential to provide adequate reentry programs that address a multitude of offender needs before leaving a correctional facility and upon returning to the community.

Literature Search Strategy

For this study, I searched for various sources published within the last 5 years as well as older sources that were relevant to the history of reentry and reintegration. Sources used in this study included peer-reviewed journal articles; dissertations; city, state, and federal websites; and government websites. I located the extant literature using Walden Online Library and the following keywords: *reentry*, *prisoner reentry*, *jails*, *reintegration*, *African American ex-offenders*, and *community-based reentry programs*. The review of the literature provided insight into the challenges and barriers faced by ex-offenders and the types of programs and services available to them.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework used in this study was Weible and Sabatier's (2018) policy feedback approach, which addresses existing policies as inputs into the policymaking process and illustrates how existing systems fundamentally reshape the political environment (see Campbell, 2018). I used the theory as a lens through which to view the understanding of how policies directly contribute to the types of reentry programs offered to African American, male ex-offenders and the quality of those programs. Policy feedback theory enriches studies of the policy process by highlighting

how previously created policies affect the likelihood and form of future policy creation (Weible & Sabatier, 2018). The creation of new reentry policies infers programs offered and new initiatives implemented will aid in potentially reducing recidivism and provide African American, male ex-offenders with the opportunity to access services that address the barriers to reentry. Policies create assets and incentives for political officials and equip those political actors with data and signals that encourage distinct explanations of the political world (Pierson, 2011).

Congress acknowledged the importance of this issue by passing the Second Chance Act (SCA) of 2007. The SCA allocates federal grants for programs and services that intend to lower recidivism rates and develop offender outcomes (National Institute of Justice, 2019). Tackling the issues of reentry and the creation of effective programs that address the various needs of African American, male ex-offenders comes about when political figures seek to implement change through public policy. In policy feedback theory, it is argued that current policies influence future policies, which, in turn, might have a positive impact on the creation of new reentry policy by addressing and mitigating previous issues within current policy (Weible & Sabatier, 2018). Cairney and Heikkila (2014) contended that when a policy is implemented and programs are equipped with resources, it assists in structuring ongoing activities and provides some groups of people with more advantages than others.

Policy is examined when there is a real need for change. For instance, when criminal justice practitioners and reentry personnel see a need for change, they will examine the current policy and the effects it has on a particular population, specifically

ex-offenders. Feedback acquired from these individuals helps to implement change. Moreover, policymakers and the media have recommended reducing the size of our prison population and considering other alternatives to incarceration, especially for those offenders who are serving time for less serious offenses (Mauer, 2018). Many, including Governor Cuomo of New York, have recommended or taken the required steps to address issues facing ex-offenders who are reentering the community after incarceration (New York State Bar Association, 2016). Policy implementation will examine how soon after arrest and confinement reentry should begin, what programs should be offered, who should receive reentry services, how to assess specific needs, and how to reduce recidivism among other aspects of the reentry process will be examined. Policy must address the essence of the various needs of each person, and these needs will often include education, the capacity to obtain employment for which the person may become well suited by the time of reentry, the accessibility of affordable housing that is in close proximity of public transportation to suitable jobs, treatment programs for substance and alcohol abuse and for mental health issues, as well as traditional medical care (New York State Bar Association, 2016). Without obtaining credible feedback regarding how effective present reentry policies are, there can only be limited change.

Dagan and Teles (2015) discussed policy reform and the importance of policy feedback in making decisions surrounding the criminal justice system and how information is processed. The authors contended people in positions of power are now taking a closer look into the issues that were previously ignored, such as mass incarceration, recidivism, and sentencing reform. These issues are far from new,

however, and Dagan and Teles suggested that political officials need to look deeper into the policy effects and how those effects become policy feedback only through the process of construction. Furthermore, Dagan Teles stated,

the enormous fiscal cost of incarceration, high levels of recidivism, and the disproportionate impact on African Americans have been clear for decades, but these factors were typically either ignored, dismissed, or treated as inappropriate for conservatives to consider until recently. (p. 133)

Policy feedback theory plays a major role in implementing new criminal justice policies that bring about positive social change. The authors noted that evidence of high rates of recidivism is now an indicator of how inefficient prisons and jails are. The implementation of new policies that are based on the data bring about political shifts that occur when political officials attend to previous information regarding the issues of mass incarceration, recidivism, and sentencing reform, generating policy changes (Dagan & Teles, 2015).

Prisoner Reentry Issues

Riggs (2015) posited that understanding how individuals transition from prison to the community has arisen as a major sociological and public policy concern. The large numbers of African American, male ex-offenders returning home from jail after serving a year or less are faced with a multitude of barriers: They must deal with the collateral consequences that derive from being arrested and sentenced to time in jail. The process of transitioning has become a distinctive part of the population dynamics of poor, urban neighborhoods (Riggs, 2015). Those poor, urban neighborhoods can be comprised of

African American males who are transitioning back into the community and dealing with the reentry process. Western, Braga, Davis, and Sirois (2015) found that while there has been an abundance of research regarding reentry and recidivism, there has been far less research conducted on the prisoner reentry process immediately following release from incarceration.

Nevertheless, African American, male ex-offenders have struggled throughout the reentry process, which is different for each individual; the circumstances surrounding prisoner reentry are also different. Pogrebin et al. (2014) suggested that ex-offenders returning home to their communities do not experience reentry the same, and the dilemmas are, in fact, quite different. However, the vast majority of ex-offenders do face difficulties surrounding employment, housing, access to government benefits, treatment programs, and family support (Pogrebin et al., 2014). As a consequence of the many challenges faced by African American, male ex-offenders, they are subject to high reentry failure rates that contribute to recidivism. Furthermore, the lack of resources to adequately address prisoner reentry problems suggest that many African American, male ex-offenders will be unable to reenter into society successfully (Pogrebin et al., 2014). Many African American, male ex-offenders are faced with the difficulty of reentering society and obtaining transitional employment and assistance from local reentry programs.

It is important that reentry preparation begins on the first day of incarceration and continues without disruption into the community (Li, 2018). Li (2018) argued that before release, it is essential to focus on pre-release programs, but more importantly, programs

that specifically target the individual needs. Pre-release programs prepare African American, male ex-offenders to be productive members of their communities and provide significant skills, including job and life skills. Furthermore, the author found that pre-release programs will help offenders overcome some of the challenges they face upon reentering their communities.

Having access to pre-release programs while incarcerated and before returning home are crucial; however, it is also vital for African American, male ex-offenders to have access to programs and resources outside of the jail to ensure they are successful during the reentry process. Redcross, Bloom, Azurdia, Zweig, and Pindus (2009) discussed that transitional job programs expeditiously place ex-offenders into temporary employment, usually in nonprofit or government agencies. Additionally, those programs provide various kinds of support, then help participants find permanent jobs. Securing and sustaining employment upon being released is a daunting task for African American, male ex-offenders, but it is necessary when trying to reduce recidivism rates among this population. Most specialists' perceptions are that steady employment is a crucial component to a successful transition into the community, but ex-offenders tend to have characteristics that make them difficult to employ (Redcross et al., 2009).

Decker, Spohn, Ortiz, and Hedberg (2014) asserted that the ability to access employment is far more difficult for African American males than it is for White males. Further complicating the problem is the fact that African American males comprise one of the largest and fastest-growing segments of the incarcerated population. Decker et al. (2014) found that due to the negative stigma attached to African American, male ex-

offenders, they are viewed as one of the least desirable applicants when applying for jobs. The researchers reported that while ex-offenders are aware of the importance of securing employment and are ready and willing to search for work, employment rates among this population remained low following reentry.

Research has shown that returning ex-offenders require more assistance than they previously did. Williams, Wilson, and Bergeson (2019) reported that decades of research indicate that employment is the key to reducing recidivism and ensuring that ex-offenders successfully reenter society. Nevertheless, the barriers related to reentry and the abundance of collateral consequences affect employment and how employers view ex-offenders. Employment status and being an African American male ex-offender is suggested to be linked to perceptions of dangerousness (Decker et al., 2014); hence, African American, male ex-offenders find it difficult to obtain long-term employment upon being released into the community.

Lockwood, Nally, Ho, and Knutson (2015) stated, "Finding a job is an immediate challenge to all ex-prisoners, and often more difficult for African American ex-offenders who typically return to economically depressed neighborhoods upon release" (p. 16). Without assistance and access to employment during the reentry process, African American, male ex-offenders are subject to recidivating due to the lack of monetary assistance, which is crucial for maintaining a life free of criminal activity. Couloute and Kopf (2018) indicated that the unemployment rates for African American, male ex-offenders are at 35.2% as compared to the 18.4% of unemployed, White, male ex-offenders. Couloute and Kopf also reported that African American, male ex-offenders

suffer from the worst labor market disadvantages despite being more likely to search for employment. Lockwood et al. (2015) contended that there are reasons why the unemployment rate is so high post-release for African American male ex-offenders, which is in part due to the lack of formal education and job training while incarcerated. Nevertheless, these barriers to employment influence independent living, which is crucial for African American, male ex-offenders to avoid becoming repeat offenders, and without the means to employment there will not be a means to financial security, which is what helps to sustain independent living. In turn, African American male ex-offenders are subject to becoming repeat offenders.

During the period of incarceration, African American male ex-offenders are provided with some form of reentry program from the DOC, which essentially prepares the ex-offender for the process of returning to the community. Upon returning to the community, there are also transitional programs available. Miller (2014) stated that reentry programming was implemented in 1991 to address the practical skills needed for acquiring employment and to focus on the decision-making process of ex-offenders regarding committing new crimes. The author contends most prisoners are released into some form of community supervision and attend transitional services which are normally concentrated in underserved communities where they resided prior to being incarcerated. Further, the author suggests that when an African American male ex-offender completes a reentry program, it does not provide a guarantee that the ex-offender will obtain or sustain employment upon securing employment.

Furthermore, while ex-offenders go through the same reentry process while incarcerated and may access transitional programs upon release, prisoner reentry is, in fact, different for each African American male ex-offender. Miller (2014) reported that with the shift in strategies utilized by reentry organizations there is no longer an emphasis placed on individualized service plans and employment that would aid in reducing poverty, housing instability, and family disintegration. The author expressed that the shift in services alters the focus of reentry programs and can serve as a disadvantage for African American male ex-offenders. Nevertheless, the author argues that reentry programs cannot address the barriers faced by ex-offenders because reentry does not remove the stigma associated with a conviction. However, the author also noted that the success of African American male ex-offenders depends on the completion of reentry programs. Ex-offenders should participate in reentry programs that primarily focus on reintegration. The programs should begin during incarceration and last throughout the entire reentry process to assist African American male ex-offenders if the services are needed (Forrest, 2016). Access to reentry services is essential in ensuring that African American male ex-offenders endure a successful reentry back into society.

Collateral Consequences

The American Bar Association (2018) reported that while it is easy for those involved in the criminal justice system to know the length of time an offender will be incarcerated, the amount of restitution an offender is mandated to pay, or the probation period, but what has been less apparent to those involved in the criminal case is the other consequences that come with being convicted of a crime. Collateral consequences are not

related to the judgment that is handed down by the judge during sentencing. “Collateral consequences are legal disabilities imposed by law as a result of a criminal conviction regardless of whether a convicted individual serves any time incarcerated” (American Bar Association, 2018, p. 4).

