

THE FAMILY CONNECTION: EXAMINING THE TRANSITIONAL IMPACT ON FAMILY
MEMBERS OF RETURNING CITIZENS REENTERING SOCIETY

by

Leon Rankins III

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

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APPROVED BY:

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to define and measure more extensively the personal barriers of family members of returning citizens recently released from incarceration in the United States. Also sought was examining the returning citizen's family members' perspectives of their issues relating to their loved ones in the reintegration process and how their challenges and barriers impacted their desire to provide transitional support to the returning citizen. The theory guiding this study is Bowen's family system theory as it suggests that individuals cannot be understood in isolation from one another, but rather as a part of their family, as the family is an emotional unit. Participants were recruited through the purposive sampling technique. Data collection was done through interviews, document analysis and reflective journal. The transcendental phenomenology approach was used to analyze the data. The findings revealed that returning citizens had exceptional challenges that resulted from both the returning citizen and the family being unprepared for the needs and demands of the former offender and the changes experienced within the family as family members attempted to adapt to their return. Support from extended family members, the community, and reentry programs is essential to the returning citizen's successful reintegration, yet most families in this study reported sparse support from these groups. Family members must be included in the pre-release planning stage of the returning citizen, where they can adequately address any concerns, expectations, and potential issues they may have in the re-entry process.

Keywords: Returning citizen, family disruption, successful reintegration, prisoner reentry, and family reunification.

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Dedication

This research is dedicated to my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, for guiding my heart and hands. I am so grateful for salvation and a life committed to building and advancing God's kingdom here on earth. To my wife, Melba and my two sons, Leon IV, and Porter L. Rankins. Thank you for the sacrifices you made throughout this research journey. The past several years while working on this dissertation has often kept me away from our leisure times. Your support is priceless and will never be forgotten. To, my mother, Edna Rankins. Words cannot adequately convey my appreciation to you for always supporting my professional and academic endeavors. You have always told me I could do anything I put my mind to do. I endeavor to always make you proud. To my sisters, Felicia Roberson, and Tracy Berry. Thank you both for the constant encouragement and push to complete this research. My prayer is that both of you are propelled to pursue your doctorates now. To my extended family members who are too numerous to name individually, thank you for your consistent prayers and words of encouragement over the years. To the participants in this study, thank you for sharing your stories. My prayer is that God will place you on a path of healing and reconciliation with your loved one. Finally, to the men and women being released back into society after completing their sentences. May you experience true spiritual restoration through the redeeming blood of Jesus Christ and walk your new path with the faith and favor that only God can give. Remember, God has a plan and purpose for your life, but it is up to you to embrace your new beginning.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Over 600,000 individuals are released from prison annually and become residents of communities in the United States (Simes, 2019). Prisoner reentry has been the principal focus of correctional policy for approximately twenty years; moreover, prison reentry literature has documented the offender's needs, promoted specific strategies, and evaluated the effects of interventions or variables on post-prison recidivism (Lucken, 2020). Emphasis on the plethora of barriers of the recently released offender reentering society has dominated extant literature. These returning citizens face a myriad of deficits when they reenter society, and their challenges are exacerbated by an array of barriers (Oulette et al., 2017). Family support for the recently released ex-offenders reentering society is seen as crucial to the reintegration process; without it, many of these individuals would have extreme difficulty overcoming the systematized obstacles they face upon their return.

“Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you” (Colossians 3: 13, 2011, NIV). Family support and friends are interdependent in a way that meaningfully impacts recidivist behavior in general, parole, and reentry outcomes (Boman & Mowen, 2017). So, if family support is integral to the offender’s ability to successfully reintegrate, understanding the personal challenges of these family members, which may prevent them from fully supporting the returning citizen during the critical time of community transition, is pivotal. Reentry planning for the ex-offender before being released is also critical to the reintegration success. Although family support is included in the reentry planning with the expectation of family members providing vital resources such as food, clothing, finances, and shelter, minimal research has been conducted on the barriers of these family members *during* the reintegration phase of the offender. Reentry planning is

hampered by the scarcity of research on family-focused services, often omitting attention to resuming family and parenting roles (Muentert & Charles, 2020). The gap in existing literature examining family members' barriers and challenges after their loved one is recently released and reentering to their communities is the foundation of this study.

The goal of this qualitative study was to add new research to the literature on the lived experiences of offender families by including their perspectives on the offender's return, how this return has impacted them during this transitional period, and any personal challenges or barriers they are encountering; consequently, preventing them from providing support to the offender. "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way, you will fulfill the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:2, 2011, NIV). Some may believe that crime victimization should take precedence over any personal challenges or barriers that the offender's family members may have. But what must not get lost in this discussion is that family members are often victims of crime perpetrated by their loved ones, whether directly or indirectly. When committed against partners and family members, crimes have disastrous effects on victims (Green & Brown, 2020). Minimizing the apparent obstacles and barriers of the offender upon their return is not the goal of this study; however, recognizing the perspectives of family members and their barriers associated with the offender's return as it relates to the reintegrative process is paramount, as it may contribute to policy reforms on prison reentry planning.

The significance of this phenomenological study centered on the fact that familial support to the offender is integral to the success of the offender's reentry to society and the offender's ability to abstain from recidivist behavior. "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect" (Romans 12:2, 2011, NIV). The connection between

social support and crime desistance is strong enough to warrant an understanding of the lives of those who provide support to ex-offenders (Bailey & Sample, 2017). Understanding the lived experiences of individuals who play such a crucial role in the reintegration of these ex-offenders is essential, specifically as it relates to shaping reentry policy, which could include strategies geared exclusively for families of returning citizens. When the absence of familial support is evident and impacts the reintegrative efforts of the offender, understanding attributing factors to this absence is critical. Many of the challenges and barriers that family members of ex-offenders primarily experience during the incarceration period are the obvious ones to the public: financial hardship, societal stigmatization, and emotional stresses that often result due to the offender's absence.

In this phenomenological study, a greater understanding of the obscure and imperceptible barriers and challenges of the family members of the ex-offender and how they provided insight into dismantling societal perceptions or preconceived notions on the family roles of the offender was sought. In existing research, there is an emphasis on rehabilitation for the offender during and after incarceration. However, there is minimal research on the need for the ex-offenders' family members to seek therapeutic intervention for the issues they might be facing, resulting from the offender's absence and subsequent return. The inconsistency between the urgency of mass incarceration affecting communities and the lack of research examining how to support offender families demand further research (Burkholder et al., 2020). This chapter began with the background detailing the historical overview of the study's topic and accentuating the research gaps, which is the catalyst for the study, the research problem, the purpose of the study, the significance of the study, the research questions, pertinent definitions to the research, and the conclusion.

Restoration of the Returning Citizen and Biblical Application

“The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me because the LORD has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor” (Isaiah 61:1-3, 2011, NIV). Unfortunately, recently released offenders returning to their communities are met with systematic challenges in conjunction with society’s stigmatization, personal prejudices, and worldviews, often making it challenging to experience a successful reintegration and transition back into society. But God’s word is clear and replete with scriptures and Biblical lessons that underscore the redemptive and restorative power of Jesus Christ.

The prisoner or ex-offender is not excluded from this redemption merely because they have committed atrocities on society. Although the stigma of being a convicted felon or ex-offender often warrant open discriminatory beliefs and practices towards these individuals, God’s word highlights the importance of restoration to the wounded, specifically the outcast. “For I will restore health to you, and your wounds I will heal,” declares the Lord, “because they have called you an outcast: ‘It is Zion, for whom no one cares!’” (Jeremiah 30:17, 2011, NIV). This study centered on the challenges of the family members of the returning citizen and the barriers they face, often resulting from their relationship to the offender and the offenses these individuals committed in society. In the context of growing evidence that prisoners’ family relationships play a vital role in their reintegration after release, some individuals are more at risk

than others to deterioration in these relationships throughout incarceration and reentry (McKay et al., 2016). The challenge for these returning citizens is to move beyond their criminal histories, reestablish their familial relationships, and rebuild a new life according to the word of God.

“Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death” (Romans 8:1-2, 2011, NIV). When an offender is sent to prison, the family's cohesiveness, and familial relationships, in general, are tested. Once the offender returns home, these relationships are often in need of restoration and reunification. Unfortunately, emphasis on employment, housing, finances, and registration requirements usually precedes the individual's spiritual needs. This study examined the lived experiences of the offender's family members and how these experiences impacted familial relationships.

What remained at the forefront during this study and after is that these offenders will require the same grace afforded to others through the Lord Jesus Christ. “But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me” (2 Corinthians 12:9, 2011, NIV). Ministering love and forgiveness to any individual who has committed criminal behavior requires compassion and recognizing that God does not discriminate towards the criminal. “For God does not show favoritism; all who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law; for it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God’s sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous” (Romans 2:11-13, 2011, NIV). It is through this study that this researcher hoped that the spirit of family reconciliation was evident, just as God’s redemptive power through Jesus Christ is evident for the offender and their family members and that the embedded hurts and wounds that

all have experienced resulting from the offender's criminal behavior and subsequent incarceration were exposed and healed in the mighty name of Jesus.

Background

Historical Context

Consider meeting a family member of a recently released ex-offender returning to their communities who, instead of being happy, joyous, and excited about their loved one's return, was anxious, nervous, ambivalent, or even angry. If that was the case, then why? Historically, familial support in prisoner reentry has been a vital component in the reintegration process. A strong emphasis on this support by the offender, reentry counselors, parole, and probation officers can be additional pressure on family members during this critical period because of societal perceptions and expectations. There is an expectation for family members to serve as the facilitators of the reintegration process for the offender (Taylor, 2016). Family members, however, are often confronted with the decision whether to accept their returning loved ones unconditionally or with varying stipulations. An example of a type of stipulation many offenders face from family members is found in Braithwaite's Reintegrative Shaming Theory. Braithwaite hypothesized that our social bonds present the chance for those who are important to us to shame deviant or criminal behavior and encourage conformity; thereby, that shaming is effective in the deterrence of criminality and deviance only if it is coupled with strong family or friendship bonds through love and forgiveness (Fitch et al., 2018). Although the concept of prisoner reentry is relatively new as it relates to correctional policy, familial support, and involvement in the reintegrative process for the ex-offender is not. For centuries, family members have waited for the sentences of their loved ones to end so they could assist them in their efforts to rebuild their

lives.

During the past decade, how incarceration affects the lives of the family members of ex-offenders has received an increasing level of interest among scholars (McCarthy & Adams, 2019). Researchers have sought to examine familial relationships between ex-offenders and family members to gain greater insight into the significance of familial support in the context of prisoner reentry and its effect on recidivism. Majority of extant literature has pointed to the negative impact incarceration inflicts on the lives of the family members; far less focus has been on the countervailing impacts of incarceration, specifically where ex-offender and family relations improve (McCarthy & Adams, 2019). Family dynamics of the ex-offender and family members can be significantly impacted once incarceration begins. Understanding how familial support impacts family dynamics, family relations, and the recidivist behavior of the returning citizen continues to evolve. Research addressing family-related issues also continue to evolve. Evidence of this is the implementation of Family Policy. Fifty years ago, the welfare of families emerged as a public issue in the United States; thus, the new field of family policy addressed a broadening series of the complex problems of family life (Ooms, 2019). Family policy and family systems theory have evolved in addressing familial dynamics and familial relationships over the years. Family Systems Theory emphasizes family as a system where each member's actions and emotions affect the others (Goldberg et al., 2019). In the context of family support to the offender, robust family systems are regularly identified in the search for effective prevention of criminal behavior. Still, they have rarely been empirically studied in the context of the incarcerated population (Brunton-Smith & McCarthy, 2017). Understanding the family's role (not necessarily the societal perception of the family role) in the offender's reintegration requires continual analysis.

Impact on Society-at-Large

A preponderance of extant research on how familial support interrelates to the successful reentry of the returning citizen focuses on the barriers and challenges of the offender with minimal focus on the personal challenges of the family members. Annually, 750,000 to 800,000 prisoners are released in the United States to return “home” from state and federal prisons; moreover, a plethora of these individuals will leave out the prison gate without family support, an education, or skills, and with a criminal record that will hinder them in their ability to find a job (Evans, 2016). Since family members are integral to the offender's successful reintegration, not understanding their barriers that may inhibit their ability to provide social and emotional support to the returning citizen can have long-lasting consequences and present a problem in the context of successful reentry. This problem may lead to a plethora of other problems that may impact society at large. One specific issue where society is impacted is the recidivist behavior of the offender. Therefore, a fundamental understanding of family relations between the returning citizen and family members is essential in reintegration planning. Over the last few decades, criminologists have identified several adult roles and rankings, including employment, positive family relations, and economic stability, as pivotal for promoting successful reentry and criminal desistance (Link et al., 2019). However, there is limited research on how family relations between returning citizens and family members impact criminal desistance.

Few researchers have investigated the circumstances that bring these successful transitions and successes, which are vital for behavior change (Link et al., 2019). Another issue affecting society-at-large resulting from not understanding the personal barriers of the family members of the returning citizen is the rising costs to house the offender in state prisons after a new crime is committed. This directly impacts the American taxpayer.

United States taxpayers spend over 250 billion dollars annually to incarcerate over two million offenders, more than any other nation (White House, 2016). This figure does not include the rising healthcare costs for the offender, specifically the aging offender who has declining health and needs additional medical care. Finally, an issue that may impact society at large is the impact on the labor market resulting from a loss of working-age adults due to the offender being resentenced and subsequently re-incarcerated and their inability to receive a job due to their prison record upon their return. Survey data indicates that men with criminal records are less likely to be employed than observationally similar individuals without documents; incarcerating men is expected to significantly affect their future labor market outcomes (Binder & Bound, 2019). The currently limited research on the personal barriers and challenges of family members of ex-offenders in the context of family relations and reentry can have profound impacts on society at large, as indicated. This causal sequence can have lasting implications for generations to come.

Bowen Family Systems Theory

Understanding how families react to the incarceration of their loved ones and their subsequent return from prison with efforts for family reunification was the premise for this study. The Bowen Family Systems Theory was chosen to provide the foundational structure of this research. Bowen promoted that family is both a relational system and an emotional system. Family members influence and are influenced by one another at the individual, dyadic, systemic, and generational levels (Erdem & Safi, 2018). This theory is relevant to the research because of the varying ways families react, process, and deal with the emotional stresses culminating from the incarceration of their loved ones and their return to society post-incarceration.

Bowen felt that the framework of the emotional system predated the origin of life and

saw the organization of natural systems as developing not just within individual organisms but between organisms in enduring relationships with each other, such as in a family system (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). The Bowen Family Systems Theory guided the study because of the varying family reactions to *family separation* resulting from the offender's period of incarceration. From a Bowen family systems viewpoint, separation anxiety is relevant to the family as a whole and is passed on trans-generationally; a disturbance in an individual is therefore viewed as a reflection of a disturbance in the overall family system (Palombi, 2016). Thus, Bowen Family Systems Theory informs the research by examining the family perspectives of their challenges and barriers resulting from the offender's incarceration and reintegrative efforts to reenter society through an emotional lens.

Bowen's original theory, comprised of six interlocking mechanisms that assisted in explaining where a family was on the continuum between differentiation and emotional fusion, include differentiation of self, triangles, nuclear family emotional process, family projection process, multigenerational transmission process, and sibling position (Thompson et al., 2019). Individuals who are *differentiated* can develop healthy, supportive relationships that balance needs for intimacy and autonomy; however, individuals who are not well differentiated are more likely to experience interpersonal challenges, specifically conflict with others and high levels of anxiety resulting from the context of those relationships (Bowen, 1976). According to Kerr (2000), *Triangles* refer to the experience in which a dyadic relationship brings in a third member with the purpose or unintentional result of reducing the direct conflict between the two primary members of the unit. Concerning Bowen's third mechanism, the *nuclear family emotional process*, sources of conflict can result from dysfunction within different subsystems within the family, like the marital dyad or individuals in the family, which essentially impacts the more

extensive family system (Thompson et al., 2019). Bowen's fourth mechanism, the *family projection process*, is when emotional problems or a lack of differentiation are transmitted from the parent to the child (Thompson et al., 2019).

An example of this is when dads may play a support role in projecting the mother's anxiety onto the children (Bowen, 1978). Bowen's fifth mechanism is the *multigenerational transmission process*. According to Roberto (1992), Bowen surmised that individuals might marry someone with the same level of differentiation; accordingly, they raise a child in that same context, thus, perpetuating the transmission process of differentiation or anxiety. Finally, Bowen's sixth mechanism, *sibling position*, is where Bowen surmises that the profiles of sibling birth order are so strong that they can be used to reconstruct family emotional processes in past generations (Bowen, 1978). Each of these mechanisms was integral to the study as the lived experiences of these family members of returning citizens were closely examined. Since there are varying familial dynamics amongst all family members and the returning citizen, Bowen family systems theory and the array of concepts and mechanisms included in this theory which had evolved over several decades, provided a structural compass for the study.

Situation to Self

The rationale for Conducting the Study

After completing an exhaustive search on existing literature on returning citizens seeking to reintegrate back to their communities after being released from incarceration, it was evident that a plethora of the extant literature was devoid of many of the voices integral to successful reentry...the family members of the ex-offender. It was critical to hear and bring their perspectives to the forefront of the complexity of prisoner reentry and the overall reintegration process. This study warranted the embedded societal perceptions and stigmatization towards ex-

offenders' family members and the offender's reliance on familial support during the reentry process. Prisoner reentry is a broad concept encompassing an array of ideologies, ideas, worldviews, and perspectives. Many of the opinions of prisoner reentry are voiced by criminologists, scholars, reentry counselors, probation and parole officers, legislators, and the public-at-large.

Rarely does the opportunity present itself to hear from those directly impacted by their loved one's absence due to incarceration and the social support they provide in the reintegration process. Research indicates that the presence of positive social support promotes post-prison success, but little is known about the stability and sustainability of such support post-incarceration (Pettus et al., 2017). The central objective of this study was to understand the lived experiences of these individuals as they see them. This study may provide findings to existing literature that could improve existing reentry policies where family planning and support are pivotal to successful reintegration. Qualitative studies exploring relationships are primarily positioned in either the social constructivist (interpretive) paradigm where the focus is to explore actors' subjective understanding of their relationships and relationship practices, or in the critical paradigms where the dual focus is to explore both actors' subjective understanding and meaning-making processes associated with their relational practices (Bologna et al., 2020). Based on the participants sharing their family perspectives and personal experiences related to the offender, their interactions with the offender, and their perspectives' social and cultural impact, the social constructivist paradigm as the research approach for the study was selected.

Assumptions

Ontology is described as a theory of existence; it is concerned with reality and human beings (Lee, 2012). The ontological assumption facing this study was that the family members of

the returning citizen have diverse perspectives and worldviews relating to their interaction with the offender before the offender's involvement in criminal activity, during the sentencing phase, the period of incarceration, their release, and their return to their communities; enabling them to express their views within the context of these varying stages of the offender's life. The lived experiences of these family members of the returning citizen have similarities and differences.

Epistemology is a theory of knowledge that examines the relationship between the inquirer and the knowable or between the knower and the individual responding; co-creating understandings implies some interaction between the inquirer and the knowable (Lee, 2012). The epistemological assumption is that we might gain greater insight into the personal family perspectives of these individuals, their challenges, concerns, and potential barriers encountered resulting from the community reintegration efforts of their loved ones. The hope was to receive a thorough look into the introspective thoughts of these individuals by conducting in-person interviews, establishing, and building trust between this researcher and the participants.

When discussing the axiology component of the research philosophy in your qualitative research, you should make your values known in the study and report your values and biases and the value-laden nature of the information received from the field (Carnaghan, 2013). Axiology mainly refers to the 'aims' of the research; this branch of the research philosophy seeks to bring clarity if you are attempting to explain or predict the world or only seeking to understand (Lee & Lings, 2008). Therefore, the qualitative axiological assumption depends on acknowledging and reporting any personal knowledge of the research phenomena and bias (Cresswell, 2013).

According to Creswell (2013), methodological assumptions include the assumptions made by the researcher regarding the methods used in the process of qualitative research and are based on the researcher's own experience in the analysis of data. The methodological assumption of this

study is that the research questions, the site, and observations collaboratively provided a broader understanding of the barriers and challenges of family members of the returning citizen during the critical period of transition.

Problem Statement

During the last few decades, criminologists have identified many adult roles and standings, including employment, positive family relationships, and economic stability, as pivotal for promoting successful reintegration and criminal desistance; however, very few researchers have analyzed the conditions which serve to bring about these transitions and successes which are key for behavior change (Link et al., 2019). The connection between social support and criminal desistance is strong enough to mandate an understanding of the lives of individuals who provide support to ex-offenders (Bailey & Sample, 2017). Prisoners' lives and consequently the lives of their family members are in no small measure defined by crime, the penal system, and correlated effects (Wells, 2020). Strong family support networks are consistently identified in the search for effective inhibitors of criminal behavior but have rarely been examined in the context of the prison population (Brunton-Smith & McCarthy, 2017). For ex-offenders at the highest risk of recidivating, family ties may not have been strong before the offender's incarceration; thus, many individuals leaving the prison system have unrealistic expectations concerning family support (McKerman, 2017). The problem was that majority of the extant literature on prisoner reentry has focused on the personal obstacles and barriers of the offender with little focus on the challenges and barriers of the family members of the recently released returning citizen seeking to reintegrate back to their communities. The support these family members are expected to provide places them at the center of the reentry debate.

Understanding their challenges and barriers in the context of community reintegration of the offender was the catalyst for the study.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to define and measure more extensively the personal barriers of family members of returning citizens recently released from incarceration. Also sought was examining the ex-offender family members' perspectives of their issues relating to returning their loved ones in the reintegration process and how their challenges and barriers impact their desire to provide transitional support to the ex-offender. Bowen Family Systems Theory guided the study. Since understanding familial relations with the offender during this reintegrative period is paramount, Bowen Family Systems Theory served as the study's theoretical framework.

Significance of the Study

This exigent yet unique explorative qualitative study sought to amplify the voices of individuals who may not have ever had the opportunity to share their thoughts and introspective views...the family members of returning citizens recently released from incarceration seeking to return to their communities. From a practical standpoint, their lived experiences may shape public perception and opinion on the totality of issues facing the ex-offender's family members; thereby, creating a greater awareness of the arbitrary societal stigmas placed on them by association and their support provided to the offender. The intended goal for this research was to advance a greater understanding of the family members' challenges, barriers, and concerns related to the offender and their return to society through the overall reentry process.

