

REENTRY AND RECIDIVISM

*A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF RECOMMENDATIONS TO SUPPORT
EX-OFFENDERS REENTERING SOCIETY*

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Abstract

Every year there are thousands of ex-offenders being released back into their communities. Often times, they are released without the proper knowledge or resources to help them become successful within their communities. Without the proper knowledge and resources, ex-offenders may end up back in prison. Reentry and recidivism programs help alleviate the issue of recidivism. There are many different reentry and recidivism programs in Washington, DC, but unfortunately there are a number of programs that are ineffective. Ineffective programs in Washington, DC contribute to the high recidivism rate. This research study will be guided by using a qualitative theory. The following research questions will be answered: (1) what are the biggest challenges ex-offenders are faced with upon release? What are some of the ways they cope with these challenges? (2) Are reentry and recidivism programs throughout Washington, DC using effective strategies to ensure that their participants will make successful transitions back into their communities? The data for this study will be collected by interviewing criminal justice professionals that hold leadership or managerial roles in reentry and recidivism programs in Washington, DC. The desired outcome of this study is to be able to have participants share the pros and cons of programs that they have conducted or participated in. This process will allow me to compare data that I have collected for each research participant.

Keywords: Reentry, Recidivism, General Strain Theory, Ex-offenders

The author acknowledges she completed this assignment in the spirit of the Trinity Washington University policy regarding academic honesty and plagiarism.

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Introduction

Reentry from prison is one of the largest problems within the criminal justice system. Recidivism rates for both juvenile and adult offenders have fluctuated throughout the years. Within the United States criminal justice system, there has been a lack of preparation for offenders to successfully return to society. There is no guarantee that ex-offenders will be successful once they enter back into society, but participation in reentry programs could help them become great citizens within their communities. The lack of effective programs that help prepare offenders for reentry have caused ex-offenders to re-offend and ultimately end up back into the criminal justice system. Due to the increasing recidivism rates throughout the United States, the corrections system must be reformed by using preventative programs such as reentry and recidivism programs (Hull, 2014).

At some point in time, most offenders must re-enter back into society. After serving lengthy jail and prison stints within correctional institutions, most offenders do not know how to function when returned into society. Ex-offenders may enter back into the criminal justice system shortly after they have been released, while some make successful transitions back into society. A study conducted by the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) showed that almost three-quarters of ex-offenders entered back into the criminal justice system and nearly half returned into correctional institutions after committing new offenses within five years of release (Cooper, Durose, & Snyder, 2014). There are different factors that contribute to recidivism. A study conducted by Corey Montoya (2009) found that there were several different factors that contributed to reoffending and recidivism. The factors that he included in his study were the lack of institutional support, poor lifestyle choices, returning to old social circles, and drugs and alcohol abuse.

The lack of resources available to ex-offenders heightens the risk of them returning to the criminal justice system and even returning to correctional institutions. In most cases, once an offender completes their sentence; they are sent out into society with nothing to their name. Most of them leave institutions without having a home to go to, families, employment or educational experience, and even identification cards. These adversities may ultimately lead an ex-offender back into a life of crime. Ex-offenders may commit theft crimes, drug solicitation, robberies, and substance abuse due to depression and anxiety. These crimes that lead them to the criminal justice system will lead them right back if they are not entirely prepared to enter back into society.

A study conducted by Wikoff, Linhorst and Morani (2012) examined returning offenders who lack basic necessities such as food, clothing, and transportation, and found they are more likely to partake in illegal activity. In this study, they also listed other factors that contribute to recidivism such as education, substance abuse, mental health, and social skills. When ex-offenders are

released from prison, they are sometimes given bus fair and the belongings that they had once they entered. This often puts ex-offenders into survival mode where they may have to turn to illegal activities to survive. Mental health, behavioral issues, and substance abuse issues are also triggered when ex-offenders feel vulnerable. It takes a collaborative effort between corrections, communities, and various organizations to help prevent ex-offenders from exhibiting old habits.

Many offenders and ex-offenders want the opportunity to start their lives over with a clean slate after being convicted and serving sentences. Some are passionate about living life as law abiding citizens in their communities. Although their desire is great, some are not afforded the opportunity to get the necessary help for them to live positive and successful lives upon release. There is a need for more recidivism and reentry programs for offenders returning to their communities. There is also need for more funding and programs available for transitioning offenders. Federal, state, and local governments need to make more strides in implementing changes so that ex-offenders could live their lives as law abiding citizens.

Statement of the Problem

Throughout the Washington Metropolitan area, the issue of recidivism persists. Even though the rates of recidivism have declined over the years, there are still many ex-offenders returning to prison after being released. The issue of recidivism is still prominent in the Washington Metropolitan area because there are not enough effective reentry and recidivism programs. There are not enough programs within the Washington Metropolitan area that provide appropriate services to meet the needs of their participants to help them make successful transitions. If there were more effective reentry and recidivism programs in this area, ex-offenders will receive the proper resources and services that they need in order to stay out of the criminal justice system.

Objective

The purpose of this qualitative study was to determine how recidivism and reentry programs could be improved to lower recidivism rates and to help offenders make successful transitions into society. After the completion of this study, a list of best practices will be distributed to reentry programs throughout the Washington, DC area.

Research Questions

This qualitative research investigated factors that contribute to effective and ineffective reentry programs for returning citizens and what factors contribute to the fluctuating recidivism rates.

Research question one

Are reentry and recidivism programs throughout the Washington Metropolitan area using successful strategies to ensure that their participants will make successful transitions back into their communities?

This question will seek to evaluate current program efforts of ensuring successful reintegration of all participants. This question gave me a sense of how both reentry staff and ex-offenders feel about the efforts of current programs when it comes to reentry and the resources available to ensure successful reentry outcomes.

