Recidivism: A Case Study of Reentry Resources and their Impact on Successful Reentry Post-Incarceration

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Abstract

This thesis details a case study regarding reentry resources available to returning citizens and their influence on recidivism (returning to prison) likelihood among people released from prison. It explores existing research on recidivism, describes the interviews conducted by the researcher, discusses the implications of this research, and suggests further avenues for research and exploration to better inform policies and future actions regarding reentry resources. Ultimately, this thesis concludes that the most useful resources for returning citizens include resources directed towards meeting basic needs like food, clothing, and transportation, housing resources, support/mentorship groups, family support, and employment organizations. Following further research to strengthen or contradict the results of this paper, future funding and resources should be allocated to these areas which have been listed as most useful for successful reentry.

Keywords: recidivism, reentry, resources, incarceration

1 INTRODUCTION

This thesis studies the conditions which make for a successful reentry process for individuals previously incarcerated. The study originated intending to understand the hardships women face upon reentering society following incarceration. However, based on preliminary research, the study's intention was expanded to understand the hardships all returning citizens face regardless of gender. This eliminated the assumption that recidivism could be a gendered issue and allowed the case study participants to not be restricted by gender. It explores the relationship between resources utilized by previously incarcerated individuals and their successful reentry following incarceration. This research is broken up into a literature review, methods, results, discussion, conclusion, and a future implications section followed by a reference and an appendix section. It culminates in a detailed analysis of reentry resources and recidivism. The goal of this research is to understand which resources have the greatest influence on limiting chances of recidivism for returning citizens, therefore creating the conditions necessary to direct policy guidelines towards decreasing mass incarceration by decreasing recidivism.

Recidivism can best be defined as "to be physically recommitted to the penal system after having been released from a previous period of incarceration"[1]. It "refers to a relapse of criminal behavior, which can include a range of outcomes, including rearrest, reconviction, and reimprisonment"[2]. It is important to understand the relationship between time served and recidivism, the legal and social impediments on successful reentry, the factors which place individuals most at risk of recidivism, the resources which are most beneficial to the reentry process and rehabilitation of inmates, and the impact of reducing recidivism. This will help future researchers and policymakers to know where to focus their attention when it comes to making communities safer, saving taxpayer money, and decreasing the number of people caught in the revolving door of the criminal justice system.

As of 2006, researchers estimated as many as 80% of all offenders relapse into crime[3]. However, research as of 2018 provides a more detailed depiction: "an estimated 68% of released prisoners were arrested within 3 years, 79% within 6 years, and 83% within 9 years"[4]. The United States has the highest percentage of incarcerated individuals in the world; if people who have already been arrested are returning to prison instead of reentering society rehabilitated, the number of people incarcerated will only grow as new people are being convicted of crimes on top of the people already in the system[5]. The crime rate will go up as prison

becomes a temporary relief for individuals until they commence criminogenic behavior. This increasing incarcerated population means taxpayers pay more and more each year to support the criminal justice system. Therefore, decreasing recidivism is of paramount importance, as it will have favorable implications: previously incarcerated individuals will successfully reenter society rather than recidivate, and prison populations will gradually decrease.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

In preparation for this research project, the literature on preexisting research was gathered utilizing key terms like "recidivism," "reentry," "incarceration," and "risk factors." This section discusses the relationship between time served and recidivism with an emphasis on the goals of prisons, legal and social barriers to reentry, factors impacting recidivism, common reentry resources, and the impact of reducing recidivism. The information gathered during the literature review influenced the primary focus of the interviews conducted by the researcher.

2.1 Time Served and Recidivism

Prisons are intended to deter criminals from recommitting and to deter potential criminals from ever committing a crime, to provide retribution to criminals' victims, to incapacitate inmates by preventing them from committing more crimes in society, and to rehabilitate inmates so they can reenter society successfully and avoid recidivating. In the process of meeting these goals, the conditions of prisons can become barriers to reentry and result in a return to a life of crime.

2.1.1 Prison Deterrence

One of the main functions of prisons is to deter both those incarcerated from recommitting and those at risk of incarceration from committing a crime in the first place. In other words, the negative aspects associated with incarceration must be strong enough to influence people's will to avoid incarceration by abstaining from criminal behavior. Some researchers advocate for the necessity of a cost-benefit deterrent effect. They argue that for people to be able to abstain from crime once they reenter society, the costs of incarceration must outweigh the benefits of committing a crime[6]. Potential costs include loss of liberty, overall time served, loss of social ties, loss of employment/income, and social stigma. Potential benefits of committing crimes include wealth, getting "high," and social prestige. However, this cost-benefit method is not necessarily a thorough assessment of recidivism risks. If social stigma is too great, if lack of employment is too pervasive, if the odds are stacked against rehabilitated individuals, then the benefits of

committing crimes become greater than homelessness, poverty, and sometimes death[6]. Therefore, while prison is a deterrent from committing a crime, the detering effect of incarceration is lost if substantial resources are not made available to people reentering society, thereby perpetuating the cycle of incarceration and release.

It is difficult to determine whether time served in prison affects recidivism rates due to the variability of crimes and sentences, the resources available to people when they get out of prison, how old individuals were when they began serving time, the familial and social support system available to them, and other such factors[6]. These factors combine to make each individual's reentry process unique. Despite the lengthy research done regarding incarceration, there are no significant results for or against incarceration as a whole. Some researchers have found that "prison exerts a criminogenic effect" while others suggest that "incarceration effects on recidivism are at best uncertain or minimal"[6].

2.1.2 Prison Retribution

Another function of prisons is to punish individuals for committing crimes. Therefore, incarceration in theory should outweigh the damage done to the victim by punishing the perpetrator. Part of the logic behind longer sentences has been that additional time in prison exacts greater retribution and creates appreciable incapacitation and deterrent effects. However, there is little evidence in support of this. More theorists argue that "the pain and strains of imprisonment, which could contribute to deterrent effects, may be more concentrated in or felt more acutely during the early stages than later stages of incarceration. At the same time, varying durations of incarceration may exert different effects on social bonds, social capital, and labeling processes, and in turn, recidivism"[6]. Longer prison sentences may have more detrimental effects on individuals' reentry possibilities and, as a result, be more costly to taxpayers as more people are being rearrested on top of new arrests made daily. Ultimately, the repetitive cycle of reincarceration both nullifies the attempted reformation of inmates and constitutes an exorbitant cost to taxpayers.

2.1.3 Prison Rehabilitation

Another function of prisons is to rehabilitate individuals so that they can reenter society as fully functioning citizens capable of contributing to the good of society. Involvement in prison programs like those offering formal education to inmates is correlated with lower recidivism rates and greater success re-entering society[3]. It is also possible that since involvement in prison programs is voluntary, involvement in such programs could be one way in which an inmate's dedication to change and to be rehabilitated manifests. Therefore, it is possible prison programs are not correlated with decreased re-

cidivism but that individual determination to change is correlated with decreased recidivism; involvement in prison programs is only a means by which determined individuals gather the tools necessary for success in the outside world. However, there is insufficient research currently regarding the potential of this relationship.