When African American male ex-offenders are released from jail, they are negatively affected by the label attached to them as criminals, and in turn, suffer from a multitude of collateral consequences. The American Bar Association (2018) noted that collateral consequences create several barriers for the newly released African American male ex-offenders. The barriers that are set in place because a conviction can affect social and economic factors, creating additional barriers and restrictions on benefits that are normally available to all (American Bar Association, 2018) — in turn, affecting the overall success of the reentry process. Collateral consequences disproportionately affect people of color and are known to have a lasting effect which hinders the African American male’s ability to access housing, employment, welfare, and many other opportunities which increases recidivism rates and diminishes the possibility of engaging in a meaningful reentry process (American Bar Association, 2018).

Collateral consequence laws interfere with African American male ex-offenders’ ability to access housing. African American male ex-offenders are tasked with searching for appropriate public housing that will accept them. There are U.S. housing policies that exclude ex-offenders from accessing public housing, and collateral consequence laws which place a mandatory ban on those ex-offenders who have been convicted of specific crimes such as drug-related offenses. The law provides that local housing authorities can

utilize discretion when denying housing to ex-offenders (American Bar Association, 2018).

Collateral consequences have long been hidden, buried in the language of state and federal statutes and codes, without a straight-forward way for individuals, their attorneys or their sentencing judges to know which ones might be pertinent and applicable to a specific situation (Forrest, 2016).

However, it is critical that African American males who have been arrested and are facing sentencing are informed about collateral consequences and the effects it will have on their reentry process. Forrest (2016) contended that being informed about collateral consequences allows and prepares the offender for the decision-making process during the life of the criminal case and provides a concise understanding of the barriers that will be faced during reentry. Collateral Consequences are attached to federal crimes committed in New York such as drug related offences, as well as misdemeanor crimes. African American male ex-offenders who are arrested and serve a jail sentence for possession of marijuana, even less than an ounce which is a Class B misdemeanor in New York City, removes the right to reside in a New York City Housing Authority apartment (NY Courts, 2017).

Collateral consequences have a lasting effect on African American male ex-offenders. The United States Commission on Civil Rights (2019) argued that collateral consequences are often unrelated to the crime that the ex-offender was convicted of and/or to the public safety concern. Based on evidence found, the United States Commission on Civil Rights held that when collateral consequences are unrelated in such

a way, they increase recidivism because they reduce access to support systems such as family. In addition to the collateral consequences, there is the issue of the courts, lawyers, and the general public being unfamiliar with the adverse effects of collateral consequences. Moreover, collateral consequences are forced on African American male ex-offenders by federal, state, or local laws and policies. Seventy to a 100 million people nationwide are affected by the negative impact of collateral consequences or will be affected due to an arrest, conviction, or incarceration.

Due to the overrepresentation of African American males in the criminal justice system, they find themselves to be disproportionately influenced by collateral consequences (United States Commission on Civil Rights, 2019). There are implications of civil rights issues. The nature in which collateral consequences disproportionately impact people of color, in turn, hinder the reentry process and place barriers on autonomous living (United States Commission on Civil Rights, 2019). “Research strongly suggests that relieving some formerly incarcerated individuals from the burdens of certain collateral consequences cultivates successful reintegration into society, helps reduce recidivism, and promotes public safety” (United States Commission on Civil Rights, 2019, p. 6). The United States Commission on Civil Rights reported that collateral consequences are known as civil sanctions because of their ability to reduce certain constitutional rights which include the 13th, 14th, 15th, and 19th Amendments. Collateral consequences diminish the freedom of African American male ex-offenders to reenter into society successfully and access opportunities which are essential to living a life free of crime.

Criminally convicted African American males have been deprived of rights and privileges since the colonial times and since then they have continued to be disenfranchised due to restrictive laws and policies continuing into the Jim Crow era and presently (United States Commission on Civil Rights, 2019). African American males reentering society are also forced to deal with issues concerning race which originated in the past and continue to be an ongoing issue in this present time which negatively affects the reentry process (Williams, Wilson, and Bergeson, 2019). Consequently, African American males are more likely to be arrested and convicted far more harshly for criminal offenses than white males.

Furthermore, simply being an African American who has a criminal record intensifies the undesirable outlook on employment (Williams, Wilson, and Bergeson, 2019). Williams, Wilson, and Bergeson (2019) found that many African American ex-offenders will resort to seeking and obtaining legal employment while taking part in illegal means of employment. African American ex-offenders will find themselves in a difficult place following their release from jail and must make tough decisions regarding how to survive while faced with the many barriers that come with the reentry process. The longer African American males are incarcerated, the harder it is to reenter society.

Evidence-Based Reentry Programs

There is research to suggest that the success of ex-offenders is determined on how reentry programs address their numerous needs. In the process of trying to mitigate the barriers to reentry, The Second Chance Act was implemented in 2007 to introduce reentry programming for ex-offenders leaving state prisons and local jails (Willison et al.,

2017). The goal of the law was to improve the reentry process through strategic planning to facilitate successful reentry, improve collaboration among criminal justice and social service systems, as well as collect data on recidivism, program outcomes based on services offered (Willison et al., 2017). Evidence-based legislation such as the SCA of 2017 addresses the challenges faced by African American male ex-offenders who are being released from jail. The SCA cultivates successful reentry (U.S. Department of Justice, 2017). It takes a strategic approach at how it improves service performance and effectiveness. The process taken by evidence-based reenter programs should provide African American male ex-offenders with services that address their specific individual needs, which are identified through a risk/needs assessment that focuses on not only personal needs but also the risk of recidivism (U.S. Department of Justice, 2017). Evidence-based reentry programs look at measurable outcomes based on the long-term goals of reducing recidivism and increasing public safety.

Determining what works has been at the forefront of many organizations that are looking to make changes in how ex-offenders reenter society. Willison et al. (2017) found within the past few decades researchers who study prisoner reentry have worked towards identifying “what works” and the characteristics that constitute effective correctional procedures and programs that focus on reentry. Researchers has shown that correctional practices and procedures that take a holistic approach in conjunction with the eight-core principles that reduce recidivism (needs/risk assessment, intrinsic motivation, target interventions, skills train, positive reinforcement, ongoing support in communities, measure processes/practices, measurement feedback (Willison et al., 2017).

The Department of Justice has identified what is known as the “roadmap to reentry.” The roadmap illustrates the five evidence-based principles which guide federal initiatives to improve correctional practices and programs for ex-offenders returning to the community.

Principle I: Upon incarceration, every inmate should be provided an individualized reentry plan tailored to his or her risk of recidivism and programmatic needs.

Principle II: While incarcerated, each inmate should be provided education, employment training, life skills, substance abuse, mental health, and other programs that target their criminogenic needs and maximize their likelihood of success upon release.

Principle III: While incarcerated, each inmate should be provided the resources and opportunity to build and maintain family relationships, strengthening the support system available to them upon release.

Principle IV: During transition back to the community, halfway houses and supervised release programs should ensure individualized continuity of care for returning citizens.

Principle V: Before leaving custody, every person should be provided comprehensive reentry-related information and access to resources necessary to succeed in the community (U.S. Department of Justice, 2017).

The department noted, as per their views and their correctional principles, reentry begins day one of incarceration and follows from custody to release. “Evidence-based practice is the objective, balanced and responsible use of current research and the best

available data to guide policy and practice decisions, such that outcomes for consumers are improved” (National Institute of Corrections, n.d.). Evidence-based approaches to reentry involve a systematic review of relevant research literature to determine what policies and practices would prove most beneficial. The review requires quality assurance and an evaluation process to ensure replication and the effectiveness of new practices (National Institute of Corrections, n.d.). Effective reentry programs and strategies implemented in jails provide offenders, the community, and their families with the notion that reentry will provide ex-offenders with employment and help them become tax-paying citizens (Mellow, Mukamal, LoBuglio, Solomon, & Osborne, 2008). Reentry services that are provided in jails are intended to assist African American male ex-offenders with the knowledge on what programs and services are available to them upon being released. Mellow et al. (2008) reported that there are reentry strategies that are free, which does not cost correctional facilities any money to supply. They contend that there is an absorbed number of ex-offenders that do not know what services are available to them once they return to the community. Services such as transitional employment, housing, medical, education, and social services. For example, in New York City African American male ex-offenders leaving jails receive a 311 card which provides ex-offenders with a free phone number. The toll-free number gives access to government information and jail-release services (Mellow et al., 2008).

Jail reentry has become a major concern over the past few decades. Solomon et al. (2008) stated “though jail reentry can build on many of the ideas and approaches of prisoner reentry, the distinct differences in the nature of the operations and the status of

the jail population require a new set of strategies” (p.16). While incarcerated, there is a multitude of underlying issues that African American males deal with prior to being released into the community. Jails have a minimal amount of time and the capacity needed to address the myriad of issues affecting offenders or the improvement of reentry outcomes because of the duration of time each offender is housed in the jail (Solomon et al., 2008). Moreover, with time, jails have collaborated with community-based organizations to help inform reentry and work towards improving reentry for African American male ex-offenders. Solomon et al. reported that collaboration and building partnerships amongst the Department of Corrections, community-based organizations, social service providers, and other stakeholders are at the core of improving jail reentry. Furthermore, policy concerns and prisoner reentry were primarily focused on prison populations while ignoring the reentry concerns of ex-offenders being released from jail.

Jails provide some services to the offenders and depending on the size of the jail may determine the types and quality of services provided. Larger jails are more likely to offer a wider range of services. However, those services are often targeted to specific populations, such as those with mental health issues, and the depth and magnitude of those services are sparse. Also, Solomon et al. (2008) reported that while a large number of jails offer services, those services provided do not extend to connecting ex-offenders with services upon being released back into the community. Consequently, the jail population is primarily comprised of young African American men who are not being provided with adequate services upon release.

Consequently, once released back into the community, African American male ex-offenders are offered limited assistance from community-based systems that will address the major transitional problems. The challenges faced by African American male ex-offenders in jail are vast and the capabilities of the jail to service those needs and challenges by providing extensive programming is simply not feasible (Solomon et al., 2008). Although jails may provide reentry programs to African American male ex-offenders, it is also vital that reentry services are a part of everyday life and assist with the challenges associated with reentry. Crayton, Ressler, Mukamal, Jannetta, and Warwick (2010) contended that the presence of community-based organizations that provide services inside the jail and outside are crucial to a successful reentry because many of the skills learned while in jail have the potential to be lost if ex-offenders are not connected with services in the community.

Community-based reentry programs provide supportive services to African American male ex-offenders who are returning to the community. Community programs assist with transitional service, which includes housing, employment services, substance abuse, educational services, and many other services that meet the needs of ex-offenders. Community-based organizations play an integral part in the reentry process, and they have engaged in an important partnership with jails to ensure that offenders and ex-offenders are provided with services in the community (Crayton et al., 2010). Hunter et al. (2015) found that when ex-offenders are transitioning from Department of Corrections' custody and returning to the community, they require assistance from community-based organizations because they offer services that deal with education,

housing assistance, employment, and vocational service. Research has suggested that integrating an evidence-based approach and a treatment component to community-based reentry programs could prove beneficial in addressing the reentry barriers and promote successful reintegration (Hunter et al., n.d.).

Community-based programs operate within jails and provide ongoing services and address many reentry needs. However, while in jail, many African American men do not receive services that address their underlying needs. Crayton et al. (2010) found that very few offenders have access to adequate services while in jail and due to these circumstances, many underserved communities take on the burden and place a strain on overburdened community resources. In 2004 the New York City DOC, began implementing reentry services. African American male offenders housed on Riker's Island are provided access to a program known as Riker's Island Discharge Enhancement (RIDE) (White, Saunders, Fisher, & Mellow, 2012). The voluntary program was implemented to support the reentry process for those returning to the community. White et al. (2012) mentioned that the RIDE program collaborates and coordinates with outside organizations to assist offenders by linking them to community-based organizations that provide health and human services. The reentry process for African American males begins during incarceration and continues 90 days post-release (White et al., 2012).