Research question two

What are the biggest challenges ex-offenders are faced with upon release, and what are the ways they cope with these challenges?

Ex-offenders often face adversities when they are released from correctional institutions. There are different ways in which they deal with the challenges that they face. Some ex-offenders use the hardships that they face as motivation to get back on their feet or they often find comfort in the same activities that initially led them into correctional institutions. This question helped me understand the different ways in which ex-offenders deal with hardships and the different types of challenges they are faced with upon release.

Research Design

The advocacy and participatory worldview guided the research for recidivism and reentry. This worldview encourages one to feel the need to bring change. The advocacy and participatory worldview focuses on groups that have been deprived of certain powers and privileges that others have (Creswell, 2015, p. 9). The advocacy and participatory worldview focuses on the need to better the lives of individuals and groups within our society. This worldview best guides research on recidivism and reentry because there is a need to be met to ensure successful reentry and recidivism outcomes. During this research study, I focused on the causes and reasoning behind fruitful and unsuccessful reentry and recidivism outcomes. I examined criminal justice professionals as well as actual ex-offenders that have made transitions back into society.

Assumptions and Limitations

For this study, the advocacy and participatory worldview guided my research. I chose to use this worldview to guide my research because it will give the participant an opportunity to provide information on how reentry programs could be improved to reduce recidivism rates for ex-offenders

and help them make successful transitions into society. Because of the scope of this research study, there are limitations to the sample of the population that I have chosen. Due to the limited time during the semester, I was not able to apply the research to other reentry programs in other areas. This study is limited to only the Washington Metropolitan area. The results can be biased due to research participants giving feedback on reentry programs that are nearby.

Participants

For this qualitative research study, the participants were criminal justice professionals, program managers or leaders that run reentry programs within the Washington, DC area. I recruited 4-6 individuals for this study. Qualifications for participants were that they have knowledge of public safety, and recidivism and reentry. To recruit participants for this study, I recruited from different reentry programs throughout the area. The participants for this study were selected through phone calls and email correspondence. Once the programs were researched and selected, I called each program to inquire about their contact information. After I obtained contact information, I sent out an email requesting their participation in the study (See Appendix A). The desired outcome of this study was to be able to have participants share the pros and cons of programs that they have conducted or participated in. This process will allowed me to compare data that I have collected for each research participant.

Ethical Considerations

All participants were required to provide informed consent to participate in the study. Participants voluntarily gave me their permission. Their decision to join was not be influenced by me or any other individual involved in the research study. Potential participants were also required to have the mental capacity to comprehend all information given to them regarding the study to make an informed decision about participating in the research (NIH, 2008). All participants had the right to have enough time to decide whether they wanted to participate in the study. Participants were not pressured into deciding.

Since all participation in this research study was entirely voluntary, participants' had the right to stop all involvement in the study. If participants felt uncomfortable with questions that were asked, they could decline to answer questions or sharing information that they were uncomfortable with. If for any reason a participant felt uncomfortable with answering certain questions or even wanted to stop participation in the study, they were not be penalized or suffered a loss of benefits (Yale, 2009). At any point in time, the participant also had the right to contact members of the BGS IRB committee for questions or concerns.

The safety of all participants is a key element in a research study. Before the study, all participants should know that their right to safety will be ensured. All information given by participants shall remain secured. Participant's identity shall not be disclosed to anyone that has no association with the research study and shall remain unknown. The participant's identity shall be kept private to protect their confidentiality.

There are several potential minor risks associated with participating in a research study. There are social, legal, and economic risks related to research studies. Sensitive information asked by a researcher may cause great embarrassment for the participant's business and may even subject them to lose employment or criminal prosecution (UCI Office of Research, 2015).

Theory

Agnew's (1992) General Strain Theory guided this research to gain a better understanding of the factors that lead ex-offenders on the path of recidivism. General Strain Theory helped me understand why ex-offenders re-offend. General Strain Theory also helped me explore the ways in which reentry programs can become more effective. In result, by understanding the reasons behind ineffective reentry programs in Washington, DC, the research helped them improve their strategies in ensuring successful programs outcomes.

General Strain Theory

Agnew's *General Strain Theory* is the theoretical perspective that guided my research study. The *General Strain Theory* was developed by Agnew (1992) to explain how different characteristics of strain contribute to delinquency and crime. Agnew (1995) posits that strain leads to negative emotions which ultimately lead to several negative outcomes including criminal behavior. Strains in this theory include failure to achieve positively valued goals, the removal of positively valued stimuli, and lastly the presentation of negatively valued stimuli. Strains that are 1) seen as unjust, 2) high in magnitude, 3) associated with low social control, and 4) create incentive to engage in criminal coping that are likely to lead to violence and criminal behavior by individuals (Agnew, 2001).

General Strain Theory is mainly used for criminology studies to determine what strains lead people to commit crimes. People that experience different types of strain develop negative ways of thinking and become frustrated when they experience discrimination, rejection, and failure. When people experience different situations in life, they find ways to overcome them. People that experience strain use criminal behaviors as coping mechanisms to relieve stress and to suppress negative emotions. Not all responses to strain are unlawful. Most responses to strain are emotional

and cognitive but ex-offenders that unsuccessfully enter back into society normally display unlawful behavior when faced with adversity. Ex-offenders that experience strain cope by exhibiting criminal behavior because they do not have the necessary resources to thrive when they return to their communities.