Not all inmates want to stop committing crimes; some become institutionalized in the sense that they cannot imagine functioning outside of prison. Inmates who do not want to change do not participate in programs at all, and they wait until their sentence ends in order to continue committing crimes in the outside world. Institutionalization occurs when inmates lose interest in the outside world and increasingly view prison as their home, only seeking to define themselves within it[3]. Institutionalized inmates may participate in prison programs and even be stellar inmates by prison standards, but they do not want their sentence to end. As a result of institutionalization, inmates do not want to leave prison because it is familiar and comfortable to them while the outside world is foreign and overwhelming. They are uncertain about their capacity to adjust to unfamiliar people, politics, technology, landmarks, social movements, and other developments after living within the shelter of incarceration. Other inmates want to reenter society and participate in the programs but still end up recidivating within a few years of release. This could be due to the phenomenon of "imagined desistance." Barrus defined "imagined desistance" as a type of desistance (ceasing criminal activity) that happens when incarcerated individuals envision their futures and emerging from the system changed without having the tools to change[7]. Therefore, they believe they have changed and will never return to prison because they have been rehabilitated, but they have not been rehabilitated. They can also plan to reenter society successfully but be faced with obstacles they are unprepared to overcome, which ultimately increases their risk of recidivating.

Researchers Gaum, Hoffman, and Venter note that experiences within prison act as moderating factors on the relationship between time served and recidivism by noting that the time spent incarcerated should be used for rehabilitative purposes instead of simply punishment for past crimes. They argue:

> "It is difficult to see how rehabilitation, relying as it does on inmates' abilities to make independent and insightful choices in their lives, and to resolve conflicts in a controlled assertive manner, can ever be successful unless they are encouraged to take responsibility for their work, acquiring skills, participating in hobbies within the prison walls, and learning to know and use their rights effectively inside the prison environment"[3].

To address the rehabilitative needs of inmates while incarcerated, prisons must consider that the needs of inmates are often long-term and orient care towards strengthening the coping skills necessary to help them be successful in society for years to come[8]. While research regarding time served and recidivism is lacking, many studies argue for increased resource availability to inmates while incarcerated so they can build the skills necessary to reenter society post-incarceration as a rehabilitated individual.

Prisons can function in many ways: as punishment for crime, as an opportunity for rehabilitation, or as a networking opportunity for criminals. If the loss is too great for individuals, they adopt the mindset of having "nothing to lose" and continue committing crime post-incarceration. Lengthy prison sentences can mean loss of familial ties, loss of social ties, loss of professional certifications, loss of wealth, a decline of physical and mental health, loss of social skills, and other aspects of a successful life in society. When individuals leave prison with significantly less than they began their sentence, they may feel hopeless and recidivate to the life and the crimes they knew beforehand because it is easier than starting over from scratch. Further, if the treatment or the sentence is unfair (racist, sexist, transphobic, wrongful conviction, etc.) the individual becomes frustrated with the system and comes to mistrust authority and, by extent, disregard the law upon release[6]. Too harsh or unfair punishment overpowers the chances of rehabilitation and leads to recidivism. Incarcerated individuals who do not want to be rehabilitated are also more likely to use prison as a networking opportunity with other criminals rather than utilize resources to help them successfully reenter society. This manifests in prison gang membership as well as criminals picking up new techniques for committing crimes and ultimately escalating the severity of the crimes they commit[9].

2.1.4 Prison Incapacitation

A final function of prisons is to incapacitate individuals, rendering them incapable of harming their victims further or threatening the wellbeing of society while they are incarcerated. In terms of recidivism and its relationship to prison and time served, some theorists suggest that "deterrent effects may be most likely in the initial months of incarceration; at the point, the 'pains of imprisonment' may be felt most acutely and criminogenic experiences that reduce social bonds or increase strain may be nominal"[6]. This would mean lengthy sentences have a curvilinear relationship with recidivism as they counter recidivism to a point before time spent in prison becomes too damaging on an inmate's capacity to be rehabilitated. Ultimately, there are mixed data regarding the impact of prison stays on recidivism as they often contain a balance of criminogenic experiences and rehabilitative experiences which varies by individual, time

served, the prison, social ties, and other such factors[6].

Many prisons are typified by corrupt officials, gang activity, mental health issues, abuse of power, fear, humiliation, and restricted access to food and education, which can traumatize inmates and make it even more difficult for them to reenter society[3]. Such toxic environments make it difficult to transition out of prison into a civilized society where many returning citizens crumble under the pressure of reentry and recidivate. Based on this underlying research, some researchers argue that before reentry programs can be implemented within prisons, further research into the everyday lives of inmates must be completed to understand what resources are most imperative to the success of inmates following their release[9].

2.2 Legal and Social Barriers to Reentry

Judicial and social barriers to successful reentry include tough on crime policy, social stigmas and stereotypes, and requirements of parole. Such obstacles combine to pressure returning citizens into recidivating rather than abandoning criminogenic behavior.

2.2.1 Tough on Crime Policy

The tough on crime movement in the US has caused incarcerated populations to drastically increase since the mid-20th century, making the US the country with the most people incarcerated in the world[8]. This fear of repeat offenders has had an inverse effect on the justice system and increased punitive measures taken against offenders to keep them incarcerated rather than to offer rehabilitative measures focused on deterring recidivism. In other words, "concern over the prevalence of crime and recidivism has in recent years led many people to support a more 'liberal' use of imprisonment and longer prison sentences"[1]. This is often seen in politics as politicians advocate for a "War on Crime," in the media as violent offenders are depicted as pathological criminals, and in memorial policies geared toward decreasing the occurrence of one specific crime based on an especially heinous event. Public fear of victimization "motivates 'get tough' rhetoric and policies that channel money away from prevention and rehabilitation programs," which further contributes to social disintegration and, ultimately, recidivism[10].

A phenomenon has occurred where there is a general decline in funding for educational and vocational programs due to lack of faith in rehabilitation, but these same programs that are losing funding are the programs which facilitate upward mobility through educational, vocational, and professional training[11;9]. Further, studies like those conducted by Nhan, Bowen, and Polzer have found that the removal of support services has led to increased recidivism rates as social disintegration grows un-restricted[10].

Commonly shared sentiments regarding the effectiveness of rehabilitation cause public authorities to not support it and view offenders as lost causes. Therefore, they do not waste legislation on reentry resources, making reentry even more difficult for formerly incarcerated individuals[3]. However, a study following prisoners released in 2005 found that "77% of prisoners were rearrested for a felony or serious misdemeanor, 55% were reconvicted of a new crime, and 28% were sent to prison for a new crime"[6]. Therefore, inmates released following longer sentences and with access to fewer reentry resources saw continued high recidivism rates regardless of increased sentencing and few reentry programs.

2.2.2 Social Stigmas and Stereotypes

Incarcerated individuals and individuals with criminal histories are often referred to as "dangerous classes" and stigmatized as untrustworthy by the public. This contributes to lower employment opportunities for people who employers identify as part of "dangerous classes." It can increase recidivism rates as individuals without jobs or similar support are more likely to resort to previous criminogenic behavior[6]. They choose to make money with familiar practices rather than be broke and homeless while abiding by the law.

Old bills like the "Three strikes and you're out" crime bill in California, which dramatically increased the punishment for persons convicted of a felony who had been convicted of one or more serious felonies in the past, demonstrated strong concern among the public about repeat offenders[1]. Although the bill is no longer active, the sentiments surrounding it remains influential on cultural attitudes towards returning citizens. This combines with general attitudes of fear and mistrust of formerly incarcerated individuals and "NIMBY-ism." This is a phenomenon where people claim to support rehabilitation and reentry for formerly incarcerated individuals but they also have the mindset of "Not In My Back Yard" (or NIMBY) regarding reentry programs. Reentry programs include cottage industries like halfway houses, food and clothing programs, and other organizations geared towards decreasing recidivism rates. Researchers Nhan, Bowen, and Polzer argue that the public's "negative attitudes towards formerly incarcerated individuals perpetuate misguided policies based on incapacitation and retribution that have increased the number of incarcerations while simultaneously dismantling reentry support services"[10]. Such punitive measures and inhospitable climates place increased strain on the reentry process for individuals released from prison.