The array of the extant literature on the systematized barriers of the returning citizens and the societal challenges they face upon their return with nominal research on the barriers of the

family members and the issues they face made this study empirically significant. Numerous studies on prisoner reentry and the systematized barriers they encounter about their release have been conducted; nevertheless, there is little empirical data on the direct and indirect impacts of prisoner reentry on the family members themselves and how the significance of these challenges influences successful reintegration of the offender. Liu & Visher (2019) conducted a study investigating the strain the family members of released prisoners experience, examining the negative emotional impact between released prisoners and their family members. The findings of this study indicate a reciprocal transmission of negative emotion between the two parties. However, this study's emphasis was solely on examining the strain the family members experience of the released prisoner. Our present study advanced research by focusing not exclusively on one emotional effect but a combination of the impact on the family resulting from the reintegration efforts of the offender. Prisoner reentry research highlights the challenges former ex-offenders face during reentry; however, the challenges their family members encounter are understudied (Liu & Visher, 2019). This study addressed this gap in extant literature by uncovering critical areas of importance as seen solely through these family members' personal, collective prisms. This study was significant because it emphasized the often-silent voices of the family members of the offender. In contrast, most research on prisoner reentry has been from the perspectives of returning citizens and their post-incarceration challenges.

The theoretical framework of this study, guided by Bowen Family Systems Theory, sought to examine the perspectives of family members of the offender, how these perspectives were shaped, the transitional impact on the family members resulting from the immediate release of the offender, and how the reintegrative efforts may be impacted. Bowen Family Systems

Theory measured these variables by the following: analyzing the emotional impact on the family members resulting from the recent return of their loved ones from incarceration examining how the emotional impact of their return affects the *current* interaction between family members and the returning citizens; and analyzing if or how the personal barriers of the family members determine their familial support to the offender and their ability to reintegrate successfully.

Bowen promoted that family is both a relational system and an emotional system. Family members are influenced by individual, dyadic, systemic, and generational levels (Erdem & Safi, 2018). Bowen's model was essential to this study because it allowed this researcher to discern how *significant* the perspectives of the family members of the returning citizens are as seen through an emotional lens and how in-depth the impacts on the reintegrative efforts of the offender. This study was theoretically significant because it sought to extend the theory by focusing on the transitional impact on the family members resulting from the offender's absence and subsequent return. McLeod and Tirmazi (2017) posited that at the familial level, family systems theory helps explain the roles of family members and the degree of closure experienced by loved ones who are not physically or emotionally present.

Considering that family members can positively or negatively influence the reintegrative process, this study can implement changes in the offender's reentry plan from local county jails, state prisons, and federal prisons when integrating family planning as a *priority* in the social transition of the offender. Family members of ex-offenders represent a type of social capital that can influence influential reintegration contingent on the strength of the bond and the nature of the relationship (Hall et al., 2018). The potential contribution of this study to the field of criminal justice was the impact it could have on prisoner release officers, reentry counselors, community transitional support services, probation and parole officers, and the community at large.

Incremental, yet vital changes may be implemented to foster an easier transition for the offender and reduce recidivist behavior by understanding the family roles in the reintegrative process.

Research Questions

This research was driven by two central questions, each supported by related sub-questions, to broaden the understanding of the personal challenges and barriers encountered by family members of returning citizens from incarceration and their expected role in the reintegrative process.

Research Question 1: What have been your experiences since your family members have returned home from prison seeking to reintegrate back into society?

There was limited research to date examining the personal challenges and barriers that family members of returning citizens experience during the reintegration process of the offender. Extant research on prisoner reentry focuses primarily on the institutionalized and systemic barriers encountered by the offender. The challenges of the ex-prisoner permeate the study centered on prison reentry; however, the obstacles to their family members are understudied (Liu & Visher, 2019). Since returning citizens heavily rely on the support of their families for transitional support, understanding the personal barriers of these family members, which may inhibit their support to the offender, is paramount. Unfortunately, many returning citizens released from prison have unrealistic expectations concerning family support (McKerman, 2017). This research question and subsequent research questions contextualized the significance of understanding the personal challenges and barriers of the family members and their impact on the reintegrative process for the offender.

Sub-question 1: How have these experiences influenced the decision to help or abstain from assisting the offender in the reentry process?

Sub-question 2: How have these experiences impacted family relations since the offender has been released from incarceration and started the reintegration process?

Research Question 2: What are the general societal perceptions towards the family members of released returning citizens from incarceration reentering their communities?

Extant literature concerning prisoner reentry focuses on societal perceptions towards offenders and not their family members. According to Schwarz (2020), stigmatization based on criminal behavior results from society's constant labeling and branding, making it challenging for the offender to move past it. The limited focus of research on the societal perceptions towards the family members of released returning citizens from incarceration accentuates the need for this question. Having greater insight into these perceptions in the context of reentry is integral to the study. The environment to which the offender returns is often linked to family; consequently, any stigmas associated with the offender may also be placed on the family members. The environments to which ex-prisoners return vary considerably; the family is inextricably connected to these contexts (Lee et al., 2016). This research question will highlight any perceived societal perceptions by the family members based on their relationship with the ex-offender.

Sub-question 1: How have these societal perceptions impacted the family relationship between family members and the offender?

Sub-question 2: What are the coping mechanisms for family members of returning citizens during the reintegration efforts of the offender?

According to Erdem and Safi (2018), Murray Bowen propagated that family is both a relational system and an emotional one where family members influence and are influenced by one another at the individual, dyadic, systemic, and general levels. Therefore,

establishing the emotional impact on the familial relationship immediately after the offender's release was pivotal in determining how successful the offender will be in the reintegrative process.

Sub-question 3: How do these emotions impact the offender's efforts to reintegrate successfully?

Sub-question 4: What community resources could benefit the family members of returning citizens during this critical period of transition for the family and the offender?

Definitions

Some of the terms utilized in this study may be familiar to the reader; nevertheless, specific definitions integral to this study's context are listed below for clarification purposes.

1. *Community reentry programs*- Programs that seek to engage recently released adult individuals with community resources for basic transitional needs (Kendall et al., 2018).
2. *Family disruption*- Within the context of this study, family disruption is the interruption of family structure relating to an arrest, sentencing, and incarceration (Muetner et al., 2019).
3. *Family reunification*-Within the context of this study, family reunification is when the offender and family members reunite post-incarceration (McKay et al., 2016).
4. *Prisoner reentry*- A wide variation of programs usually operated through government agencies and non-profit organizations explicitly designed to improve the outcomes of prisoners reentering society (Doleac, 2019).
5. *Returning citizens*: Individuals who return to their communities after incarceration (Cnaan & Woida, 2020).

6. *Social stigmatization*- Within the context of this study, social stigmatization is the negative perceptions and attitudes towards ex-offenders who hold disadvantaged positions in terms of devaluation (Gonultas, & Ozturk, 2020).
7. *Successful reintegration*-Achieving incremental successes after incarceration, such as legitimate employment, stable housing, and entrepreneurship (Andersen et al., 2020).

Summary

Daily, recently released returning citizens seeking to reintegrate into their communities are faced with a plethora of systematized barriers often impeding their efforts for a successful community transition. These individuals heavily rely on their families for support during their transition back to society. However, these family members encounter an array of personal challenges during the critical phase of the reintegrative process; however, the extent of research primarily focuses on the barriers of the offender with limited focus on the barriers of the offender's families. Brunton-Smith and McCarthy (2017) posited that strong family support networks are consistently identified in the search for effective inhibitors of criminal behavior but have rarely been examined in the context of the prison population. Since family members are integral to the successful reintegration of the returning citizen and instrumental in preventing recidivist behavior, understanding their challenges and barriers which may hinder their support to the offender in the reentry process is paramount.

This study sought to address the gap in the existing literature by hearing the family perspectives of the offender during the transitional phase from incarceration to the community. The goal was to broaden insight into the significance of family support in the reintegrative process and increase the likelihood of successful reentry for the offender.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

The purpose of this chapter was to contextualize the current study within the academic discourse and culture of inquiry on returning citizens from incarceration and the transitional impact on their family members. The primary goal of this literature review was to demonstrate the gap in the extant literature on the challenges and barriers of family members of returning citizens seeking to reintegrate into their communities. In addition to highlighting this gap, this literature review also underscored the complexities of implementing the Bowen model specifically concerning offenders, their families, and reentry. The lack of existing studies examining the familial relationships in the context of prisoner reentry using the Bowen model warranted the current study. The study sought to extend the theory by focusing on the transitional impact on the family members resulting from the absence of the offender and subsequent return. This literature review accentuated the plethora of existing literature that indicates the offender's barriers and challenges during incarceration and post-incarceration with limited research on the barriers and challenges of family members, specifically during the critical period of reentry and reintegration for the returning citizen.

Successful transition of recently released offenders reentering society is primarily predicated on the offender's ability to overcome systematized barriers that can hinder the offender's efforts to reintegrate back into society fortuitously. According to Wodahl and Freng (2017), the path to successful reintegration after incarceration remains difficult. More clearly, understanding the barriers to reentry faced by these returning citizens will allow for more effective strategies to be enacted. Existing qualitative research has demonstrated the difficulty of reentry and the need for consistent and sustained communication (Stillion Southard & United

States Penitentiary-Atlanta Debate Team, 2019). Ex-offenders who have recently been released from incarceration are faced with many deficits once they return to society, and their challenges are exacerbated by many barriers (Ouellette et al., 2017). Prisoner reentry is complex.

Regardless of decades of critical reconstructing, policy and practice on prisoner reentry often remains within the framework of individual responsibility that refuses to acknowledge the structural drivers of criminalization (Burch, 2017). Emphasis on the societal stigmatization of the offender, the expectation of the offender's recidivist behavior, and the overall impact of the offender's return on the victim(s) of the crime continues to largely permeate existing literature on the reintegration of these men and women. The offender and society often see a robust support system as integral to the success of this reintegration. A principal component of this support system is the offender's family, who may be crucial in providing financial support, emotional stability, and a stable living environment during the critical days after their release from incarceration. Once the offender is released into society, anxieties about housing, acquiring a job, reuniting with family, and treatment needs are fundamental concerns that warrant immediate attention (Cantora, 2015). For many of these offenders, their family members become paramount to their successful transition, often serving as the catalysts for offenders not committing new crimes and completing their post-release requirements such as probation, community control, registration, classes, and counseling.

There is an abundance of existing research underscoring the significance of familial support and the vital impact on the offender's ability to reintegrate successfully. However, there is limited research on the personal challenges of the offender's family members, which they often encounter during the transitional period of the offender's return home, which can impede the reintegration process. Here, we illuminate the lack of research evaluating the problem that the

personal challenges and barriers of family members of the offender often encountered during this critical transition period can significantly hinder the efforts of the offender and the impact on family reunification. From the offender's perspective and society's, family members are expected to be intrinsically involved in reintegration. Once they are released from prison, many offenders depend on their immediate, paternal family and the chosen family of their partners for their initial financial and material support (Charles et al., 2019). However, many of these family members have not fully grasped the enormity of the offender's return, the changes that are likely to occur, and the subsequent impact on family dynamics.

Strong family support networks are consistently identified in the search for effective inhibitors of criminal behavior but have rarely been examined in the context of the prison population (Brunton-Smith & McCarthy, 2017). Since family members are viewed as a central component of the reintegration process for the offender, the internal challenges and concerns these family members encounter can have dire consequences to the offender's ability to become productive in the process. The level of chaos and social disorganization of extended family members of offenders returning from incarceration can pull these individuals off a seeming path of success (Lobuglio & Piehl, 2015). Hence, the reason for the phenomenological qualitative study.

Examining the transitional impact on family members of recently released returning citizens from incarceration is paramount; specifically, how the offender's return has impacted their perceptions of the offender, their ability to provide the anticipated financial and emotional support to the offender, the impact and change to current family dynamics, and their perception or reaction to perceived societal stigmatization towards offenders and their family members. This literature review is organized to address the demonstrated gap in existing literature

accentuating the barriers of the offenders *and* family members encompassing four focus areas: 1) familial relationships; 2) stigmatization and discrimination against the offender and family members; 3) housing barriers, and 4) recidivist behavior. The gap in the extant literature on the personal challenges and barriers of family members, the transitional impact during the reintegration process, and their coping mechanism during this transitional period within these four focus areas will underscore the need for the study.

Although understanding the barriers these offenders encounter as they return to society is critical, *not* understanding the transitional barriers of their family members can be detrimental to the offender. It cannot be overstated that family members of returning citizens are inextricably intertwined in the offender's reentry. The environments to which returning citizens return vary considerably concerning having access to resources, support services, correctional policies, and crime rates, all of which can influence the success of reentry programs; however, the family is often inextricably connected to these contexts (Lee et al., 2016). The limited research on the challenges of family members of returning citizens and their impact on the offender's successful reintegration underscores the need for this phenomenological qualitative study. Since these family members play such a vital role in the offender's success, as existing research indicates, examining the personal challenges and barriers these family members encounter during the transitional period of these returning citizens underscored the need for this phenomenological qualitative study.

Literature Search Strategy

For this study, a search for various sources published within the last 5 years and older sources that were integral to understanding reentry, reintegration, and the family support system was conducted. The extant literature using the Jerry Falwell Online Library was located using

the following keywords: *prisoner reentry, family reunification, family reintegration, returning citizens, ex-offenders, community-based reentry programs, family dynamics, and social stigmatization*. Sources used in this study included peer-reviewed journal articles, city, state, and federal websites, and government websites. Boolean operators were used to defining search results as this procedure further significantly reduced redundancy. Databases included Criminal Justice Abstracts with Full Text, Psychology and Behavioral Sciences, Legal Collection, MEDLINE, NTIS, Family and Society Studies Worldwide, and Health Sources.

Theoretical Framework

Bowen Family Systems Theory

Because the purpose of this study was to analyze the transitional impact on family members of returning citizens from incarceration and establish their potential influence on the offender's ability to successfully transition, situating the personal barriers and challenges of the family members within the context of the more extensive family system is appropriate. Dr. Murray Bowen started pontificating about human functioning in large nonfamily systems in the 1940s (Baker, 2017). Bowen propagated that family is both a relational system and an emotional one. Family members influence and are influenced by one another at the individual, dyadic, systemic, and generational levels (Erdem & Safi, 2018). Since the Bowen model is grounded in a larger context of social structure theories and concepts, it is imperative to highlight its correlation. For example, Aker's social learning theory of criminal and deviant behavior posits that the same process of learning in a context of social structure, interaction, and situation produces both conforming and deviant behavior; thus, the difference is the direction of the balances of influences on the behavior (Akers & Jennings, 2019). Bowen discovered that the process by which individuals within a family evolve, a more vigorous sense of self occurs slowly

and entails exploring how each is part of a multigenerational family system (Palombi, 2016). Bowen Family Systems is considered an influential foundational factor in the married couple and family therapeutic field; thus, identifying differentiation of self as a crucial characteristic that relates to one's individual and relational maturity (Handley et al., 2019). Bowen first started to think about the apparent parallels between emotional patterns in the family and society, believing that man is an evolving form of life (Baker, 2017). Bowen's observation that the family functioned as a unit led to the discovery of solid and predictable patterns of behavior which operated outside the consciousness of family members (Noone, 2017). Since Bowen Family Systems Theory of human behavior sees the family as an emotional unit but underscores the complexity of the family unit and since the family dynamics between the returning citizen and their families are often complex, replete with difficulties and challenges, this theory guided the study. At the familial level, family systems theory helps explain the roles of family members and the degree of closure experienced by loved ones who are not physically or emotionally present (McLeod & Tirmazi, 2017). Understanding the roles of family members within the family structure is pivotal. Alfred Adler and his work on birth order within the family structure lends credence to the Bowen model. Birth order, which highlights early-life family domain experiences, is a fundamental determinant of individual behavior (Jaskiewicz et al., 2019). As previously noted, the environment in which the ex-offender returns is inextricably connected with the family. As such, the former roles of the family members before incarceration are often in contrast to post-incarceration, where family dynamics have fundamentally changed. Family dynamics are situated within the larger context of family systems. When family unification is attempted after the offender's prison release, difficulties often emerge. This can be the result of childhood issues of the offender, unresolved issues before incarceration or family strain in

general. Old resentments and unresolved issues from the family of origin can constrain adults in current relationships with parents or siblings, having negative effects on relationships with other partners or children (Fishbane, 2019).

To understand how their challenges and barriers shape the change in these dynamics and subsequently impact the roles of these family members in their efforts to assist these ex-offenders, this qualitative phenomenological study was conceptualized and guided using Bowen Family Systems Theory. Understanding the distinction between family support and family conflict is paramount. Emerging research suggests that family conflict may play a pivotal role in the reentry process (Mowen & Boman, 2019). Should family conflict emerge resulting from the offender's release from incarceration and subsequent return to society, understand attributing factors to this conflict and the basis for this study. Although family dynamics play a crucial role within the reentry process, the offender's characteristics and experiences during incarceration can influence family dynamics (Mowen & Visser, 2016). Since existing literature primarily focuses on the barriers of the offenders and not family members, understanding that the change in traits and patterns of the offender during incarceration can greatly impact the dynamic family post-incarceration; thus, potentially influencing emotional support.

Dr. Murray Bowen Family Systems Theory or commonly known as Bowen Theory suggests that personal psychosocial and physical functioning is impacted by anxiety and problems which are generated by interactions among family members; moreover, the nuclear family emotional system is a concept which explains how issues in the family system are developed (Cepukiene & Celiauskaite, 2020). One of the main components of returning citizens' reentry process is the emotional support provided by family members to the offender. Understanding the challenges and barriers these family members encounter during this period of

transition will provide insight in determining whether that emotional support is not only warranted but expected for the returning citizen as they reintegrate into society.

Family support and peer relationships are interrelated in a way that explicitly impacts recidivism, generally, and parole and reentry outcomes (Boman & Mowen, 2017). Post-release success is attributed to family connections and is a key factor in an offender's return (Muentner & Charles, 2020). Family support seems to relate to prosocial reentry outcomes not solely because of emotional or interactional bonds but because families provide for the basic needs of returning citizens (Mowen, Stansfield, & Boman, 2019). Although familial support is integral to the success of the reentry process, there is limited research on how this domestic support is hindered based on the personal issues of the family members, individually and collectively.

The focus on the constant needs of the offender and the ongoing challenges they face in the reintegration process takes precedence in existing research over the issues encountered by family members, directly and indirectly, resulting from the return of the offender. Although existing research highlights current familial conflict affecting the reintegration process, this research falls short of intricately examining underlying causes and attributing factors. For ex-offenders at the highest risk of recidivating, family ties may not have been strong before the offender's incarceration; thus, many individuals leaving the prison system have unrealistic expectations concerning family support (McKerman, 2017). Understanding the causation of the breakdown of these family ties underscores the significance of this study.

During the last few decades, criminologists have identified many adult roles and statuses, including employment, positive family relations, and economic stability, as pivotal for promoting successful reintegration and desistance; however, very few researchers have analyzed the conditions that serve to bring about these transitions and successful which are critical for

behavior change (Link et al., 2019). To have a clear understanding of what constitutes successful reintegration for the offender and the link between familial support and the offender's ability to overcome the systematized barriers upon their release from incarceration, this study has the potential to advance the family systems theory by closely examining the emotional impact on the family resulting from the offender's return, and the personal challenges and barriers of family members during the transitional period of the offender. In addition, since there is limited research on the analysis of familial support and the offender, the current study may further advance the theory by incorporating new concepts discovered in the study, which can be integral in providing insight into the topic of successful reentry.

Related Literature

This literature review demonstrated the evident gap in the existing literature on the current barriers and challenges of the offender during incarceration and post-incarceration by foregrounding four areas: 1) familial relationships; 2) stigmatization and discrimination of the offender and family members; 3) housing barriers of the offender, and 4) recidivist behavior of the offender. The limited emphasis in the existing literature on the various challenges encountered by relatives of the offenders who have just returned from prison underscores the need for this study.

Familial Relationships

The array of barriers that ex-offenders endure during the period of community reentry often results in stigmatization and discrimination that can negatively affect the offender's functioning and well-being, which are integral to successful reintegration (Rade, Desmarais, & Burnette, 2018). Based on the present literature, the challenges encountered by family members resulting from their loved ones' return from incarceration are secondary to the difficulties and

challenges of the offender. Relationships with other family members are often fragmented; thus, the responsibility of support for the offender while incarcerated falls primarily to one or two people within the family to care for their relative and upon release (Delayney-Thiele et al., 2016). Many existing studies demonstrate that families are a central component to the offender's successful reintegration. The family's support can be crucial in determining if the offender will become a productive, contributing member of society. In addition, families may serve as facilitators of successful reentry where they assist with housing, employment, and finances. These are vital services to any offender returning to their communities (Folk et al., 2019). So, suppose the offender is having difficulty receiving help from their family members in assisting with these services. In that case, one may assume that underlying factors are attributed to the absence of support. Understanding these factors is pivotal to this study.

One of the fundamental goals of reentry and the reintegration process for the offender is to provide resources so that the offender will not be urged to re-offend. Since family members are viewed as integral to the offender in their efforts not to re-offend, establishing the connection between social and family support and criminal desistance is paramount. Bailey & Sample (2017) asserted that the relationship between social support and criminal desistance is strong enough to mandate an understanding of the lives of individuals who provide support to ex-offenders. But the overwhelming lack of research that examines potential family barriers and issues that may hinder the offender in the reintegration is evident and the catalyst for this research.

The reintegration process for the offender is often seen exclusively through the views and embedded opinions of those who are often *indirectly* impacted by the offender's return. Existing research is limited on the reintegration process as seen exclusively through the lens of the family

members who are often directly affected by the offender's return. The offender is expected to adjust to prison life during the incarceration period, follow institution rules and guidelines, and prepare for their release. Family members also are expected to adjust to life after their loved ones are sentenced to incarceration. This can present a myriad of challenges for the family and the offender depending on the family dynamics at sentencing, specifically when there is existing family conflict. Existing research demonstrates that family conflict creates adverse mental health outcomes (Wallace et al., 2016). Thus, understanding family dynamics and potential family conflicts is crucial during this period. In addition, conceptualizing incarceration as part of a greater risk set that encompasses the behavior of the offender's family members has policy implications (Giordano et al., 2019). The minimal extant research on the behavior of family members and its role in the reintegration process of the offender highlights the significance of the current study.

A plethora of research underscores the negative impact that incarceration has on family's lives; however, there has been less focus on the countervailing effects of incarceration, specifically where prisoner-family relations may improve during the sentence (McCarthy & Adams, 2019). Relationship Education programs for the offender are critical to successful reentry. Harcourt et al. (2017) examined relationship education with 122 incarcerated individuals. The conclusive findings of the study indicate that positive change in three domains of functioning, including a couple, individual, and parental, emerged. Since this study examined the offender's relationship education and family dynamics during incarceration, the current study will advance extant literature by its sole focus on family dynamics and relationship education post-incarceration.