When offenders are released from prison, they may not always have the proper resources to properly function within their communities. In most cases this causes them to re-offend due to the adversities that they may face. When faced with adversities, ex-offenders may turn back to a lifestyle of crime due to strains that they endure. Strains such as education, unemployment, homelessness, substance abuse, and mental illness are adversatives that offenders face when they reintegrate back into society. General Strain Theory was used during this study to determine how reentry programs can better provide resources and services to participants to keep them from re-offending and to lower the recidivism rate in the Washington Metropolitan area.

Reentry and Recidivism Programs

People believe that once ex-offenders have served their sentences and have been released from prison that they are free from troubles and can start their lives as law abiding citizens within their communities. People are unaware of the hardships and adversities that ex-offenders face when they are released from prison. Not every ex-offender makes successful transitions back into their communities. Studies have found that about two-thirds of released ex-offenders will be rearrested within one to three years of release (NIJ, 2014). It takes a collaborative effort to help ex-offenders stand clear of the cycle of recidivism. Effective reentry programs ensure the success of their participants by meeting the specific needs of each participant, utilizing evidence based practices, monitoring performance measures, and forming partnerships with other businesses and organizations to ensure that there are adequate resources and services to help build successful returning citizens.

Effective reentry and recidivism programs are conducive to the success of reintegrating ex-offenders. There is a need for more programs within the Washington Metropolitan area to be able to provide the proper resources and services to their participants. This is imperative because it helps with the fluctuating recidivism rates and also helps ex-offenders become successful and productive citizens within their communities. There are many adversities and hardships that transitioning offenders endure. Having more thriving programs within this area will make reintegration less difficult and will help ex-offenders gain the skills and confidence that will shape them into successful and law abiding citizens within their communities.

It is important to be aware of and *meet the specific needs of each participant* that enters reentry programs. Each participant no matter the age, race, or gender should have a tailored program track to meet their specific needs. When offenders are released from serving their sentences, they can face many types of adversities that may cause them to re-offend. Some of the adversities that they face are homelessness, unemployment, substance abuse, and mental and physical health issues. These issues should be tackled during incarceration, during the reentry process, and post release.

The problem in the Washington, DC area is that there are not *enough programs to meet the needs of ex-offenders*. In most cases, it is hard for transitioning offenders to find programs that fit their specific needs. It is often that ex-offenders return to their communities with no support. It is hard for ex-offenders to successfully function when they do not have the proper resources and services available to them. This is problematic because it causes high crime rates within communities. Rose, Clear, and Scully (1999) found that releasing many offenders into the communities where there are little to no resources causes a high crime rate. It is important for communities' leaders to pay attention to the needs of reintegrating offenders that are within their communities. It is hard to service offenders when there are no programs and resources in place once they are released. Programs that are successful pay attention to the needs of the demographic of the people that they need to service and comes up with strategies and plans to better serve the population in need. Each participant has different needs, and it is important that each person receives individualized resources and services that will help them become successful in their transition.

Effective reentry programs utilize evidence based practices to create successful outcomes of their programs. *Evidence based practices* help program participants become successful and to help reduce their chances of re-offending. Evidence based practices are the uses of current research and best available data to guide policies and practice decisions for outcomes of consumers (CJI, 2009, p. 3). Evidence based practices are emphases on approaches that are deemed to be effective through experimental research rather than professional experience only (CJI, 2009). It is important for reentry programs to follow evidence based practices in order to effectively make an impact on their participants. Often times, programs use strategies that are ineffective and refuse to change the way they develop and implement their programs. This results in ineffective and unsuccessful program results. Programs that do not use evidence based practices often do not want to change their ways of implementing new strategies and policies because they are afraid of trying something new. This is problematic because the issue of reentry and recidivism is always changing so there needs to be new practices in place to help eradicate the issue. It is important for programs to use evidence

based practices in order to have more successful program outcomes instead of continuing to use ineffective methods to eradicate the issue of recidivism.

Performance measures are a very important factor in effective reentry programs. Performance measurement is the continuous monitoring and reporting of programs accomplishments, particularly the progress of pre-established goals. (GAO, 1998, pg. 3). Performance measures address program activities that are conducted, products and services delivered by program, and the results of those deliverables. It is imperative for reentry programs to conduct performance measures regularly. It is important because it helps to determine what improvements can be made within the program to ensure successful outcomes. The process of performance measurement is important because it helps programs determine what strategies are useful and what strategies are ineffective. Without performance measures, programs cannot improve and deliver effective methods to help their participants thrive. Performance measures assess how well the program is working and also helps determine what is needed to help the program improve.

Partnerships are essential to the success of effective reentry programs. It takes more than just the effort of program leaders and staff. For reentry programs to thrive it takes the help of communities, governments, and other agencies and programs. The goal of all reentry programs is to help ex-offenders make successful transitions back into their communities and to become law abiding citizens. It takes a collaborative effort in order to achieve these goals. Partnerships are important for successful reentry programs because it allows more funding, resources, and strategies to be available to programs so that they can achieve program goals. States share a key strategy in reentry; they have learned to create partnerships with other organizations (Yoon & Nickel, 2008, pg. 1). Successful reentry programs develop partnerships with non-profits, churches, schools, and other community organizations. Building partnerships helps reentry programs become more effective because it helps them provide more resources and services for their participants so that they can become success and help lower the issue of fluctuating recidivism rates.

Theoretical Construct

This qualitative research study helped identify the factors that contribute to the success or failure of reentry and recidivism programs within the Washington, DC Metropolitan area. Reentry programs are vital to the successful reintegration of ex-offenders and will help lower their chances of recidivism. There are successful reentry and recidivism programs in this area that provide great resources and services to their participants, but there are also programs that are unable to do the same. It is important for programs to provide their participants with the proper resources and services so that

they can become successful citizens within their communities. Although there are great programs within this area, there are still not enough programs in this area that provide resources and services to those that are making the transition back into society. There are many different factors that contribute to programs being able to provide resources and services to their participants. These factors include funding, meeting participant's specific needs, skilled staff, support from communities and governments, and performance measures. These factors all contribute to the problem of programs not being able to provide the proper resources and services. These factors helped guide my research and helped to find a resolution to help programs thrive.