2.2.3 Requirements of Parole

Smothering restrictions on returning citizens' occupational, housing, and lifestyle pursuits ultimately have

detrimental effects on individuals' ability to reenter society. Former sex-offenders are unable to find housing, former drug addicts can have difficulty affording Urine Analysis tests, and ultimately many formerly incarcerated individuals are unable to cope under the intense pressure of parole. Researchers Gaum, Hoffman, and Venter argue that "if ex-offenders are prevented from gaining lawful employment (e.g., by-laws restricting their employment) they may be prompted or forced to find other ways of supporting themselves which may violate the law"[3]. The immense pressure placed on parolees and formerly incarcerated individuals to stay out of prison while fulfilling the requirements associated with their release ultimately leads to increased "technical violations" like forgetting to call in about their whereabouts, submitting a clean Urine Analysis, having a stable job, etc.[10]. It is also difficult for them to overcome the social impediments to their reentry created by their time in prison, including the following: "adverse effects on ties to family and friends, mental and physical health, employment prospects, and the ability to access public housing"[6]. All of these are useful resources that could make them more successful in fulfilling technical requirements associated with their parole. This helps make them more successful in staying out of prison.

2.3 Factors Impacting Recidivism

Based on preexisting research, the key factors which seem to have the most influence on individuals' likelihood of committing or recommitting crime include race, prison gang membership, gender identity, conviction, family and social environments, mental health and substance abuse issues, and other variables.

2.3.1 Race

Research shows a consistent association of race, gender, age, conviction of property offenses, and arrest history with recidivism. Racial minorities are more likely to recidivate than their white counterparts, men are more likely to recidivate than women (operating on a binary system of measurement), youth are also more likely to recidivate than older previously incarcerated individuals, people convicted of property offenses are more likely to recidivate than those convicted of violent offenses, and those with more extensive arrest histories are more prone to recidivism than those with fewer arrests in their past[4;9;12].

Black males have the highest incarceration rate, being in "state or federal facilities 3.8 to 10.5 times more often than white men and 1.4 to 3.1 times more often than Hispanic men"[12]. This could be due to underlying social factors like racialized politics, racial profiling, racialized sentencing, and socioeconomic status, which combine to impede upward mobility for African American men.

2.3.2 Prison Gang Membership

Prison gang membership is also correlated with a 6% increase in recidivism[9]. People who have a lifetime commitment to crime are drawn to join prison gangs where they network with other inmates committed to a criminal lifestyle. Furthermore, law enforcement officials are more inclined to closely observe known members of prison gangs because they are more likely to participate in deviant activities in and out of prison[9].

2.3.3 Gender Identity

While statistics regarding recidivism rates among women are lower than those among men, there is relatively little research regarding women's experiences during and post-incarceration, as they are a small but growing part of the incarcerated population. As of 2013, women only made up approximately 12% of the incarcerated population, but the growth rate for the population of incarcerated women is significantly higher than for the population of incarcerated men[13]. Other research suggests the number of women in prison increased by 50% between 2000 and 2016, while the number of men in prison only increased 18% during the same period[5]. If recidivism rates are not decreased through improved reentry programs and resources available to women, the number of women behind bars will continue to increase. This will have detrimental effects not only for the women's quality of life but for their families who will lose a primary caregiver and a wage earner[5]. It also has detrimental effects for taxpayers who will see more of their money being used to incarcerate people, and for marginalized communities who will continue to lose members of their community since they represent a disproportionately large portion of the incarcerated population[5].

Most women incarcerated in the US have histories of alcohol and/or drug use as well as have been physically and sexually abused in their lives[8]. Instead of providing them with rehabilitative programs oriented towards helping them overcome trauma and drug use, the justice system fails to respond to trauma. Instead, these individuals are incarcerated in response to the crimes they committed, thus overlooking the factors which influenced such deviant behavior. Other shared themes among incarcerated females' paths to crime include growing up with at least one family member incarcerated, growing up in single-parent homes or without a guardian, high rates of substance abuse, risky sexual behaviors, experiences in violence and abuse, mental and medical health issues, and a significant number of stressful life events relative to their age at arrest[8]. Research following women reentering society found substance use, employment, and housing to be influential factors in successful or unsuccessful reintegration into society. Although women are at a greater risk of experiencing the risk factors which contribute to crim-

inal activity, researchers found that "state-sponsored support to address short-term needs such as housing reduced the odds of recidivism by 83%"[8]. Furthermore, enhanced vocational skills of incarcerated women also helped decrease recidivism as well.

Such research is important for the future of incarcerated women because more women are incarcerated today than there were twenty years ago, which means more women will reenter society in the next few years as their sentences are fulfilled[12]. Resource availability forms a key component of this process because women are more likely than men to experience relationship, housing, health, and other issues post-incarceration which often put them at higher risk of recidivating[13]. Understanding the impact of different reentry resources on recidivism will prove useful in deterring women from participating in the cycle of recidivism which many individuals are caught within. Studies show that the mass incarceration of women decreases the economic and social stability of low income, urban communities, particularly communities of color[5]. Decreased recidivism for women means more stability in families and society as a whole, which will benefit everyone, not just incarcerated, and previously incarcerated populations.

2.3.4 Conviction

The conviction individuals are charged with is also correlated with their likelihood of recidivating. A study conducted by Alper, Durose, and Markman found that in the nine years following their release from prison, people initially arrested for property offenses were most likely to recidivate than those arrested for drug, violent, or public order offenses[4]. In the study, the researchers clarified that "violent offenses include homicide, rape or sexual assault, robbery, assault, and other miscellaneous or unspecified violent offenses;" "property offenses include burglary, fraud or forgery, larceny, motor vehicle theft, and other miscellaneous or unspecified property offenses"[4]. Similarly, "drug offenses include possession, trafficking, and other miscellaneous or unspecified drug offenses"[4]. Lastly "public order offenses include violations of the peace or order of the community or threats to the public health or safety through unacceptable conduct, interference with a governmental authority, or the violation of civil rights or liberties"[4].

2.3.5 Family and Social Environment

Family and social environments have been consistently associated with recidivism among offenders, particularly among juvenile offenders since they do not have the capability of living independently as minors[12]. Offenders over the age of 21 also experience such impediments to reentry from their family and social spheres when those areas of their lives are involved in crime. This includes abusive relationships, substance addic-

tion, gang activity, and other environments where criminal behavior is normalized. As a result, many individuals are barred from seeking help reentering society from their peers and family, which puts them at a further lack of resources and tools compared with previously incarcerated individuals who do not have criminogenic familial and social ties.

2.3.6 Mental Health and Substance Abuse

Other factors which can influence an inmate's chance of recidivating include mental health, history of antisocial behavior (criminal activity), and substance use[12]. Often, reentry programs and prison programs are not concerned with addressing larger issues like psychological distress and psychopathic problems influencing these factors. Furthermore, prisons and jails are often used as an "easy fix" to deviant behavior committed by individuals, thereby creating a criminal record for individuals who need mental health and substance abuse resources rather than incarceration. The comorbidity of mental health issues and substance abuse may prevent previously incarcerated individuals from being able to seek reentry help from services and manage their resources[14]. In such situations, previously incarcerated individuals must receive assistance coping with their mental health before they can feel confident enough to pursue reentry resources upon release.