When African American male ex-offenders are released into the community, the RIDE program provides a case manager to assist with the reentry process and address their individual needs. However, minimal face-to-face contact with case managers is required monthly, and program availability upon reentering back into society is

determined by program availability (White et al., 2012). Consequently, the one-on-one contact between the case manager and the African American male ex-offenders may be ineffective due to the minimal contact required. Overall, White et al. (2012) found that those ex-offenders who participated in the RIDE program as compared to those who did not display any difference in recidivism rates among the individual. The researchers questioned the efficiency of the RIDE program in that the program was voluntary, and it was up to the offender to participate and remain involved in the reentry process.

The reentry process for African American male ex-offenders varies, each situation is different and based on individual needs, and commitment to the process is essential. White et al. (2012) proclaimed that there is an issue regarding the number of services provided once an ex-offender returns to the community and community-based reentry programs are not equipped with the proper resources to keep them engaged in the program. They noted that ex-offenders once released from DOC custody are no longer under custody and are free to make personal decisions regarding reentry. Community-based reentry programs provide a myriad of services that African American male ex-offenders can access within the community as well as during incarceration. However, community-based reentry programs may not solve all the issues associated with the reentry process. Rade, Desmarais, and Burnette (2018) stated there are a large number of offenders returning to the community facing several challenges. In response, there has been an increased focus on policies and practices nationwide that aid in reducing reentry barriers.

Service-Needs Fit

Gill and Wilson (2017) stated that there is limited evidence to illustrate how effective reentry programs are due to how programs are structured. They noted that the possible reasoning behind this is based on programming not being specifically designed to match the individual needs of offenders and address the risk factors which contribute to reducing recidivism. The service-need fit is a crucial determining factor for the successful reentry of ex-offenders. Further, reentry initiatives and interventions are designed to be correctional-based, community-based, or both, and how the service offenders vary (Berghuis, 2018). Consequently, many reentry programs focus on one aspect of reentry while disregarding the other factors contributing to reentry and recidivism. Berghuis (2018) described reentry programs as being either unimodal or multimodal, meaning they either focus on one aspect of reentry or they target multiple aspects of the reentry process. Nevertheless, reentry programs should take a holistic approach and focus on the transition from incarceration to the community, in turn, maximizing reintegration (Berghuis, 2018).

Moreover, reentry programs are designed to be short because the risk of recommitting a crime after release is more probable during the first-year post-release (Berghuis, 2018). Reentry programs are designed to provide services in three different phases: while in jail, while in the community, and lastly, during the integration process where living independently is encouraged (Berghuis, 2018). Visher and Lattimore (2007) conducted a study to examine the reentry needs of SVORI men offenders upon returning to the community. SVORI, serious, and violent offender reentry initiative, is a Federal

plan to provide states with knowledge on how to use their current correctional resources to reduce recidivism. SVORI was a national response to address the reentry needs of ex-offenders and determining what services should be provided based on first-hand reports. Visher and Lattimore conducted an examination process of the responses of the SVORI men and found that the main reentry needs were employment, education, job training, financial assistance, health care, and a driver's license. Correctional and government agencies work in conjunction with one another to determine what services are necessary for the reintegration process, which they believe is the recipe for attaining a crime-free lifestyle. Taxman (n.d.) determined that the service acquisition model utilized by reentry initiatives such as, "Serious and Violent Offender Reentry Initiative (SVORI), Transition from Prison to the Community Initiative (TPCI), Reentry Partnership Initiative (RPI), reentry drug courts, Weed and Seed" (Taxman, n.d., p.1) does not take into account the two reoccurring issues faced by ex-offenders. First and foremost, ex-offenders often do not attend services even when they are mandated by a court order to do so. Secondly, many offenders elect to do jail time rather than participate in community-based intervention services (Taxman, n.d.).

Nevertheless, Taxman (n.d.) suggested the efforts to advance the current knowledge surrounding reentry and reintegration have not been developed to sufficiently provide adequate services to ex-offenders. He asserts the reentry and reintegration process should be based primarily on the ex-offender's personal reintegration plan, which is determined by their individual experiences and needs. Many assumptions are made to determine what services African American male ex-offenders should be provided to

reintegrate back into the community successfully and refrain from recidivating. Services that are focused on the individual needs of African American ex-offenders can have a positive effect on reentry. Listwan, Cullen, and Latessa, (n.d.) concluded the need for the responsivity principle, which makes determinations on how to deliver service interventions that are appropriate for the ex-offender by matching the abilities and style of each participant.

Studies have shown that the characteristics of ex-offenders can be a determining factor in the outcome of the reentry process (Listwan et al., n.d.). Overall, the ability of services to be beneficial for African American male ex-offenders means the services must be based on three critical factors: risk, need, and responsivity factors of each ex-offender (Listwan et al., n.d.). Marlowe (2018) stated risk, need, responsivity, is derived from decades of research on “what works” when matching the individual risk factors of ex-offenders and interventions focused on individual conditions responsible for recidivating. Marlowe (2018) suggested compelling evidence is available which indicates RNR is a reliable practice. Many service providers and criminal justice professionals have not grasped the concept of RNR correctly, so in turn are delivering services that do not match the need and risk factors of the individual ex-offender (Marlowe, 2018). The process of delivering services that match the needs of African American male ex-offenders is an arduous task.

Jails to Jobs

In response to the previous mentioned issues regarding reentry and reintegration, the Jails to Jobs initiative was implemented by a mayor in the northeast United States in

2018 to address the barriers associated with reentry for ex-offenders serving time in a city jail in the northeast United States. The Jails to Jobs initiative intends to provide African American male ex-offenders with access to jobs upon returning to the community. Additionally, while serving a sentence of a year or less, offenders will have access to five hours of reentry programming that will address therapeutic, vocational, and educational needs of each offender (New York City, 2017). Reentry services are not only an essential part of the reintegration process but also reducing recidivism. The initiative will address the individual need, as well as other components related to successful reentry. The Administration's new system will focus on need and risk factors on the very first day an offender enters the jail as well as include additional individualized programming to address the unique needs of each offender (New York City, 2017). The initiative uses prior research, specifically a 2013 RAND study, to determine what is needed to address the ongoing reentry needs. The Jails to Jobs initiative will provide peer navigators from several community-based organizations to assist African American male ex-offenders and transitional employment (New York City, 2017). Research has proven having access to transitional employment reduces recidivism by 22%. The initiative has partnered with a multitude of leaders from the criminal justice system to address the ongoing reentry and reintegration needs (New York City, 2017).

Effectiveness of Reentry Programs

African American male ex-offenders face several barriers when they return home from serving time in jail and look to reentry programs for answers on how to navigate the reentry process effectively. However, there are issues surrounding the reentry process,

and those issues have been recognized. To mitigate the previous and current reentry and recidivism issues, funding has been allocated to develop programs and initiatives. For instance, The SCA, The SVORI, and most recently, and The Jails to Jobs initiative among several others have been implemented (Listwan, Cullen, and Latessa, n.d.). While there is a considerable number of reentry programs available to those returning home, those programs are diverse in the services they provide, and the way they address individual needs, and little is known about how effective they are. Gill and Wilson (2016) stated that there is a limited amount of evidence available to determine if reentry programs are, in fact, effective. The authors further noted that an explanation for the insufficient evidence is based on ex-offenders not properly being matched with services that meet their specific needs. While an abundance of programs and initiatives have been created to remove the barriers associated with prisoner reentry, the effectiveness of those reentry programs has long been debated by scholars, political officials, criminal justice practitioners, and several others in the fields of public policy and criminal justice. Listwan et al. (n.d.) contended that many programs and initiatives that do not incorporate evidence-based practices are more than likely to produce ineffective programs that do not work.

Furthermore, Vigne (n.d.) mentioned that reentry programs vary in terms of content quality and the impact they have on recidivism. The author notes that these programs may be more effective for certain populations dealing with specific issues. The focus has been placed on simply reducing recidivism to determine if a reentry program can be deemed sufficient. Recidivism should not be the only measure to conclude if a

reentry program is effective. Other factors should be considered, such as if there was an improvement in the quality of life, are they working, and has sobriety increased (Petersilia, 2004). The author stated the overall goal of reentry programs is reintegration, which encompasses more than being arrest-free. Lee and Stohr (2012) also argued that there are other indicators to consider rather than merely recidivism when questioning effectiveness. The purpose of reentry programs is to assist with the successful transition of ex-offenders into the community.

With the implementation of new reentry programs, organizations have been reviewing evidence from program evaluations to determine “what works” to ensure that a program is successful. The “what works” literature identifies programs and makes determinations based on a scoring system that is used to evaluate studies conducted on reentry. The scoring system is utilized to evaluate the level of impact (James, 2015). Muhlhausen (2018) mentioned that the Interagency Reentry Council, which is comprised of several agencies across the federal government, had reviewed a report that incorporates relevant research and program evaluations regarding the effectiveness of various reentry programs. The report is also used to determine the next steps to move forward and develop recommendations and advance reentry policies. James (2015) argued that when using recidivism statistics to evaluate programs, it is essential to have a clear understanding of what is included in the definition of recidivism.

As mentioned above, there is little evidence available to conclude if reentry programs are effective. There is not a complete understanding of what is effective and what is not when developing reentry programs. There is a need for a more comprehensive

understanding of the reentry process (Muhlhausen, 2018). What has been found is that reentry programs that are explicitly focused on employment have exhibited being ineffective in reducing recidivism and unlikely to succeed (Muhlhausen, 2018). While employment is an essential component of successful reentry, it takes far more than a job to ensure that the reentry process is successful. James (2015) noted that the “what works” literature that has emerged illustrates that programs centered around work training and placement, drug and mental health treatment, and housing assistance have shown to be effective.

The overall consensus is that reentry programs should focus on change and take a holistic approach towards the reintegration process to, in fact, be successful. Lastly, James (2015) noted that there are limitations when exclusively making determinations based on limited literature centered around the effectiveness of some reentry programs — in turn, making it extremely difficult to make determinations on effectiveness.

Summary and Conclusions

There are several reentry programs available to address the many barriers and needs of ex-offenders. However, many reentry programs may not be appropriate for addressing individual need and risk factors. The review of the literature provides relevant information regarding reentry, reintegration, recidivism, African American male ex-offenders, barriers, reentry models, services, and programs. It is vital for reentry programs and criminal justice officials to have a clear understanding of RNR and how these factors can be beneficial to the reentry planning process. Overall, the literature review highlighted the reentry barriers for African American male ex-offenders and the

resources that are available while incarcerated and upon being released into the community. Chapter 3 includes the research design, research method, data collection methods that were utilized to guide the study. Additionally, the interview questions will be outlined and explained.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the effectiveness of reentry programming and the reentry experiences of formerly incarcerated, African American men who were detained in a city jail in the northeast United States and participated in Jails to Jobs. The findings of this study provide a comprehensive understanding of the reentry process of African American, male ex-offenders who were incarcerated in a city jail in the northeast United States and the lack of understanding concerning where organizations and criminal justice agencies fall short after persons in custody are released back into society. This study involved an evaluation of reentry programs through conducting semi structured interviews with African American, male ex-offenders. The primary goal of this study was to address the following research question:

What are the reentry experiences of African American men returning home from a city jail in the northeast United States who participated in the Jails to Jobs program?

In this study, I gathered the lived experiences of African American, male ex-offenders who had participated in the Jails to Jobs initiative after serving a year or less in a city jail in the northeast United States to ascertain how effective the reentry program is as well as its effect on recidivism. In this chapter, I discuss the role of the researcher, methodology, design and rationale, participant selection, instrumentation, recruitment, participation, data collection, data analysis, and trustworthiness.