Effective reentry programs

Effective reentry programs are programs that are successful in reducing recidivism and improving the lives of participants by shaping the behavior of ex-offenders by providing treatment services and case plans that are tailored to meet their specific needs. Reentry programs are considered effective when they have successfully helped ex-offenders make their transition back into society (Cullen, Latessa, & Listwan, 2006).

Meeting participants' specific needs

Each participant in reentry programs has their own criminogenic needs. Criminogenic needs are characteristics or circumstances that contribute to an individual's risk of recidivating. Some examples of these needs include substance abuse, anti-social attitudes and beliefs, and high family conflict and intimate relationships. These examples all contribute to the risk of recidivism and require a tailored program track for each participant (CSG Justice Center, 2017).

Evidence based practices

In the field of corrections and reentry, evidence-based practices are specific intervention models and principles that are used to guide interventions that research has proven to lead desirable outcomes. Evidence-based reentry practices have been shown to be evident in producing positive results in reducing recidivism and rehabilitating ex-offenders (Glassheim, 2011, p. 4).

Performance measures

In reentry programs, performance measures involve identifying important objectives that are consistent with programs missions, measuring how you are accomplishing those objectives, and taking what you've learned and making necessary changes to improve program performance. Performance measures in reentry also hold program leadership and staff accountable for achieving program goals (Gnall & Wilson, 1999).

Partnerships

Reentry Partnerships includes the collaboration of police, courts, corrections, communities, social service agencies, shelters, health-care centers, and nonprofit organizations that share the common goal of improving public safety and providing effective reentry programs for returning citizens. Partnership members work collectively to provide services and resources to people that need reentry support (Byrne and Taxman, 2002).

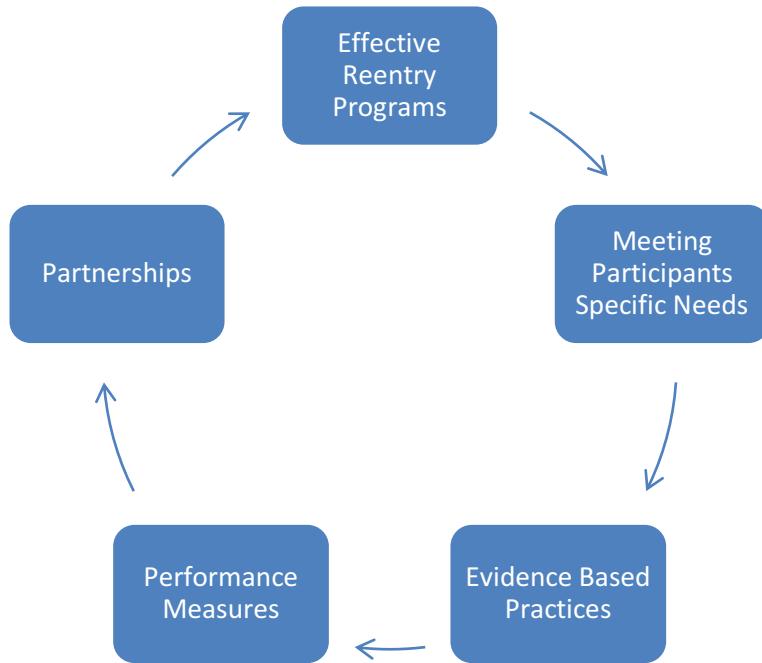


Figure 1. The theoretical model of effective reentry programs.

Analysis

This chapter discusses the data that was collected through interviews conducted to the six-research participants. This chapter gives a brief description of each participant in this study and their roles working in reentry programs in Washington, DC. The data analysis strategy is described and gives a description on how the researcher analyzed the data that was collected from the interviews.

Population

Participants in this research were self-selected by responding to the recruitment letter than was sent through email. Each person that was willing to participate in the research study responded to the email stating that they were interested in the study and provided me with a copy of the signed

consent document that I provided. Out of the nine recruitment emails that I sent, only six people responded and scheduled interviews.

All research participants were over the age of 18 as required and were both male and female. The research participants all held leadership or managerial roles in reentry and recidivism programs throughout the four quadrants of Washington, DC. Each participant had at least five years of experience working in the criminal justice profession, had dedicated time to improving public safety, reshaping the lives of individuals that have been in and out of correctional institutions. Two out of six participants had their own experiences as returning citizens, which lead them to pursue careers in the field of offender reentry. The participants past and present experiences working in offender reentry allowed them to be open and honest about what contributes to recidivism and what needs to be improved within available programs in Washington, DC.

Aretha, Executive Director of a women's reentry program in North West (NW) Washington, DC and has over 15 years of experience working in non-profit and criminal justice organizations.

Catherine, 5 years as Director of reentry program in North West (NW) Washington, DC that caters to both men and women, and is a returning citizen that has participated in reentry programs.

Maria, Reentry Program Coordinator in South West (SW) Washington, DC that caters to men, women, and juveniles and has 7 years of experience working in criminal justice organizations.

Eileen, Program Manager of a transitional facility in South East (SE) Washington, DC with 7 years of experience working in non-profit and correctional institutions.

Alisha, Reentry Program Coordinator in North East (NE) Washington, DC with 12 years of experience working in the field of reentry and various criminal justice organizations.

Craig, Executive Director of men's reentry program in South East (SE) Washington, DC with over 15 years of experience working in correctional institutions and is a returning citizen that has participated in reentry programs.