2.3.7 Other Variables

Influential variables that returning citizens are less capable of controlling include age, antisocial history, race, family criminality, family rearing, and gender, all of which have implications for individuals' chances of recidivating. Variables that are more subject to change regarding returning citizens' likelihood of recidivating include antisocial personality, criminogenic needs, personal distress, social achievement, and substance abuse[12]. Reentry programs can target the latter which can indirectly soften the impact of the less-easily controlled variables on previously incarcerated individuals and help them avoid recidivism. It is important to address such factors because multiple studies show that antisocial behaviors, poor employment, poor mental health, substance abuse, inadequate or inaccessible information about resources, and social environments are just a few of the factors which have been directly tied to chances of recidivism.

2.4 Reentry Resources

Some of the key reentry resources regarding individuals' reentry into society include social networks, substance abuse assistance, education, employment, the fulfillment of basic needs, and awareness and accessibility of resources[11]. The degree to which each of these needs is met influences an individual's likelihood of

recidivating. There are two types of organizations that can assist with reentry: those that help with immediate needs like emergency assistance organizations, transportation help, food vouchers, etc., and those that help with long-term upward mobility like education, employment, and substance abuse rehabilitation[11]. This section is broken up into resource awareness and accessibility, basic needs, social networks, substance abuse, education, and employment.

2.4.1 Resource Awareness and Accessibility

Other factors that influence recidivism are awareness and accessibility. In the US, services such as food assistance, temporary cash assistance, and Medicaid are underutilized due to many people's lack of awareness of their eligibility and lack of awareness of the resource's availability[14]. When it comes to accessing reentry services, many prisoners find the services confusing and intimidating, which makes them more likely to underutilize resources and ultimately recidivate[10]. For example, employment organizations cannot only offer a list of companies hiring. They need to provide a list of companies willing to hire formerly incarcerated individuals, provide references for the formerly incarcerated individuals, help with resume building, and help them prepare for interviews[11]. Similarly, many doctors and health specialists do not accept Medicaid, which leads to patients in need of care not being able to find affordable and accessible care.

Successful reentry requires reentry organizations to improve their coordination of services for formerly incarcerated individuals. However, the current climate of reentry organizations is anything but organized. The resources available to people reentering society is akin to a "hodge-podge assortment of official and unofficial agencies and organizations localized in different regions" which makes it difficult for people to not only be aware of all the resources available to them but to access the resources[10]. Furthermore, applications for such resources often have a 30-day processing period creating a 30-day window where released inmates lack access to food, housing, medical services, and other basic needs[14]. With this in mind, researchers advocate for facilitated access to social service programs as well as access to substance abuse treatment upon release. Such facilitation could be offered through prisons themselves, parole boards, parole officers, and halfway houses. By introducing available reentry resources early, returning citizens have less opportunity to fall back into the old habits which led them to criminal behavior in the first place.

2.4.2 Basic Needs

Aside from education and jobs, previously incarcerated individuals have reported a need for assistance with more basic needs like transportation, access to cloth-

ing and food, medical treatment, and housing[14]. In one study, "pre-release inmates...reported that receiving assistance in meeting basic needs was the most important resource in successful integration into the community"[14]. Lack of food, shelter, or medical treatment puts undue stress on individuals to stay alive when their main focus should be staying out of prison. Lack of clothing and transportation make it exponentially more difficult for formerly incarcerated individuals to not only find a job but to get to and from that job daily. Transportation can involve bus passes, light rail passes, bicycles, and ride shares, but such resources are often unavailable, inaccessible, or under accessed due to lack of knowledge about them. Group housing organizations like the Oxford House and other halfway houses and community homes offer not only stability but supportive environments in which returning citizens can thrive. Some organizations help people find clothing for job interviews and other needs as well as non-perishable food donations which alleviate stress and allow people to focus on overcoming the many other obstacles associated with reentering society. By meeting basic needs to survive outside prison, individuals have significantly less stress placed on their day-to-day lives while they work on reentering society successfully.

2.4.3 Social Networks

Social networks are significant factors regarding previously incarcerated individuals' successful reentry. Social networks involve familial ties, friends, coworkers, support groups, and other resources which can either ease the reentry process or push formerly incarcerated individuals towards recidivism[10]. Reentry is already a difficult process for many individuals because they are disadvantaged by poor education, poor job prospects, substance use histories, and criminal backgrounds, which limit housing options and can alienate families[11]. Reentry can become more difficult when their desires to not recidivate alienate them from their former friends, family, and associates[11]. When individuals' previous social connections prior to their conviction encourage deviant behavior, "establishment of new social connections that discourage criminality is key for long-term desistance"[7]. Research shows that prison programs which focus on the development of social bonds, social capital, and prosocial strategies for managing strain assist with reentry because many ex-convicts entering society lack the social capital to create favorable social ties[6;11].

2.4.4 Substance Abuse

Along with social networks, substance abuse is a key factor correlated with recidivism[10]. Substance abuse is a debilitating addiction for many people, which often goes untreated while incarcerated. As a result, many

people struggle to stay clean when they have new freedoms not afforded to them in prison. Recovery support groups like Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, and other support programs can offer advice, feedback, and inspiration to people struggling with addiction. Studies show that as many as "fifty percent of federal inmates and 16% of state prisoners were convicted drug offenders. In comparison, 53% of state prisoners and 7% of federal prisoners were serving time for violent offenses"[12]. Considering that such a significant number of people are incarcerated for drug use, an effective strategy for decreasing prison populations would be to offer drug treatment programs to previously incarcerated individuals while incarcerated as well as when they reenter society. Research shows a positive correlation between the number of drug and alcohol-related offenses and the total number of times individuals have been imprisoned[3]. If individuals can overcome addictive behavior around substances, they have a better chance of avoiding addictive behavior around catching new charges.

2.4.5 Education

Education plays an important role in the reentry process for previously incarcerated individuals because it helps increase their qualifications for jobs when they are released from prison. Previously incarcerated individuals that earned a GED while incarcerated were significantly less likely to return to prison within three years than those who did not earn a GED while incarcerated. This was particularly impactful among young offenders[15]. In one study regarding the effect of education on recidivism, researchers reported that post-release, "77% of those persons who had completed formal educational offerings [while incarcerated] were employed as reported by a supervising parole officer"[1]. Online and in-person classes and tutoring help equip returning citizens with more resources to help them achieve successful reentry.

2.4.6 Employment

Employment can be one of the most difficult resources for formerly incarcerated individuals to obtain upon release, making it extremely difficult for them to earn money to pay for necessities. Unemployment is one of the strongest predictors of an individual's likelihood of recidivating[16]. Therefore, "educational intervention for inmates results in positive post-release functioning, including higher employment rates, the type and wages of employment found, and a person's success on community supervision"[1]. Losses in education programs and organizations impact the employment of ex-prisoners which can then influence recidivism[11]. Without a steady income, people struggle to meet even the most basic needs for day to day survival. Employment agencies can help returning citizens not only find jobs,

but format resumes and create goals for themselves to pursue.