By examining the family dynamics prior to, during, and post-incarceration, highlighting the personal challenges and barriers of the offender's family members after the offender's release can provide greater insight into the reintegration process and determine how successful this process will be upon their return to their communities. McCarthy and Adams (2019) examined the potential strain that incarceration has on family-prisoner relationships. This study closely examines the lives of family members visiting their male incarcerated relatives in England over three months. The primary purpose of this study was to investigate how the period of separation between the offender and family members affected their relationship during the incarceration period and whether their relationship changed or evolved for the better. The study's findings yielded that the initial period of separation between the family member and the offender resulting from incarceration was pivotal. The time apart provided the family member time to recover from challenging periods before preceding incarceration, making the visitation time crucial to reestablishing the family-prisoner relationship (McCarthy & Adams, 2019). Although this study examines the family relationship during the incarceration period, which can be useful during the reintegration process for the offender, its failure to provide insight on the familial relationship *before* the incarceration period and the potential impact that status has on transition, and the reentry process presents challenges to the researcher seeking to understand how family dynamics and family conflict contributes to the reintegration of the offender.

The factors that often attribute to the strain on the family offender relationship were not examined in this study, making it challenging to determine if personal challenges or barriers of family members attributed to the family conflict, which ultimately can have consequences on the reintegration process the offender. Family support for the offender manifests in various ways. There is the misconception that when family conflict is present, support for the offender is

consistently absent. However, the presence of family conflict does not necessarily mean that strategic and or expressive support is absent (Link et al., 2019). Examining the familial relationship between the offender and family members during the incarceration period is prevalent among researchers with limited research on the relationship before the incarceration period. One example is a study conducted by authors Lannutti and Harner (2019), where communication skills between the offender and family members were examined during incarceration. Twelve female inmates incarcerated in the urban city jail on the United States East Coast were interviewed, which included questions centered around communication challenges while incarcerated, communication skills that needed to be improved, and other communication concerns they had during this period of incarceration. The study's findings concluded that family communication during incarceration, family support during incarceration, parenting challenges, and family conflict were themes found. Although the study's findings provide thoughtful analysis on the communication skills between the offender and family members during their incarceration period, the communication skills before the incarceration period are not examined; thereby, underscoring the need for the current study as communication skills between the family and offender before sentencing may present family conflict.

Understanding the relationship's state before the offender is sentenced can provide insight into potential reasons for the family's lack of motivation to assist the offender upon release. By examining potential barriers and challenges of family members once the offender is released, the current study determined if family support during the incarceration period is an attributing factor in assisting the offender. The incongruence between the urgency of mass incarceration affecting neighborhoods and the lack of existing literature examining how to support families of the incarcerated demands further research (Burkholder et al., 2020). Familial support for the

offender upon their release is not only warranted but often expected. The challenges of the ex-offender impact not only the returning citizen and their families but also the economy and the safety of the communities to which they seek to reintegrate (Schiavone, 2017). Understanding this impact, specifically on families, is the core of this current study in determining if their challenges and barriers impact or impeded their motivation or ability to assist the offender during the reintegration process. A plethora of existing literature focuses on family support and the quality of family relationships during the incarcerated period. Still, there is limited research on the familial relationship prior to incarceration or post-incarceration. Jardine (2018) included a study examining the lives and experiences of families impacted by imprisonment in Scotland. This study aimed to analyze how familial relationships are constructed and maintained during the time of imprisonment and how those impacted by the imprisonment of a family member are perceived by and interact with the criminal justice system (Jardine, 2018). In-depth interviews were conducted with 19 individuals from 14 families.

These findings suggest that familial relationships affected by imprisonment are not just highly individual but also actively constructed through embodied displays of care and commitment (Jardine, 2018). Although integral in understanding the complexities of familial relationships and the offender, this study underscores the gap in existing literature in relation to family dynamics post-incarceration and the personal challenges and barriers of the family members, which may provide insight into the transitional impact of the returning citizen. For example, parents of the incarcerated have experienced varying challenges during the incarceration period. However, existing literature has indicated that the parents of the incarcerated experience high levels of distress, burden, and social stigma, research into their affairs is only now starting to emerge (Gueta, 2018). This further accentuates the need for this

current study. The current study will provide further insight on how familial relationships post-incarceration impact the transition on family members of the offender and the returning citizen.

Ex-offenders have difficulties adjusting because of broken family and community relationships, unemployment, and lack of aftercare services, among other factors (Chikadzi, 2017). The adjustment period for returning citizens is critical as they encounter an array of systematized challenges. Many offenders may not realize the enormity of their absence after returning to their families. After being released from incarceration, women ex-offenders often expect their reunions to be happy with their children and other family members but are not cognizant of the pain their children experienced due to their incarceration (Agboola, 2017). The current study will seek to further expand existing literature on the impact of the offender's absence as a barrier affecting familial relationships and the reintegration efforts of the returning citizen. By focusing on the offender's lack and its potential impact on the established familial relationships post-incarceration, this current study will seek to fill the evident gap in extant literature which has focused primarily on the barriers of the offenders instead of the barriers of the family members which ultimately can have a profound effect on the returning citizen's ability to reintegrate. Currently, there is limited research on the concerns and challenges of family members of the offender post-incarceration as these returning citizens seek to reintegrate into their communities.

Existing literature is replete with research on the impact on the family members before and during the incarceration period—for example, the sentencing phase of the offender. Two qualitative research projects conducted with family members of prisoners serving the Imprisonment for Public Protection (IPP) in England and Wales examined the mental health impact of indeterminate sentences of prisoners on their family members (Straub & Annison,

2020). While these projects add to the extant literature on the stressors encountered by family members *during* the incarceration period, the current study will be distinct in that it focuses on potential stressors post-incarceration, specifically during the transition and reintegration period of the offender. There is also a myriad of existing research on the financial challenges of family members of offenders during the incarceration period. A growing body of research analyzes the injurious consequences of men's incarceration for the economic stability of the families they leave behind (Bruns, 2020). A recent study conducted by Bruns (2020) investigated how partner incarceration is linked with women receiving financial assistance from family members and friends by using a longitudinal survey beginning with interviews of nearly 5,000 mothers and their children. The study's findings indicate that partner incarceration has a ripple effect and that it influences the financial situations of incarcerated men, the mothers of their children, and the friends and family who provide financial assistance to these women (Bruns, 2020). This recent study is indicative of the gap the current study seeks to fill. The results of this study accentuate the challenges of family members during the incarcerated period instead of post-incarceration. The current study's focus on the post-incarceration challenges family members will fill the current gap in the extant literature on this topic.

Stigmatization/Discrimination

Recently released prisoners returning to their communities often face societal stigmatization based on their past criminal behavior. Words make a difference when describing individuals involved in the criminal justice system; terminology used in policies programs and research publications is frequently derogatory, stigmatizing, and dehumanizing (Tran et al., 2018). This stigmatization can impede their efforts to a successful transition as they seek to reintegrate into society. Moore and Tangney (2017) posited that anticipated stigma is thought to

cause withdrawal from situations in which there is the potential for discrimination which essentially causes negative impacts on behavior and functioning; moreover, this may have implications for offenders reentering the community, potentially hindering community integration and encouraging maladaptive behavior after their release. Stigmatization based on criminal behavior results from the consistent labeling and branding by society, making it challenging for the offender to overcome (Schwarz, 2020). The systematized barriers for offenders seeking to reintegrate into society make it difficult for a successful transition. Compounded with the additional stigma on offenders makes reintegration is a daunting task. The stigma associated with a felony conviction can impede the process of reentry, and emerging research findings indicate that an offender's community can amplify or temper the mark of one's criminal record (Huebner et al., 2019). Societal stigmatization and discrimination towards convicted felons are often seen solely through the prism of morality, often discounting other attributing factors. LeBel (2017) asserted that formerly incarcerated individuals are perceived by many in society as the least eligible of all citizens to receive social benefits or services of any kind. The stigma of incarceration may be mitigated by the passage of time spent out of prison; human capital, mainstream social networks, and familial connections may improve (Brown, 2019).

Based on former offenders' challenges when they reenter society, many believe that convicted felons lack the moral fortitude to contribute as productive community members and should continually be held responsible for their criminal behavior and subsequent convictions (Furst & Evans, 2017). The negative public perception of the offender is propagated by the permanent stigma created by the offender's criminal record. According to Radice (2017), the United States criminal history database currently stress seventy-seven million criminal records,

and low-income people and individuals of color constitute a severely disproportionate number of them; thus, a criminal record makes it more difficult for offenders to solidify housing, become employed and reunite with their families. Societal perceptions towards offenders are embedded into various contexts, such as cultural and religious, creating additional hurdles for the returning citizen seeking to become productive and contributing members of society. Individuals who perceive offenders as incapable of changing from their prior criminal activity would view them as more probable to re-offend if given the opportunity, thereby engendering more stigmatizing views (Tan et al., 2016). The degree to which offenders are stigmatized is often based on the type or severity of the crime. Non-violent offenders disproportionately are stigmatized at a lower rate than offenders who commit crimes that are violent or sexual, especially as it relates to registered sex offenders or sexual predators. Registered sex offenders often report experiences of social stigmatization and being physically isolated from their communities resulting from their labeled status, leading them to be distrustful of outsiders (Klein et al., 2018). Not only does the stigmatization of these sex offenders affect them, but also their families.

Family members of offenders often endure harsh criticism of their continued support of their loved ones before, during, and upon their release from incarceration. The family members of registered sex offenders view themselves as direct targets of public scrutiny, ostracism, harassment, and employment discrimination (Plogher et al., 2016). This is also prevalent in family members of offenders with mental illness. The stigmatization of offenders with mental illness is a barrier that greatly affects the offender's ability to successfully reintegrate into society due to the embedded societal views towards offenders who have a mental illness. Mentally challenged offenders may suffer discrimination due to a mental disorder or the result of being offenders or both (Grounds, 2019). Family members of offenders with a mental illness

experience significant emotional, social, financial, and psychological stressors; consequently, they are expected to deal with both an array of emotions and a double stigma for they hope to cope (Rowaer et al.,2018). The stigmatization of offenders is seen as imposing additional or collateral sanctions upon the individual upon completing their prison sentences. Convicted felons face an array of collateral consequences, which include legal restrictions on voting, public assistance, stigma, family tensions, and financial insecurity; moreover, these consequences surpass well beyond an offender's criminal sentence in general and are frequently more cumbersome than the sentence itself (Hoskins, 2018). This adversely reduces the offender's ability to reintegrate successfully, making it difficult to solidify the basic resources needed for a successful transition.

Among the many barriers, offenders encounter after they are released from incarceration, the stigmatization associated with the offender, registration requirements, and ongoing labeling and being branded "convicted felon" presents a myriad of potential problems for recently released citizens returning to their communities. The myriad expectations placed on the offender post-incarceration can appear overwhelming to the returning citizen seeking to reintegrate successfully. According to Orians and Framptor (2020), the formerly incarcerated individual will face a unique set of hurdles. Over the next 72 hours, those released on parole have to register within three days at their local Probation and Parole Office, where they will begin paying \$65 per month to be "*supervised.*" The societal stigmatization of ex-offenders often has long-lasting consequences, making it an ongoing challenge for these men and women to move past their criminal histories. Ex-offenders are a rejected group in many societies where they are highly stigmatized and facing life-long discrimination; this rejection essentially extends the punishment and diminishes their ability to function as ordinary citizens function (Kyprianides et al., 2019).

The array of challenges and barriers the ex-offender will encounter is a realization that these individuals must recognize immediately. There is little time to fully enjoy their freedom without the urgency to confront these challenges head-on.

The focal points for these individuals are the reintegration process and the ability to enmesh into communities that are not so welcome to ex-offenders. Discrimination and stigma have both been factors that thwarted returning citizens to integrate well when released from incarceration; the most important and essential thought in the mind of the ex-offender once they are released is not necessarily freedom of life, but the reintegration process into the community (Jasni et al., 2019). Unfortunately, these individuals being released from incarceration are often stigmatized by race and social class, making their reentry process difficult (Caputo-Levine, 2018). The stigmatization by race and social class undoubtedly impedes the reentry process for men and women of color, usually returning to impoverished neighborhoods with limited resources for successful reintegration. De Giorgi (2017) asserted that these masses of marginalized young men and women are released daily into the segregated neighborhoods of urban containment from which they were forcefully removed months, years, or decades earlier, often carrying only a bag of clothes, a bus ticket and a few dollars provided by the correction's department.

Incarcerated men and women are disproportionately poor, undereducated, homeless, and most likely to be people of color compared to the general population (Tyler & Brockmann, 2017). As previously noted, public perception of ex-offenders propagates this stigmatization and discrimination. Since discrimination and isolation influence the success of offenders upon their release and return to their communities, understanding attitudes toward and empathy for returning citizens is critical to increasing success in reentry (Moak et al., 2020). The public

perceives ex-offenders are likely to re-offend and support excluding them (Denver et al., 2017). Reentering communities after being released from incarceration requires discipline and an overwhelming desire to accomplish realistic goals. Prisoners' lives and consequently the lives of their family members are in no small measure defined by crime, the penal system, correlated effects (Wells, 2020). The current study will investigate stigma and discrimination related directly to the offender's family members during the reentry and reintegration process for the recently released returning citizen. This will add to the extant literature, which primarily has exclusively examined the societal stigma and discrimination associated with the offender. The general perception towards the offender returning from prison to their neighborhoods has been negative, with the embedded societal opinions skewing their ability to reintegrate successfully.

Moak and colleagues (2020) examined the viability of using reentry simulations as an instrument for influencing changes in participants' views about the realities of offenders returning to their communities after being incarcerated. The study included 27 students who participated in a community corrections course. They were asked to complete a quantitative pre and post-test assessing views towards prisoners returning to their communities. The study's findings indicate that simulating the experience of released prisoners returning to their communities positively impacted those participating in the simulation (Moak et al., 2020). The positive results of this study indicate a myriad of existing studies that emphasize the experiences of social stigmatization of the offender and not necessarily of the family members, although stigmatization among them exists.

There is a common misconception that reentry solely benefits the offender. But if familial support is warranted by the offender and an integral component to successful reintegration, the family and the returning citizen can benefit from the process. Thus, successful reentry is

beneficial to the former prisoner, the family, and public safety (Strickman, 2017). By examining potential barriers of family members during the reintegration process of the returning citizen, the current study will seek to add to the extant literature on family members benefitting from the reentry and reintegration process.

For many of these offenders, the stigmatization of being a convicted felon has far-reaching consequences. The continued reputational damage, stigmatization, and collateral consequences that these ex-offenders suffer reach the level of dignity taking because these men and women are both dehumanized and infantilized (Jefferson-Jones, 2018). The revolving door of stigmatization for the offender continues consistently. The carceral system extends well past the prison gates as former offenders are identified and treated as social threats; moreover, ostracized from the broader community (Rolston, 2018). When individuals are convicted of crimes, expected losses are due to stigmatization (Mungan, 2018). Stigmatization is a process by which specific individuals are devalued and alienated from certain social interactions because they are viewed as possessing a negative characteristic (Summers et al., 2018). While there is a profusion of existing literature that focuses on the stigmatization of offenders while incarcerated, there is limited research on offender stigmatization post-incarceration. In addition, the minimal focus has been given to the perspectives and experiences of individuals after they are released from prison regarding stigma and its impact on reintegration and occupational engagement (Sinko et al., 2020). The limited extant research on the stigmatization of family members of returning citizens reentering their communities further solidifies the need for the current study.

Individuals stigmatized are exposed to permeating stereotypes about their group, discriminatory treatment from others, and laws that prevent their participation in community events (Moore et al., 2018). There are various types of stigmas and discriminatory practices

against returning citizens depending on their criminal charges. Huebner et al. (2019) examined the discrimination and social stigma placed on sexual offenders. This article was selected for this literature review to highlight the distinctions between stigmas associated with the sex offender and offenders in general, with little emphasis on the impact of the stigmas on the offender's family members or sex offender during the reintegration process. In Missouri, the study was conducted with 32,461 individuals in prison and 13 460 on parole, where approximately 15 percent had a sexual offense conviction (Huebner et al., 2019). The study's findings concluded that structural stigma was a consistent barrier to the sex offender reentering society post-incarceration, specifically concerning residence restrictions. Although the extant literature on examining the stigmas and discrimination experienced by the recently released offender seeking to reenter society provide researchers thoughtful and careful analysis on their impact on the reintegration process, the limited research on the stigmas and direct effect on the family members of these individuals during the reintegration process validate the significance of the current study and will add to the extant literature on this topic.

Housing Barriers

Annually, approximately 700,000 ex-prisoners are returning home in the United States, and an additional 9 million are released from county jails (McKernan, 2017). The societal perception towards the offender often makes it difficult for the offender to solidify housing. One area in which public opinion clashes with reintegration policies and practices concerns housing assistance (Grommon, 2017). The housing challenges for returning citizens are predicated on various factors. For some, housing restrictions resulting from a sex charge can significantly impede their options. For others, the lack of finances limits their housing prospect or even their race. HUD warned that criminal history-based restrictions on access to housing are primarily

disproportionately to burden Blacks and Hispanics (Custer, 2018). The financial burden that many returning citizens experience can hinder their ability to acquire stable housing; consequently, employment is required to address this financial burden, but stable housing is generally necessary for finding employment (Mooney & Ricciardelli, 2017). Each returning citizen will have their unique individual situation; consequently, what works for some may not work for others (Zortman et al., 2016). Existing literature is abundant on the housing challenges and barriers of the returning citizen seeking to reenter society. This extant research primarily examines contributing causes to the homelessness of these individuals with limited focus on establishing the link between housing barriers for the offender and its impact on their families during the critical period of transitioning from incarceration to their communities.

The current study added to the existing literature by establishing the connection between the housing barriers for returning citizens and their family members' impact on their homelessness during reintegration. McKernan (2017) closely examined the array of systematized barriers preventing returning citizens from experiencing housing instability upon their release from incarceration. Examining the factors which contribute to the homelessness of the offender is the centerpiece of this study. Findings indicate that evidence-based strategies are integral to the offender who encounters many barriers preventing successful reintegration.

Improving the quality of life of the offender post-incarceration by examining these barriers is significant. However, little research has evaluated the homeless offender's effect on the family members or the causal factors of the family not providing housing for the returning offender post-incarceration. Existing research focuses on examining incarceration as a contributing factor to homelessness and how homelessness contributes to imprisonment. A study conducted by Moschion & Johnson (2019) over 2.5 years examines the housing status of

disadvantaged and homeless Australians after being released from incarceration to determine if homelessness contributes to their imprisonment or their periods of imprisonment is a contributing factor to their homelessness. The study's findings concluded that homelessness did not increase the likelihood of incarceration, but that incarceration does increase homelessness (Moschion & Johnson, 2019). As noted earlier, the offender sees the family as an integral component in the reintegration process, often relying on the family for housing upon release. This study underscores the need for additional research encompassing the offender's family concerning housing as they seek to reintegrate into their communities.

Concerning family conflict and the homeless offender, much of the existing research highlights the attributing factors during the offender's incarcerated period instead of the family's issues upon the returning citizen's release. Muetner et al. (2018) examined family disruption in the form of jailed parents' housing instability in the twelve months leading up to their most recent period of incarceration by using the Family Stress Proximal Process Model to understand the connection between housing instability and children's behavior problems. The findings indicate that housing instability, homelessness, and recidivism in jailed parents were primarily joint, with many disruptions occurring with young children (Muetner et al., 2018). The current study will add to the extant literature by further examining if family disruption or family conflict are transitional barriers for the returning citizen's family members, which may potentially impact the reintegration process.

There is an array of extant research which often inextricably links both homelessness and the incarcerated individual together, with minimal focus on the family dynamic of the recently released homeless individual. Umamaheswar (2018) studied the connection between incarceration and homelessness, presenting a reflexive account of the process of conducting

qualitative research on two populations considered as vulnerable: homeless and incarcerated men. Conclusive findings of the study indicate the plethora of challenges a qualitative researcher encounters when conducting interviews in the prison setting. Individuals about to be released from the prison setting often have restrictive experience policies, inhibiting their ability to reintegrate successfully. Various federal and regional policies exacerbated by stigma prevent the ex-offender disenfranchised by restricting access to housing, employment, and community engagement (Kannenbergh & Conley, 2020). Restrictions to housing, employment, and transitional services for returning citizens are also compounded by barriers like health challenges and court fines. Policy makers should seek ways to diminish incarceration's devastating influence by advocating a more open and responsive health care system and creating support structures for ex-offenders, their families, and communities (Tyler & Brockman, 2017).

A cross-sectional study of the relationship between legal debt and duration of homelessness conducted by Mogk et al. (2020) interviewed 101 adults currently in the criminal justice system experiencing homelessness in Seattle, Washington. The research findings indicated that respondents experienced homelessness approximately 41 months while in the criminal justice system, specifically two-thirds having been convicted of a crime and 78% having been incarcerated (Mogk et al., 2020). After being incarcerated, the high percentage of homeless individuals intensifies the need to examine potential attributing factors post-incarceration further. A study conducted by Walker et al. (2014) used a qualitative study investigating the link between social capital and the challenges of parole reentry conducted with 73 individuals released on parole. Conclusive findings indicate that individuals who were released from incarceration to a secure home with family members acknowledged that this was pivotal to successful reentry; thus, individuals who were released without having a place to stay or having to rely on a shelter

were not as successful in the reentry process with encountering difficulties solidifying employment (Walker et al., 2014). This is pertinent to this researcher's current study as it underscores the significance of the family as integral to housing stability for returning citizens.

Discrepancy over underlying factors attributed to the homelessness of the offender remains prevalent in existing research. Previous research finds that the formerly incarcerated are at an increased risk for homelessness, but studies disagree regarding how these individuals experience homelessness (Remster, 2019). Since housing stability is key to successful reentry, understanding potential factors which may elevate the likelihood of housing instability, individuals residing in an institution will leave the residential context one day and move to a stable, independent way of living. This transition is not without challenges, as it turns out this socially vulnerable group runs a heightened risk of becoming homeless (Verstraete et al., 2018). Returning citizens are faced with housing policies that historically have not been supportive of the reintegration process. Ex-offenders had minor support for helpful housing policies. The most support for housing policies is considered harmful; moreover, citizens appear more willing to subject ex-offenders to poor and unsafe housing conditions than noncriminal populations (Dum et al., 2017). Existing housing policies that may be difficult for the returning citizen to attain housing need reforming. Current reform may benefit individuals who have already been successful in reentering society. Still, they fail to address the immediate need for housing stability of the ex-offenders who have just been released (Crowell, 2017). When reforming these policies does not take place, social implications become evident. Hignite and Haff (2017) posited that housing stability and links to social service agencies are pivotal factors for ensuring ex-offenders do not become re-incarcerated.

To be clear, being released from incarceration with no permanent housing negatively impacts the possibility of experiencing a smooth transition from prison to the community (Cooper, 2017). Since an array of extant literature fails to examine the personal challenges and barriers of family members of returning citizens and how these barriers may impact the housing status of the offender, the current study may prove crucial in providing insight into the reintegration process of the offender and the family unit. Gaps in existing literature related directly to reintegration, stigma, barriers, and perspectives of family members and service providers are identified by Egleton et al. (2016). This article demonstrates the evident gap in literature impacting returning citizens to their communities. Since the authors highlight the perspectives of family members of ex-offenders as a noticeable gap in the extant literature, family members' views of these returning citizens are crucial in the current study.