Data Analysis and Coding

After I conducted the six interviews, I then transcribed each interview onto a Microsoft word document. After transcribing each interview, I again listened carefully to each interview and took notes on key words and phrases that stuck out to me the most. The first level of coding that I used was *taxonomy* which is also referred to as initial coding. Saldana (2009) describes initial coding as picking out key words or phrases from transcripts and placing them into groups that form similarities or themes.

The second level of coding that I used is *axial coding*, which is described as the process of establishing relationships between themes that were recognized from the first level coding (Saldana,

2009). The purpose of axial coding is to provide themes that let the researcher know “if, when, how, and why” something happens (Charmaz, 2006, p. 62).

Finally, the third level of coding that I used was *triangulation*, which was used to compare my coding with the original data. Triangulation can be described as a primary strategy of establishing validity in evidence from sources that are examined to build a justification for common themes (Creswell, 2014).

Trustworthiness

In order for me to display trustworthiness for this research study I must show credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. I ensured credibility by making persistent observations of my research participants. I took time out to explore all details of the participants so that I could decide what is important and what is relevant in the study (Williams, 2011). This allowed me to obtain information from participants that were credible. This study displayed transferability because the concepts that were developed can be used by another researcher. The information that will be provided can be utilized by other researchers in other fields of study but the concepts will remain the same. Dependability was used in this study because I examined all aspects of the study carefully. I was sure to examine all data collected, research, and other findings that ensured that the results of the study were dependable. Last, confirmability was used because made sure to compare my findings to literature written by different authors and other professionals that will consider the confirmability of my research findings.

Taxonomy coding

For this first level coding, I transcribed each of the interviews onto a Microsoft word document and picked keywords and phrases that had developing themes and categories. The raw data allowed me to come up with 5 categories. The purpose of the initial coding is to have the researcher to remain open to all possible theoretical directions indicated by readings of the data (Charmaz, 2006, p. 46). The categories that resulted from this analysis included recidivism risk factors; program set-backs; effective program factors; successful program participants; and program leaders and staff. There was one outlier that existed, with one participant stating that her particular program had no problem with obtaining funding and resources to keep the program up and running.

Table 1. *Taxonomy coding from keywords to categories.*

Keywords and Phrases	Resulting Category
Participants aren't motivated to change, vices, resourcefulness utilized the wrong way, substance abuse, mental illness, survival mode, repeat cycles, chaotic lifestyle	Recidivism risk factors
Funding has been cut, poor program oversight, programs are repetitive, lack of support from government, unqualified staff, outdated equipment, poor performance measures, same programs plans for each participant	Program set-backs
Address specific needs to participants, oversight, grants, evidence based practices, address criminogenic needs of participants, create effective strategies, start participation at sentencing, plans in place after participants are released	Effective program factors
Motivated, dedicated to change, tired of jail and prison, committed, accepting responsibility for actions, eager, not making excuses, engaged in programs	Successful programs participants
Guidance, motivate participants, empathy for participants, hold participants accountable, accepting of all people, passion to change lives	Program leaders and staff

Axial coding

For this level of coding, I examined correlations between the themes and similarities that were developed from the first level of coding. According to Saldana (2009), the purpose of axial coding is to reassemble data that has been split during the initial stage of coding. After identifying themes from the initial stage of coding, I determined with the following themes: Resources, participant needs, collaborations, program outcomes, and new strategies. The five themes that emerged from the taxonomy coding helped me to determine what factors contribute to effective reentry programs. After conducting and transcribing each interview, each participant stated that they needed more resources, they needed to know how to meet each participant needs, they would like to partake in more collaborations with other programs, and they wanted to come up with new strategies to improve their programs. After categorizing the relationships between the first level coding themes and the second level coding themes, I then wrote a memo for each relationship. I have included memos of some of the emerging categories.

In the first round of the axial coding, program outcomes became the axis and was compared to resources, collaborations, new strategies, and participants needs. In the second round of axial coding, resources became the axis and were compared to program outcomes, collaborations, new

strategies, and to participant needs. In the third level of coding, collaborations became the axis and was compared to program outcomes, resources, participant needs, and new strategies. In the fourth level of coding participant needs became the axis and was compared to program outcomes, resources, collaborations, and new strategies. Lastly, during the fifth level of coding, new strategies became the axis and was compared to program outcomes, resources, collaborations, and new strategies.



Figure 2. An example of the axial coding for Program outcomes.

Examples of memos derived from the axial coding

Resources and participant needs

It is important for programs to have all the necessary resources that will help ex-offenders make successful transitions back into society. Funding along with other program resources was a common theme that every participant mentioned during interviews. It is difficult for reentry programs to provide services to their participants if there is no funding for resources that keep programs thriving.

...Funding, funding, funding, and more funding. That's what it all boils down to. The only way to help our participants is to have service dollars, operational dollars, and capital dollars. If we don't have those three pots of money then we can't do us. We

won't be able to provide our participants with the proper resources and services. You think the recidivism rates are high now, they're going to continue to rise if nobody puts money into returning services. If you don't put money into reentry services, the recidivism rates will continue to rise and returning citizens will forever be lost in the system -Catherine

Collaborations and program outcomes

During interviews, participants mentioned the importance of collaborations to achieve successful program outcomes. One single reentry program can't be successful without collaborations. Collaborations help reentry programs to successfully meet the needs of their participants. Collaborations with faith based organizations, communities, courts, health centers, churches, and nonprofit organizations help address the specific needs of ex-offenders. Collaborations are important because they help determine what has and what has not been effective in the past and helps to create effective strategies for reentry services moving forward. Collaborations within reentry programs in Washington, DC help remove barriers that keeps programs from thriving.