It is also important to note that recent legislation regarding the Ban the Box initiative has positive implications on future employment opportunities for returning citizens. In previous years, job applications included a box for individuals to "check" concerning if they had been previously incarcerated. The Ban the Box initiative removed this criminal history check box from job applications[16]. Although background checks continue to be a common component of interview and hiring processes, by allowing individuals to interview before the background check is conducted, they have the opportunity to discuss their past convictions openly and honestly. This demonstrates their complete rehabilitation post-incarceration and improves their chances of being hired by the company. Another policy directed towards assisting returning citizens in employment is the Work Opportunity Tax Credit, or WOTC, which allows private employers to apply for federal tax credits for hiring individuals from certain groups, like people released from prison in the last year[16]. However, the WOTC and Ban the Box policies do not do enough to assist with employment for returning citizens. Employers must be more incentivized to hire previously incarcerated individuals, making the Ban the Box initiative less necessary than the WOTC policy if utilized correctly.

2.5 Impact of Reducing Recidivism

Beyond keeping prison beds empty and lowering costs of incarceration, successful reentry is important because it means fewer people behind bars and more people contributing to society as a whole. In 2002, the Bureau of Justice Statistics reported 68% of those released from prison were rearrested for a felony or serious misdemeanor and 63% were recommitted to prison within three years of their release. This is an increase from 63 percent and 41 percent recorded in a study conducted in 1989[9]. More recently, a study that followed released inmates from 2005 to 2014 reported 82% of prisoners rearrested during the 9-year period following their release were arrested within the first three years[4]. Within the first three years out of prison, the first year is the most critical. Dooley, Seals, and Skarbek reported that two-thirds of rearrests occur within the first year following release and dub the first nine months out of prison as the "critical period," because after this period, the re-arrest rate declines for previously incarcerated individuals[9].

The United States has the highest incarceration rate, but it is unclear if the country has the highest recidivism rate as well, as most countries do not list recidivism rates[2]. State prison populations have increased by 700% since the 1970s, as well as average time served, which increased by nine months between 1990 and 2009[6;12].

As of 2014, 2.8% of adults were under some form of correctional supervision[12].

The employability rate of previously incarcerated individuals "represents employment with a stable employer, the payment of state and federal taxes, and the receipt of credits for quarters of employment through social security administration"[1]. Decreasing recidivism can improve the health and social well-being of the public by increasing public safety, helping to control institutional overcrowding, and ultimately reducing financial burdens on taxpayers[8;14]. As of 2011, associated costs of incarceration were more than $52 million[12]. This does not include indirect costs like social services, child welfare, or education. It demonstrates the potential for dissemination of unused funds if fewer people are incarcerated.

The relationship between recidivism and reentry organizations impacts the neighborhoods and their residents beyond just the previously incarcerated individuals. The effects of mass incarceration will be felt for years to come, which means the dependence of ex-prisoners on reentry organizations is unlikely to end and may even increase[11]. This makes it even more important to understand the relationship between recidivism and reentry programs so that taxpayers can save money, crime rates can go down, and more people can contribute to society.

Based on the supporting literature, it was determined that the best way to understand which resources are most useful to reentry was to conduct interviews with previously incarcerated individuals who have since successfully reentered society. The purpose of this research was to understand which reentry resources were deemed most useful by individuals who have experienced successful reentry. Their responses would then be utilized to inform future research and policy recommendations regarding reentry resources.

3 METHODS

The initial goal of this research was to learn more about the hardships that women face upon reentering society following incarceration and what resources are available to help them through the difficult changes which accompany reentry. This goal was chosen due to preliminary research that women are more likely than men to experience relationship, housing, health, and other issues post-incarceration, which often put them at higher risk of recidivating by committing new crimes to send them back to prison[13]. However, upon gathering research through literature and interviews, it became clear that this statement was not supported across studies, that recidivism is not a gendered issue, and that the pandemic must be addressed for both men and women reentering society to decrease prison populations as a whole. The goal of the research became to understand how resource availability influences people's likelihood of recidivating so that policy and procedure recommendations can be made regarding reentry programs and resources.

A series of seven detailed, qualitative interviews were undertaken, with an orientation around reentry processes including resources and obstacles which returned citizens experienced during their reentry process. The anonymous interviews were conducted with each individual either in person or over the phone depending on accessibility, and they lasted between thirty and ninety minutes in length. The participant demographic includes people who have personal experience reentering society post-incarceration and are no longer on parole, some of whom have experience providing reentry services to previously incarcerated individuals–a professionalization based on personal experiences which makes them some of the most valuable resources returning citizens could utilize.

The interviews were based on the template listed in the appendix. They were conducted in an open-ended manner and allowed each participant to guide the interview with their narrative. Participants were asked to discuss their experiences reentering society post-incarceration, specifically to elaborate on factors that assisted or impeded their process of reentry, such as what obstacles they faced, what resources they had available to them, and what resources they wished had been available to them.

Based on the conflicting research regarding the conditions leading to incarceration, the identities which influence experiences with incarceration, and the usefulness of resources in the reentry process, a case study regarding the reentry process of seven individuals who were previously incarcerated was conducted. Each of the individuals was a current resident of Colorado, had previously been incarcerated within the Criminal Justice System, and had been on parole but was no longer on parole. The researcher identified potential interview participants based on social networks they had built through previous work with a non-profit reentry organization in the Denver area. The seven interview participants were chosen based on a snowball and networking method. Through the non-profit, the researcher was able to connect with five people to interview and then network with those individuals for two more interview participants. The organization did give explicit consent to the researcher, allowing her to work with them and obtain contacts from them for her research.

The information gleaned from the interviews was then compared with that from analyzing pre-existing literature to theorize potential reentry programs and resources to provide returning citizens. This was the most useful method to conduct the research because it embodied a non-invasive way to address predominant personal issues faced by a marginalized and often

Table 1 Study Demographics

Participant	1 (JA)	2 (TJ)	3 (BT)	4 (JM)	5 (LM)	6 (JC)	7 (TS)
Age	41	48	49	60	36	51	47
Race	Hispanic	African American, Caucasian, Native American	White	White	Native American and Caucasian	White	African American
Gender	Man	Man	Woman	Man	Man	Man	Man
Employment Status	Full Time	Full Time	Full Time	Full Time	Full Time	Full Time	Full Time
Socio-economic Status	Working Class	Working Class	Middle Class	Middle Class	Working Class	Working Class	Working Class
Relationship	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Offense	Gang-related 2nd degree murder	Drug distribution, theft	Meth distrbution and manufacturing	Racketeering	2nd degree assault	Sexual offense	Gang-related homicide
Time Served	32 years	4 years	6 months	5 years	3 years	20 years	22 years

misunderstood population of people. The interviews were then coded for similar responses where reentry resources were concerned, specifically regarding which resources each individual found most useful to their reentry process, which resources were not provided but they wished had been provided, which resources were more difficult for them to utilize, and which resources were easier for them to utilize. The demographics of the participants in the study are summarized in Table 1.

The participants ranged in ages between 36 and 60 years old. Six of the seven participants were men and one was a woman. Three of the participants were white, one was African American, one was Hispanic, one was Native American and Caucasian, and one was African American, Caucasian, and Native American. All of the interview participants were employed full time. Two of the participants identified as middle class and five of the participants identified as working class. All but two of the participants reported being in a steady relationship with a significant other. Their offenses included gang related second degree murder, drug distribution and manufacturing, theft, racketeering, second degree assault, sexual offense, and gang related homicide. Four of the participants served five years or less and three participants served twenty years or more.