Research Design and Rationale

Research Design

I used a qualitative, phenomenological design which will provide insight into the perceptions and lived experiences of African American, male participants who had been incarcerated in a city jail in the northeast United States and participated in Jails to Jobs and develop a comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of reentry programming. Creswell (2014) noted phenomenological research involves the researcher describing the participants' common or shared lived experiences about the phenomenon as expressed in interviews. The use of a qualitative methodology allows the researcher to ascertain a real understanding of the participants perceptions and experiences. The qualitative method is used to understand people's beliefs, experiences, attitudes, behaviors, and interactions (Pathak, Jena, & Kalra, 2013). The qualitative method as opposed to the quantitative method allows the researcher to build a relationship with participants rather than depending on numerical data.

The various qualitative research designs share the common research steps that begin with the research problem and continues to the questions, the data, the data analysis, interpretations, and the research report (Creswell, 2013). However, according to Yin (2011), phenomenological studies emphasize interpretive analyses that are devoted to capturing the uniqueness of events as described by the participants. Yin noted phenomenological studies not only examine the events being studied but also their political, historical, and sociocultural context (p. 14). I used the qualitative approach to gain a real understanding of African American, male ex-offenders' lived reentry

experiences as they relate to the Jails to Jobs program and its effectiveness. While the phenomenological approach shares some aspects of grounded theory, grounded theory was not appropriate for this study because it is used to develop an argument based on the data that are grounded in the views of the participants (see Creswell, 2014). However, phenomenology emphasizes gaining an understanding of how human beings experience their world by allowing the researcher to put themselves in another person's shoes and to understand the subjective experiences of participants (Sutton & Austin, 2015, p. 226).

Rationale

Sutton and Austin (2015) noted qualitative research could assist researchers in accessing the thoughts and feelings of research participants, which can enable the development of an understanding of the meaning that people ascribe to their experiences (p. 226). The rationale for choosing to use a qualitative research method with a phenomenological approach in this study was that it would provide me with insight into the lived experiences of African American, male ex-offenders who participated in Jails to Jobs. A phenomenological approach helps to comprehend various individuals' common or shared encounters of a phenomenon, and it is essential to understand these shared experiences to create practices or policies or to develop a more profound understanding of the features of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2006). The choice of a qualitative research method paired with a phenomenological approach allowed me to utilize interviews with numerous participants to gain a real understanding of the topic based on their insights and lived experiences.

Furthermore, a phenomenological approach allowed me to answer the research question. Phenomenology utilizes interviews with participants who provide first-hand knowledge about their reentry process. Creswell (2013) noted the fundamental goal of the phenomenology approach is to arrive at a description of the nature of the particular phenomenon. Interviewing is the most common format in data collection and can consist of semi-structured, structured, or in-depth interviews (Creswell). Jamshed (2014) mentioned that semi-structured, in-depth interviews are vastly utilized as a one-on-one interview format with an individual and may also be utilized in a group setting. Moreover, semi-structured interviews allowed me to present the interview questions in a less formal, open-ended format. In turn, this allowed for flexibility in the interview process as well as the ability to present follow-up questions and have a discussion with participants and build rapport. I conducted in-person, one-on-one interviews rather than using an online survey or telephone interviews. Conducting in-person interviews offered the ability to observe the participants' body language and facial expressions as well as for note taking based on those social cues. According to Opdenakker (2006), face-to-face interviews can take advantage of the interviewee's social cues, including voice, intonation, and body language. Overall, observing social signals can provide the interviewer with additional information that can be added to the verbal answer given by the interviewee.

Role of the Researcher

In this qualitative, phenomenological study, I conducted face-to-face interviews with each participant and ensured there was no bias present during the interview process.

Bias can happen at any stage of research, including study design or data collection, as well as during the data analysis phase and publication (Pannucci & Wilkins, 2010). As the researcher, it is crucial to determine how bias will be prevented; I minimized and prevented bias by strategically selecting participants, using active listening skills, focusing on the facts and what I do not know, and remaining objective. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were held with 11 African American, male ex-offenders who participated in Jails to Jobs and open-ended questions were used to gain a better understanding of the reentry process and the effectiveness of the program. “Qualitative interviews afford researchers opportunities to explore, in an in-depth manner, matters that are unique to the experiences of the interviewees, allowing insights into how different phenomena of interest are experienced and perceived” (McGrath, Palmgren, & Liljedahl, 2019, p. 1002).

Additionally, I gained the trust of the participants by building a professional relationship with them and provided each participant with background information on the study before the interview to ensure they knew what to expect and were comfortable. The participants were also required to sign a consent form. Building trust is essential in qualitative research, and the researcher must communicate well with the potential participants. Knowing how to communicate effectively “will create a relationship or state of having trust and mutual responsiveness with others (Zakaria & Musta’amal, 2014, p.1.1).

Honesty is another important aspect of the interview process, and it is essential to ensure that the participants are not fabricating data. This ethical concern was addressed

by informing the selected participants on the importance of providing accurate and honest information.

Furthermore, the role of the researcher is to be flexible and anticipate challenges that may arise throughout the interview process and protect the participants. Protecting the participants is done by maintaining confidentiality and anonymity. I did not use the participants' names throughout the study; instead, pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of each participant. The results of the study are nonidentifiable and will not lead to the identification of any of the participants or distinguish one participant from the next.

Participant Selection

The participants were 10–15 African American, male ex-offenders who took part in the Jails to Jobs reentry program, an initiative implemented by a mayor of a city in the northeast United States. Groenewald (2004) stated that according to Boyd (2001), two to 10 participants are sufficient to reach saturation, and according to Creswell (1998), interviews with up to 10 participants are acceptable in phenomenological studies. I selected the participants based on an age range of between 25–50 years old. The participants were chosen from one reentry program in the northeast United States. These participants had to agree to participate in a face-to-face interview regarding the phenomenon.

I chose African American, male ex-offenders as the population for this study because the literature revealed that African American males are incarcerated and recidivating at high rates and are experiencing far more barriers to reentry than any other population. Gentles, Charles, Ploeg, and McKibbin (2015) suggested that purposeful

sampling is conducted by selecting information-rich cases for in-depth qualitative studies that provide insight and a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon being studied. The participants in this study were identified and selected based on their knowledge and experiences of the reentry process. According to Moser and Korstjens (2018), criterion sampling is utilized in phenomenological studies to choose participants that meet a predefined criterion. Moser and Korstjens further suggested that the experiences of the participants with the phenomenon of interest is the most important criterion.

Before the interviews were conducted, potential participants were provided with a flyer detailing the aspects of the study by reentry personnel. The participants attend programs at the designated reentry program. I had a meeting with the reentry program director to provide background information on the study and asked the reentry program to give the flyer to participants that met the specific criteria. Each participant was given a consent form and information on confidentiality and privacy prior to their interview.

Instrumentation

I conducted individual, face-to-face interviews with participants to collect data for this study. Open-ended, semi-structured interview questions that focused on the participants' lived experiences regarding the reentry process were asked to gain a comprehensive understanding of the personal reentry process, build rapport with the participants, and ascertain the effectiveness of reentry programs at reducing recidivism among African American males. I recorded participants' responses and took notes regarding their body language, tone, and facial expressions during the interview. The

recordings were transcribed, then the transcripts were reviewed. I reviewed the audio recordings and transcripts numerous times to ensure validity. Participants were provided with a copy of their transcript to confirm and ensure the accuracy of their statements.

Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

There was specific criterion for participation in the interview process. First, the participants had to be African American, male ex-offenders who participated in the Jails to Jobs initiative implemented by a mayor in the northeast United States and were either currently taking part in transitional services at a reentry program or had completed the program. Second, the participants must have been incarcerated in a city jail in the northeast United States and were between the ages of 25–50 years old.

I recruited potential participants from a selected reentry program located in the northeast United States that provides transitional services to ex-offenders. Data were retrieved from 11 participants via a face-to-face interview. The strategy employed to locate participants included speaking with the reentry program director and asking him or her to distribute a flyer to approximately 20 participants who met the criteria. I created the flyer to explain the study and provide contact information to possible participants.

The potential participants were provided with a consent form, which they were asked to review, sign, and return before the initial face-to-face interview date. The consent forms ensured that each participant acknowledges that they have a clear understanding of the purpose of the study and interview process and that it is entirely voluntary. Each potential participant was informed before that interview that the interview is optional, and they are not obligated to participate. Also, they were notified

that in the event they no longer want to take part in the interview, they have the option to opt-out. Participants willing to take part in the interview were contacted to schedule a time and date. Questions or concerns regarding the study were addressed before the interviews. Participants were informed that their information will remain protected.

In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted in a safe and neutral location and last approximately 60 to 90 minutes. The participants were informed that the interviews will be recorded using a recording device. I asked the participants for permission to record them before the interviews begin. Upon beginning the interview, the researcher provided an introduction informing the participants about the importance of the research and the reasoning behind the interview. The research questions were aligned with a phenomenological study and the policy feedback theory. I transcribed the interviews by hand by to ensure accuracy rather than utilizing a transcription service.

Each participant was provided with a copy of the transcript to review and verify the information obtained is accurate. The process of member checking involves ensuring the trustworthiness of the data and the credibility of results. Data or results are returned to participants to check for accuracy (Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, & Walter, 2016). The recorded data obtained from the interviews and notes will be saved to a folder on my laptop and password protected. The information obtained from data analysis and collection will remain protected for approximately 5 years and destroyed after that.

Data Analysis Plan

As previously mentioned, the interviews were recorded and transcribed by the researcher. The purpose of the face-to-face interviews were to obtain insight into the

reentry experiences of African American male ex-offenders and answer the research question. The data collected from the recorded interviews were coded and analyzed to find common themes and concepts. Codes, categories, and themes were developed from the transcribed interviews. Further, data was coded and analyzed using Microsoft Word, and what Moustakas (1994) refers to as the technique where the researcher returns to the interview experience to acquire comprehensive descriptions. The descriptions then provide the foundation for “reflective structural analysis” to depict the overall significance of the participant’s experiences based on their individual stories.

Issues of Trustworthiness

According to Nowell, Norris, White, and Moules (2017), “it is essential that qualitative research is conducted rigorously and methodically to yield meaningful and useful results” (p. 1). The authors further state “that to be accepted as trustworthy, qualitative researchers must exhibit that the data analysis process was conducted in a precise, consistent, and exhaustive manner” (p.1). As the researcher, it is vital to determine that the research is accurate, dependable, and without bias. I will consider the four aspects of trustworthiness, which are dependability, credibility, transferability, and confirmability.

Dependability

Dependability is referring to the potential for replication and if other researchers can repeat the research and produce similar findings. To establish dependability, researchers can employ the technique known as an audit trail. An audit trail is a code and recoding method that requires the use of an external person who will assess, analyze, and

validate the data analysis through keen observations to determine how dependable the researcher's findings are if they can be duplicated (Anney, 2014). I ensured dependability by audio recording each of the participant interviews to capture the participants exact responses to the questions.

Credibility

Credibility is essentially asking the researcher to make a connection between the research findings and reality to illustrate the truth in the findings. Credibility is about knowing that the findings from the research are valid and or accurate. To establish credibility, several techniques can be utilized. Triangulation refers to utilizing several different methods or sources of data to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon. Triangulation is also a strategy used to test for validity (Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, & Neville, 2014). I ensured credibility by incorporating member checking where I shared the transcripts with participants which guaranteed that the findings are accurate and based on their own words. Also, allow for any errors or misinterpretations to be corrected.