...Basically, being able to communicate with one another. The more that you're able to utilize each other as resources and bounce ideas off one another, the programs in DC will be strengthened. If one organization is lacking in one area and another organization is lacking in one area, they should be able to make a collaborative effort by coming up with strategies and to also share resources that will help both of their programs promote successful program outcomes -Eileen

Triangulation

Triangulation was used to validate the analysis in the initial and second levels of coding. Creswell (2014) described triangulation as the strategy that establishes the validity of the emerging themes that derived from the initial and second levels of coding. I used this strategy to determine what relationships derived from that initial coding. After analyzing the participant's responses, there was a common theme of resources for reentry programs. Participants explained that resources either contributed to the success of reentry programs or contributed to the failure of reentry programs.

Participants' needs were a very common theme throughout the interviews that were conducted. Program participants stated that meeting participants needs was an important component of reentry program outcomes. Research participants stated that it was important to understand the specific needs of each participant for them to achieve reentry success. Each reentry program participant needs a specialized program track that meets their specific needs. Participants

may require resources and services from other reentry programs throughout the area. This is where the relationship of collaborations emerged.

Research participants felt that collaborations were a major factor in achieving successful reentry program outcomes. Collaborating with other reentry programs and organizations is beneficial to the success of reentry program participants. Collaborations through various organizations within Washington, DC can improve the outcomes of recidivism. Research participants stated that collaborations can help participants receive various services like mental health support, employment services, substance abuse services, and housing.

New strategies for reentry programs was also commonly stated by the research participants. Participants felt as if the current reentry practices were not effective as they once were. Research participants felt as if new strategies for successful reentry programs should be implemented to reduce the recidivism rates within Washington, DC. Program strategies that were once effective, no longer yield successful outcomes.

Discussion

The purpose of this chapter was to address the two research questions that were presented at the introduction of this research study. The research questions were answered based on the findings from the raw data. During this chapter I discussed what I concluded of the study based on common themes and relationships that were formed in the analysis chapter. Lastly, I provided recommendations and implications for reentry programs in Washington, DC

Research Questions

Research question one

Are reentry and recidivism programs throughout the Washington, DC area using successful strategies to ensure that their participants will make successful transitions back into their communities?

Participants' stated that they believed that their programs were somewhat using successful strategies to ensure that program participants will make successful transitions back into their communities. The participants believed that they have been doing a good job at performing their current strategies but they also believed that there is still much more room for improvements.

I do think that our program has been effective but I also think that we are constantly looking for other effective strategies because this is a tough population. We can talk about reintegration in a theoretical sense, but the implantation and application of

that theory to successfully move a client from one place to another is a lot tougher than it looks. Aretha

Research question two

What are the biggest challenges ex-offenders are faced with upon release? What are some of the ways they cope with these challenges?

Participants' stated that their program participants face many challenges upon release. The biggest challenges that they are faced with is finding housing and employment as well as mental health and substance abuse issues. Many returning citizens have lost everything during their incarceration and it makes things harder after they have been released. When they return to their communities they no longer have a home or employment. Often, if they have committed serious offenses it makes it harder for them to find employment. If they are fortunate enough to find employment immediately after release, the jobs do not pay enough for them to take care of themselves.

The hardships that ex-offenders face upon release triggers their mental health and substance abuse issues. The hardships that they face causes them to turn back to the old habits that caused them to go to prison in the first place. "If there is not a plan in place for returning citizens immediately after they have been released, they are going to go back to what they know. The reality of failure after release triggers the mental issues which spirals to the substance abuse. We don't want returning citizens to go into survival mode. This is where they use their resourcefulness in the wrong ways, which contributes to another cycle of criminal activity" Catherine

Conclusions

Why is there a persistent issue of recidivism in Washington, DC? There is a persistent issue of recidivism in Washington, DC because reentry programs in this area aren't quite successful in achieving effective strategies for their programs that will ultimately yield successful outcomes for their participants. This research study has provided an explanation for the factors that contribute to recidivism and what reentry programs in Washington, DC can do to make ex-offenders have a successful transition back into their communities.

Recidivism in Washington, DC has been an issue for many years. Agnew's *General Strain Theory* guided my research and helped me understand the reasons behind recidivism and the struggles that ex-offenders face upon release from correctional institutions. The issue of recidivism in Washington, DC will not go away until effective strategies are utilized by reentry programs and returning citizens are connected with the programs immediately after release. It is imperative for

reentry programs in Washington, DC to continuously make changes and determine what really works when it comes to their programs. It is important for current reentry programs to eliminate strategies that have not been effective and to continue to discover what really works to achieve successful program outcomes.

The analysis chapter helped me to understand the commonalities that emerged from the participant interviews. The data revealed that there were several reasons why reentry programs in Washington, DC have not been successful and what actions need to be taken to achieve program success. After analyzing the first and second coding levels, I discovered the themes of program resources, participant needs, collaborations, and new strategies. The themes that emerged from the analysis were factors that contribute to successful reentry programs. Effective reentry programs do not completely stop recidivism, but they help keep ex-offenders on the right track of becoming successful citizens of their communities.

There are no guarantees that reentry programs will help all ex-offenders stay out of prison but it is necessary for returning citizens to participate in reentry programs once they have been released from prison. Reentry programs help ex-offenders make a smooth transition from prison life back into society. Effective reentry programs provide participants with resources that they need to successfully function when they return to their communities. Effective reentry programs provide their participants with resources and services for mental health and substance abuse issues, housing, employment, education, and family connections. These services and resources help alleviate some of the struggles that returning citizen's face during reintegration.