4 RESULTS

Based on the interviews, the following information was gleaned from the participants and categorized into seven classifications of resources and stressors. The results included implications for resources like program participation while incarcerated, obstacles faced upon

reentry, basic needs, employment, familial relations, desired resources, and emergent themes.

4.1 Program Participation While Incarcerated

Prisons provide various classes and activities in which inmates can participate, some of which can help prepare them to reenter society successfully. All of the seven interview participants in the case study reported utilizing various prison resources, including faith-based programs, resume-building classes, meeting with a substance abuse-recovery group, taking academic classes, or tutoring other inmates while incarcerated. Most participants reported that the classes on substance use and resume building were not useful to them as they did not cater to their substance abuse-recovery needs and their reentry needs. They remarked that they wished the programs had involved more mentorship and advice aspects. They also reminisced that the usefulness of the programs provided to them was determined by the mindset and determination of the inmate.

> "There are programs, but you have to want to get better. You have to want to rehabilitate yourself. I'm telling you, there's not a lot of guys in there that do." –JM

The participants who participated in academic programs did so because they were dedicated to making the most of their time while incarcerated and to reentering society with more tools to help them succeed. The interview participants who reported participating in faith-based programs reported they felt more at peace with their circumstances than before they began tak-

Table 2 Reentry Barriers

Participant	1 (JA)	2 (TJ)	3 (BT)	4 (JM)	5 (LM)	6 (JC)	7 (TS)
Unemployment	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Housing/Shelter	X	X			X		X
Mental Health		X			X		X
Substance Use Recovery		X	X		X	X	
Food/Clothing	X	X		X	X	X	X
Transportation	X	X			X	X	X

ing the class–remarking increased feelings of empathy, increased devotion to religious faith, increased sense of belonging to a favorable community, and increased hope for their future post-incarceration.

> "And some people are like 'when did you start doing reentry?' and I'm like 'when I was inside.' And that's where the work really starts. People come and see you, like church folks. And people come in and talk, motivational speakers, and then you have movie time, and all that stuff. I engulfed myself in everything that was outside...So I got all kinds of knowledge about where I wanted to go, and I developed some confidence about what I could do." –TJ

4.2 Obstacles Faced Upon Reentry

Different stressors individuals face during their reentry process can influence their likelihood of recidivating. Each of the interview participants experienced specific obstacles to their successful reentry, however, there were also trends in types of barriers to reentry each participant faced. These barriers were broken into five categories including unemployment, housing/shelter basic needs, mental health, substance use recovery, food/clothing basic needs, and transportation basic needs. All seven participants experienced unemployment for some period of time, four of the seven participants experienced difficulties finding housing, three of the seven participants experienced mental health issues, four of the seven participants utilized substance abuse or similar support programs, six of the seven participants experienced difficulties procuring food and clothing, and five of the seven participants experienced difficulties with transportation. Ultimately, each participant described the process of re-entering society as a difficult process due to both obstacles and massive changes in lifestyle following incarceration.

> "I had to uh learn how to drive. I had to find a job. I had to find a place to live, housing." –TJ

The type of offense a person served time for also influences their reentry process and specific reentry ob-

stacles they may face. Different social stigmas and legal precautions accompany each offense with which individuals are charged, and such offenses include sexual offenses, violent offenses, and drug offenses, to name a few.

> "One of the difficulties that a person with a sexual offense has is that that kind of ends the conversation for a lot of people. So if you're looking for a job or if you're looking for whatever, umm, as soon as they find that out, that's the end of the conversation. So it's very difficult in that circumstance." –JC

Common barriers to reentry discussed by the interview participants were most easily summarized in Table 2.

4.3 Basic Needs

For this research, basic needs include food, clothing, transportation, and housing. All of these resources are crucial to human survival since they enable individuals to partake in other resources beyond their basic needs. Six of the seven interview participants reported utilizing reentry services for basic needs like food and clothing. Five of the seven interview participants reported utilizing transportation services in their reentry process. Other resources addressing basic needs include food stamps, emergency support centers like food and clothing banks, bike rentals, and passes for public transportation.

4.3.1 Housing
Although housing is a seemingly obvious resource returning citizens need, it is still considered a basic need by many standards. Without shelter, individuals are homeless and therefore unable to fully participate in society since they lack an address that is utilized for mail, identification, and even job offers. Four of the seven interview participants reported utilizing housing resources during their reentry process. Those that had strong familial support throughout their reentry process were less likely to report housing as a significant obstacle or stressor since they had outside assistance.

The main obstacles associated with obtaining housing post-incarceration involve affordability and accessibility. Returning citizens must find housing within their price range, close to public transportation so they can get to and from work, and they often must fulfill other requirements associated with community homes. Such requirements include urine analyses, curfews, cleanliness, chores, and other contributions to the community.

> "A severe lack of affordable housing made reentry very difficult and it continues to make reentry difficult today." –TS

Housing was not only important for shelter, but it offered community support for individuals who did not have much support. It created a sense of community and a support system for those who rented rooms in halfway houses with people in similar situations as themselves.

> "I can't stress enough how much of a difference it made living in an Oxford House, or any sort of community environment. There's not a whole lot of opportunity for people to be around somebody that's been through it and done well if you're going to do it on your own." –LM

4.4 Employment

Employment is an important aspect of reentry since it provides an income for individuals to begin saving money, builds their resumes, and provides beneficial networking opportunities with other citizens. All of the participants listed employment as a priority upon reentering society. Employment is a condition of parole as well as a condition of housing in many halfway houses. Therefore, it is a major concern for returning citizens.

> "Everything that I had to do at the Oxford house was just reassuring that I could make everything happen for parole that they were asking. You know, maintain employment, maintain sobriety, hold yourself accountable to meetings that you have to be at, get your license before driving your car, you know." –LM

Five of the seven participants found employment through social networking with family and friends while the remaining interview participants found employment through employment agencies. Four of those who found employment through social networks have experienced more consistent employment and upward mobility in their careers. They are also currently working with reentry organizations as resources they either found useful or wished they had had access to in their own reentry process. The two remaining participants who found employment through employment

resources are employed in careers with less upward mobility. This could be related to their conviction record or their method of procuring employment without networking opportunities.

> "He was like 'you're coming to work for me because I need you to work with the youth offenders.' And I was like 'okay.' So then I worked there for almost a year because it was only the summer program. And then I moved into being a medical case manager...Umm, yup… And I started here as a vocational specialist and I worked my way up to manager and then director." –BT

4.5 Familial Resources

Family connections can be predictors of successful reentry because they can mean extra assistance and support for returning citizens. Six out of the seven interview participants listed their family as a prominent resource they utilized in their reentry process. Most utilized family for housing, money, clothing, food, transportation, and general morale-boosting. The participant who did not utilize their family as a resource noted significantly more difficulty meeting basic needs like food, clothing, transportation, and even housing.

> "Family is huge. So my family, they kicked in with some assistance that I really needed...It always helps to have good strong family support along with good strong community support." –TS

Many of the interview participants also remarked on some factors which inhibit the ability of returning citizens to receive help from family upon reentering society. Family members can be prevented from assisting their returning relatives if they are receiving government assistance as well as if they too have a history of criminal activity and are on parole or still committing crimes (for instance gang activity).