Transferability

Transferability refers to the generalizability of the research findings in another context. According to Statistic Solutions (2018), other settings could mean similar situations, populations, and or related phenomena. A technique used to ensure that there is transferability present in the research is incorporating what is said to be thick descriptions. Lincoln and Guba noted that lush descriptions are used to attain what they describe as a type of external validity (Amankwaa, 2016). My accounts of the data

collection process can provide a comprehensive understanding of the research. Hence, this technique ensured that the reader could make judgments based on what was revealed by the participants. I ensured transferability by providing thick descriptions and detailed accounts of the data collection process.

Confirmability

Confirmability is the confidence within the findings of the research based on the participants' responses as it relates to their views, opinions, and experiences rather than the biased remarks of the researcher. Confirmability helps to illustrate that the participants' responses were represented accurately and inform the research findings. There are several techniques that the researcher can use to ensure confirmability. Qualitative researchers can provide what is known as an "audit trail," which highlights the researcher's data analysis steps to provide a rationale for the decision-making processes (Statistic Solutions, 2019). Additionally, reflexivity is useful in phenomenological research studies because this technique takes into consideration the researcher's background and how it may influence the research. Utilizing a reflexive journal can keep track of what is happening throughout the entire research process (Statistic Solutions, 2019). I ensured confirmability by documenting the data collection process and journaling my thoughts about the coding process and provided feedback on why specific codes emerged and the meaning of the themes that were chosen.

Ethical Strategies

When conducting a research study that deals with human subjects, ethical concerns may arise. It was crucial to ensure that all aspects of the study meet the

requirements of Walden University Institutional Review Board. The participants were not forced or promised anything in return for volunteering to participate in the study. All participants were made to feel comfortable with sharing information and informed that they had the right to decline to answer questions or decline to participate in the interviews.

Informed consent was obtained from each participant, and all questions and concerns will be addressed before the interview being conducted. I spoke with each participant and ensure them that their personal information, names, and their identity will remain confidential and all data will be protected. The interviewees' names were coded, and they were known as Participant I, Participant II, and so forth. To ensure that the information remains confidential, I obtained a lockbox and keep all materials safe and secure as well as the information was password protected on my laptop. Additionally, it will be vital to review the recording and transcripts to ensure the reliability of the data.

Summary

Chapter 3 illustrated the reasoning behind choosing a qualitative phenomenological approach, which provided insight into the lived reentry experiences of African American male ex-offenders, their perceptions, and the effectiveness of reentry programs. Chapter 3 provided background information on how the study was completed and how participants were chosen. Also, semi-structured interviews were utilized, and the data was transcribed and coded by hand. Chapter 4 discussed the detailed findings from the interviews and the codes, themes, and patterns derived from the transcripts.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to utilize a phenomenological approach to explore the effectiveness of reentry programming and the reentry experiences of formerly incarcerated, African American men who were detained in a city jail in the northeast United States and participated in the new Jails to Jobs program that provides reentry services for all while incarcerated. The following research question guided the study:

Research Question: To what extent is the Jails to Jobs program effective based on the reentry experiences of African American males who participated in the program?

I developed 10 interview questions to address the research question (see Appendix A). The interview questions were structured to allow each participant the ability to answer each question in an open-ended way.

In this chapter, I discuss the procedures used for conducting interviews, demographic information on participants, and the results of the semi-structured participant interviews. Data from the interviews with 11 African American, male ex-offenders who participated in the Jails to Jobs program is included. Chapter 4 also includes a description of the study setting, the data collection method, and the data analysis will be reported. Additionally, this chapter will consist of evidence of trustworthiness, and the results of the study.

Setting

I spoke with the program director of a reentry program in the northeast United States that oversaw the Jails to Jobs reentry program and discussed the purpose of and the inclusion criteria for the study. I informed the program director that I would provide a letter of cooperation that would give details on the research and would require her signature. I asked her if she would be willing to distribute flyers to the participants that met the criteria after I received IRB approval, I informed her that I would contact her once I received authorization to conduct the study and she agreed. After receiving IRB approval (Approval Number 02-06-20-0674518) (see Appendix B), the program director was contacted. I informed her that I had received permission to conduct the study, and I sent her the flyer for distribution. After receiving IRB approval and participants were recruited, interviews were scheduled with each participant. Fifteen prospective participants agreed to be interviewed for the study; however, I was only able to secure 11 participants due to three participants not showing up for their interview. The interviews were conducted in a private office space to ensure privacy.

Demographics

The participants in this study were 11 African American men who participated in the Jails to Jobs program at a reentry program in the northeast United States (see Table 1). Before conducting the interviews, each participant was provided with an informed consent form. All participants signed the informed consent form, and all the participants met the inclusion criteria. The inclusion criteria included being an African American male, aged 25–50 years old, who had participated in the Jails to Jobs program. Several of

the participants indicated that they were not offered the program while in jail, while others stated that they had taken part in the Jails to Jobs program while in jail. Those that were not offered the Jails to Jobs program while in jail stated that they either enrolled themselves in the program or someone recommended the program to them.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Participant	Gender	Race	Offered the Jails to Jobs program in jail	Employed
P1	Male	African American	No	Yes
P2	Male	African American	Yes	No
P3	Male	African American	No	No
P4	Male	African American	Yes	No
P5	Male	African American	No	No
P6	Male	African American	Yes	No
P7	Male	African American	No	No
P8	Male	African American	No	No
P9	Male	African American	No	No
P10	Male	African American	Yes	No
P11	Male	African American	No	No

*(end of table)***Data Collection**

Before conducting the interviews, I established rapport with each participant, which allowed them to feel comfortable sharing information with me about their reentry experiences. I conducted 11 face-to-face interviews; each one took place in a private

office space. The interviews were initially scheduled for 40–45 minutes; however, the interview times lasted between 20–30 minutes. Before the interviews were conducted, each participant was asked if they had any questions about the interview and/or the consent form. The consent forms were provided to each participant before conducting the interviews, and they were informed that they would need to be signed before the start of the interview. I collected data by asking each participant 10 open-ended questions as well as follow-up questions. The 10 interview questions were developed to gain insight into the reentry experiences of the chosen participants who took part in the Jails to Jobs program.

Each interview was recorded with a recording device as well as my cell phone to capture the responses of each participant. During the interview process, I read the interview protocol and informed each participant that I would be recording and taking notes as well as periodically checking the recording devices to ensure that they were functioning correctly. While conducting the interviews, I wrote down crucial facts regarding the participants' reentry experiences as well as their views and/or opinions of the Jails to Jobs program and recidivism. During the interviews, I listened to the participants describe their lived reentry experiences and their views on the Jails to Jobs program. I ensured to keep my biases to myself and not provide my opinions based on how they responded to each question during the interview and the data analysis process.

At the end of each interview, I provided each participant with a gift card, thanked them for participating, and reiterated that I would be sending them a copy of the interview transcript for them to review to ensure that the interviews were documented

accurately. After completing the 11 interviews, I transcribed each one by hand. The recordings were listened to individually, and the participants' responses were typed out verbatim. I sent each participant a copy of the interview transcript via e-mail and asked them to review the transcripts to ensure they were accurate and to contact me via e-mail if there were any changes that needed to be made. None of the participants e-mailed regarding making changes to the transcripts.

Data Analysis

I listened to each of the 11 interviews as I transcribed verbatim. The participants' names were not used in the transcript; the participants were labeled as P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10, and P11. Following the completion of the transcribing process, I analyzed the research data, read the interview transcripts 3 times to ensure validity, made notes, and highlighted critical vital phrases and sections to develop codes and themes. Additionally, I wrote down the codes and grouped the text with the corresponding codes. The codes were based on what each of the participants stated. The codes were then turned into themes. All the data that were collected from the transcribed interviews and notes was reviewed and collated into groups that were identified by the specific codes. The codes were then examined to uncover any patterns, which were used to help develop the emergent themes. Lastly, I reviewed each of the themes to determine if they were accurate and represented the data.

I also reviewed the notes I took during the interviews along with the transcripts to ensure that my interpretation of the data was accurate. It was helpful to listen to the interviews and read the transcripts because it led to the realization that each of the

participants shared common experiences related to being unable to secure employment, the type of programs they participated in, and their overall views of the reentry program.

I did not use any software to analyze the data; instead, it was analyzed by hand. Each of the codes describes specific ideas or feelings that were expressed by the participants, and those codes were then turned into common themes. The emergent common themes were (I) informative, (II) guidance, (III) insight, (IV) not meeting needs, and (V) meeting needs. Data saturation was reached through the 11 interviews. There were many similarities present in the participants' depiction of their reentry experiences related to the Jails to Jobs program.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Dependability, credibility, transferability, and confirmability are all crucial components when establishing trustworthiness within the research. Dependability was achieved in this study by using an audio recorder to document the exact responses of each participant. By transcribing each interview and the use of member checking, I was also able to ensure accuracy of the data. Credibility is achieved by depicting the data accurately, and I achieved this by sending each participant a copy of their transcribed interview and asking them to review it to ensure it was accurate. I informed them to contact me via e-mail if any changes were required. All 11 participants received their transcripts, and there were no changes required.

Transferability was achieved by providing thick descriptions, which allow for the findings to be applicable and for other researchers to apply the results to their studies. Lincoln and Guba noted that lush descriptions are used to attain what they describe as a

type of external validity (Amankwaa, 2016). I obtained detailed information from each of the eleven participants. The semi-structured interviews with each of the participants, allowed them to go into detail while answering the interview questions, providing insight into their lived reentry experiences, which is in line with phenomenological studies.

“Phenomenology can be defined as an approach to research that seeks to describe the essence of a phenomenon by exploring it from the perspective of those who have experienced it” (Neubauer, Witkop, & Varpio, 2019, pp. 5). After interviewing the 11 participants, it was evident that saturation was reached.

I achieved confirmability by ensuring that the participants’ responses were represented accurately by reviewing the transcripts and listening to the recorded interviews several times. Journaling notes were used to provide additional insight into the participants’ thoughts, views, and opinions related to their reentry experiences and the effectiveness of the reentry program.

Results

I conducted this phenomenological study to explore the effectiveness of reentry programming and the reentry experiences of formerly incarcerated, African American men who were detained in a city jail in the northeast United States and participated in the Jails to Jobs program. This study provided insight into their reentry experiences and the effectiveness of the reentry program at reducing recidivism among African American men. Eleven participants were interviewed, and similarities were present in each of their responses to the interview questions. They shared common experiences with the reentry program and their views on the effectiveness of the Jails to Jobs program. My research

question guided this study. In turn, I was able to gain an in-depth understanding of the participants' lived reentry experiences and the effectiveness of the program based on their responses.

The research question that guided this study was: To what extent is the Jails to Jobs program effective based on the reentry experiences of African American males who participated in the program? The data revealed that the formerly incarcerated, African American men shared similar experiences, thoughts, views, and opinions on how the program has helped them through their reentry process, what needs were not being met, and what they found beneficial about the program. The participants shared mixed feelings about how the program is structured and the services they were offered.

A majority of the participants shared the view that the program was effective because the program gave them the tools to help them become a productive citizen and it provided them with the opportunity to secure forms of ID and transportation. The participants stated that it is not just about the program, but as an individual, they had to want to change and be an active participant. Furthermore, five participants felt the program did not benefit them when it came to securing employment. They all expressed the desire to work and took part in the program because they needed work. Participants expressed not merely wanting to engage in training and interview preparation but become employed. Many participants displayed disappointment and frustration that the Jails to Jobs program was unable to assist them with removing the barrier of unemployment, which is crucial for a successful reentry. The participants wanted a fair chance at being sent on interviews with employers that transitioned into real employment options;

however, they all stated that they felt comfortable at the program because the staff has been incarcerated, and they could relate to the staff because they share many of the same reentry experiences. Based on the coding of the data, I developed five themes: informative, guidance, insight, not meeting needs, and meeting their needs. In the following subsections, I discuss the findings related to these themes.