Recidivist Behavior

In many communities, relatives, friends, and society have difficulty accepting and reintegrating returning citizens into the community due to negative perceptions about them; thus, contributing significantly to re-offense and recidivism (Dako-Gyeke & Baffour, 2016). Understanding the recidivist behavior of ex-offenders and its impact on family members is complex yet integral to the current study. There are varying facets of recidivism and various attributing factors. Social and environmental factors may also heighten the risk of recidivism by constraining choices and pro-social opportunities for community reintegration after they are released from prison (Barrenger et al., 2017). The risk factors for recidivist behavior are numerous and multidimensional (Hall et al., 2016). To fully understand recidivist behavior by the offender, its impact on family members of the offender, and its impact on the reintegration process, existing research which examined recidivism and familial relationships post-

incarceration, recidivism attributed to non-familial support post-incarceration, policies for successful reintegration for the recidivist offender, and potential causal factors attributed to recidivist behavior was sought. Reviewing extant literature examining recidivism rates and causal factors during the reintegration process was key. As huge numbers of individuals continue to return to the community from prison, policymakers and criminal justice practitioners continue to seek ways to help reintegrate offenders into the community and reduce the probability that they will return to criminal activity (Visher et al., 2017). Recidivism and family are often used interchangeably. Understanding family rearing issues and problematic interactions are predictive indicators of an individual's latter re-offenses (Katsiyannis et al., 2018). Suppose ex-offenders who were previously incarcerated find themselves with insufficient social support as they reenter society. In that case, they may be vulnerable to committing offenses against themselves or others, resulting in recidivism (Schnappauf & DiDonato, 2017).

Understanding this lack of social support and familial support is pivotal in the current study, especially as it relates to the offender's family members. One of the central components of this current study is determining if social/family support is lacking, then why? Pettus-Davis et al. (2017) contended that over half of released ex-offenders are reincarcerated within 3 years. Social support from family members after incarceration dramatically reduces the likelihood of reincarceration presence of social support promotes post-incarceration success. Still, little was known about the stability and sustainability of such assets after the offender is released. Understanding the stability and sustainability of support is paramount and any underlying factors contributing to the decline of family support post-incarceration.

Shamblen et al. (2017) surveyed 280 men in prison reentry, where relationship skills were measured. The study compared men who were a part of the Creating Lasting Family

Connections (CLFCFP) group and men who were a part of the controlled group. Communication skills, conflict resolution skills, intrapersonal skills, emotional awareness, interpersonal skills, relationships management skills, relationship satisfaction, and relationship commitment were measured. Findings of the study indicated that members of the CLFCFP group had larger sustained improvements in relationship skills (Shamblen et al., 2017). However, results did not suggest that CLFCFP did not have a significant impact on recidivism.

Although this study sought to address the relationship skills of the offender and their impact on recidivism, the focus on the relationship skills of the offender and not the relationship skills of the offender's family members accentuate the need for the current study. An inordinate amount of extant literature focuses on the offender's relationship with family members *during* their incarceration periods and how the communication between the offender and the family impacts the reintegration period. Folk et al. (2019) examined contact with family members during incarceration and its impact on post-release functioning. Participants of the study included 507 incarcerated adults in a local jail facility. Findings of the study indicated that more frequent contact with family during incarceration predicts increases in family unity, which signifies better mental health during the first year of the offender's release (Folk et al., 2019). The current study will seek to add to extant research by examining communication skills between the offender and family members post-incarceration since a plethora of existing research primarily addresses the status of the offender and the family during the incarceration period.

When asked if they will ever return to prison, many ex-offenders are uncertain; this uncertainty is the result of their outlook on returning to their environment and their perspective on the criminal justice system (Skinner-Osei & Stepteau-Watson, 2018). The environment where the offender returns are often predicated on the economic status of the individual. The

environment, in turn, can have a positive or detrimental effect in the reintegration process depending on where the offender is forced to live upon release. The disparities in communities where these individuals return post-incarceration indicate a broader systematized problem that disproportionately affects offenders of color, often contributing to their recidivist behavior.

When a prison sentence ends, returning citizens must reestablish their relationships to neighborhoods and communities; thus, neighborhood attainment is structured by location and availability of institutional housing while others live in the neighborhoods of others, relying on housing arrangements with family and friends instead of obtaining their abode (Simes, 2019). Using a longitudinal survey of individuals returning to the Greater Boston area, a study conducted by Simes (2019) analyzed disparities in neighborhood attainment post-incarceration. One hundred twenty-two men and women who were incarcerated in Massachusetts were interviewed over one week. Conclusive findings of the study indicate that issues solidifying housing, re-incarceration, and immense racial disparities in neighborhood context explain the ecological structure of social inequality in urban neighborhoods in an era where mass incarceration is prevalent (Simes, 2019). The study's sole attention on the offender's challenges post-incarceration also underscores the significance of the current study. The focus on the offender's environment with no mention of the family members of the returning citizen in the study as integral to the reentry process for the returning citizens provides credibility for the need for the current study. As the number of ex-offenders returning to their communities continues to grow, a model for successful prisoner reentry is pivotal to address the barriers *they* face reintegrating into a changing society (Valera et al., 2017). The emphasis in existing research on the barriers of the offenders and not the barriers of the offender's family members is evident. The recidivist behavior of the offender is attributed to several causes. Examining this behavior in the

context of familial support will seek to fill the gap in existing research that does not bring to the forefront the barriers of returning citizens' family members, which may provide insight into the lack of familial support during the reintegration process.

Summary

This literature review sought to discover past research on barriers and challenges of ex-offenders being released from incarceration and the barriers and challenges of their family members in the context of familial support during the reintegration process. Guided by Bowen Family Systems Theory, in which human behavior sees the family as an emotional unit, this researcher searched for literature that examined the familial relationship between the recently released returning citizen seeking to reenter society and their family members and how the offender's reintegration efforts and transition impacted the family. Since there are minimal studies on reentry guided by Bowen Family Systems Theory, this current study sought to advance the theory through new concepts acquired during the research process. Four specific focus areas were examined: familial relationships, stigmatization and discrimination against the offender and family members, housing barriers, and recidivist behavior. What resulted amounted to a profusion of research on the barriers of the offenders during incarceration and upon their release as they reentered their communities. These barriers included societal stigmatization and discrimination against the offender, discrimination against family members of the offender, housing discrimination, the various challenges to solidify housing for the offender post-incarceration and attribute factors to the recidivist behavior of the offender. Unfortunately, there was minimal extant research on the barriers of the offender's family members during the reintegration process. This conclusion by no means seeks to minimize the array of challenges and systematized barriers the offender encounters upon their release and return to society. It

merely supports the assertion made in Chapter 1 that a gap exists in the current research placing the barriers of these returning citizens during and after incarceration at the forefront and any barriers and challenges of the family members during the transition period as secondary or obsolete.

There was a common link between the offender and family members concerning the stigma associated with criminal activity and the offender's subsequent return and desire to reintegrate. In addition, the offender's family in the context of reintegration also encountered stigmatization and discrimination because they supported the offender's desire to reenter society. Concerning the other three focus areas: familial relationships, housing, and recidivist behavior, the minimal focus on the family members, the family members' perspectives, and the overall challenges they face resulting from the offender's return in the context of the reintegration of the offender underscore the potential for the current study to fill this evident gap in existing research.

Chapter 3 outlines the methodological considerations for addressing the gap in the literature of the barriers and challenges of family members of returning citizens recently released from incarceration. Research questions and sub-questions seek to explore the lived experiences of the family members of returning citizens once they have reentered their communities seeking to reintegrate successfully.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

This chapter presents a discussion of the research design, research questions, research setting, participant selection, procedures, data collection, and data analysis that were used to investigate the barriers of family members of returning citizens reentering society. There has been extensive research on the plethora of systematic barriers facing recently released prisoners reentering society. However, these barriers are primarily seen as the catalyst for recidivist behavior resulting in these offenders' subsequent return to prison. Although understanding these barriers in reducing recidivism is pivotal, there are other factors in the context of successful prisoner reentry that have been minimally researched.

Since there are high rates of citizens reentering society with issues that may impact their friends, family members, and communities, policymakers and practitioners should understand successful methods for their reintegration (Anderson et al., 2018). Understanding how the returning citizen's release from prison and attempts to reenter society impact their family members and the barriers these family members experience through the reintegration process may assist the policymakers and practitioners in prisoner reentry and, more importantly, the family members in general. Research on incarceration, reentry, and the family has yielded evidence that family members play a pivotal role in prisoners' successful return to the community (Datchi et al., 2016). Having a greater insight into the lived experiences of these family members may add to existing research with the expectation of yielding practical solutions for the family and the offender during the reintegrative process and the potential for shaping policy changes for prisoner reentry overall.

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study was to explore the barriers and challenges that family members of returning citizens recently released from incarceration have experienced resulting from their relationship to the offender before, during, and after incarceration and how or if these barriers have impacted the reintegration process for the offender. Given that majority of extant literature has primarily focused on the barriers of the offender, this study was integral in accentuating the voices of the family members who are viewed as vital to the successful reentry of the offender.

In Chapter 2, there was an exhaustive literature review conducted focusing on four foregrounding areas: familial relationships, stigmatization and discrimination of the offender and family members; housing barriers of the offender, and recidivist behavior of the offender all of which exposed a demonstrative gap in the literature of the barriers and challenges of family members of the returning citizen during the reentry process of the offender. In this chapter, an outline of the research methodology including the research questions of the family members of the returning citizen, the research design selected, the setting, participant selection, the procedures, the researcher's role, data collection strategies, how interviews were conducted, data analysis, issues of trustworthiness, ethical considerations, and summary were presented.

Design

Through this qualitative phenomenological study, the researcher sought to discover the familial impact on family members of returning citizens recently released from incarceration spoken solely through the prism of their lived experiences before, during, and post-incarceration. Discovering the catalyst and any underlying factors attributed to challenges and barriers encountered resulting from their relationship with the returning citizen is paramount. The researcher intended to evaluate the roles of these family members and how they are integral to

the returning citizens' efforts to obtain and sustain a successful reentry once they are released. As the participants reflected on their personal experiences, their diverse stories provided a contextual structure as themes emerged; thus, the qualitative methodology with a phenomenological design was selected for this study. The qualitative design for this study was chosen for a plethora of reasons. First, this study closely examined the personal lived experiences of family members of returning citizens and how these experiences had contributed to and shaped their worldviews. According to Turale (2020), the origins of qualitative description are based on naturalistic inquiry strategies, the least theoretical of all the qualitative approaches but practical or pragmatic when researchers desire to uncover the who, what, or where of certain events or situations experiences. Second, this study aimed to attempt to provide context into the challenges of family members of returning citizens reentering society. Qualitative research considers the natural contexts where individuals or groups function, as its goal is to provide an in-depth understanding of real-world problems (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). Third, this researcher sought to understand how incarceration and the recent release of their loved ones have shaped the roles of these family members in the reentry process.

Through qualitative inquiry, the research seeks, interprets, and shares others' perspectives and their own on some aspect of the social condition, contributing to the multiplicity of voices and visions and to the plurality of knowing (Glesne, 2016). Finding the commonalities among the participants and their shared experiences in relation to the barriers encountered prior, during, and post-incarceration of their loved ones was central to this study. Because of this, a phenomenological method was selected. According to Cresswell (2013), a phenomenology approach centers on the commonality of a lived experience within a specific group; moreover, the fundamental goal of the approach is to arrive at a description of the nature

of the phenomenon. Therefore, a transcendental phenomenology approach was selected as opposed to an empirical phenomenology approach. There are two distinct paradigms within phenomenology: empirical phenomenology (Giorgi, 2009) and transcendental (Moustakas, 1994). According to Moustakas (1994), as it relates to Epoche or bracketing, the investigator must view the phenomenon being investigated without bias or preconceived notions.

On the other hand, empirical phenomenology presupposes a lesser- degree of bracketing as possible and accepts additional necessary grounding of the research within the research (Giorgi, 2009). By contrast, transcendental phenomenology comprises four major components: epoche, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis of meanings and essence (Moustakas, 1994). Since this researcher intended to be minimal in the research resulting through careful bracketing, a transcendental phenomenological approach was best for this study.

By choosing the transcendental phenomenological method, the researcher can ask deeply probing interview questions to the pool of participants (Cresswell, 2013). Since this study examined the challenges and barriers of the family members of returning citizens by allowing them to share their lived experiences, the qualitative methodology with a phenomenological design is the best selection. Researching the phenomenon of the human experiences of these family members, their barriers resulting directly or indirectly from their relationship with the returning citizen, and transitional challenges encountered during the reintegrative process further underscores the significance of selecting the qualitative research methodology for this study.

The basic premise of phenomenology is that people live not cognizant of its effects on our thinking and doing. The development of awareness requires that people turn towards this relationality, becoming with phenomena as they are constituted as something manifest,

graspable, or meaningful (Freeman, 2021). Hearing the voices of the individuals in this study solely from their unique experiences and perspectives afforded this researcher the opportunity to fully grasp how their lives have been impacted resulting from the incarceration of their loved ones and their subsequent release, making the qualitative approach the best method for this study. However, a quantitative approach would not have been the best fit for this study in that it seeks to understand relationships among variables measured numerically and proceed deductively (Cresswell, 2018). Further, quantitative research was close-ended in nature -and suggests that the variables be well-established in advance and that the study be led by a strongly established theory that provides *a priori* insight into potential relationships (Cresswell, 2018). Since the current study sought the subjective experiences of these individuals, which are difficult to quantify, and the research process was inductive rather than deductive, a qualitative approach was best suited for conducting this research.

Research Questions

This research was driven by two central questions, each supported by related sub-questions, to broaden the understanding of the personal challenges and barriers encountered by family members of returning citizens from incarceration and their expected role in the reintegration process.

RQ1: What have been your experiences since your family member has returned home from prison seeking to reintegrate back into society?

SQ1: How have these experiences influenced your decision to help or abstain from assisting the returning citizen in the reentry process?

SQ2: How have these experiences impacted family relations since the returning citizen has been released from incarceration and started the reintegration process?

RQ2: What are the general societal perceptions towards the family members of recently released returning citizens from incarceration reentering their community?

SQ1: How have these societal perceptions impacted the family relationship between family members and the returning citizen?

SQ2: What are the general coping mechanisms you have used in dealing with the challenges and barriers encountered during the reintegration of your loved one?

Setting

The site chosen for this study was a reentry facility located on the Gulf Coast. The center is referred to as (pseudonym) Florida Reentry Coalition (FRC) throughout this dissertation to ensure confidentiality. This site was selected for several reasons. FRC is a center comprised of transitional services for recently released individuals reentering their communities and support services for families of formerly incarcerated individuals. It is considered a “one-stop-shop” for former offenders where they have accessibility to job placement, soft skills training, community resources, and GED preparation. Geographically located in the inner city, this center is surrounded by other agencies and organizations providing a wealth of information and resources to many underserved populations. There are also resources available to family members of returning citizens who frequent the center during the initial intakes of former offenders. The center is also considered a resource center for the Florida Department of Corrections (Florida DOC), where recently released prisoners can access their employment database for potential jobs. Family members of these recently released prisoners often accompany these individuals during the intake process. Since this organization is considered key to reentry in this area, and family members of returning citizens are cognizant of its location and proximity to other community resources, this researcher feels this setting is one of the best sites to choose for

participants in the study. There are several confidential rooms for the interviews without the participants being disturbed during the survey. This researcher also considered the organizational structure of FRC. It has a Board of Directors which governs the Executive Director. Under the executive director's auspices, there are caseworkers and reentry counselors onsite to assist the ex-offenders recently released from incarceration.

Participants

The target population for this study includes all biologically related adult family members whose loved one was currently released from incarceration in one year or less, reentering the community. To be eligible, participants were at least eighteen years of age and had some role in returning citizens' reentry or reintegration into society. Existing theoretical and empirical research asserts that family involvement in the reentry process of the offender has positive outcomes for the offender in preventing recidivist behavior (Berg & Huebner, 2011). As explicitly stated in the recruitment flyer, these requirements will ensure that participants selected will have experiences with the phenomenon being studied. The sample pool of participants at the study site consisted of 11 family members of returning citizens. The usually small sample size in qualitative research is contingent on the information richness of the data, the variety of participants, the scope of the research questions, the phenomenon, the data collection method, and the type of sampling method (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). The researcher reached out to the primary contact of Reentry Alliance of Florida, Women with Clear Vision, Restoration and Revive Florida DOC, and Strong Mothers of the Incarcerated as Living Example (S.M.I.L.E.), requesting permission to post the participant recruitment flyer on their front lobby. Each of these organizations serves former incarcerated men and women.

Additionally, support services are provided to the family members of their clients, who

recently were released from incarceration. A purposive sampling strategy was employed. To engage in purposive sampling, this researcher sought to contact the family members of returning citizens who have been to prison more than once but also endeavored to include family members of returning citizens who may have been to jail only once as to gain insight into a full range of family member' experiences. The goal of meeting broad criteria of adult family members of returning citizens within an age range of 18 and older, replete with diverse ethnicities, gender, and crimes committed by the returning citizen was critical. Palinkas et al. 2015 state that purposive sampling allows researchers to gather a broad range of viewpoints concerning the topic of the study. A purposive sample is a non-probability sample that is selected and centered on the characteristics of a population and the study's objective (Crossman, 2020). The researcher expected the sample for the study consisted of 11-15 family members, though saturation will be employed to determine the final sample size. Saunders et al. 2018 contend that saturation should be operationalized in a manner that is consistent with the research questions, the theoretical position and analytic framework selected for the study. To improve the study's rigor and trustworthiness, purposive sampling was the best method to employ. Purposive sampling has a long developmental history, and there are as many, perceptions that it is simple and straightforward (Campbell et al., 2020). Since data was collected from diverse populations, this researcher deems the maximum variation sampling procedure best for this study. Maximum variation sampling is where participants were selected based on a wide variation in backgrounds (Moser & Korstjens, 2018).

Procedures

An initial letter with information on the study was sent to the Center Director of FRC requesting their facility to hold interviews for the study (Appendix B). Once approval was

granted by FRC (Appendix C) to use their facility, the researcher waited for Liberty University IRB approval online. Once IRB approval was granted (Appendix A), procedures began for recruitment, participation, and data collection. Recruitment flyers (Appendix D) were disseminated at the following locations for potential candidates: Reentry Alliance of Florida, Women with Clear Vision, Restoration and Revive, Florida Department of Corrections Probation and Parole, and S.M.I.L.E. (Strong Mothers of the Incarcerated as Living Examples). As previously stated in the sample recruitment section, potential candidates who indicated an interest in participating in the study would be notified by phone or email to begin the screening process against inclusion and exclusion criteria through an audio-recorded telephone interview using Cube ACR software for Android phones. An initial participant's letter (Appendix E) was mailed to potential participants of the study who indicated an interest with details of the screening process and research. A follow-up letter (Appendix F) was mailed two weeks later to potential participants with details of the study and reminding them of the consent form to participate. The screening interview data was handwritten on the interview form (Appendix G) and indicated if the candidate was eligible or ineligible for the study based on the responses. To ensure accuracy, the handwritten data were compared to the audio recording. A consent form (Appendix H) was also be mailed to potential participants requesting them to bring the signed consent form with them to the face-to-face interview. All candidates deemed eligible for the study were contacted to schedule their face-to-face consultation with this researcher. Any candidate considered as ineligible for the study was informed at their telephone screening interview; nevertheless, as part of the study material, information obtained during the pre-screening on the data collection forms were securely maintained. After all face-to-face interviews were scheduled, data collection for the study began (Appendix I).

To ensure privacy and confidentiality, the interviews occurred in a secure meeting room set off from the public's entrance and expected to last no more than 1 hour. Data were collected on the participant's interview form and transferred to an electronic Microsoft Word file. In addition, there was an electronic and hard copy word file for each participant. Utilizing the Sony UX560 digital audio recorder, each interview was audio-recorded and then transcribed for written verification with any ancillary notes made by this researcher. The person entrusted to transcribe the data had no access to participant identifying information to ensure confidentiality. Before receiving any data from the study, the transcriptionist was required to sign a confidentiality agreement (Appendix J). At the culmination of each face-to-face interview, a debriefing interview took place while still being audio-recorded. This debriefing interview aims to review the purpose of the research and to discern if the participant has experienced any issues during the interview that may have caused adverse effects. Debriefings are vital to qualitative methods such as focus groups, interviews, or observations (McMahon & Winch, 2018). After reviewing the purpose and significance of the study, the researcher provided an opportunity for the participant to ask any questions concerning the study. At the culmination of the interview and debriefing process, each participant was given a \$30 money card for their participation.

The Researcher's Role

“For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (Ephesians 2:10, 2011, NIV). The researcher's role in this phenomenological study is multi-faceted. First, this researcher ensured that God is glorified during every phase of this study. It takes courage for anyone to share their personal experiences, especially when those experiences may entail some dark, hurtful moments. Understanding the personal challenges and barriers of the participants of this study as they shared their thoughts

required the researcher to demonstrate the Godly traits of humility and compassion. “Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble” (1 Peter 3:8, 2011, NIV). Through compassion and humility, God’s glory would be manifested through this study. Hopefully, the results led to true spiritual restoration for the family members of the returning citizen and the returning citizens themselves. Second, this researcher’s role is to engage completely while guiding the interview process without providing any suggestive responses. This can only be done by recognizing that the qualitative researcher gains access to the participants’ natural environment and is the principal research instrument used to collect and analyze data (Clark & Veale, 2018). This researcher considered it an honor and privilege to have direct access to the participants and their experiences. As a human instrument in the study, this researcher was cognizant of his assumptions and personal experiences about the phenomenon being studied. Cresswell (2013) asserted that qualitative researchers have the challenge in a phenomenological study to bracket personal experiences and assumptions concerning the phenomena from the interpretation of the data. These experiences may create interpretations born of the researcher’s impressions and not that of the participants.

While this researcher had distant relatives who have been incarcerated, the phenomenon being studied is from the perspectives of family members of returning citizens *integral* in their reintegrative process. This researcher had never had relatives reentering society where he was integral in their reintegrative process; thus, not being impacted by their return. To the extent where the phenomenon being studied centered on relatives who have direct contact with the returning citizen and have had an integral role in their efforts towards a successful reentry, this researcher’s assumptions, and biases of how these relatives are impacted were minimal. Researcher reflexivity, essentially a researcher’s insight into their own biases and rationale for

decision-making as the study moves ahead, is critical to rigor (Johnson et al., 2020). Acknowledging potential moments of personal interpretation or bias, based on assumptions, comments in a separate section of the field notes exclusively separated from the participant's commentary and reflections were noted. The goal here was to maintain focus on the participant's self-reflection consistently. For this to be possible, a researcher must build awareness, sensitivity, and trustworthiness. It was essential as the sole researcher for this study to acknowledge any potential biases towards returning citizens or family members. The transcendental phenomenological design allows the researcher to focus on these family members' experiences by making it necessary to set aside any preconceptions concerning their motives and experiences before, during, and after the incarceration of their loved ones. Being able to see vividly through our beliefs is the primary step towards reaching methodological integrity and thus towards reporting and demonstrating trustworthiness in our research; moreover, reaching awareness is pivotal to understanding ourselves as the primary instruments (Gabarre & Gabarre, 2020).