> "I couldn't live with any of my relatives that were out here because all of them were on government subsidized housing and if you are a recipient of government subsidized housing, you cannot have people who are on parole living with you." –TS

4.6 Desired Resources

As the interview participants have all successfully reentered society and have direct experience utilizing an array of reentry resources, their reflections regarding what resources they would have desired in their reentry process hold significant weight. Among the participants,

when asked about what types of resources they wish had been more readily available to them, they remarked that assistance with basic needs (food stamps, transportation assistance, clothing, etc.), information about what resources were available to them, mentorship programs, and mental health services would have been most helpful to them. Four of the seven participants reflected on difficulties having enough food, having appropriate clothing for work, and traveling between their place of residence and their place of employment as well as to and from urine analysis tests. Further, four of the seven participants remarked that they would have liked to know more about what resources they had access to at the time. They were sure to note that there are more resources available to previously incarcerated individuals today than there were a few years ago when they began their reentry process. They mentioned the need for an up-to-date database with information regarding the types of resources available to returning citizens.

> "I guess [I would want] just more information. Because there is a lot of places out there, but if they could just make it more systematic. As far as the places to go for trying to find a job as a felon, trying to buy an apartment as a felon. Or what kind of credit is available to you. Or how to set up a bank account and stuff like that. You know, stuff that helps you actually function... You know, just having people explain that a little better." –JA

Four of the seven interview participants remarked on the lack of mentorship resources available to returning citizens and discussed potential assistance a mentor could give with navigating resources.

> "I think reentry programs are important. I think it should be thought through what reentry programs people should be going to, and what's a good fit. And back then, they didn't have peer mentors, or peer navigators or those things. And I think now we do have those things, and it's more helpful. I didn't have much. No. Umm, my probation officer gave me some directives, but it was more 'Get a job. Follow the rules. Do your UAs,' and kind of that stuff." –BT

One out of the seven participants remarked that they would have liked to have more access to mental health services upon reentry. They remarked that the reentry process is a very difficult time for many previously incarcerated individuals, particularly those who have little resources to assist them.

> "I just wish there was more mental health resources when I came home. Because there was

a lot of things that I was dealing with concerning PTSD and some trauma from prison. And if I could have gotten over some of those things that I was going through, I probably wouldn't have done some of the self-medication that I did with alcohol or gone through some of the depression that I was going through when I was released." –TS

4.7 Emergent Themes

A common theme that emerged from the research unexpectedly was advice regarding embracing change and the value of a positive mindset. In terms of the reentry process, the interview participants discussed the mentality which helped them reenter society successfully. They talked about stressors like parole obligations, lost social connections, taxes, expenses like rent, food, clothing, transportation, and other basic needs which make people uncomfortable in society.

> "When you're faced with all those responsibilities and everything that you have to do in society in order to be efficient and productive, it's easy to get discouraged or give up. And they'll use crime again as a vehicle to go back to prison where they're taken care of. Where they don't have responsibilities." –LM

The interview participants also talked about mindset changes in terms of addressing ways of thinking which got them in trouble with the law in the past. They talked about the value of changing their attitude and mindset to lead a more sustainable, productive, and successful life outside of prison.

> "You just kind of have to accept in a lot of ways that it's a new life. Nothing's the same. You can't go back to your old life because that's not what you want to do anyway." –JA

> "I knew that there was a huge possibility that if I didn't change the way I thought about my relationship to society, my relationship to authority, my relationship to myself, then I had a really big chance of doing what I saw most of the people I saw in there doing and coming back for their second or third term in prison." –LM

The interview participants also shared insights about recidivism and the mindsets they utilized to avoid such patterns. They discussed the value of recognizing malignant behavior patterns as abnormal and unnecessary as well as their potential to have severe consequences on their future.

"Men who get into prison, come out. Get into prison, come out. Get into prison, come out. It becomes a normal part of life. It's just something that happens. And they just sort of see themselves as either a victim of that or that it's unavoidable or inevitable, or whatever. And so, I mean, it's like when somebody gets a cold and people just say well people just get colds from time to time. Well these guys just go to prison from time to time... You just can't think that way." –JC

5 DISCUSSION

5.1 Professionalization

Based on the responses to the interviews regarding resources utilized and obstacles faced, a theme has emerged regarding the most useful reentry resources. The majority of the interview participants have pursued careers in reentry resources for people returning from incarceration. Therefore, their responses when asked about the most useful resources for reentering society were thoughtful and well-informed. These individuals "do not 'put it all behind them' in exchange for conventional lifestyles, values, beliefs, and identities. Rather, they use vestiges of their deviant biography as an explicit occupational strategy"[17]. This professionalization of their past has made them invaluable resources to individuals returning from incarceration as well as to researchers looking to understand more about the reentry process. They each faced unique reentry obstacles and became passionate about utilizing their own experience to help steer other people on the right path to successful reentry. By becoming the mentors and providers of resources that many of them wished they had during their own reentry process, they have helped to improve the chances of individuals reentering society successfully. They drew upon not only their personal experience but the experiences of the people they have helped in their jobs. They discussed significant stressors they faced like meeting their own basic needs including food, clothing, transportation, and housing as well as the value of support groups or mentorships, family support, and employment.

5.2 Basic Needs

As noted by Costopoulos, Plewinski, Monaghan, and Edkins, assistance with basic needs is one of the most influential factors in successful reentry[14]. Unreliable or unaccounted for transportation, food, shelter, clothing, and medical treatment create additional stressors for returning citizens who also must find a job, fulfill parole requirements, and ultimately reintegrate themselves into society. Returning citizens need access to organi-

zations which offer assistance with transportation–like bike donations and public transportation, which offer food donations–like food stamps and nonperishable food donations, and which offer access to clothing donations. They also need access to halfway houses and medical treatment–each of which are difficult to locate and apply for following incarceration and depending on their crime.

5.3 Employment

As English noted, unemployment is one of the strongest predictors of recidivism[16]. Since all of the interview participants identified unemployment as an obstacle they faced, it is not only a significant issue for its impact on prison populations, but its widespread influence on previously incarcerated individuals. Therefore, employment agencies need to offer more information to returning citizens to help them find, qualify for, interview for, and keep jobs.

5.4 Support

Mentors, familial support, and support groups can form positive social networks encouraged by Nhan, Bowen, and Polzer to ease the reentry process for returning citizens[10]. It was also recommended by Barrus for individuals to establish positive social networks following incarceration to help deter them from recidivating and encourage them to avoid deviant activities[7]. Such support groups can also have positive influences on returning citizens' mental health and by extension their reentry because they offer them advice, help, and even people with whom to talk. This is supported by Costopoulos, Plewinski, Monaghan, and Edkins, who argued that mental health and substance abuse can combine to create even greater barriers to successful reentry by preventing individuals from seeking reentry help[14]. Therefore, it is important to offer resources like support groups and positive social networks so returning citizens can overcome mental health issues and substance use, allowing them to successfully reenter society. Receiving assistance with substance use recovery was also connected with successful reentry by Gaum, Hoffman, and Venter[3], who identified a correlation between drug and alcohol-related offenses and the total number of times individuals had been sentenced. Therefore, substance abuse recovery assistance like support groups could decrease individuals' likelihood of recidivating for drug-related offenses which would decrease the number of people incarcerated.

"When I stopped using, that's when I leaned on my family... Umm, where a lot of people don't have family with resources that can do that. So, if it was just me, and I was out there

alone, I absolutely would have needed housing assistance, umm employment assistance, transportation assistance. Umm, and just general, like peer support." –BT

The interview participants often discussed the impact such stressors can have on individuals' successful reentry prospects and the value of mentors and support groups as well. Role models, the opportunity to learn from others' experiences, and empowering social spheres help equip returning citizens with the necessary mental and emotional tools to be resilient in the face of adversity and impediments to their reentry. They were forthcoming when comparing personal experiences to those they heard about from returning citizens whom they had helped.