Table 2

Summary of the Findings

Themes	Theme Definition	Participants	Results
Informative	The participants being able to gain information on the reentry process through conversations with reentry staff.	P3, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9	The overall results indicated that that participants agreed they were able to speak with the staff if they needed assistance, to simply ask a question, and or advice. The participants expressed that they were being kept on the right track because their caseworker or another staff member provided vital assistance and information to be successful. It was stated that everyone is accessible and there is good communication and understanding.
Guidance	Providing participants with the necessary tools to not recidivate.	P1, P2, P3, P4, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10, P11	The overall results indicated that the participants felt they were provided with a sense of hope when attending the program because they were provided with guidance to keep them on the right track and out of jail. The program instilled in them the will to change by motivating them to seek employment, giving them something to do, provided opportunities, and removed them from negative environments.
Insight	Being able to share a common bond with reentry staff who have been incarcerated before and have a real understanding of the process.	P1, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10	The overall results indicated that the participants felt the program was effective because they were able to share a common bond with the staff because they too had been previously incarcerated. The participants stated that they felt comfortable at the program because the staff understood them, their reentry process, and they were an example of how you can go to jail and come home and change your life for the better. They provided the skills necessary to help them regain their lives and become productive citizens.

Not meeting needs	Not providing participants with the resources they required to meet their individual reentry needs.	P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P9, P10	The overall results indicated that the participants came to the program primarily for employment. They felt that the program was not effective because it did not provide them with either employment or housing. The participants expressed that the program needed to provide access to interviews with employers that were willing to hire ex-offenders. They stated that they were promised there would be employment opportunities after graduating the Wilderness program, but there was limited follow through as it pertained to setting up interviews, providing housing assistance, and access to mental health professionals.
Meeting their needs	Providing participants with assistance to meet their individual reentry needs and be considered an effective program.	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10, P11	The overall results indicated that the participants felt the program was effective at meeting specific needs. They indicated that the program was successful when it came to providing transportation, in the form of a metro cars, assisting them with obtaining forms of identification, meeting social service needs, and resume building. Additionally, the participants expressed that their needs were met because they were provided with interview preparation, counseling, meals, training certificates, transitional housing, internships, interviews, and clothing.

(end of table)

Informative

The meaning of the theme informative is the participants being able to gain information on the reentry process through conversations with reentry staff. The theme informative emerged as a common theme among the majority of the participants.

Returning home from being incarcerated and requiring assistance appeared to be a common factor amongst the participants. Being able to obtain information on how to

navigate the reentry process is crucial for a triumphant return to the community for the African American male. Participants reported being able to talk to the Jails to Jobs staff and receive vital information regarding their reentry process. The participants' expressed a sense of ease knowing that they could come to the reentry program, talk to anyone, ask questions, and obtain information on how to meet their reentry needs. Participants felt supported when knowing that they can access the program and speak to any of the employees.

P1: "I can talk to just about anybody here. And I feel like, like, like we've known each other for a while, and you don't feel like you have to hold, hold back or hesitate. If you want to ask somebody something, you could just come up and just ask a question. They won't look at you any type of way. They won't feel that way because they know your situation. They know how you feel, so it's never uncomfortable."

P3: "They yeah, they gave you, they gave us like a little sheet and a few words like that you know how to approach an interview. Like, you feel me like the interviewer wants to know about you. They don't want to know about jail, or they want to know about your work history, don't you don't have to like disclose information that's not needed. Yeah, they definitely help you."

P5: "They, we did a workshop with the wilderness workshop where it shows you how to interview and, you know, the right things and the wrong things to do as far as the resume is concerned, as far as the interview is concerned. And even as far as your work ethic is concerned, they showed you know they had a lot of helpful

tools on how actually to retain and maintain a job. So, they did good on that part. I'm not gonna lie; they did a really good job on that one. I learned a lot of stuff coming here, as far as that's concerned."

P6: "They keep you on the right track and give you a caseworker that spends time with you and talks to you. You got your caseworker if you have a problem or issue. Got they cell phone number, they do good, good communication. They understand, feel like it's a good thing."

P7: "I mean basically it's just been advice so far advice. They help you work on. Like, they helped me figure out what I wanted to do because I used to always say, I'll do anything for a job. But now they got like; they opened up my mind to things like specific things that I want to do. Like I don't just want to do the building maintenance or something like that like I could work in an office, I could do something else. So, and information and they got the references. Like if you cool with any of them, you know. They got names, and they got connections, take a plug you in, they know what to do. They know who to talk to."

P8: "But they have provided me with the information to be successful."

P:8 "The people here, they're kind, they help you. They do help you find a job. They're not just here for a paycheck. They really want to help you, and they do help.

P9: "Anybody can help you whether it's Mr. White, whether it's Mr. Bruce or brother David. You know, Miss Rogers, Ms. Reyes, any everybody, and Ms. Pleasant. Everybody helps. At some point, if they can't do anything that's related

to their field, they could point you in the right direction to help to get you the help or to the person that can help you.”

Guidance

The meaning of the theme guidance is providing participants with the necessary tools to not recidivate. When asked about recidivism and how the Jails to Jobs program helps them throughout the reentry process, it was communicated that the program has a way of offering them guidance, assistance, and the will to change their ways, in turn helping them stay out of jail. Formerly incarcerated African American males find themselves returning to jail when their reentry needs are not met. Many of the participants expressed how the Jails to Jobs program has put them on the right track by providing motivation and a safe space where they can interact with those who can relate to their struggle with the reentry process and recidivism.

All of the participants expressed being incarcerated on more than one occasion, and by participating in the Jails to Jobs program, it put them in a position not to recommit a crime. They explained that as part of the Jails to Jobs program, they took part in a specialized program which was designed to address the barriers associated with the reentry process. The specialized program addresses the employment barriers associated with the reentry process, provided skills trainings, and assist participants with preparing for interviews.

P1: “You can have an A-one team, an A-one coach, but if you not going to do your part, then it doesn't matter. It's really up to the person. But for someone who

really wants to change themselves, better themselves, I feel this will be a perfect place to go.”

P1: “For someone who doesn't really know what to do, what to expect, they give you a lot of skills, a lot of tools to prepare yourself for things that's coming and more importantly, they share what they've been through on their reentry and how you can relate to them. How it's okay to be nervous and scared, but you get through it.”

P2: “So, it was to get me out of that negative environment and putting money in my pocket. So, to get me out of a negative environment, and I'm keeping money in my pocket, and I'm having something constantly to do. I'm not going to go back to jail.”

P2: “Since I've been out, I went into these programs and got my GED. Going into these programs, I didn't know that they had colleges that I didn't know that people, convicted felons could have all these jobs.”

P3: “Um, as a now, I could say yes. Because like it's keeping me on the right track. Um, I think it's good because like, um like it's keeping a lot of like my age bracket, people that's older keeping a lot of us like out of trouble like it's a lot of people that like you know, I recognize their face from being in jail and it's like they came home around the same time as me. The program must be doing something because you are staying out here. Like, I feel like the program is going in the right direction of keeping people out of jail. Being worth coming for. Certain programs, it's like you don't everybody don't give you that effort that you

might be given. So, like for them for this program to match your effort and seeing that you trying and all that, it's well worth it.”

P4: Because it's things I've been looking for, but I ain't have no motivation to do it. So, since I joined the program, it gets me up every morning just to look for a job.

P6: “Basically, just stay focused on my current situation, as far as finding job placement, and if I need like transportation, ask them and just basically stay focused. And one mistake, they remind me that one mistake I can end up back incarcerated. So, they remind me that all the time and I was in the course, my wilderness course.”

P7: “It just took me off the streets for a certain amount of time during the day to not be doing something else. That could have been bad. Yeah. Yeah, not be a better person, just stay on stay on the right path.”

P8: “I just need the opportunity, and I'm here for that.”

P8: “That's right, so that I don't have to backtrack no more or go back to Riker's Island where I'm just a number.”

P9: “I can do it if somebody else can. If somebody else has been, who has seen the things that I've seen, done the things that I've done, and they can believe in themselves, it gives him a hope to choose a different path.”

P9: “It gives you the opportunity to actually do something better with their life. For me, as a recovering addict, it helped me in my recovery, getting the tools necessary to help somebody else, which in turn help myself. So, but anybody else

were trying to get a job, whatever, whatever field it is, they sit there with the wilderness program and actually sit you through interviews on how to how to conduct interviews with a criminal background. And basically, be prepared with not only your interview skills but also finding the training that you need to obtain employment.”

P10: “Um, no, not yet. Not yet. But that's the thing. That's the thing. You don't have time to commit crimes while your mind is on getting a job. You see what I'm saying. You want to; you don't want to put yourself back in a box. You see what I'm saying. You want to continue to be free. Every day that you come here is one step closer to getting to where you need to be. It provides you with the mindset to change, you know, from being a criminal to again, being a productive citizen to society, you know, this is a very effective, very, very effective.”

P11: “I kind of like it because it gives you like, even though you've been locked up or anything of the sort, it gives you like opportunities to get back to the day to day basis life of living and knowing how New York is. So, gives you the opportunity to get back in, get back into something that you like. Earning a living.”

Insight

The meaning of the theme insight is being able to share a common bond with reentry staff who have been incarcerated before and have a real understanding of the process. While conducting the individual interviews, the participants expressed the importance of attending a reentry program that has employees who share a collective

experience with and who can understand what they have been through because they, too, were previously incarcerated. The participants stated that they felt more comfortable sharing information and asking questions because they knew the staff would be understanding and not judgmental. They felt a connection, which, in turn, allowed them to feel a sense of freedom when expressing their thoughts, feelings, or concerns.

P1: “They share what they’ve been through on their reentry and how you can relate to them. How it’s okay to be nervous and scared, but you get through it.”

P1: “I can talk to just about anybody in here. And I feel like we've known each other for a while, and you don't feel like you have to hold back or hesitate. If you want to ask somebody something, you could just come up and just ask a question. They won't look at you any type of way, and they won't feel that way because they know your situation. They know how you feel, so it's never uncomfortable.”

P3: “That's, that's, that's one thing that makes me feel more comfortable opening up to them because some of them can relate way more than what I’ve been through, but they can still relate.”

P:4 “Yeah, you can relate to them. I don’t know; it’s just that vibe I got when I came in here. Everybody that works for programs like this always, not always have not been incarcerated.”

P5: “I just, you know, I mean, the people who work here, as individuals, they pretty good because they people that have actually been through what you go through.”

P6: Yes. That's one of the reasons why I came, and they do understand you. And they an example of how you can go to jail, come back and really fix your life and it's not like it's always light at the end of the tunnel, you gotta, you just gotta help yourself first.

P7: That' what I'm saying that just, watching the people that work here, just knowing that they that you could do it because most of them was locked up, so it's just always a reminder. Seeing them is a reminder.

P8: It's beautiful because everybody here that's been to prison and experiences in some shape or form. So, there's not a lot of hostility, you know what I mean, bitter, bickering. It's a genuine help. And they got the right people in the right places. As far as this establishment is concerned.

P9: "Um, and it's just the overall welcome family that they have that they have in here. It's a family setting of people who are just like me. Somebody who I can see as that somebody who's been through the tough times and got through it, and they're willing to help, the willingness is the willingness to help with from staff from all staff is big here."

P10: "It has every entity that's necessary for. Re-gaining yourself as a citizen in society productive you know productivity in your peers are like-minded, you know, and they have the same barriers. As well, so you know, my thoughts with that, is that it's great because it's an environment where you don't have to feel some kind of way if you understand what I'm saying."