Although reentry programs are helpful in preventing ex-offenders from returning to prison, participants of reentry programs should be doing their part as well. Ex-offenders that participate in reentry programs should make a conscious effort to utilize services and resources that are provided to them. Reentry program staff cannot make them participate. They must take the initiative and decide that they want to fully commit to participating in reentry programs that will help with their transition back into society.

Recommendations

Reentry programs are very important to the success of returning citizens. Although some reentry programs in Washington, DC have great intentions, they are not effective in their strategies to help alleviate the issue of recidivism. Working in the field of reentry is not always easy as it seems. Unfortunately, reentry programs face challenges that sets them back and keeps them from helping returning citizens achieve successful transitions back into their communities. After conducting interviews and analyzing data, I found that most reentry programs in the Washington, DC area are

repetitive and utilize the same strategies. If reentry programs in Washington, DC all utilize the same ineffective strategies, they cannot achieve program success.

Reentry programs should start program participation for offenders at sentencing. Often reentry programs in DC start connecting with ex-offenders after they have already been released for months. By that point, it may be too late to connect with ex-offenders that are trying to adjust to life in their communities. It is important for reentry programs to develop connections with their participants for them to best establish what resources and services that their participants need upon release. I recommend this strategy because this will also help ex-offenders remain productive during incarceration. When ex-offenders have been productive during incarceration, it helps them to avoid making decisions that will land them back in prison. It is important for reentry programs to also have a tailored plan for each participant immediately after release. This helps prevent ex-offenders from returning to the same communities, relationships, and habits that led them into a life of crime. Without having a set plan in place for ex-offenders after release, you run the risk of recidivism because they do not have the proper resources or mindset to successfully thrive after being released.

I also recommend collaborations between reentry programs in Washington, DC. After analyzing the data from participant interviews, I found that there was not much communication and collaboration between reentry programs in Washington, DC. I also found that many of the reentry programs share the same issues that prevents their programs from thriving. Collaborations between reentry programs in Washington, DC will help determine what strategies have been effective in achieving successful programs outcomes and what has not been effective. Collaborations will help reentry programs bounce ideas off one another to help improve program strategies and to share resources with one another to help strengthen programs in the area.

As part of the collaborations, I recommend reentry programs in Washington, DC to start up a reentry task force. For programs to successfully achieve reentry program outcomes, everyone needs to be on one accord. I believe that reentry programs in Washington, DC could achieve more program success if they worked together to help alleviate recidivism in the Washington, DC area. A reentry task force comprising of various reentry programs in Washington, DC could collectively create and implement new strategies for reentry programs. Lastly, there should be more reentry symposiums held in Washington, DC. Program leaders, community leaders, and citizens throughout Washington, DC could come together and discuss the challenges that ex-offenders face and the issues that reentry programs experience as well.

Implications

Due to limitations of this study, I was only able to interview 6 program leaders. For future research studies on this topic, it would be beneficial to interview transitioning ex-offenders and current reentry program participants. This will allow the researcher to get their perspective on what is needed to help them make successful transitions. The researcher will be able to get authentic information from ex-offenders on their experiences on making transitions back into their communities and their experiences with participating in reentry programs in Washington, DC. If my recommendations were put into practice, communities will have less drug crimes, violent offenses, and homelessness. Instead, communities will have more citizens that contribute positively and will be able to make changes within their communities.

Summary

The purpose of this research study was to determine how recidivism and reentry programs could be improved to lower recidivism rates and to help offenders make successful transitions into society. A qualitative research design was used to guide my study. Two research questions directed the study. To analyze data from participant interviews, I used a three-level coding process. For the coding process I used, taxonomy or naming, axial coding, and triangulation to ensure the validity of the data. After analyzing the data, there were common themes that emerged from the research participants. The themes that emerged were program outcomes, resources, participant needs, collaborations, and new strategies. Each of these themes were considered factors that would make reentry programs in Washington, DC effective.

For reentry programs in Washington, DC to thrive, they need to work on using the themes that emerged from the participant interviews. Reentry programs in Washington, DC should be given more resources to keep their programs thriving and to provide new services and resources for their participant. Meeting participants' needs is also a factor that contributes to successful program. Reentry programs should know what each participant needs and should make a custom program track that fits their needs. Collaborations are also important for reentry programs in Washington, DC. Collaborations will allow programs to share ideas and come up with solutions on how they can eradicate recidivism and unsuccessful outcomes in the area. Collaborations will also allow them to share resources that will help strengthen each of their programs. Lastly, implementing new strategies will help reentry programs tremendously. Using old strategies will not help their programs strive. It is important to continuously develop new ways of operating programs to ensure successful program outcomes.

To improve program outcomes, I recommend reentry programs to start program participation for ex-offenders at sentencing. This will allow programs to build a relationship with their participants to provide the proper resources and services for them upon release and to also help participants remain productive during incarceration. I also recommend programs in Washington, DC to collaborate with one another. This will allow them to share ideas, resources, and will allow them an opportunity to implement new strategies for their programs. Programs can collaborate through creating reentry tasks forces and holding reentry and recidivism symposiums to get community leaders and citizens involved to help alleviate the high recidivism rates.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Recruitment email

Greetings (participant's name)

My name is Aiesha Jones, a graduate student at Trinity Washington University working under the supervision of Faculty Supervisor Dr. Kelley Wood. I am currently studying at Trinity to obtain my Masters of Science Degree in Administration, with a concentration in Federal Program Management. As a requirement of this program, I am required to conduct a research study based on a topic of my choice. For my research study, I have decided to study reentry and recidivism programs in Washington, DC. The purpose of this study is to identify what factors contribute to effective reentry and recidivism programs in this area that help ex-offenders make successful transitions back into society and to help them become law abiding citizens of their communities. The reason why I am contacting you is to request your participation in this study.