This researcher did not have any prior relationship, connection, or association with any known members of the intended sample population. This researcher recognized that any prior contact or association with participants in this study could place the study at significant risk with the potential of posing a threat to the integrity of the study, heightened ethical concerns, and major implications for data collection and data analysis. For transparency, this researcher met with the site's director after initial approval to hold the study at this location solely for introduction, clarity on logistics, and any questions or concerns. There were no potential participants of the study present during this researcher's visit to the site.

Data Collection

Qualitative data for this transcendental phenomenological study came from in-depth, semi-structured interviews with family members of recently released returning citizens to understand the challenges and barriers they face resulting from their role in the reintegrative process of their loved ones. Data collection for this study began after IRB approval by Liberty University and FRC, which served as the study's setting. Once approval was solidified, this researcher recruited participants and conduct in-depth, semi-structured interviews with individuals who consented to participate. Secondary data was collected from research notes and document collection. One of the main functions of this researcher was to ensure that the findings of this study were both valid and reliable. *Data Triangulation* is using two or more methods to obtain conclusive results in qualitative research that increases the reliability and validity of a study's findings by providing a clearer picture of the problem, increasing confidence in the findings, creating innovative ways to understanding a phenomenon, and by providing distinctive answers or results (Naeem, 2019). To accurately measure the phenomenon of the transitional impact on family members of returning citizens reentering society and to help triangulate the data, this researcher implemented three strategies: audio recordings of the interviews, document analysis and reflective journal notes. Qualitative researchers bring their personal bias to the research, share their bias with those who read the study and seek to mitigate their personal bias to ensure that they correctly interpret the participant (Fusch et al., 2018). Qualitative researchers must be aware of potential personal bias, as this propensity to challenge the validity of the results; thus, warranting the need for data triangulation.

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews for this transcendental phenomenological study were the

appropriate type of data collection utilized by this researcher. The purpose of the interviews was to capture the participant's lived experiences as family members of returning citizens prior to, during, and post-incarceration. Phenomenology is enacted by its commitment to describing experiences, not an explanation or analysis (Moustakas, 1994). One of the primary reasons this strategy was chosen is that it presented a clear opportunity for the researcher to gauge the participant's introspective thoughts and feelings on the specific phenomenon. It is first in the sequence of data collection because it helps to establish a relational focus between the researcher and the participant at the beginning of the study. According to Dejonckheere and Vaughn (2019), interviews should not be conducted with a transactional type of question-answer style to obtain quality data. Instead, they should be unfolding, iterative interactions between the interviewer and interviewee. Having an open dialogue with the participants is paramount to this researcher to collect data that explains the phenomenon in detail through the shared lived experiences of these individuals. The questions asked centered on the experiences of the phenomenon being studied, with the expectation of the participants freely expressing themselves. Open-ended questions enable the participants to openly convey their experiences with minimal influence by the researcher's perspectives (Creswell, 2019). Semi-structured interviewing requires both a relational focus and practice in the skills of facilitating the interview; these skills include: 1) determining the objective and scope of the study; 2) identification of participants; 3) consideration of ethical issues; 4) planning logistical aspects; 5) developing the interview guide; 6) establishing trust and rapport; 7) conducting the interview; 8) memos and reflection; 9) the analysis of the data; 10) demonstrating trustworthiness of the data; and 11) presentation of the findings in the paper or report (Dejonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). Within the context of this phenomenological research design, the research undoubtedly should center on what occurs

within the family members and how they are conveyed to the researcher as they described their lived experiences during the reintegrative process of the returning citizen. There was the expectation by this researcher that other topics and themes would emerge during these semi-structured interviews, contributing further to the phenomenon being studied. This is another reason this type of data collection was chosen in comparison to surveys. In comparison to written surveys, qualitative interviews have the advantage of being interactive and letting unexpected topics emerge and be taken up by the researcher (Busetto et al., 2020). The interview questions for the study appear below (also see Appendix I):

1. Please introduce yourself to me and provide a recollection of your understanding of this research study.

This question reflects a general background to ensure that the participant has a clear understanding of the recruitment materials, informed consent documentation, and comprehensive study.

2. Discuss your current relationship with the returning citizen by describing your closeness, some events that you have experienced before them being incarcerated, during incarceration, and since their release.
3. Please detail your feelings and emotions that you experienced once you discovered your family member was returning home from incarceration and if these feelings and emotions have changed since they have been home.
4. Describe any changes in your relationship from the beginning of their incarceration period up until their release.
5. How has the returning citizen's return to society personally affected you financially?
6. How has their return impacted other family relationships?

7. Describe how you managed your life during the returning citizen's incarceration period.
8. Describe how you have adjusted since the returning citizen has been home.
9. At the beginning of this interview, I asked you to describe your closeness with the returning citizen. Describe how this closeness has been impacted since the returning citizen has been home.
10. Describe any personal barriers or challenges you have encountered during the incarceration and release of your family member.
11. Describe how these personal barriers or challenges have impacted your desire or ability to assist the returning citizen in the reentry process.
12. How would you define your role in your family member's reintegration process?
13. Describe your personal feelings towards this role.
14. How are you currently finding support for your own needs during this transitional period?
15. What other tools or support do you need to help yourself and the returning citizen with reentry?
16. Describe how you believe society looks at family members of returning citizens.
17. How have these views (society's perception) impacted your relationship?
18. What have been your coping mechanisms or skills during the reintegration efforts of your loved one?
19. Please describe what you believe should be done to shape public opinion of returning citizens and their family members.
20. Suppose part of the returning citizen's post-release reentry plan included a meeting requiring family members to be present with the returning citizen upon release. How do you see yourself participating in the process?

Families represent a type of social capital that can impact influential reintegration contingent on the strength of the bond and the nature of the relationship (Hall et al., 2018). Thus, questions 2, 3, 4, 6, and 9 are foundational questions meant to gauge the current state of the relationship between the family member and the returning citizen; moreover, to seek an understanding of the relationship has evolved, deteriorated, or generally been influenced during incarceration or since their family member's recent release from prison. Provided the plethora of challenges and obstacles to successful reentry, acquiring forms of support to enable the reintegration process was substantially valuable post-incarceration (Lee et al., 2016).

Focus is often on the victim on who the harm has been directly inflicted and completely ignore the damage inflicted on the relative of the convicted felon; in most cases, harm is more financial and makes them economically weak (Sarkar et al., 2020). Therefore, questions 5, 7, and 8 will allow the participant to place in context the financial impact experienced resulting from their assistance to the returning citizen during incarceration and the discussion of necessary living adjustments within the family structure/family dynamics since the offender's return home.

Past reentry research highlights the challenges formerly incarcerated individuals face during the reentry process, but the challenges their family members experience are understudied (Liu & Visher, 2019). Since there is an evident gap of existing literature underscoring the challenges and personal barriers of family members of returning citizens, questions 10 and 11 will enable the participant to express the barriers and challenges they have experienced resulting from their relationship with the offender, their assistance to the offender, or a combination of both.

Existing research has indicated that relationships between incarcerated individuals and family members can improve over time, making the reintegrative process and transition easier

once the family member is released and returns to society. McCarthy and Adams (2019) asserted that there has been minimal attention on the countervailing effects of incarceration and specific cases where prisoner-family relations might improve during the incarceration period. Questions 12 and 13 address the family member's role in the reintegrative process, expanding on the relationship status with the returning citizen.

To fight the social isolation and stigma associated with the incarceration of a family member, increasingly efforts are made to support families affected by imprisonment (Bradshaw & Muldoon, 2020). However, many who have a consistent relationship with incarcerated men and women also experience courtesy stigma; moreover, unique stressors and the stigma of having a loved one who is incarcerated influence family members to seek and give specific types of support (Hinck et al., 2019). Questions 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, and 19 are integral in assessing any family members' stigma resulting from their association or consistent relationship with the offender. Further, these questions sought to understand any coping mechanisms family members have employed during this reintegration process and how these coping mechanisms have impacted the overall relationship between offender and family member.

What would public policy look like if it reflected not only the evident importance of family relationships in the lives of individuals reentering society but also the specific factors which shape how those relationships face during incarceration? (McKay et al., 2016). Question 20 seeks to gauge the significance of family members as integral to the reentry process seen solely through the prism of the family members themselves. Understanding how these family members view themselves throughout the entire reintegrative process was pivotal in understanding how their challenges and barriers impeded their ability to provide sustained support to the returning citizen or propel them to provide greater support post-incarceration.

Document Analysis

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), document analysis is a component of data collection research and is the second method used in this study. Family members of returning citizens are asked to write a 250 minimum word essay entitled “My Family, My Story: A Personal Reflection,” where they were asked to provide in detail any thoughts that they did not convey during the face-to-face interview and wish to do so about their feelings and views towards the returning citizen. As a qualitative research method, document analysis is often selected as a second or supplementary method of collecting data to add rigor to a study through a multi-method form of triangulation (Cardno, 2018). Document analysis is social research and is a vital research tool in its own right; moreover, it is an invaluable component of most schemes of triangulation, the combination of methodologies in studying the same phenomenon (Bowen, 2009). Due to the time restraints of the face-to-face interview and participants’ varying schedules, the essay is a method that provides the participant a broader opportunity to share their thoughts on a more intimate and personal level. They will be given the title at the culmination of the face-to-face interview and will have one week to complete the essay.

The participants were to email their essay to this researcher once it was complete. This allowed this researcher to validate further the data collected from the face-to-face interview. Since the study’s aim was to examine the personal barriers and challenges of family members of returning citizens, collecting data from these additional resources added rigor to the study. To ensure reliable results because utilizing document analysis has concerns for researcher bias, O’Leary (2014) provided an eight-step process that should take place in document analysis: 1) create a list of texts to explore; 2) consider how texts will be accessed with focus on linguistic or cultural barriers; 3) acknowledge and address biases; 4) develop appropriate skills for research;

5) consider techniques to ensure credibility; 6) understand the data one is searching for; and 7) consider ethical issues.

Researcher Reflective Journaling

The third source of data was reflective journaling. This method was utilized last as it enabled this researcher to engage the research more in-depth. Ortlipp (2008) asserted that using reflective journals allows researchers to make their experiences, opinions, thoughts, and feelings known. Thoughtful analysis is related to how the researcher interprets empirical data; no data source is impartial. The researcher analyzed all data through measurement, observations, interviews, or secondary data analysis (Deggs & Hernandez, 2018). Reflexivity can be viable to qualitative researchers while conceptualizing a study, implementing a survey, analyzing a study, and writing a study (Valandra 2012). This journal was an additional source of insights into the lived experiences of family members of returning citizens as reflected throughout the research process with this researcher's introspective thoughts, perspectives, and feelings from beginning to the end of the study.

Data Analysis

Hermeneutic phenomenology and transcendental phenomenology, two major approaches, represent philosophical assumptions about experience and methods to organize and analyze phenomenological data (Moerer-Urdahl & Cresswell, 2004). While hermeneutic phenomenology requires reflective interpretation of a text or a study in history to achieve a meaningful understanding, meaning is the core of transcendental phenomenology of science, a design for acquiring and collecting data that explicates the essence of human life experience (Moustakas, 1994). As indicated earlier, this researcher selected transcendental phenomenology as the appropriate methodology for this research study. For this study, the data to be analyzed was

obtained from family members of returning citizens recently released from incarceration reentering their communities. Examining the personal challenges and barriers of these family members is the core of the study. As indicated in the role of the researcher section, this researcher was aware of any personal biases or preconceived notions about the phenomenon.

Bracketing/Epoche

The first step in conducting the data analysis was to reduce the data to the essence of the shared experience (Moustakas, 1994). This could be done through eidetic reduction. According to Moustakas (1994), to effectively analyze the data, the first step in the analysis process is bracketing or putting on the epoche, a practice in which the research must suspend all judgments concerning the phenomenon. This was critical during this stage as one of the ways to ensure that the researcher is credible with the data. Epoche, a reflection method, enables the researcher to acknowledge the biases they may bring to the research. In contrast, bracketing is a process that allows the research to separate key concepts during the interview that emerge during the interview, essential in phenomenological reduction (Moustakas, 1994). During the epoche stage, the researcher basically can “clear the mind” of any initial thoughts concerning the phenomenon.

Transcribing

Transcribing the text was the second step in the data analysis process. It was essential in this stage to allow the researcher to develop a *Composite Description* of the meanings and essences of the experience, a method of individualized textural-structural descriptions, where the group is represented collectively (Moustakas, 1994). For this study, the researcher transcribed the recorded face-to-face interviews, the participant’s 250-word essay, and this researcher’s reflective journal. According to Tracy (2013), transcription requires the researcher to listen repeatedly to participants' voices, which can be integral in early analysis. The

written text was then compared with the notes taken during the interview and the reflective journal. Notetaking during the interview process is important as emerging patterns and themes may develop. Appropriate symbols were used during this stage. When transcribing, using appropriate symbols is critical so that another researcher can understand the data. At the same time, fact-checking helped the researcher correct any mistakes made during the transcription process (Manyam & Panjwani, 2019).

Organizing the Data/Coding

The third step in the data analysis process for this study was organizing the data. The main objective in this stage was to ensure that the data was methodically organized so that a clear picture/story could quickly be developed. This researcher began with coding the data through NVivo software through labeling and organizing the dataset. Coding is a method to systematically organize and understand the data (Tracy, 2013). The interviews, the participant's essays, and this researcher's reflective journal were compared against the research questions and sub-questions to identify and refine codes and themes. According to Moustakas (1994), after determining that the data has been reduced to encapsulate the research, the process of clustering the information into the core themes of the experience was done; moreover, themes were established through this process. This assisted in deducing categories.

Maintaining a Reflective Journal-Data Analysis

This researcher maintained a reflective journal in this stage for appropriate transferability and credibility. Manyam and Panjwani (2019) contends that journaling undoubtedly serves as an audit trail for the researchers to keep themes and choices transparent and coherent, thereby playing a critical role in the qualitative data analysis process.

Trustworthiness

“The works of his hands are faithful and just; all his precepts are trustworthy” (Psalm 111:7, 2011, NIV). Trustworthiness is vital to all research. As a Christian researcher, every facet of this study must reflect integrity, honesty, uprightness, and truth. The importance of trustworthiness in this study was conveyed to participants by providing a detailed description of the study, supporting documents, IRB approval, agency approval, and consent forms.

Credibility

Credibility is a construction for the researcher and the subsequent reader (Stahl & King, 2020). According to Creswell and Poth (2018), the processes of recorded and transcribed interviews, member-checking, document analysis, and the collection of artifacts are all components of transcendental phenomenological research that have been validated and expounded upon. One way of promoting the credibility of the study was through the various processes of triangulation, where several sources of information or procedure from the field are implemented to establish identifiable patterns (Stahl & King, 2020). The research was conducted to extract the profuse amount of information during the interviews. The semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted at an approved site after hours where the center staff had no access to the participants, with efforts to maintain confidentiality. Three distinct methods were utilized to record the data: interviews, participants’ essays, and this researcher’s reflective

journal. Transcripts were reviewed twice by this researcher, submitted to each family member of the returning citizen who participated in the study for review and comments (respondent validation), and reviewed additionally after the period of review and commentary ended. Allowing participants to review and provide feedback with their individual transcribed interviews as a review cites the value this process has in triangulation (Patton, 2015).

Dependability and Confirmability

Dependability in qualitative research requires the researcher to account for the description of the changing context and how that might impact interpretation (Ahmed & Muhammad, 2018). Furthermore, since the phenomenon under investigation tends to change during the study, the research findings and procedures must be consistent, reliable, and repeatable. Therefore, this researcher included an external audit to assess the study to attest to the dependability and confirmability. The external audit is one of the most systematic, rigorous verification strategies and places specific demands on the researcher to maintain good records and provide a clear audit trail; it challenges the researcher to document the research process and to be intentional and methodical in relation to record-keeping (Miller, 1997).

Transferability

Evaluating the quality of qualitative research to ensure rigor in the findings is vital, especially if findings contribute to theory and be used in practice (Daniel, 2019). Transferability in qualitative research proposes that findings from one study can be applied to other settings or groups of people (Houghton et al., 2013). To demonstrate transferability, the researcher ensured that the participant recruitment and selection of a sample was based on expert knowledge of participants and participants are knowledgeable concerning the phenomenon under investigation (Forero et al., 2018). Transferability is being able to generalize terms in a case-to-case transfer

(Patton, 2015). Transferability was anticipated in the results to assist reentry planning for returning citizens post-incarceration in other counties and states, specifically where families were an integral part of the reintegration process for returning citizens.

Ethical Considerations

“May integrity and uprightness preserve me, for I wait for you” (Psalm 25:21, 2011, NIV). The prayer of this researcher was that this study would be guided by Christian principles and represented the Kingdom of Christ. Creswell and Poth (2018) identify ethical considerations, including using IRB, consent forms, and the confidentiality of records. The research was not conducted until this researcher received IRB approval and site approval. No participant was contacted until IRB approval was granted. Since the focus of the study was on the challenges and barriers of family members of returning citizens, this researcher provided a clear understanding of the study’s focus and objective over the phone during the initial screening. Pseudonyms were used to ensure confidentiality. Since the interviews were conducted at the site after hours, the staff, former offenders, other family members of returning citizens (non-participating) were not known who were being interviewed unless the participant disclosed the information.

The consent forms used in the study conveyed to the participants the voluntary nature of the research study. In addition, a well-constructed form to inform the family members of the voluntary nature of participation was provided. Another ethical consideration was ensuring the confidentiality of the participants and their information provided in the study. Therefore, this researcher stored all records in a locked file cabinet in his home office. No one else had access to these records. Utilizing the Sony UX560 digital audio recorder, the interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for written verification. This researcher will retain the recordings until

approval of the dissertation. After the dissertation is approved, the recordings were destroyed. From the date of the approval of the dissertation, the transcripts will be maintained for four years. After four years, transcripts will be destroyed. “And whatever you do in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (Colossians 3:17, 2011, NIV).

Summary

This chapter describes the method of data collection and analysis used in this transcendental phenomenological research study to understand the personal challenges and barriers of family members of returning citizens reentering society. To understand the family members' role and potential impact on the success of the returning citizen's ability to reintegrate into their communities, it was essential to gain insight into the personal barriers of these family members who often are expected to play such a vital key role in the reintegrative process. This chapter described the data collection methods using interviews, participant essays, and this researcher's reflective journal. An overview of how the data was analyzed in a credible and trustworthy manner was provided. The study received IRB approval from Liberty University, and approval was obtained from the Center Director of the site where the study took place. Triangulation was utilized to validate and corroborate the data. Data analysis was conducted by bracketing/epoche, transcribing, coding/labeling, and reflective journal analysis. Chapter 4 presented the results of the data analysis.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

“We are hard-pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair, persecuted, but not abandoned, struck down, but not destroyed” (2 Corinthians 4:8-9, 2011, NIV). The purpose of this qualitative transcendental phenomenological study was to explore the transitional impact and personal barriers of family members of returning citizens from incarceration reentering society and how these barriers have impacted the returning citizen’s reintegration efforts. Chapter Four contains the presentation of the study findings yielded from the data collection and analysis methods described in Chapter Three. The data collection involved semi-structured individual interviews with eleven participants, document analysis which consisted of a written essay from the participants, and reflective notes/journal. The data analysis involved eidetic reduction (Moustakas, 1994). This chapter consists of a narrative of the participants and an account of the theme development process which generated the themes.

Participants

After receiving approval from Liberty University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB), approval number FY-20-21-678, five sources for family members of returning citizens from which to recruit potential participants was sought: Reentry Alliance of Florida, Women with Clear Vision, Restoration and Revive, Florida Department of Corrections Probation and Parole, and Strong Mothers of the Incarcerated as Living Examples (S.M.I.L.E.). Flyers were disseminated to each organization and posted in their family life centers from June 7th through July 12th (5 weeks) except Florida Department of Corrections Probation and Parole. After several unsuccessful attempts to speak to the circuit administrator for approval to leave the flyers at their site, this researcher decided to focus on the four remaining organizations that had responded in

favor of allowing the flyers to be placed in their organizations. Two organizations (S.M.I.L.E.) and Restoration and Revive asked if flyers could be sent electronically. The flyer was sent electronically from this researcher's computer and was posted on both websites. Participants from any of the four organizations were to contact this researcher directly by phone or email to arrange an initial telephone screening interview. Through the screening interview, demographic data concerning participant gender, age, ethnicity, and relationship to the returning citizen were gathered. Participants' verbal confirmation to be audio-recorded was solidified, and the screening process for the study began.

To reach thematic saturation, ten to twelve participants was the goal of the study. In total, 18 reached out to this researcher about participating in the study. Completing the initial telephone screening were thirteen individuals. Two individuals were ultimately excluded or declined to participate, bringing the final count of participants to 11. Participants included had to be at least 18 years of age, biologically related to the returning citizen, and have some type of role in the offender's reentry or reintegration process. All individuals who reached out and indicated an interest in participating in the study had to participate in an initial telephone screening interview. During this phase, inclusion and exclusion criteria had to be met.

The study's participant pool included 11 individuals, all living in the same city in Florida. Demographic results were derived from the criteria described in Chapters 1 and 3 and resulted from the screening and the face-to-face interviews. A total of 8 women and three men, ages 20 to 78, completed the study. Of these participants, 8 are Black, two are White, and one Hispanic. Each participant is a representation of a single-family unit biologically related to the returning citizen. The demographic characteristics of the individual participants are summarized in Table 1, and the following subsection includes a narrative description of each participant.

Table 1*Participant Demographics*

Participant (pseudonym)	Gender	Age	Race/ ethnicity	Marital status	Occupation
Caitlyn	Female	33	Black	Married	Homemaker
Christine	Female	65	White	Single	Florist
Damon	Male	55	Black	Married	Unknown
Dominique	Female	20	Black	Single	Unknown
Elizabeth	Female	53	White	Single	Retired
Lillie Mae	Female	78	Black	Widowed	Retired
Marzette	Male	63	Black	Married	Retired
Natasha	Female	47	Black	Single	Unknown
Preston	Male	53	Black	Married	Coach
Raphael	Male	46	Hispanic	Single	Health care
Samantha	Female	25	Black	Single	Food service

The demographic characteristics of the individual participants' returning citizen relatives are summarized in Table 2, and the following subsection includes a narrative description of each participant.