Not Meeting Needs

The meaning of the theme not meeting needs is not providing participants with the resources they required to meet their individual reentry needs. The participants talked about how they thought the program was beneficial in many aspects. Still, they mentioned that some individual needs were not being met while participating in the Jails to Jobs program. Formerly incarcerated African American males must have their individual reentry needs met. By meeting and addressing those needs, it helps to reduce the likelihood of recidivating. Some of the participants mentioned finding employment on their own by conducting their own job searches because the Jails to Jobs program was not assisting in that area. It was also said that the program is a “scam,” or the program is promising employment if you enroll in the Wilderness program, but it never happens. Furthermore, it was stated that they are being sent on interviews with employers who are not interested in hiring them because they have been incarcerated. In addition to not being able to obtain and maintain employment, there were concerns regarding housing and mental health needs.

Participants were asked if there were any services or skills that they felt they needed that were not offered to them through the Jails to Jobs program.

P2: “They need to get more ties in with places that are actually going to hire people that got violent criminal backgrounds. Like I’ve been to places that they send me to on an interview and these people don’t even hire felons, it’s like they just jump on stuff and they don’t even elaborate. They need to actually get

contacts with people and be like hey, do you hire convicted felons because that's the type of people that we have."

P2: "So, I've told them that I wouldn't mind starting up school up in September for the social services. And they ain't even get me plugged into nothing, no peer counseling or anything like that. I've been told them this. They don't have services here."

P3: "All the services that I think that I need like I think that like I already got like my GED I have. I have a vocational; I already been doing the A.R.T, the aggression, all of that substance abuse. Cause, it's like you got to do it again. So, it's like I already did all of that, but it's like the only thing that I don't have that they can offer me is work at the given moment."

P4: "Right now, housing. They didn't offer it because I think the lady isn't here anymore. Someone new, I think. And I think um, psych too."

P4: "Like, I need somebody really, yeah, a trained individual. A person to vent to that's it."

P5: "They gave me helpful tools to use during interviews, during job searches. And, you know, that part is very insightful. So, I'm not gonna lie, they show you how to interview, they show you how to, you know, different things that they show you on as far as getting the job is concerned. They've been right on the money with that. But as far as the following through to actually get the job, that's not happening."

P5: “Yea, they are promising that if you complete their program that there’s going to be job placement and job assistance. But, in reality, you are given tools, but you’re not given the assistance. That’s a problem. You’re given tools to, you know, they’ll help you, they’ll assist you in doing a resume, they’ll assist you with going to you know, they do job fairs, but it’s just like-- maybe sometimes they dealing with too many people and the caseload is too heavy. And it just gets out of hand. Maybe that’s the issue.”

P5: “Well, they suppose I have connections with employers that are soft and warm towards convicted felons. And that’s what the whole gist to the program is that you know, we connect employers, with felons with ex-felons. And it gives them a better chance on you know, reentry, and transitioning, transitioning into back into, you know, being a citizen. By the end of the day. That’s not what’s happening.”

P5: “At one point, I believe that this organization was all about that. But just like I said, somewhere in the red tape and bureaucracy, it turned into a numbers game, and it’s starting to show. If it’s obvious to me, that’s a problem.”

P6: “I didn’t really get sent on an interview yet because I got a job so fast on my own, that after I completed the wilderness program. I already had the interview lined up, so I wouldn’t really say they helped me with a job, but they helped me get my OSHA like that’s the course they put me in now.”

P9: “So, I haven’t I haven’t obtained housing.”

P10: Um, not as yet. I just got home recently, but it's coming. You know, they like you might not even need to go to an interview. I'm just gonna pass your resume through.

Meeting Their Needs

The meaning of the theme meeting their needs is providing participants with assistance to meet their individual reentry needs and be considered an effective program. The participants discussed how the program was effective at provided them with assistance when it came to obtaining their documents and offering trainings where they could obtain certificates. Participants explained how, when they were incarcerated, they lost all of their ID's and personal documents that are needed to navigate the reentry process. All the participants mentioned that the reentry program provided them with assistance when it came to transportation because they offer them Metro cards as well as help with their resumes. Additionally, the participants shared that the program provided them with breakfast and lunch.

P1: "Well, they give you, uh, they give you metro cards, they offer counseling. They are really devoted in helping you find a job. They really, really go above and beyond to get you where you're going or where you need to be. Those people are really genuine."

P2: "Honestly, the only thing that I like to say they might have to help you out with your interview skills, and that's not even, that's really like the only thing."

P3: "Um, like whatever, whatever per se that I may have needed done like as a resume, they helped me fix my resume to a point where any job that's in my need

like they hired me. Like um, they provide metro cards so you can get to and from places. Like they help out, they help out in a major way.”

P4: “Breakfast and lunch if you ain’t got nowhere to eat. Free metro cards, and they care about they clients. Interviews and I also got my OSHA, Culinary. That’s all I wanted.”

P4: “Well, the only thing they helped me with was like mine benefits, my ID, and getting back into society. Basically, social security cards. Um, birth certificate. I didn’t have to go to the DMV, and welfare benefits helped me with that. Instead of putting me in a shelter, they helped me get into a three-quarter transition house.”

P5: “They offer internships, and they offer school programs and stuff like that to prepare you for jobs, but they offer all that type of stuff they good with. Like right now, if I want to do an internship, I could get hooked up like that.”

P5: “They are addressing individual needs because some people are not here for a job. Some people were here for maybe internship training or something like that so they can get the skills that they need to actually work. So, they are doing a good job with that. Because I believe that they help people, you know, they offered me a lot of internships, but I didn’t come for that.”

P6: “They give you transportation help me fix my resume. I already had a resume, but they help me fix it up. They helped me with OSHA as we speak.”

P7: “If you don’t like have common knowledge of certain shit, like how to get a job or I don’t know they add like a little responsibility to your life like structure. It’s good for the community.”

P7: “P7: It helped me get some IDs, they taught me, they taught me some patience in here.

P7: Like dealing with people, and they gave me some skills on if I go on a job interview, stuff like that they help, they assist with that. They hooked me up with some clothes that I needed.”

P8: “Um, when I didn’t have any money to get any food, they gave me a piece of paper where I could go to human resources, and I went down there, and they gave me some food stamps. And they said, they going to give me \$22.50 in cash, but another lady said that I’m eligible for SSI. So, she gave me an appointment to go down there to SSI Thursday.”

P8: Well, I was in the after, and I didn’t have anywhere to go before I came home from jail, and they allowed me to go to the shelter. And make some appointments. So, we’re looking at looking at an apartment. Not a roommate, an apartment. That’s how they helped me so far. And they helped me establish four pieces of my ID.”

P9: “They will help with my resume. They provide Metro cards to go to and from appointments or interviews.”

P10: “First, when I was coming out, first when I came out, you know, the main things that you need is your credentials, you know, your ID’s. They was very

effective with that, helping me to get the ID's. And you know, the birth certificates, things of that nature. Assist me with ideas, ideas with the housing. The staff here also prepares you for job training, readiness, you know, job readiness training. How to get past the interview, as well as you know, the attire for the interview. So, it's very effective for me, it was."

P11: "What do I think? It's helpful. With getting you a job and teaching you the format of how to how to get how to get the job and how to talk to when you're being talked to and explain yourself about the job."

P11: "Transportation. And they give you breakfast and lunch."

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore and understand how effective the reentry program is and gain a comprehensive understanding of the reentry experiences of formerly incarcerated African American males. In Chapter 4 I described in detail the setting and the demographics. I presented data obtained from the 11 face-to-face interviews that I conducted with formerly incarcerated African American males. I developed one research question which was used to guide this research study. The reentry experiences and the effectiveness of the program were described by the 11 formerly incarcerated African American males by utilizing in-depth semi-structured interviews. The interviews shed light on the effectiveness of the program based on the participant's reentry experiences.

In Chapter 4, I examined the method utilized to analyze and collect data from the eleven participants. I presented evidence of trustworthiness and the results of the

transcribed interviews. Participants described their views of the program, its effectiveness, and various aspects of their reentry experiences. The data analysis process resulted in five themes: (I) informative, (II) guidance, (III) insight, (IV) not meeting needs, (V) meeting needs. Chapter 5 discusses the interpretation of the findings, limitations of the study, recommendations for future studies, and social change implications.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to explore the effectiveness of reentry programming and the reentry experiences of formerly incarcerated, African American men who were detained in a city jail in the northeast United States and participated in the new Jails to Jobs initiative that provides reentry services for all while incarcerated. The review of the literature illustrated there was limited research conducted on the reentry experiences of African American, male ex-offenders who were detained in a jail. The literature available primarily focused on prison populations. Muhlhausen (2018), stated, “we don’t have a strong understanding of what works and what doesn’t, and there’s a pressing need for additional research to help us better understand the dynamic process of reentry” (pp. 13). I conducted this study to gain a comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of reentry programs and the reentry experiences of African American, male ex-offenders who have participated in the program.

Previous research has shown that many reentry programs are not effective because they do not address the participants’ individual needs or reduce recidivism. All 11 participants in this study reported that while they believed the program to be effective in providing them with missing documentation, metro cards, and other useful resources, the program fell short when it came to providing employment opportunities. Ten of the 11 participants were unemployed. The one participant that did indicate they had a job stated they secured employment on their own before participating in the program.

Participants reported that they conducted job searches on their own because they had been unsuccessful when depending on the program to assist them. All the participants expressed that they primarily participated in the program because they needed employment and were informed that if they participated in the program, there would be employment opportunities.

Interpretation of the Findings

The participants' responses to the interview questions were similar, and they shared common reentry experiences and views on the effectiveness of the reentry program. The findings from this study reveal that participants felt the program was effective when it addressed specific barriers to reentry, including addressing social service needs, providing training, and offering a sense of self-worth. However, a significant component of successful reentry is employment, and participants explained that they were not successful in securing sustainable employment. Existing research was consistent with these findings. The Charles Koch Institute (2020) stated the importance of becoming a productive member of society and that is determined by a few factors, including employment, housing, and education. "A successful reentry program is one which helps individuals overcome one or more of these barriers and collaborates with other community resources to supplement its own program with other services" (Charles Koch Institute, 2020, pp. 3).

Furthermore, previous research has shown that it is essential to address individual needs. Gill and Wilson (2017) stated that the effectiveness of reentry programs is hard to determine due to the way programs are structured, and this may be in part because

programs are not focusing on the individual needs of ex-offenders. Programs that focus on the unique needs of African American, male ex-offenders can have a positive effect on reentry and reducing recidivism. The African American, male ex-offenders in the current study explained the importance of gaining employment, so they can have money in their pockets, pay their bills, and stay out of jail. Participants explained that they were informed by program staff that if they participated in the program and completed the Wilderness program, they would be paired with a career coach and a case planner who would assist them with securing employment. Participants discussed how the career coach helped with interview preparation, provided clothing for interviews, and aided in resume building; however, they were disappointed when it came to finding a job, being sent on interviews, or going to interviews with employers that hired ex-offenders. It was evident that many participants, despite not being employed, felt the program was effective because they were able to enroll in training to obtain certificates, their social service needs were met, or they were provided with housing assistance. Others felt they were not getting everything that they needed because they were not provided with what they were promised, which was employment.