Participation in this study requires a 30 to 45-minute interview where you will be answering questions based on your experience working in your program or organization dealing with reentry and recidivism. To participate in this study, you must hold a leadership or managerial role within the program or organization as well as have great knowledge related to public safety and reentry and recidivism.

If you agree to participate in this study, I am responsible for ensuring the confidentiality and safety of your identification as well as the confidentiality of your program or organization. Attached you will find a document which clarifies your rights and safety as it pertains to participation in this research study. Should you agree to participate in this study, please email me your contact information along with a signed copy of the informed consent document that is attached. I greatly appreciate your time. I look forward to hearing back from you. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me.

Regards,

Aiesha D. Jones
MSA Student, Trinity Washington University
jonesai@students.trinitydc.edu
202-341-3899

Appendix B: Informed Consent

Reentry and Recidivism: A Qualitative Analysis of Recommendations to Support Ex-Offenders Reentering Society

I would like to invite you to participate in a research project, which will add to the knowledge of effective recidivism and reentry programs throughout the Washington, DC area. The findings or results of this study will help fulfill the requirements for a Master of Science in Administration in Federal Program Management at Trinity Washington University. I am under the supervision of my faculty advisor Dr. Kelley Wood.

Participation: I will ask you to (to participate in an interview/ to complete a survey/ take pre- and post-tests/ participate in a workshop or seminar, and etcetera).

Privacy: Your participation in this study and your responses is confidential. In the study, and the resulting paper, you will be known by a pseudonym if I refer to you. This document and any notes or recordings that might personally identify you as a participant in this study will be kept in a secure place that only I will have access to. Only the faculty advisor, and myself, might know who has participated in this study. Three years after the completion of this research study all personally identifying information will be destroyed.

Risk: The researcher foresees minimal risk to participants as follows,

- No risk of physical harm
- A potential for minor emotional discomfort, depending on the topic of the study and questions posed, or responses sought. If you experience discomfort, you may choose to skip questions or to withdraw from the study. If you experience discomfort beyond the time you participate in this study you may contact the faculty advisor (contact information is below).
- No social, economic, or legal implications are expected. It is recommended you do not share the specifics of your responses or your participation in this study with others. The researcher will maintain your confidentiality throughout the study.

Benefits: Assisting the researcher in completing their degree requirements and contributing to the general knowledge related to this research topic are the only expected benefits. There is no direct benefit and no compensation associated with this study.

Signature page

Reentry and Recidivism: A Qualitative Analysis of Recommendations to Support Ex-Offenders Reentering Society

I understand I may withdraw from this study at any time. If I have any questions or concerns regarding my participation in this research study I may contact the faculty advisor, Dr. Kelley Wood, or the BGS Institutional Review Board (IRB), which oversees the ethical practice of research involving persons conducted at the Trinity Washington University School of Business and Graduate Studies. By signing this document, I understand the following,

- I understand what it means to participate in this study.
- I understand my rights as a participant in this study, which the researcher has explained.
- My participation is confidential, including all information I share, and I will be known by a pseudonym if referred to in the study.
- I am indicating that I consent to participate in this study, that I am at least 18 years of age, and I am eligible to participate in this study.

I may retain a copy of this document for my own records.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Printed Name: _____

Phone Number, Email Address, or Postal Address: _____

Thank you for your participation,

Aiesha D. Jones

MSA in Federal Program Management

Email Address: @students.trinitydc.edu

Research Supervisor: Dr. Kelley Wood
(202) 884-9640, or WoodKe@trinitydc.edu

BGS Institutional Review Board
(202) 884-9640, or email BGS@TrinityDC.edu with **BGS IRB Questions** in the subject line.

Appendix C: Data Collection Instrument

Introduction Questions

1. How did you begin your career working in offender reentry?
2. Probe: What sparked your interest in this career field?
How would you describe the importance of offender-reentry programs?
3. Do you believe reentry programs are effective in supporting offenders through reentry?
4. Probe: Explain why ex-offenders should participate in reentry programs after release?

Open-ended Questions

5. How would you describe the mission of your program?
6. Probe: Explain how you achieve the mission of your program.
7. How is your program administered to participants?
8. Probe: Explain how your program/organization administers services to participants.
9. What services are offered to your participants?
10. Probe: How did you determine what services and resources should be offered to participants?
11. Is there a set of requirements for ex-offenders to participate in your program?
12. Probe: If so, what requirements allow ex-offenders to participant? And what restricts them from participating?
13. How are the participants in your program recruited?
14. Probe: How do you get participants to join your program?
15. Do you believe that your program is effective? Explain
16. What services or resources can be used to improve your program?

Semi-structured Questions

Offender related questions

17. Do you think that program participation during incarceration is beneficial to transitioning offenders?

18. Probe: Explain why or why not.
19. Based on your experience, what resources and services do ex-offenders need most after they are released?
20. Probe: Explain what resources and services have been effective in your program.
21. Why do you think ex-offenders return to prison?
22. Probe: What factors contribute to recidivism?
23. Do you find that participants in your program are motivated to succeed?
24. Probe: Explain why or why not.

Program related questions

25. How does your program go about meeting the specific needs of each participant?
26. How does your program monitor the progression of each participant?
27. Does your program follow evidence based practices?
28. Probe: If so, have they been effective?
29. How does your program monitor its performance measures?
30. Probe: Have your methods of monitoring performance measures been effective?
31. Does your program use partnerships to make your program more effective?
32. Probe: If so, what partnerships have been used and how do they benefit your participants?
33. In what ways do you think programs in Washington, DC could be improved collectively?