Table 2*Participants' Returning Citizen Demographics*

Participant (pseudonym)	Relationship of returning citizen to participant	Age of returning citizen	Duration of last incarceration (in years)	Total number of incarcerations	Time since last release
Caitlyn	Grandfather	77	25	3	6 months
Christine	Son	33		6	3 months
Damon	Brother	51	3	3	1 year
Dominique	Father	44	10	1	Unknown
Elizabeth	Uncle	77	10	More than one	11 months
Lillie Mae	Son	52	8	4	1 year
Marzette	Son	38	3	5	1 year
Natasha	Daughter	28	1.5	1	1 month
Preston	Son	29	3	2	Unknown
Raphael	Sister	41	3	1	8 months
Samantha	Mother	49	4	2	3 months

Caitlyn

Caitlyn is a 33-year old married Black female and the mother of two small children. She is a stay-at-home mom and occasionally attends church. She is the granddaughter of an offender who just completed 25 years in prison, resulting in a conviction for a crime of violence. The returning citizen has been home for 6 months. Caitlyn has allowed her grandfather to stay with them until he can access his social security benefits and housing. However, due to COVID, solidifying housing has taken longer than anticipated, and because of his extensive incarceration, attaining the necessary records for his social security benefits has proven more challenging. Caitlyn is the only family member who is assisting her grandfather currently. She indicates she reached out to other family members but has not received any positive response. She

acknowledges how difficult it has been trying to provide food, shelter, clothing, and toiletries to her grandfather consistently since her husband is the sole financial support for the family. Her grandfather's sentence and incarceration has severed several family relationships causing deep emotional wounds due to the violent nature of the offense. Caitlyn has expressed in the interview that her biggest concern is her grandfather's age and his difficulty adjusting to "the free world" after being gone for such a long time. Since there are currently no other family members who are willing to assist in her grandfather's reentry, Caitlyn has reached out to community resources like the red cross, salvation army, and local reentry programs for help. She contends that once his social security benefits kick in and he has acquired housing of his own, the family's transition may be somewhat easier. She describes the past 6 months as "overwhelming." She is considering seeking a mental health therapist to help her deal with the many changes.

Christine

Christine is a 65- year old White female and mother of a recently released male. She currently works as a florist but plans to retire within the next year or so. She professes a deep religious faith and attends service virtually due to COVID. Her son was released from incarceration 3 months ago and currently resides in a federal halfway house about 5 miles from her home. After he is released from the halfway house, he will be staying with Christine until he can acquire a job and attain housing. She has indicated that her son has been to prison at least 6 times over the past 10 years. Her son's crimes are generally non-violent, with the exception of about one or two of them. Christine indicates that she is the only one who has ever provided and supported her son in and out of incarceration. In the document analysis and interview, it is revealed that Christine has many regrets on her continual support to her son where she feels she

has enabled him to continue his involvement in criminal activity resulting from her continual support for him during his incarceration and subsequent releases back into society.

Damon

Damon is a 55-year year Black male with three adult children. His brother was released a year ago from prison after doing 3 years for a violent crime and currently resides with Damon and his wife. He professes a deep religious faith and attends church regularly. Damon's brother has been to prison three times in the past 15 years. According to the document analysis and interview, his past criminal activity has tremendously hurt their relationship, making his assistance in the reintegration process extremely difficult. He has not had consistent employment since his release. He does, however, bring money to Damon to help with household bills. The income is generated from donating plasma and temporary jobs. Also, in the interview, Damon indicates severe trust issues with his brother resulting from his brother's addiction to crack cocaine. He does not allow his brother to be in his home unless he is present for fear of him stealing items out of the house to sell for drugs. Damon's brother has other relatives, but they do not want anything to do with him or his reintegration efforts. His brother's presence in the home has caused some challenges between Damon and his wife. Damon expresses a desire to give his brother a period that he must be out of their home, but so far has not done so.

Dominique

Dominique is a 20- year old Black female who indicates a strong religious affiliation. She is a single mother with three children and works full time. She is the daughter of a recently released returning citizen who just completed a 10- year prison sentence. This was the returning citizen's first time incarcerated, resulting from a violent offense. Dominique is the only child of her father. The returning citizen currently resides with Dominique until he can become financially stable enough to have his own home. Dominique indicates that her father's return, unfortunately,

has put additional emotional stress and financial strain on her as she is responsible for her three children and now him. She sees her relationship with her father as “evolving” due to her being an adolescent when he was initially sentenced. Through document analysis and the interview, it was discovered that she never visited her dad while incarcerated but occasionally wrote letters to him. The lack of an ongoing relationship during his incarceration has caused many challenges in developing their relationship. She points to her faith in Christ as the catalyst for developing a better relationship with the returning citizen. Dominique is the only one who is assisting the returning citizen in the reintegration process.

Elizabeth

Elizabeth is a single 53-year old White female and niece of a recently released male. She is a retired school- teacher and is a volunteer at one of the local hospitals. But since COVID, she has not been able to put in volunteer hours. She professes no religious affiliation. Her uncle was released from prison 11 months ago after doing 10 years and is currently residing in her home. This was not his first time incarcerated, but she cannot remember how many times. Elizabeth is the sole supporter and help to her uncle. Her uncle’s crime was violent, requiring him to remain on probation for the next 5 years and mandatory counseling. Because of her uncle’s advanced age, deteriorating health, and challenges with coping outside of prison, Elizabeth indicates how integral she believes she is to his transition and reentry. In the interview, Elizabeth stated that she has three adult children who have expressed their displeasure at her assisting her uncle due to the nature of his crime and how they see her assistance to her uncle as an “unnecessary burden” to their mother. Elizabeth conveys her deep concern for her uncle in the document analysis and interview, yet her love and concern for her children. Her responses and body demeanor indicate a person who appears torn between helping her uncle and maintaining peace with her children.

Lillie Mae

Lillie Mae is a 78-year Black widow and mother of a recently released male. She is a retired home health nurse and has attended church for years until the COVID Pandemic. She sees herself as spiritual, not religious. Her son has been home for one year after being incarcerated for 8 years for committing a violent crime. This was her son's fourth time being incarcerated. Lillie Mae has had several health challenges, as this is evident in her physical demeanor and appearance. Lillie Mae acknowledges that her son's return "this time" has had a more negative impact than before due to her advanced age and her limited monthly income. Her responses in the interview highlight her many concerns in her ability to provide the transitional support her son needs to prevent him from going back to prison. In the document analysis and the interview, Lillie Mae expresses her sadness for her son's continual challenges with the law and incarceration. Still, she comes across as happy that he is home. Her principal concern now is her safety and security, but she will continue to do what she can to assist him during this phase.

Marzette

Marzette is a 63-year old married Black male whose son was just released from incarceration one year ago after doing 3 years in prison. His son has been incarcerated three times for violent offenses. Marzette does not consider himself deeply religious but believes in God. He is retired from the Navy and enjoys his home with his wife of 40 years. For the past year, Marzette has helped his son financially and enabled him to stay in the home. However, due to a recent altercation between the two, Marzette asked his son to leave the house. Currently, his son is residing in a homeless shelter. Marzette continues to provide financial support to his son and takes him to his required classes and meetings. The document analysis and interview show that Marzette is passionate about rebuilding the relationship between him and his son. Marzette's

wife, the mother of the returning citizen, is completely detached from her son. Marzette indicates that he and his mother's relationship is wholly estranged, resulting from their son's continual criminal behavior and imprisonment. There have been efforts on behalf of Marzette to repair this relationship with no success. Marzette is the sole support for his son, specifically in assisting him in reentering society.

Natasha

Natasha is a 47-year old Black single female. Her daughter was released from prison one month ago after 18 months for a non-violent crime and currently resides with Natasha. She does profess a strong religious affiliation. Natasha is also raising her daughter's twelve-year-old daughter in the home. Her daughter is currently not working, so Natasha is responsible for all of her daughter's financial affairs. As indicated in the document analysis and interview, Natasha also was incarcerated at different times during her daughter's adolescent and young adult years and feels somewhat responsible for the way things turned out with her daughter. She acknowledges that their relationship has many challenges, but they both seem willing to repair any problems. This was her daughter's first time in prison but not her first time being arrested. Natasha points to her strong Christian faith as the foundation of her home and realizes that she could not be where she is now if not for her beliefs in the Lord Jesus Christ. Natasha was just recently released from incarceration herself about two years ago and has managed to transition powerfully. Consequently, she hopes the things she learned and the resources she has acquired can all benefit her daughter as she navigates in the reentry process.

Preston

Preston is a 53-year old Black male and the father of a son who recently was released from incarceration after doing 3 years for larceny. Preston has just recently gotten married. He

characterizes himself as “deeply religious” and heavily involved with his local church and community organizations. He also assists with youth sports teams in his community. His son resides with him and his new wife. He acknowledges how challenging the past couple of months have been during this transitional phase with his son. In the document analysis and interview, Preston revealed himself as a devoted father to all of his children and would do anything he could to help them. He also acknowledges that his son began using drugs in high school and has been out of juvenile detention centers, county jails, and state prisons. His son’s biological mother passed away several years ago. Since her death, Preston has become the only help in his son’s addiction recovery during his imprisonment and now his reentry back into society. Preston acknowledges that his son is working, but unfortunately, spends most of his income on drugs and alcohol. This type of behavior is having a detrimental effect on the current family dynamics in the home. During document analysis and the interview, Preston made frequent Biblical references affirming his support of his son. His responses to the questions indicate his faith and commitment to family, as seen through his Biblical worldview and perspective.

Raphael

Raphael is a 46-year old Hispanic male and brother of a recently released female. He is single and works in the health care field. Raphael considers himself a devout Christian and attends church and Bible study regularly. Raphael’s passion for his Christian faith is evident in document analysis and the interview based on his responses concerning the hope of salvation and deliverance for his sister through the “redeeming blood of Jesus.” He presents himself in the interview with passion for his faith in Jesus. This is evident also in his responses in the document analysis. His sister was released from prison eight months ago after doing 3 years for a non-violent crime and resided with her brother occasionally. Her housing instability is attributed to

her diagnosis of Bipolar I disorder. This is the first time his sister was incarcerated but not the first time in trouble with the law. He acknowledges the challenge of providing transitional support to his sister due to her mental illness and her unwillingness for consistent treatment. He is the only relative of his sister to provide transitional support to her since her release from incarceration. He appears eager to convey his thoughts on the transitional impact of his sister's return from prison.

Samantha

Samantha is a 25-year old Black single female with two children who works in food service. She doesn't profess any specific religious affiliation but indicates that she prays to God for direction every day. Her mother just recently returned from prison three months ago after doing 4 years for a non-violent crime. Her mother currently resides with Samantha and her two children in a two-bedroom home. Her mother has had difficulty finding a job since her return home due to her extensive criminal history.

Consequently, Samantha is providing full financial support for her mother. In the document analysis and interview, Samantha indicates that her mother's relationship has always had difficulty mainly due to her mother's criminal activity, often causing Samantha and her siblings to be in foster care. Expressions of anger and frustration from Samantha are evident during the interview as she discusses her mother and their relationship status. Samantha is the only one of her mother's children who has consented to be a part of her transition by helping her during her reintegration. In the interview, Samantha conveys her resentment in having to help her mother when she believes her mother should be helping her with her two children. Samantha expresses her concerns: the emotional disconnection she has with her mother, the feelings and

thoughts of resentment, and embedded childhood hurt that continue to resurface now that her mother is present in the house.

Results

After the data was collected from the 11 participants through interviews, document analysis, and the researcher's reflective journal, the data were analyzed using Moustakas's (1994) approach. This researcher limited his personal biases and experiences from the data and examined the participants' statements in their terms through epoche. The following subsection is a description of how the themes were developed. The second subsection is a presentation of the research question responses.

Theme Development

The data were analyzed through the three-step phenomenological procedure recommended by Moustakas (1994). The three steps were: bracketing/epoche, transcribing, and organizing and coding the data. The researcher also maintained a reflective journal throughout the data collection and data analysis processes.

Step 1: Bracketing/Epoche

Bracketing, or epoche, consisted of reflecting on potential biases and preconceptions to become aware of them. Potential biases were noted in the reflective journal. The researcher noted the potential for religious bias, writing in the reflective journal, "As a Christian myself, I wanted to make certain that my personal beliefs didn't factor into the data collection or interpretation of the data. The goal was to make certain that the data were not compromised in any way."

After potential biases were noted, the researcher worked during the data collection and data analysis processes to remain mindful of those potential biases and work mindfully to suspend them to minimize their influence on the data and findings. During the data collection

process, an additional source of potential bias, the researcher's background and family, was noted in the reflective journal after a challenging experience with a participant:

One of the low points of the research and writing process occurred after completing one of the participant interviews. The individual began to cry uncontrollably after communicating her thoughts to me. This was very difficult to see and witness. I did a follow-up with her, and she was fine. Hearing the raw stories and emotions from these individuals challenged me to look at my family, history, how I was raised, and how my siblings and I turned out. I took an introspective look into my life and the decisions I have made. These interviews and essays caused me to examine my current life as a husband and father of two sons.

The researcher believes that by utilizing reflective journaling as a method for analyzing the data, he could filter out personal biases. Researchers incorporate the participant's experience into their awareness, contemplate it, relate it to other experiences and seek to sieve out their personal biases, including attitudes, personal perspectives, and personal experiences (Golblast & Wonerstein, 2016). The process of bracketing and epoche has therefore contributed to the confirmability of the data and findings by enabling the researcher to minimize the potential effects of his identity, experiences, preconceptions, and the biases associated with them.

Step 2: Transcribing the Data

The 11 interviews, 11 essays, and reflective researcher journals were transcribed into Microsoft Word documents. During the transcription process, the researcher listened to the audio-recorded interviews repeatedly to become familiar with the participants' voices and ensure the most accurate transcription possible. After the interview transcripts were drafted, the researcher reread them while listening to the audio recordings to verify their accuracy. The

essays and reflective researcher journals were transcribed from written originals and researcher-verified for accuracy.

Step 3: Organizing and Coding the Data

The transcripts of the interviews, essays, and reflective journals were imported as source files into NVivo 12 computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software for organization and coding. Coding the data began with breaking the data down into meaning units. Meaning units were blocks of text, consisting of phrases or groups of phrases, that met two criteria. First, all meaning units described some aspect of a participant's lived experience. Second, all meaning units included enough information to be a meaningful description of an aspect of a participant's experience when excerpted from its context in the transcript and presented as a standalone quotation.

An example of a meaning unit was found in Dominique's interview transcript, where she stated, "I'm frustrated because I look at him with anger, bitterness, and resentment. I know I should not, but I do. I am resentful and angry at him." This text was identified as a meaning unit because it was relevant to describing a lived experience (her anger and frustration with the returning citizen, her father) and because it contained enough information to describe her experience of feeling anger and frustration at her father when excerpted from its context in the transcript. A total of 333 meaning units were identified across all data sources. Each meaning unit was assigned to a node in NVivo.

Next, the meaning units were clustered into codes. This researcher began clustering by first labeling the meaning units. Texts are coded where words, phrases, or sentences which stand out as describing the experience or phenomenon being study or which expresses outright its meaning for the participant are extracted or highlighted, moreover, each coded bit of data is

sometimes referred to as a “meaning unit” (Grossoehme, 2014). Each node in NVivo was labeled with a psychologically sensitive, descriptive word or phrase in the third-person language, indicating the significance of the data assigned to it. The purpose of using third-person language was to extract a more general significance from the meaning units that would allow units with similar meanings to be clustered together. The descriptive labels were psychologically sensitive because they preserved the essential meaning the participant attributed to the experience. When meaning units had similar meanings, they were assigned to the same NVivo node under the psychologically sensitive, third-person, descriptive label. Each node represented an initial code.

As an example of the initial coding process, the previously quoted meaning unit from Dominique’s interview, “I’m frustrated because I look at him with anger, bitterness, and resentment. I know I should not, but I do. I am resentful and angry at him,” was given the psychologically sensitive, descriptive label, Anger and frustration at returning citizen. The following meaning unit was identified in Preston’s interview transcript: “He [my son] is back to his old habits and hanging around his old friends. So, I guess I’m very angry and frustrated.” Like the meaning unit from Dominique’s transcript, the quote from Preston’s transcript indicated that he experienced feelings of anger and frustration at the returning citizen. The meaning unit from Preston was therefore assigned to the same initial code as Dominique’s, labeled Anger and frustration at returning citizens. Overall, meaning units from nine out of 11 participants were assigned to this initial code. In total, the 333 meaning units were assigned to 36 initial codes. Table 3 is a list of the initial codes.

Table 3*Initial Codes and Frequencies*

Initial code (alphabetized)	<i>n</i> of participants contributing through Essays	<i>n</i> of meaning units included from Essays	<i>n</i> of participants contributing through Interviews	<i>n</i> of meaning units included from Interviews
Anger and frustration at returning citizen	3	3	6	21
Anger and frustration with self	0	0	2	2
Anxiety on own behalf	0	0	7	8
Anxiety on returning citizen's behalf	1	1	6	9
Compensating for negative societal perceptions	0	0	9	13
Coping through self-care	0	0	3	4
Determination as a coping mechanism	0	0	1	1
Family assistance as a coping mechanism	1	1	4	4
Feeling committed to helping the returning citizen	4	4	11	23
Feeling of futility	1	1	4	7
Feeling protective of the returning citizen	3	3	4	5
Financial strain	2	2	9	17
Grief	1	1	5	9
Increased closeness with other family	0	0	1	1
Living with the returning citizen	1	1	9	9
Negative coping mechanisms	0	0	3	3
Negative impact on family relationships	6	6	7	14
No financial strain	0	0	1	1
No impact on family relationships	0	0	6	6
No one else could help	1	1	2	2
No one else would help	5	6	8	13
No support organizations or agencies	0	0	10	20
Not close to returning citizen	2	2	5	10
Ongoing criminality	2	2	3	9
Positive current relationship with returning citizen	3	3	6	16

Initial code (alphabetized)	<i>n</i> of participants contributing through Essays	<i>n</i> of meaning units included from Essays	<i>n</i> of participants contributing through Interviews	<i>n</i> of meaning units included from Interviews
Rationalizing criminality	2	2	3	4
Refraining from judgment about crimes	2	2	1	1
Regret providing assistance	0	0	1	2
Returning citizen needed help	6	6	3	5
Sense of responsibility for criminality	3	4	2	4
Spirituality as a coping mechanism	2	3	4	10
Stigma by association	0	0	8	10
Stigma has a negative impact on family relationships	1	1	4	5
Trying to include returning citizen	1	1	2	2
Wanting further support for coping	1	1	5	6

Note. *N* = 11.

Initial codes were identified as related when a cluster of them converged on a single, overarching idea relevant to describing participants' lived experiences of the phenomenon. As an example of this process, the initial code, Anger at frustration at returning citizen, was clustered with eight other, related codes, including but not limited to Anger and frustration with self, Anxiety on own behalf, Financial- strain, and Feelings of futility. These codes express that most participants had negative emotions and experiences associated with helping the returning citizen that made providing the help more difficult. There was also one code indicating discrepant data, labeled, No financial strain. The nine related codes were clustered together under a theme given the label. Negative post-release experiences made helping the returning citizen difficult. Overall, the 36 initial codes were assigned to five themes. Table 4 indicates how the initial codes were grouped to form the themes.

Table 4*Themes as Groups of Initial Codes*

Theme <i>Initial code grouped to form theme</i>	<i>n</i> of participants contributing through Essays	<i>n</i> of meaning units included from Essays	<i>n</i> of participants contributing through Interviews	<i>n</i> of meaning units included from Interviews
Theme 1. Choosing to help the returning citizen depended on perceived need and sense of obligation	11	16	11	85
<i>Anxiety on returning citizen's behalf</i>				
<i>Feeling committed to helping the returning citizen</i>				
<i>Feeling protective of the returning citizen</i>				
<i>Living with the returning citizen</i>				
<i>No one else could help</i>				
<i>No one else would help</i>				
<i>Positive current relationship with returning citizen</i>				
<i>Rationalizing criminality</i>				
<i>Refraining from judgment about crimes</i>				
<i>Returning citizen needed help</i>				
<i>Sense of responsibility for criminality</i>				
<i>Trying to include returning citizen</i>				
Theme 2. Negative post-release experiences made helping the returning citizen difficult	8	9	11	80
<i>Anger and frustration at returning citizen</i>				
<i>Anger and frustration with self</i>				
<i>Anxiety on own behalf</i>				
<i>Discrepant data - No financial strain</i>				
<i>Feeling of futility</i>				
<i>Financial strain</i>				
<i>Grief</i>				
<i>Not close to returning citizen</i>				
<i>Ongoing criminality</i>				

Theme	<i>n</i> of participants contributing through Essays	<i>n</i> of meaning units included from Essays	<i>n</i> of participants contributing through Interviews	<i>n</i> of meaning units included from Interviews
<i>Initial code grouped to form theme</i>				
<i>Regret providing assistance</i>				
Theme 3. Impacts on relationships depended on family acceptance of the returning citizen	6	6	11	21
<i>Discrepant data – Increased closeness with other family</i>				
<i>Negative impact on family relationships</i>				
<i>No impact on family relationships</i>				
Theme 4. Stigma has harmed family members and family relationships	1	1	11	28
<i>Compensating for negative societal perceptions</i>				
<i>Stigma by association</i>				
<i>Stigma has a negative impact on family relationships</i>				
Theme 5. Coping strategies tended to be solitary because support organizations were unavailable	3	4	11	48
<i>Coping through self-care</i>				
<i>Determination as a coping mechanism</i>				
<i>Family assistance as a coping mechanism</i>				
<i>Negative coping mechanisms</i>				
<i>No support organizations or agencies</i>				
<i>Spirituality as a coping mechanism</i>				
<i>Wanting further support for coping</i>				

Research Question Responses

This presentation of the research question responses is organized by two research questions. The five themes developed during data analysis were used to address the questions. Table 5 indicates how the themes were used to address the research questions.

Table 5*Research Question Responses by Theme*

Research Question	Theme(s) used to respond to question
<p>RQ1: What have been your experiences since your family member has returned home from prison seeking to reintegrate back into society?</p> <p>SQ1: How have these experiences influenced your decision to help or abstain from helping the returning citizen in the reentry process?</p> <p>SQ2: How have these experiences impacted family relations since the returning citizen has been released from incarceration and started the reintegration process?</p>	<p>(Addressed by addressing the two sub-questions)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theme 1. Choosing to help the returning citizen depended on perceived need and sense of obligation • Theme 2. Negative post-release experiences made helping the returning citizen difficult • Theme 3. Impacts on relationships depended on family acceptance of the returning citizen
<p>RQ2: What are the general societal perceptions towards the family members of recently released returning citizens from incarceration reentering their community?</p> <p>SQ1: How have these societal perceptions impacted the family relationship between family members and the returning citizen?</p> <p>SQ2: What are the general coping mechanisms you have used in dealing with the challenges and barriers encountered during the reintegration of your loved one?</p>	<p>(Addressed by addressing the two sub-questions)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theme 4. Stigma, referred to as negative society labeling placed on the offender and family as a result of the offender's criminal activity (Pickett & Bushway, 2017) has harmed family members and family relationships • Theme 5. Coping strategies tended to be individualistic because support organizations were unavailable

Research Question 1

RQ1 was: What have been your experiences since your family member returned from prison seeking to reintegrate back into society? RQ1 was addressed by responding to the two sub-questions. The following subsections are discussions of the responses to the sub-questions.