"It's easy for people to say, 'this is too much, I don't want to do this', and they want to go back. I think that plays a significant factor in people [recidivating], and it maybe has to do with the fact that there's not a whole lot of mentors out there saying 'you got this.'" –LM

They also discussed the value of support groups and similar networking with individuals who have successfully reentered society. They placed great value on the inspirational value individuals can have to people who would otherwise feel alone and weak when faced with a task as daunting as reentering society successfully.

"If you can see someone succeed from where you had the worst time of your life, and you can see someone succeed from that vantage point, then maybe you can as well." –TS

6 CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS

It is important to recognize that no resource was clearly identified as the most useful resource between the seven interview participants. This implies that returning citizens are in unique situations which require different combinations of resources for them to be successful. Therefore, funding and support should be allocated to the resources which are most commonly identified as useful resources, even though they may not be every individual's champion resource. Based on this research, the most useful resources for reentry include resources directed towards meeting basic needs like food, clothing, transportation, and housing resources, support/mentorship groups, family support, and employment organizations. Considering that this is a broad spectrum of relatively common reentry resources, the greater overarching problem may be a lack of accessibility and the knowledge that such resources exist.

Therefore, policies and funding should be directed towards supporting such organizations so they can better assist returning citizens and alleviate high recidivism rates which would contribute to society as a whole.

6.1 Recommended Next Steps/Insights and Implications

6.1.1 Policy Implications

Based on the research, future policy recommendations should be directed at providing increased funding and accessibility for reentry resources. The specific reentry resources which should be targeted by such policies include meeting basic needs like food, clothing, transportation, and housing resources, support/mentorship groups, family support, and employment centers.

Policies directed at funding basic needs would include long-term commitments made by returning citizens to the organizations in return for their services. This is to ensure that returning individuals take as much assistance from reentry organizations as they can without jumping from organization to organization. By committing to organizations that provide basic needs, the organizations can monitor returning citizens more closely to ensure their successful reentry. For example, housing should be offered in conjunction with access to food stamps, transportation, and clothing for those who express a need for them.

Policies directed at support and mentorship programs would include funding for support groups structured similarly to Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous, which provide not only a support network but an accountability mentor. This would also require the involvement of parole officers who would need to help coordinate meetings and hold parolees accountable for attending those meetings. Similar programs already exist but are not enforced widely, therefore, widespread enforcement of such mentorship and support programs will help more people successfully reenter society.

Although it would be difficult for funding to be provided for familial resources, exceptions could be made for families who pose no other red flags for housing parolees besides being on welfare, food stamps, or Medicaid.

Policies directed at supporting employment centers would involve funding for up-to-date resource management, initial meetings mandated and scheduled by parole officers and more incentives for employers to hire previously incarcerated individuals. By funding employment centers, they can stay up to date on employment opportunities for returning citizens as well as provide quality assistance to them in their job search. By mandating a meeting with an employment organization, more returning citizens can start their reentry process by at least learning about employment oppor-

tunities, if not finding a job right away. Lastly, while there are already tax incentives for employers to hire people with criminal records, the incentives are not enough. Increasing the incentives directed at employing previously incarcerated individuals combined with the previously implemented Ban the Box political movement can create more jobs and decrease stigma against people with criminal records.

Policy recommendations from this research clearly show the varying influence of individual factors on different people and that re-entry organizations should recognize this. However, while housing and employment are important for some returning citizens, family counseling, drug treatment, life skills training, and other resources may be more important initially. This helps lend insight into future research so the reentry process can be better understood and therefore better supported to decrease recidivism.

6.1.2 Future Research

To ensure thorough data collection and accurate policy recommendations, further research must be done. This study focused on reentry resources using a case study and an analysis of literature. Considering the small population of the case study, more research must be done with a larger, more diverse sample size to ensure accurate and thorough data collection. This would solidify the conclusion regarding the relationship between reentry resources and recidivism.

To build off of this study, further research must be done on the influence race has on recidivism, the influence gang-related activity has on recidivism, and the influence trauma has on recidivism. It is also important to widen the span of research to include more successfully returned citizens to ensure more accurate and representative data.

Furthermore, if this research had been given more time, it could have been useful to create comparison groups between successfully returned citizens and those who recidivated and to interview more people. Interviewing more people would increase the diversity of the sample group which would make the data more inclusive of people from different backgrounds and with divergent identities. Comparing successfully and unsuccessfully returned citizens would provide more insight on not only what made people successful but what made them unsuccessful, which would allow for more causal analysis instead of correlation analysis of reentry resources and obstacles.

It is also important to note that the professionalization of some of the interview participants could have been a contributing factor to their successful reentry. Therefore, further research on the benefits of using one's past to shape a successful career and future should be studied as well as more interview participants should be selected who have not professionalized their past ex-

periences. This would contribute to further understanding of what resources returning citizens have found most useful to them in their reentry process and what resources they wished had been provided to them. This would solidify, if not narrow down, the data supporting future policy implications regarding steps taken to reduce recidivism.

7 APPENDIX

7.1 Reentry Interview Guide

Date:
Interview Code:
Pseudonym:

First, I will ask you a few questions about your life, in order to gather some context to your story and your reentry into society post-incarceration. As a reminder, anything you feel uncomfortable answering, you can just say "pass," and we will quickly move on to the next question. All the information you provide will remain confidential.

General Information
    Age:
    Ethnicity:
    Gender:
    Socioeconomic Status:
    Employment status:
    Marital/Relationship Status

1. One of the goals of this study is to learn about how the justice system and society can offer better resources and programs to help people reenter society and decrease recidivism rates. This requires us to know about your pathway through life, both before and after your incarceration. Can you please tell me about yourself? With events you feel comfortable sharing, can you please tell me about your life history, including any activities, relationships, or other things you feel are relevant to your story? (early family life, parental/sibling/friend/significant other/work relationships, significant childhood events, school experiences, work history, romantic attachments, housing situations, etc.) What of these factors do you feel have had the most influence on your life?

    (a) Can you tell me about your life story? Before and after incarceration?

2. How many years were you incarcerated for?
3. How long have you been out of prison?
4. Can you please describe what reentering society was like for you?

(a) Difficult, family connections, job search, housing, substance use help, acceptance, stereotypes, internal struggles?

5. Can you tell me about the decision-making processes and difficulties around terms of parole and/or catching new charges?

6. Did you participate in a reentry-type program while you were incarcerated, prior to your release from prison?

(a) What sort of things did you learn in this program and do you think it was helpful to you?

7. What sort of resources did you have access to for help reentering society when you were released from prison?

(a) Which of these resources did you find most useful to you in reentering society post-incarceration and avoiding recidivating?

8. What resources do you wish had been provided to you when you were released from prison but weren't provided to you?

(a) Why do you think they would have been helpful?

9. What are some things which made you successful in reentering society?

(a) Relationships, reentry resources, job, responsibilities, reentry program?

10. What are some things that made reentry more difficult for you?

(a) Stressors, challenges, pushes/pulls towards recommitting crimes?

11. What are some tools and resources you struggled to find, and what are some tools/resources that you found easier to get?

12. If you could give one piece of advice to someone reentering society post-incarceration, what would you tell them?

8 EDITOR'S NOTES

This article was peer reviewed.

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