Theoretical Framework

The policy feedback theory addresses existing policies as inputs into the policymaking process and illustrates how current systems fundamentally reshape the political environment (Campbell, 2018). I used this theory in this study to help understand how policies shape the types of reentry programs that are offered to African American, male ex-offenders as well as the quality of those programs. The policy

feedback approach can be used to examine the policy process and how current policies affect the development of future policies. Because there was and still is a need for change regarding the types of reentry programs offered and the services provided, new programs and initiatives have emerged. Weible and Sabatier (2018) stated that when current policies affect the implementation of future policies, it can have a positive impact because feedback helps to address and mitigate the previous issues with the current policy. The research has also shown that policy must address the individual needs of African American, male ex-offenders to be successful.

Five of the 11 participants in this study expressed not having their individual needs met when it concerned securing and maintaining employment. Additionally, 2 of the 11 participants expressed not having their needs met when it came to receiving housing. While other requirements were being met, these two critical barriers to reentry were missing for those participants. Two of these 11 participants provided feedback on how the program could be more effective, stating that they believed the Jails to Jobs program needed to be structured differently to be effective. They revealed that the program would benefit from change when it comes to how the program assists in providing employment opportunities and addressing individual needs.

Limitations of the Study

I identified multiple limitations in this study. All the participants in this study met the criteria of being African American, male ex-offenders, aged 25–50 years old, who were detained in a jail in the north east United States and participated in the Jails to Jobs program. The first limitation was that all the participants were African American men. This was a limitation because the study was limited to only men who were part of one ethnic group. The second limitation was the Jails to Jobs program is a new reentry initiative that was implemented in 2018, and there has not been a sufficient amount of time available to review and make changes to the program. If another study is conducted in the future, there may be different findings as it pertains to the effectiveness of the program. The third limitation was the sample size. While the sample size was consistent with qualitative, phenomenological studies, it was still relatively small. Using a larger sample size could have provided a more in-depth view and understanding of the effectiveness of the reentry program.

Recommendations

The ability of formerly incarcerated individuals to access reentry programs that assist with employment, housing, education, mental health, and other services that address individual needs is crucial. However, it is exceedingly vital that African American, male ex-offenders returning home from jail are provided with reentry assistance that meets their individual needs, to ensure a successful reentry and reduce recidivism rates.

The reentry program should consider making adjustments to how it is structured and how it deals with large numbers of participants with many different needs to ensure that it effectively addresses participants' individual needs. Information and access to permanent housing and obtaining and maintaining employment are crucial factors for successful reentry and reducing recidivism rates. The reentry program should provide additional services and training that will meet the participants' needs concerning these specific factors. Participants expressed being offered the same types of training that they already completed while in jail and wanted the opportunity to obtain training certificates in industries other than culinary and construction.

Another recommendation would be to offer trained, licensed mental health professionals to assist participants with issues they may be experiencing. While participants expressed feeling a connection to the staff and being able to speak with them openly and discuss their concerns, it was also mentioned that a professional would be helpful.

Additionally, I would recommend that future research be conducted on the Jails to Jobs program with a larger population to gain further insight into the effectiveness of the program and how it addresses participants' needs. It would also be beneficial for future researchers to conduct this same study over a more extended period to allow for the collection of greater detail on the lived reentry experiences of the participants. Future research should also include the views and opinions of staff members who are providing these reentry services to clients, which could offer a better understanding of the program and what they believe would make the program more effective.

Implications for Social Change

There are social change implications because the findings of this study provide awareness into the lived reentry experiences of African American, male ex-offenders and the effectiveness of the reentry program. Taking into consideration the feedback from those who participated in the reentry program can shed light on future policy changes to the way reentry programs are implemented. Providing insight into what could make the program more effective could lead to the generation of policy changes to how services are offered to ex-offenders and perhaps how to restructure reentry programs to ensure their individual needs are being addressed, which could reduce recidivism rates. Recidivism rates are reduced, and employment rates are increased when ex-offenders secure and maintain long-term employment. Additionally, it is crucial to have other reentry needs met to ensure barriers are removed, and the ex-offenders become productive citizens in the communities where they reside.

A further implication for social change is keeping families together. When the barriers to reentry are properly addressed, ex-offenders find themselves able to provide for their families and remain on the right path, keeping them out of jail and able to care for their children and significant others. Lastly, communities are negatively impacted when the reintegration process is unsuccessful (Li, 2018). When the reentry process is effectively addressed, communities are improved because they become safer and crime rates decrease, which improves public safety and the public health of the communities where they live and raise families.

Conclusion

The process of leaving jail and returning to the community is an arduous task for many African American, male ex-offenders. Having access to reentry programs that are effective in addressing individual needs is crucial, especially when it involves securing and maintaining employment and access to permanent housing. Based on the findings of this study, African American, male ex-offenders who participated in the Jails to Jobs program expressed the program was effective at addressing several of their needs; however, when it concerns employment and housing there was a disconnect and participants felt that the program needed to assist them more with going on interviews, meeting with employers who are willing to hire formerly incarcerated individuals, and providing direct placement. The feedback from these participants should be taken into consideration when it comes to policy changes surrounding how reentry programs are structured and the types of services available for those returning home from jail. The reentry experiences of these participants offer insight into the needs of ex-offenders and where programs fall short once an ex-offender returns home.

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to explore the effectiveness of reentry programming and the reentry experiences of formerly incarcerated, African American men who participated in the Jails to Jobs program. Each of their experiences, views, and opinions offers policymakers the opportunity to explore alternatives to how programs are structured and how individuals' needs are being addressed and lead to an improvement in the effectiveness of the program and future programs.

Before this study, there was limited research on the reentry experiences of African American men who were previously incarcerated in a jail because a majority of the literature focused on prison populations. The findings of this study addressed the gap in the literature by providing an understanding of the effectiveness of reentry programming and the reentry process as well as indicating a lack of understanding of where organizations and criminal justice agencies fall short after a person is released from jail.

The emergent theme of not meeting needs should be examined in future research to gain a better understanding of what policy changes can be implemented to ensure that reentry programs are addressing participants' individual needs by providing services that take a holistic approach towards servicing the diverse needs of every individual.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Date: _____
 Location: _____
 Name of Interviewer: _____
 Name of Participant: _____
 Assigned participant number: _____

Script

Hi (use participant's name). Thank you for agreeing to participate in my study. As we discussed previously when you were invited to participate in my study, I am Tracee Harvey and I am attending Walden University as a doctoral student in the school of Social and Behavioral Studies. I am conducting research on the reentry experiences of formerly incarcerated African American males who have participated in the Jails to Jobs program. I want to first thank you for taking the time to review and sign the consent form. I will review the consent form before we begin the interview and answer any questions you may have. I want to inform you again that the interview is completely voluntary and at any time you have the right to withdraw and there will be no consequences. You may end the interview at any time or refuse to answer any question during the interview if you choose. Your identity and response will remain confidential because you will be assigned a participant number to ensure confidentiality. During the data collection and analysis process, all notes and recorded data from today's interview will be stored in a folder on my laptop which is password protected. All information will be stored and secured for five years and deleted at the end of the five years. Additionally, all data obtained, and the participants' information will be locked in a lock box for five years and destroyed after that.

Participation in this research study involves a 40 to 45-minute interview and a follow up email if you or I require clarification after the interview ends today. I will also be emailing you a copy of your transcript to review to ensure that I recorded and interpreted everything properly during the interview. I will email you the transcript and you can respond to the email verifying you received it and provide feedback regarding the transcript if necessary. Lastly, during this interview, I will be periodically taking notes and checking the recording devices to ensure they are functioning properly.

1. Can you explain how you became involved in the Jails to Jobs program? Was the program offered to you while in jail?
2. What are your thoughts/ views and or opinions of the Jails to Jobs program?

3. Please explain, how the Jails to Jobs program has assisted you during the reentry process? How has the program addressed your needs?
4. Can you describe how the Jails to Jobs program removed any of the barriers associated with reentry, such as education, employment, housing etc.?
 - A. If so how?
 - B. If not, why?
5. Can you explain the type of assistance/services you receive when attending the reentry program?
6. Can you tell me who provides you with assistance while participating in the Jails to Jobs program?
7. What are your thoughts/feelings on how well the program is structured?
8. Can you explain to me how the Jails to Jobs program has prepared you to successfully return to the community?
9. Can you explain how the Jails to Jobs program provides you with the tools to not recidivate (rearrested and return to jail)?
10. Can you tell me what services or skills you feel you need that you were not offered through the Jails to Jobs program?

Is there anything else you would like to share with me about your experiences? I would like to close with thanking you again for participating in this interview. If you should have any questions after this interview my contact information is on your copy of the signed consent form.

Appendix B: Approval Letter

Dear Ms. Harvey,

This email is to notify you that the Institutional Review Board (IRB) has approved your application for the study entitled, "Prisoner Reentry and Recidivism: Access to Reentry Programs and Reducing Recidivism for African American Male Ex-offenders."

Your approval # is 02-06-20-0674518. You will need to reference this number in your dissertation and in any future funding or publication submissions. Also attached to this e-mail is the IRB approved consent form. Please note, if this is already in an on-line format, you will need to update that consent document to include the IRB approval number and expiration date.

Your IRB approval expires on February 5, 2021. One month before this expiration date, you will be sent a Continuing Review Form, which must be submitted if you wish to collect data beyond the approval expiration date.

Your IRB approval is contingent upon your adherence to the exact procedures described in the final version of the IRB application document that has been submitted as of this date. This includes maintaining your current status with the university. Your IRB approval is only valid while you are an actively enrolled student at Walden University. If you need to take a leave of absence or are otherwise unable to remain actively enrolled, your IRB approval is suspended. Absolutely NO participant recruitment or data collection may occur while a student is not actively enrolled.

If you need to make any changes to your research staff or procedures, you must obtain IRB approval by submitting the IRB Request for Change in Procedures Form. You will receive confirmation with a status update of the request within 10 business days of submitting the change request form and are not permitted to implement changes prior to receiving approval. Please note that Walden University does not accept responsibility or liability for research activities conducted without the IRB's approval, and the University

will not accept or grant credit for student work that fails to comply with the policies and procedures related to ethical standards in research.

When you submitted your IRB application, you made a commitment to communicate both discrete adverse events and general problems to the IRB within 1 week of their occurrence/realization. Failure to do so may result in invalidation of data, loss of academic credit, and/or loss of legal protections otherwise available to the researcher.

Both the Adverse Event Reporting form and Request for Change in Procedures form can be obtained at the Documents & FAQs section of the Walden web site:
<http://academicguides.waldenu.edu/researchcenter/orec>

Researchers are expected to keep detailed records of their research activities (i.e., participant log sheets, completed consent forms, etc.) for the same period of time they retain the original data. If, in the future, you require copies of the originally submitted IRB materials, you may request them from Institutional Review Board.

Sincerely,

Libby Munson

Research Ethics Support Specialist

Office of Research Ethics and Compliance

Walden University

100 Washington Avenue South, Suite 900

Minneapolis, MN 55401

Email: irb@mail.waldenu.edu

Phone: (612) 312-1283

Fax: (626) 605-0472

Volunteers Needed for Research Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the effectiveness of reentry programming, and the reentry experiences of formerly incarcerated African American men who were detained in a city jail in the northeast United States and participated in the new Jails to Jobs initiative.

The research will benefit reentry policy and reentry programs by allowing the participants to share their lived experiences and the effectiveness of the program. It will provide awareness into the issue affecting many African American males and generate knowledge that will translate into outcomes for policy change.

Criteria:



African American male ex-offenders 25-50 years of age who were detained in a New York City Jail, who are or have participated in the Jails to Jobs Program.

Involvement:

40-45-minute recorded interview in a safe, neutral, and private location (library or office space) to answer interview questions regarding lived reentry experiences and perceptions of African American male ex-offenders participating in the Jail to Jobs program.

Contact Info:

Email: Tracee.Harvey@Waldenu.edu