Research Question 1/Sub-question 1

RQ1/SQ1 was: How have these experiences influenced your decision to help or abstain from helping the returning citizen in the reentry process? Two of the themes identified during data analysis were used to respond to this question. The two RQ1/SQ1 themes were: (Theme 1) choosing to help the returning citizen depended on perceived need and sense of obligation, and (Theme 2) negative post-release experiences made helping the returning citizen difficult. The following subsections are presentations of these themes.

Theme 1: Choosing to Help the Returning Citizen Depended on Perceived Need and Sense of Obligation. All 11 participants contributed data to this theme via their interviews and essays. Participants stated that their decision to help the returning citizen was based on two major factors: 1) their perception that the citizen needed their help and 2) their perception that they had a personal obligation to help the returning citizen. Participants' perceptions that the returning citizen needed help were based on perceptions that no one else would help the citizen and that the citizen was vulnerable (e.g., because of health conditions). Participants' sense of personal obligation to help the returning citizen was based on family bonds and spirituality.

All participants reported the perception that the returning citizen needed help. For most participants, the sense that the required returning citizen help was based on medical needs, such as those associated with advanced age, mental health challenges, and chronic health conditions. There is a plethora of returning citizens who never actually receive the treatment they need post-

incarceration. This is especially true in relation to the mental health needs of the returning citizen. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, an estimated 16% of adult prisoners report either a mental disorder or having stayed in a psychiatric facility, translating into nearly 300,000 individuals in active need of mental health treatment while incarcerated and after they are released, yet only a fraction, receive the treatment they need (Pogorzelski et al., 2005.). In comparison to those without a history of incarceration, the formerly incarcerated are significantly less likely to have a consistent source of medical care, three times as likely to report being unable to access medical care, and suffer from chronic illnesses such as heart disease, diabetes, and hypertension (Kulkarni et al., 2010). In his essay, Raphael wrote of his sister, “Her struggle with mental illness doesn’t help her ability to reenter society effectively,” citing his sister’s bipolar disorder as a reason why he perceived her as needing help. Elizabeth said in her interview of her 77-year-old uncle, “His health is failing. His eyesight has gotten bad. He has a lot of medical problems, which require me to assist him in so many ways,” citing her uncle’s health conditions as the reason why he needed help. Elizabeth added in her essay, “His declining health, his lack of mental stamina, and his restrictions as a convicted felon are all reasons that justify my willingness to help him.” Caitlyn cited the advanced age of her grandfather as the reason why he needed help, saying in her interview: “Basically, my grandfather has gotten to the age where he needs as much support as possible.” Thus, the perception of vulnerability on the returning citizen was a strong motivator for most participants to offer assistance.

Participants mentioned two significant reasons why they, specifically, felt compelled to help the returning citizen instead of allowing someone else to take that role. First, all participants reported the perception that no one else would or could help the returning citizen and the corresponding perception that no one would if they did not help the returning citizen. In her

interview, Samantha said of being the only one of her siblings who would help her mother, “My other siblings don’t want to have anything to do with her or her reentry . . . Since all my siblings refuse to help, I am the only one.” Caitlyn said in her interview that she was the only member of her family who would help her grandfather: “So many of my other family members refused for him to come with them and indicated their displeasure for me allowing him to come to stay with us . . . At this point, I am his only support.” Dominique reported in her interview that she resented being her father’s sole supporter, a role that she perceived as defaulting to her when everyone else in her family refused to help him: “I was angry that none of his relatives wanted anything to do with him and that I would be the one to help him get on his feet.” Elizabeth wrote in her essay of her 77-year-old uncle, “My uncle has no one. No one else at all,” leaving her as the only person willing to provide help. In her interview, Lillie Mae reported a similar situation: “I am the only person helping in this [reentry] process. Everyone else has turned their backs on him.” Participants’ responses consistently suggested that the help they provided to the returning citizen was a burden they did not want to bear alone.

Participants reported that their families cited returning citizens' criminality and other past or present negative behaviors as reasons for refusing to help. For example, in her essay, Samantha wrote of her siblings’ refusal to help their mother, “All my siblings refused to help her because they still carry the anger and hurt from the constant lies and disappointment from childhood.” In his interview, Marzette described his wife as distancing himself from their son when their son began to commit crimes, with the result that Marzette felt he bore the burden of helping: “Once [our son] started committing crimes, his mother became completely detached from the situation, making me his only help. It’s difficult to see my wife completely detached from the situation, so I feel that the weight is on me.”

In explaining their willingness to help the returning citizen when other relatives refused, participants stated they felt uniquely committed to or protective of the citizen. Caitlyn, for example, said in her interview that she thought she had inherited her mother's bond with her grandfather and that after her mother's death, responsibility for her grandfather devolved to her: The bond that I have with my granddaddy is mainly the result of my mama's relationship with him. It was an excellent relationship. Unfortunately, my mama passed away several years ago, so I must help him all I can.

Christine wrote in her essay that she felt uniquely responsible for her son as his only living parent: "He is my life. He is my son. I feel like I'm responsible for assisting him." Likewise, Damon described how he had been positioned as his younger brother's protector by their mother during early childhood and how he had remained in that role into adulthood, with the result that he perceived the duty to help his brother as devolving uniquely to him: I have always felt responsible for my youngest brother. I sort of took him under my wings when he was born and continued into adulthood . . . Mother made sure of this. Once my brother started getting into trouble, I remained active in his life, always to his rescue because I felt responsible.

Lillie Mae explained in her interview that her maternal bond with her son committed her to help him after his release from prison: I wonder to myself why I continue to support this grown man. But he's my son, and I love him . . . I have always tried to be there for my son. He was my heart. I love both of my children, but my son had a special place in my heart, I guess, because I knew he needed me more.

Another way participants' intense concern for the welfare of their returning citizens manifested was in the anxiety most of them reported they experienced on the citizen's behalf.

Caitlyn felt anxiety about her grandfather because of his failing health; she said in her interview: “My nervousness has since turned into anxiety. I find myself anxious a lot wanting to make sure that granddaddy is taken care of.” Raphael wrote in his essay that he experienced significant anxiety because of his sister’s mental health condition, which put her at risk for criminal behavior: “My sister suffers from bipolar disorder. This has changed her life entirely. She is a very loving and caring person when she is taking her medication. But when she isn’t, the consequences of her actions are severe.” The source of most participants’ anxiety was the perception that their loved one was engaging or would engage in criminal behavior again. Preston said in his interview that his anxiety for his son was so great that he sometimes wished his son was still in the comparative safety of prison: “I figured he was safer behind bars than he would be when he got out . . . I’m worried more now than ever before. Every time I hear an ambulance or police car, I think it’s my son.” Lillie Mae worried that given her advanced age and her son’s ongoing criminality, there would be no one to help her son after she died: “I won’t be around forever. This is a major concern to me. But he simply won’t get it. He will do well for a minute and then go back to criminal activity.” Damon described his anxiety about his brother’s welfare by saying in his interview that he was, “Scared to death . . . I immediately became scared for him upon his release because I knew he wouldn’t be restricted from the drugs and could get them when he wanted them.”

The responses quoted in this paragraph were representative. Participants expressed intense anxiety about their loved ones’ welfare, particularly concerning recidivism risk. However, they did not directly cite this anxiety about why they felt committed to helping the returning citizen. Instead, they described their anxiety resulting from perceiving the limitations of the help they could give. For example, Lillie Mae described her anxiety about her death,

eventually preventing her from further assisting her son. This key point accentuates the American ideal that individuals are the primary movers of prosperity, not the government. However, participants' intense experiences of anxiety on their returning citizens' behalf were associated with and may have influenced their sense of commitment to helping their loved ones.

It was notable in most participants' responses that they shared their relatives' anger over the returning citizens' past and present negative behaviors, but that they nevertheless felt compelled to help the returning citizens. Marzette believed that his son had returned to criminality after being released from prison. He thought that further incarcerations were inevitable unless a drastic change occurred in his son's character and behavior. When Marzette provided support to his son and his son continued to risk recidivism, Marzette said in his interview that his experience was, "I don't always feel like he is meeting me halfway." However, Marzette added in the same interview response that he felt committed to helping his son regardless of his son's behavior: "Although I may feel the urge not to help him during this transitional phase, I will continue. He needs me." Preston was more explicit than Marzette in expressing his dissatisfaction with his role as his son's only support, stating in an interview response, "I don't like having this role, but I'm his daddy, so what am I supposed to do?" While Marzette stated that his perception of his son's need maintained his commitment to helping, Preston noted in an interview response that his faith compelled him to help and that this experience of external compulsion made him angry: "Because of my relationship with the Lord, I can't just walk away. This makes me mad." Samantha said in her interview that, like Marzette, she sometimes felt a desire to stop helping the returning citizen: "There are plenty of times when I don't want to help her at all. But because she is my mother, I feel compelled to." Thus, participants did not help their returning citizens because they excused past or ongoing

criminality. Instead, most of them shared the disapproval and anger of their relatives, who refused to allow it. The factor that made participants offer help when other relatives would not be a sense of being uniquely responsible for the returning citizen's welfare, through a combination of preexisting family bonds and the perception that no other help was forthcoming. Participants' experiences of anger and frustration with their returning citizens are discussed in more detail under the following theme.

Theme 2: Negative Post-Release Experiences Made Helping the Returning Citizen Difficult.

All 11 participants contributed data to this theme via interviews, and eight participants contributed data through their essays. As stated under Theme 1, participants felt a strong personal commitment to helping their returning citizens based on family bonds, unavailability of other sources of help, and, in some participants' cases, spirituality. However, all participants also reported negative experiences after the returning citizens' release, which made helping the citizen more challenging. These negative post-release experiences included anger and frustration at the returning citizen, anxiety about the consequences of the returning citizens' current behaviors for the participants themselves, grief, feelings of futility, and financial strain associated with being the returning citizens' sole support.

Almost all participants expressed that their experiences after their loved ones' return included anger, frustration, resentment, or bitterness toward returning citizens. For example, in his interview, Damon expressed anger and dismay over his brother's repeated relapses into substance abuse:

I was also angry that he continued to do the same thing over and over . . . His ongoing drug use has divided us. I can't understand how you do these few years in prison and then come out doing the same things that got you arrested before and sent to jail. For the life of me, I can't understand. That's crazy as hell.

Dominique reported in her interview that her father went to prison when she was 10 years old, with the result that, "I have grown up without a dad." Dominique added that because she felt abandoned by her father through his choice to commit a crime, she continued to feel "Anger. Bitterness. Frustration. Resentment" toward him. Lillie Mae described herself in an interview response as frustrated by her son's recidivism: "My son has been incarcerated four times, and I'm so frustrated and tired of dealing with the same thing over and over again." Lillie Mae added in a different interview response that she was angered by the nature of her son's offense and the restrictions it entailed: "The challenges of his registration requirements and sex offender status angered me, making me not want to help him in this process." Marzette said of his son in an interview response, "I'm angry because he's an adult and he should be doing better for himself," and Preston said of his son in an interview response, "It makes me frustrated just thinking about him . . . I'm very angry and frustrated, but not surprised. I expected him to do everything he is doing now." Samantha wrote in her essay of the lifelong pain she and her siblings had suffered because of her mother's choices and of the intense anger she sometimes felt: "Ever since I can remember, me and my siblings have struggled going from foster home to foster home because of my mother's drug use and constant trouble with the law. There have been times when I have hated her." Thus, although participants expressed love for their returning citizens and a deep commitment to helping them, their feelings were often painfully ambivalent, in that they also experienced intense anger and bitterness over past or current behavior.

For more than half of the participants (six out of 11), the anger and frustration were not mitigated by a sense of closeness to the returning citizen. Instead, the anger and frustration often prevented them from feeling close to the returning citizen. Samantha said in her interview that given the anger she felt toward her mother over past behavior, "I don't think we are becoming

closer. We are drifting farther and farther apart. I don't like it, but it's the truth." In her interview, Dominique said of her father that his absence during his incarceration had prevented them from maintaining a bond: "I honestly feel we have never been close. This is mainly due to my age when he went to prison and the length of time he was gone." Damon said in his interview of his brother that current behavior prevented them from being close: "His ongoing drug use has divided us." Like Damon, Marzette felt more and more distant from his loved one because of continuing criminality: "Me and my son were very close over the years, but the more he has been in trouble, the harder our relationship has suffered." Preston's experience of distance from his son was also a result of his son's ongoing criminality; he said in his interview: "This son here that we're talking about hasn't learned his lesson at all. We used to be so close, but not anymore. Not anymore."

For five participants, intense grief over their returning citizen's criminality presented a further barrier to collaborative assistance. Dominique described her experience of her father's absence during his lengthy incarceration as leaving a wound:

I need to be emotionally healed. I am broken. Since he is my dad, I know that I have a responsibility to do what I can to help him get on his feet. But just the thought of me missing all of those years. He was gone for 10 years. Ten years is a long time not to have your dad.

In his interview, Raphael described intense grief over the loss of his sister as he remembered her from their childhood, a distancing that began after the onset of her mental illness and engagement in criminality:

I have felt sad. I have been in an expectation mode, but then I have felt down. I guess it's safe to say that my emotions have been all over the place. I often look for the little girl I used to play

with on the playground, humble and sweet. It isn't easy to see this woman now, although she is my sister. My heart breaks.

Raphael's reference to feeling let down was associated with his sister's noncompliance with her treatment (refusal to take medications as prescribed) and subsequent engagement in negative behaviors that distanced her from him. Preston said in his interview that his son's present behavior made him grieve over his son's prospects: "It hurts me to see my son go down this path . . . It hurts me to say this, but I feel like he will wind up back in prison or dead if he doesn't change."

Seven participants reported anxiety on their behalf as an experience that made helping their returning citizens more difficult. For example, Christine said in her interview that her responsibility for her son caused her anxiety: "I felt anxious not knowing how much of a responsibility I would have in helping him." Elizabeth said in her interview that she had anxiety about her health: "I can see that my health has suffered somewhat because of the worry and emotional wounds that I have endured since he has been with me." Natasha said in an interview response that because she had been released from prison not long before her daughter was, she also had anxiety about herself: "I have been emotionally unstable for quite some time because even as I help her, I still have personal needs of reintegrating back into society myself."

Almost all participants (10 out of 11) reported that helping their returning citizens was difficult because of the financial strain. Caitlyn said in an interview response, "We have felt the financial impact of granddaddy's presence in the house . . . his not having finances has made life a bit overwhelming." Damon spoke in an interview response of feeling compelled to assist his brother financially so his brother would not be rearrested: "The financial impact has been

horrible. That's a major challenge. Trying to help him with his probation and classes has put me in a jam. Those things have to be paid, or they will arrest him again." Lillie Mae wrote in her essay of the financial challenges of helping her son while she was on a fixed income: "I can't continue to help him like I used to. I'm now on this fixed income, and it is rough having to stretch every month. At this stage in my life, I shouldn't be worrying about my grown son." Only one participant provided discrepant data indicating that helping her returning citizen did not place her under financial strain. Raphael expressed in an interview response that he had few other expenses and had a good-paying job: "Her release has impacted me financially, but there are no complaints here about that. I'm single, and I work a lot. I make perfect money . . . so the financial impact is not a problem."

Research Question 1/Sub-question 2

RQ1/SQ2 was: How have these experiences impacted family relations since the returning citizen has been released from incarceration and started the reintegration process? One theme emerged during data analysis to address this question. The theme was: (Theme 3) impacts on relationships depended on the family acceptance of the returning citizen. The following subsection is a presentation of this theme.

Theme 3: Impacts on Relationships Depended on Family Acceptance of the Returning Citizen. All 11 participants contributed to this theme through their interviews, and six participants contributed to this theme through their essays. Almost all participants (nine out of 11) reported that their experiences of returning citizens being released from incarceration negatively impacted family relationships. Negative effects took their form of conflict with and estrangement from other family members due to their strong disapproval of the participants' helping the returning citizens. Conversely, only two participants reported that they experienced

no impact on family relationships, an outcome they attributed to their relatives' approval of the help they gave the returning citizen. Thus, whether the impact on family relationships was negative or neutral depended on the family acceptance of the returning citizen.

In reporting that the help they gave the returning citizen had a negative impact on their family relationships, participants described estrangement resulting from family perceptions that the participant was going against the family's wish to reject the returning citizen. For example, Caitlyn described a situation of this kind in her interview, saying that some relatives had discontinued contact with her because they disapproved of her decision to help her grandfather: Unfortunately, my helping granddaddy has severed other relationships in the family. This has shocked me and hurt me. Several family members have stopped speaking to me because I took him in. This has caused a great division in our family, which I always considered being close.

Caitlyn reported that her husband supported her in helping her grandfather and that the relatives who disapproved were members of her extended family. For Damon, as he reported in his interview, the conflict was within his household, where his wife disapproved of his helping his brother, causing Damon to have to choose between rejecting his brother and alienating his wife:

One thing it has done was put a strain on my and my wife's relationship. She has a significant problem with him living with us. I am often forced to decide between my wife and my brother. My support for him has affected my marriage.

Like Damon, Marzette said that his conflict over the returning citizen was with his wife: "One of the ways his mother deals with the pain and embarrassment of our son's arrests and incarceration is to assume he doesn't exist and completely ignore the obvious. This has caused an unnecessary division between his mother and [me]." This division appeared to be conversational,

affecting the communication between the husband and wife resulting from his consistent support to their son. Samantha said in her interview that her helping her mother had created a division between her and some of her siblings: “A couple of my other siblings are resentful toward me that I even allowed her to come to stay with me. They felt I should have walked away. Sometimes I think I should have.” Samantha’s response was the statement that she also sometimes questioned whether she should be helping her mother.

Dominique and Christine were the only participants who did not report any negative impact on family relationships. However, Dominique acknowledged that as a single working mother with three children and limited income, her father’s presence in the house was causing financial strain; she did not report a negative impact on their family relationship. Christine said, “[My helping my son] hasn’t impacted other family relationships at all. Since he has been in the halfway house, he hasn’t seen anyone else.” However, it should be noted that Christine’s son was planning to move in with her after he left the halfway house. Christine did acknowledge her upcoming retirement as a florist but did not indicate that assisting her son was a financial strain nor that their family relationships were impacted. Dominique said that she didn’t know her father’s side of the family and that her mother approved of her helping her father: “My mom admires the fact that I was willing to take my dad in. So, I guess you can say it has not impacted other family relationships.” Natasha provided partly discrepant data in indicating that her helping her daughter had caused some conflict between her daughter and herself associated with Natasha’s care for her daughter’s child: “This has presented problems because I feel my daughter is resentful that I’m taking the time with her daughter and didn’t take the time with her growing up.” However, Natasha stated that her helping her daughter had brought her closer to her other children: “I’m grateful for my two other children, who give me support and advice when it

comes to helping my daughter and granddaughter. They both understand the things I have been through and the pressures which go along with that.” By “things I have been through,” Natasha meant her own experiences of incarceration and reentry and her struggles to raise her granddaughter while her daughter was incarcerated.

In summary, most participants reported that the help they gave the returning citizens post-release had a negative impact on at least some other family relationships. Conflicts arose within households when other household members objected to the hospitality and resources being given to the returning citizen. Conflicts arose within extended families when other relatives felt the family should be united in rejecting the returning citizen. This rejection was not based solely on whether the crime was violent or sexual but on the offender's assistance in general. When helping the returning citizen did not cause conflict with other family members, they accepted the returning citizen enough that they did not object to help being provided. Thus, across all participants, the impact of helping the returning citizen on other family relationships depended on their other relatives' acceptance of the returning citizen as one who deserved compassion. From a biblical worldview, the concept of God's unmerited favor is applicable here. None of us deserve God's grace, mercy or compassion. But because of God's loving kindness, we are often given it. “But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it (Ephesians 4:7, 2011, NIV).

Research Question 2

RQ2 was: What are the general societal perceptions towards the family members of recently released returning citizens from incarceration reentering their community? This question

was addressed by responding to the two sub-questions derived from it. The following subsections are presentations of the responses to the RQ2 sub-questions.

Research Question 2/Sub-question 1

RQ2/SQ1 was: How have these societal perceptions impacted the family relationship between family members and the returning citizen? The theme used to address this question was: (Theme 4) stigma has harmed family members and family relationships. The following subsection is a presentation of this theme.

Theme 4: Stigma Has Harmed Family Members and Family Relationships. All 11

participants contributed to this theme via their interviews, and one participant contributed to this theme through their essay. Most participants stated that they perceived society as stigmatizing the families of returning citizens, a situation that caused harm to those family members. One of the forms this stigma was perceived as taking was a societal perception that returning citizens, who had served their sentences, still had a debt to society that they needed to pay. This societal attribution of debt was perceived as combined with a societal unwillingness to allow returning citizens to pay their debt by proving their value to society. The question here is how much more should they have to pay (debt) to the community if they have completed their sentences, made restitution for their crimes, and reentered society? Some participants also reported that the stigma attached to the family members of returning citizens harmed family relationships when relatives resented being stigmatized and rejected the returning citizen and anyone. As a result, they wanted to help them to compensate.

Almost all participants expressed that they did not perceive society as looking favorably upon the families of returning citizens. In her interview, Dominique described experiences that were representative of those reported by other participants, saying that people in society tended

to stigmatize her because of her association with the returning citizen and often misinterpret the help she gave her father as a sign that she condoned his crime:

Based on the comments I often get concerning my dad, I believe many in society feel that family members who support their loved ones who have been to prison are stupid or shouldn't help them. We are stigmatized in many ways, like our loved ones who have been to prison. They think that we condone what they do just because we help them. This is not the case. I have never condoned what my daddy did years ago. I am angry when I think about it. But what am I supposed to do? I'm his only child. Plus, I'm a Christian. I am supposed to do what I can to help him.

In the just-quoted interview response, Dominique made clear that she did not condone her father's crime and that she was angry because of it. Her help for her father was not a sign that she approved of her father's past criminality but rather an expression of filial loyalty and the Christian imperative to be charitable and honor her parent. Far from supporting her father unconditionally, Dominique struggled to accept him and forgive his absence from most of her childhood. Being stigmatized for her charity and filial loyalty toward her father only made helping him more complicated than it already was. Lillie Mae reported an experience similar to Dominique's. Lillie Mae's returning citizen was her son, who had committed a crime that society particularly condemned. As his sole supporter, Lillie Mae said in her interview that she felt stigmatized by societal perceptions and associated with having a registered sex offender residing at her address:

The first barrier I have experienced is dealing with the stigma of his charge in my neighborhood. My son is a registered sex offender. Unfortunately, this label not only affects him but me, too, because of his registration requirements, his restrictions around

children, and his address as my residence. This is a challenge for me because of what people in my neighborhood and surrounding areas are saying.

In his interview, Marzette corroborated Lillie Mae and Dominique's perception that society stigmatized the relatives of returning citizens by association: "Society does not view family members of returning citizens too favorably, I don't imagine, because they often connect the felon with their families." The result of society's perceived tendency to stigmatize the families of returning citizens, Marzette added, was that "No one wants to be a champion for a convicted felon," with the result that returning citizens were more likely to lack adequate support.

Thus, even though returning citizens had ostensibly paid their debt to society by serving their prison sentences, participants believed that the community regarded them as unredeemable and extended the resulting stigma to family members, particularly those who tried to help the returning citizen. Societal perceptions that the returning citizen was not yet redeemed were exacerbated, most participants said, by a perceived unwillingness to give returning citizens a chance to prove that they were worthy members of the community. During her interview, Christine spoke emphatically, saying, "Society doesn't look too kindly to convicted felons. Many believe that they don't deserve second chances . . . People see convicted felons as no hope. The scum of the earth." Notable in Christine's response was her perception that because society stigmatized returning citizens as "the scum of the earth," members of the community tended to believe that returning citizens "don't deserve second chances." Natasha, who had also undergone reentry as a returning citizen, said that society was often unforgiving and would not allow returning citizens to prove themselves and leave their crimes in the past:

I have seen many people come out of prison and do everything they are supposed to do, yet still not be forgiven by society. Their criminal history is constantly brought up when they seek employment. This is a significant challenge. How do they expect us to move ahead with our lives if they aren't willing to allow us to put the past behind us?

In her interview, Dominique expressed her belief that media focus on recidivism rather than successful rehabilitation contributed to the stigmatization returning citizens' experience: "There is a lot of emphasis and attention on the criminal who continues to commit a crime, but there is very little attention on the individual who has just been released and has a desire to change their life." In the same interview response, Dominique added that the media could effectively promote a more positive societal perception of returning citizens: "I believe if there were success stories on these individuals, it might help shape the public's view." Caitlyn expressed frustration in her interview with society's perceived refusal to give returning citizens a second chance:

I fully accept that convicted felons should pay their debt to society. But once that debt has been paid, then damn it, allow them to reenter society without the bullshit. Come on. We must do better at giving these men and women true second chances without judgment or criticism.

Some participants made clear that their relatives joined in the perceived societal condemnation of returning citizens. Elizabeth said in her interview that the negative judgments of family and friends were the biggest obstacle to helping the returning citizen: "The first barrier I have faced has been dealing with the negative comments and opinions by friends and then family. The things that people say can have a profound effect on your life. And the comments have been ugly." Caitlyn also described family condemnation as a more immediate barrier than

societal stigmatization: “It is difficult to put the blame exclusively on society when your family members look at their loved ones returning from prison as garbage.” Negative comments by friends and family members could influence people who would otherwise assist a returning citizen in rejecting that person instead. Dominique offered an example of this influence in her interview, saying that hostile comments by the people around her almost persuaded her not to help her father:

“I started to believe what others were saying about my dad and that I shouldn’t help no convicted felon.” Dominique’s faith helped keep her loyal to her father; however: “I quickly realized that this was wrong. I asked the Lord to forgive me for not wanting to help him.”

In summary, participants reported that society stigmatized the family members of returning citizens because of perceptions that helping a convicted felon was a sign of condoning the crime. This is contrary to the word of God. We are mandated Biblically to love one’s neighbor as oneself. Society is often confronted with whether to forgive the offender and enable them to move ahead with their lives again or constantly remind them of their crimes, making it difficult for them to transition successfully. The stigma associated with helping a returning citizen in this study was exacerbated because society continued to stigmatize citizens who had served their sentences without giving them a chance to redeem themselves. The stigma associated with helping a returning citizen was exacerbated when family members and close friends echoed it.

Research Question 2/Sub-question 2

RQ2/SQ2 was: What are the general coping mechanisms you have used in dealing with the challenges and barriers encountered during the reintegration of your loved one? The theme

used to respond to this question was: (Theme 5) coping strategies tended to be solitary because support organizations were unavailable. The following subsection is a presentation of this theme.

Theme 5: Coping Strategies Tended to Be Solitary Because Support Organizations Were Unavailable. All 11 participants contributed to this theme through their interviews, and three participants contributed to this theme through their essays. Participants reported solitary coping strategies such as self-care, spirituality, substance use, and avoidance. Some participants said that their families and friends provided them with some coping support, and some were considering entering into therapy. Participants reported that they would have liked to have access to organized support for returning citizens' family members but that they did not know about or have access to them.

Three participants reported that they engaged in some form of self-care to cope. For Caitlyn, remaining mindful of the good aspects of her life helped her cope. She said in her interview: "I am blessed to have a loving and understanding husband and two beautiful children. When I realize how thankful and blessed, I am, this enables me to cope with the stress somewhat better." Marzette said in his interview that he engaged in solitary recreation to help himself cope: "I fish and fish and fish. I love the water. It's the most peaceful place for me. So that's my place of solitude, where I seek to find the answers to questions." Elizabeth said in her interview that she coped by remaining mindful of her determination: "I just try to get up every day and keep pushing even when I don't feel like doing it or feel so weighed down."

Majority of participants (six out of 11) stated that their spirituality helped them to cope. Dominique used her Christian faith to manage; she said in her interview: "If it wasn't for my strong faith in Christ Jesus, I don't know what I would do . . . My spiritual connection with the Lord is by far what has enabled me to cope with all of this." Asked during her interview what her

coping mechanisms were, Lillie Mae responded, “The word of God . . . Through my relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ, I pray that my son gives his life to the Lord and finds redemption.”

Preston wrote in his essay that his faith had sustained him:

It is my faith that has gotten me through the past several years. I consistently ask God for the strength daily to do what I need to do. John 14:14 says, “Ask anything in my name, and I will do it.” I have asked the Lord to bring healing and recovery to my son.

Almost half (five out of 11) participants received some help from their families and friends in the form of emotional support. Caitlyn said in her interview that her husband was a vital source of support and facilitator of her coping: “I appreciate my husband for recognizing when I need a break from granddaddy and the kids. He helps out more even after he returns from a hard day at work.” For Marzette, the most helpful social support was a friend who had also had a son with a felony conviction; he said in his interview: “I have a friend who also has a son who is currently incarcerated. His son has life in prison with no chance of parole. He and I talk a lot about our sons and encourage one another.” Samantha expressed in her interview that she was grateful to her friends for helping her to cope: “I thank God I do have caring friends who recognize the struggles I face in helping my mother. They often give me encouragement and support.”

Four participants reported that they used negative coping strategies, including avoidance and substance use. Three of these participants reported that avoidance as their primary coping strategy. Christine said in her interview that she slept to avoid confronting her feelings: “I sleep a whole lot to suppress my true feelings of guilt, anxiety, and hurt.” Dominique used to sleep and overeat to avoid or suppress her feelings; she said in her interview: “If you call overeating and sleeping a lot a coping mechanism, then I guess that is what it is.” One participant reported

substance use. Damon said in his interview that he sometimes drank to cope, although he recognized that this was a negative coping strategy: “To be honest, I drink now and then just to relax. This is probably my biggest coping mechanism. It isn’t the best way, but it helps for that moment.”

Five participants reported that they believed they needed the support of a therapist. Marzette said in his interview, “There are times when I believe I should seek professional help with instructions on letting go.” Preston said in his interview, “Sometimes I even think I need counseling myself on how to deal with my son.” Raphael reported in his interview that he had taken advantage of an opportunity to receive counseling and that it had helped him: “I am currently in counseling myself. This has helped me a great deal. My job offers to counsel, and I have taken advantage of it.”

For most participants, the individualistic and solitary nature of coping was associated with an absence of organized support for returning citizens' families. In his interview, Damon provided a representative response indicating why such supports would be helpful: Anytime a person considers bringing a loved one home after being released from incarceration, they should be a part of a meeting to discuss the pros and cons. Unfortunately, we often go in blindly trying to help without realizing the significant impact that taking in a loved one will have on you.

Christine said in her interview that she was not aware of any programs to help people in her situation: “I have heard of different programs that assist convicted felons in reentry, but I don’t know about too many that assist the family members.” In her interview, Elizabeth corroborated Christine’s perception: “There seems to be a lot of focus on the needs of those being released from incarceration, but we as family members need the support as well. We need

direction and ways to cope.” Marzette’s perception diverged somewhat from those of Christine and Elizabeth, in that he reported the existence of supports for mothers of returning citizens but a lack of support for fathers: “What is interesting is that there is often a lot of focus on the mothers of incarcerated individuals but rarely does anyone talk about the fathers of the incarcerated and their concerns.” Caitlyn provided discrepant data indicating that she had found a support group for family members of returning citizens: “I just discovered a support group for family members of convicted felons. I am strongly considering attending.” Caitlyn’s data, taken in conjunction with other participants’ responses, suggested that support groups for family members of returning citizens may exist but that they may be inadequately advertised and difficult to learn of. It should be noted that Caitlyn said she had “just discovered” the support group, although her grandfather had been out of prison for six months.

Summary

Two primary research questions were used to guide this study. RQ1 was: What have been your experiences since your family member returned from prison seeking to reintegrate back into society? This question was addressed by responding to the two sub-questions derived from it. RQ1/SQ1 was: How have these experiences influenced your decision to help or abstain from assisting the returning citizen in the reentry process? Two themes were used to respond to this question. The first RQ1/SQ1 theme was: choosing to help the returning citizen depended on perceived need and sense of obligation. All 11 participants contributed data to this theme via interviews, and eight participants contributed data through their essays. Participants stated that in their experience, their decision to help the returning citizen was based on two major factors, including their perception that the citizen needed their help and their perception that they had a personal obligation to assist the returning citizen. Participants’ perceptions that the returning

citizen needed help were based on perceptions that no one else would help the citizen and that the citizen was vulnerable (e.g., because of health conditions). Participants' sense of personal obligation to help the citizen was based on family bonds and spirituality.

The second RQ1/SQ1 theme was: negative post-release experiences made helping the returning citizen difficult. All 11 participants contributed data to this theme via interviews, and eight participants contributed data through their essays. As stated under Theme 1, participants felt a strong personal commitment to helping their returning citizens based on family bonds, unavailability of other sources of help, and, in some participants' cases, spirituality. However, all participants also reported negative experiences after the returning citizens' release, which made helping the citizen more challenging. These negative post-release experiences included residual anger and frustration at the returning citizen, anxiety about consequences of the returning citizens' current behaviors for the participants themselves, grief, feelings of futility, and financial strain associated with being the returning citizens' sole support.

The second sub-question derived from RQ1 was: How have these experiences impacted family relations since the returning citizen has been released from incarceration and started the reintegration process? The theme used to respond to this question was: impacts on relationships depended on the family acceptance of the returning citizen. All 11 participants contributed to this theme through their interviews, and six participants contributed to this theme through their essays. Most participants reported that the help they gave the returning citizens post-release had a negative impact on at least some other family relationships. Conflicts arose within households when other household members objected to the hospitality and resources being given to the returning citizen. Conflicts arose within extended families when other relatives felt the family should be united in rejecting the returning citizen, not having ever read any existing research on

the importance of social support in preventing returning citizens from recidivist behavior. When helping the returning citizen did not cause conflict with other family members, they accepted the returning citizen enough that they did not object to help being provided. Thus, across all participants, the impact of helping the returning citizen on other family relationships depended on their other relatives' acceptance of the returning citizen as a person deserving help.

RQ2 was: What are the general societal perceptions towards the family members of recently released returning citizens from incarceration reentering their community? This question was addressed by responding to the two sub-questions derived from it. RQ2/SQ1 was: How have these societal perceptions impacted the family relationship between family members and the returning citizen? The theme used to address this question was: stigma has harmed family members and family relationships. All 11 participants contributed to this theme via their interviews, and one participant contributed to this theme through their essay. Participants reported that society stigmatized the family members of returning citizens because of perceptions that helping a convicted felon was a sign of condoning the crime. The stigma associated with assisting a returning citizen was exacerbated because society continued to stigmatize citizens who had served their sentences without giving them a chance to redeem themselves. The stigma associated with helping a returning citizen was exacerbated when family members and close friends echoed it.

RQ2/SQ2 was: What are the general coping mechanisms you have used in dealing with the challenges and barriers encountered during the reintegration of your loved one? The theme used to address this question was: coping strategies tended to be solitary because support organizations were unavailable. All 11 participants contributed to this theme through their interviews, and three participants contributed to this theme through their essays. Participants

reported solitary coping strategies such as self-care, spirituality, substance use, and avoidance. Some participants reported that their families and friends provided them with some coping support, and some were considering entering therapy. Participants reported that they would have liked to have access to organized support for returning citizens' family members but that they did not know about or have access to them. Chapter 5 is a presentation of the conclusions drawn from these findings.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study was to explore the barriers and challenges that family members of returning citizens recently released from incarceration have experienced resulting from their relationship to the offender prior to, during, and after incarceration and how or if these barriers have impacted the reintegration process for the offender. Since majority of extant literature has primarily focused on the barriers of the offender, this study is integral in accentuating the voices of the family members who are viewed as integral to the successful reentry of the offender. Chapter two explored scholarly literature on the aspects of 1) familial relationships; 2) stigmatization and discrimination of the offender and family members; 3) housing barriers of the offender; and 4) recidivist behavior of the offender, all of which exposed a demonstrative gap in the literature of the barriers and challenges of family members of the returning citizen during the reentry process. Chapter three described the data collection methods using interviews, participant's essays, and this researcher's reflective journal. Chapter four detailed the narrative of the participants and an account of the theme development process which generated the themes. The current chapter presents a summary of the results, discusses the implication of the findings in the context of the relevant theory and literature, outlines the delimitations and limitations of the study, and recommends future research.

Summary of Findings

Two primary research questions were used to guide this study. The first research question explored the participants' experiences since their family members returned home from prison seeking to reintegrate into the society. This research question was addressed by responding to two sub-questions. The first sub-question focused on how the personal experiences of the family

members influenced their decision to help or abstain from helping their family members recently released from prison seeking to reintegrate back into the society. Two themes emerged from the analysis in response to this sub-question. The first theme was that opting to help the returning citizen relied on the perceived sense and need of obligation. The second theme associated with this sub question was the negative post-release experiences encountered by the family members which made helping the returning citizen complex. The second sub question associated with the first research question focused on how the experiences affected family relations since the returning member was released from incarceration and begun the reintegration process. The assessment of the themes generated one theme which was that the impact of the relationship relied on the family's acceptance of the returning citizen. The general response was that the experiences since the returning citizen was released from incarceration had negative impacts on family relationships.

The second research question focused on the general societal perceptions towards the family members of recently released returning citizens from incarceration re-entering their community. The study responded to this research question by addressing two sub-questions. The first sub-question asked the participants how their societal perceptions affected their relationship with the returning citizen. As demonstrated in chapter four, the participants considered society to be stigmatizing the families of returning citizens, a situation that caused harm to those family members. The participants reflected on how society was unfavourable to the families of returning citizens, characterizing them as enablers of criminal activity committed by the offender. The second sub question of the second research question focused on the coping mechanisms the participants use in dealing with the challenges and barriers encountered during the reintegration of the citizen returning from incarceration. Participants reported solitary coping strategies such

as self-care, spirituality, substance use, and avoidance. Some participants reported that their families and friends provided them with some support in coping, and some participants were considering entering therapy. Participants reported that they would have liked to have access to organized supports for family members of returning citizens, but they did not know about or have access to them.

Discussion

The study was guided by two main questions, with each supported by related sub-questions, aimed at broadening the understanding of the personal challenges and barriers encountered by family members of returning citizens from incarceration and their expected role in the reintegrative process. This section discusses the findings of these research question in the context of the theoretical and empirical literature examined in chapter two.

RQ1: What have been your experiences since your family member has returned home from prison seeking to reintegrate back into society?

The aim of this question was to understand participants' experiences since their loved one has returned home. As demonstrated in the literature review, there is limited study exploring the individual challenges that family members of the returning citizen experience during the reintegration process of the offender. Liu and Visher (2019) agreed that the challenges of family members are understudied. Since these returning citizens depend on their family for transitional support, a focus on the challenges of these family members may contribute towards support programs to the offenders. The themes emerging from this research question sought to contextualize the personal challenges of the family members and their implications on the reintegrative process of the offender.

The main theme emerging from this analysis was that negative post-release experiences made helping the returning citizen a difficult task. The participants felt a strong personal commitment to helping their returning citizens based on family bonds, unavailability of other sources of help, and, in some participants' cases, spirituality. These findings support Bowen's family system theory that family is both a relational system and an emotional one, where family members influence and are influenced by one another at individual, dyadic, systemic, and generational levels (Erdem & Safi, 2018). In support of this theory, the current study found that the negative experiences with the returning citizens made helping them a challenge. Mowen and Visher (2016) agreed that the characteristics of the offender and experiences during incarceration have the potential to influence family dynamics although family dynamics play a crucial role within the re-entry process. The main negative personal experiences emerging from this study included residual anger and frustration at the returning citizen, anxiety about consequences of the returning citizen's behaviour, grief, feelings of futility, and financial strain associated with being the returning citizens' sole support.

This study also found that the impact these experiences on family relations relied on family acceptance of the returning citizen. Most participants reported that the help they gave the returning citizens post-release had a negative impact on at least some other family relationships. These findings are in line with Boman and Mowen (2017) observation that family support and peer relationships are interrelated in a way that specifically impacts recidivism generally and parole and re-entry outcomes. Post-release success is attributed to family connections and serves as a key factor in an offender's return (Muentner & Charles, 2020). Family support seems to relate to prosocial re-entry outcomes not solely because of emotional or interactional bonds, but because families provide for the basic needs of returning citizens (Mowen et al., 2019).

Conflicts arose within households when other members of the household objected to the hospitality and resources being given to the returning citizen. This conflict was based on attention and financial resources being given to the returning citizen and seen as underserving by other family members. Conflicts arose within extended families when other relatives believed the family should be united in rejecting the returning citizen. When helping the returning citizen did not cause conflict with other family members, it was because those family members accepted the returning citizen to the degree that they did not object to help being provided. Chikadzi (2017) agrees that ex-offenders have difficulties adjusting because of broken family and community relationships, unemployment, and lack of aftercare services among factors. Thus, across all participants, the impact of helping the returning citizen on other family relationships depended on their other relatives' acceptance of the returning citizen as a person deserving help. The findings from the current study demonstrate how familial support is hindered based on the personal values of the family members, individually and collectively.

RQ2: What are the general societal perceptions towards the family members of recently released returning citizens from incarceration re-entering their community?

This question sought to reflect participants' societal understanding towards the returning citizen. As demonstrated in the literature review, a range of studies have explored societal perceptions towards offenders and not their family members. Schwarz (2020) noted that stigmatization based on criminal behavior is the result of the constant labelling and branding by society, making it challenging for the offender to move past it. The environment to which the offender returns is often linked to family; consequently, any stigmas associated with the offender may also be placed on the family members. The environments to which ex-prisoners return vary considerably; the family is inextricably connected to these contexts (Lee et al., 2016). As such,

the study findings would provide insights into perceived societal perceptions by the family members based on their relationship with the ex-offender.

The main theme emerging from this analysis is that stigmatization has harmed the relationship between family members and the returning citizen. Stigmatization is a process by which specific individuals are devalued and alienated from certain types of social interactions because they are viewed as possessing a negative characteristic (Summers et al., 2018). Participants reported that society stigmatized the family members of returning citizens because of perceptions that helping a convicted felon was a sign of condoning the crime. These findings are consistent with Moore and Tangney (2017) findings that anticipated stigma caused withdrawal from situations in which there is the potential for discrimination which essentially causes negative impacts on behaviour and functioning; moreover, this may have implications for offenders re-entering the community, potentially hindering community integration and encouraging maladaptive behaviour after their release. Stigmatization based on criminal behavior is the result of the consistent labelling and branding by society, making it challenging for the offender to overcome (Schwarz, 2020). The systematized barriers for offenders seeking to reintegrate to society makes it difficult for a successful transition.

The stigma associated with helping a returning citizen was exacerbated because society continues to stigmatize citizens who have served their sentences, without giving them a chance to redeem themselves. Moore et al. (2018) noted that people who are stigmatized are exposed to permeating stereotypes about their group, discriminatory treatment from others, and laws that prevent their participation in community events. In many communities, relatives, friends, and society in general have difficulty accepting and reintegrating returning citizens into the community due to negative perceptions about them; thus, contributing significantly to re-offense

and recidivism (Dako-Gyeke & Baffour, 2016). The stigma associated with helping a returning citizen was further exacerbated when other family members and friends reaffirmed these societal stigmas by their negative comments and opinions of the returning citizen relating to the help they received. These findings have a significant contribution to understanding the recidivist behaviour of ex-offenders and its impact on family members.

This study also found that the main coping strategies participants used appeared to be solitary because support organizations were either unavailable, or family members were not aware of any such resources. Participants reported solitary coping strategies such as self-care, spirituality, substance use, and avoidance. Rowaer et al. (2018) agreed that family members of offenders with a mental illness experience significant emotional, social, financial, and psychological stressors; consequently, they are expected to deal with both an array of emotions and a double stigma for which they hope to cope. The stigmatization of offenders is seen as imposing additional or collateral sanctions upon the individual upon completing their prison sentences. Convicted felons face an array of collateral consequences which include legal restrictions on voting, public assistance, stigma, family tensions, and financial insecurity; moreover, these consequences surpass well beyond an offender's criminal sentence in general and are frequently more cumbersome than the sentence itself (Hoskins, 2018). This adversely reduces the offender's ability to reintegrate successfully, making it difficult to solidify basic resources needed for a successful transition. Some participants reported that their families and friends provided them with some support in coping, and some participants were considering entering therapy. Participants reported that they would have liked to have access to organized support groups for family members of returning citizens as they may have the potential to assist them with their personal challenges.

Implications

This study underscores the need for changes in how the criminal justice system prepares both the ex-offender and the family for release. Currently, the offender goes through a pre-release program which primarily focuses on the potential challenges of the offender and what they should expect, but not the family. The pre-release program for the inmate about to be released to society focuses on prisoners' preparation for release in relation to their health and social care needs, the perceived appropriateness of discharge accommodations, and the offender's awareness of services which may be required for their continuity of care (Forsyth et al., 2015). This presents a complexity in relation to the family members assisting their loved ones without guidance or instruction, potential problems post-incarceration, and a general lack of what to expect during the reintegrative phase. This is an important point. Since the participants conveyed the need for organized support and a sense of direction on how to assist their loved ones once they are released, placing these families' concerns at the center of the offender's release plan with some type of training and guidance is paramount not only for the benefit of the family members, but the offenders themselves. This generates the need for a pre-release program before the ex-offender is released that serves both the offender and the family members which focuses on such issues as finding a job, setting realistic goals for reintegration and outreach services, and training family members about those behaviors that may surface after the ex-offender leaves incarceration. The expectation is for family members of the returning citizen to be better prepared in handling unforeseen problems which may arise post-incarceration while simultaneously meeting their own needs during this critical phase.

Reentry Counselors, Family Therapists, and Human Service Specialists serving families impacted by the reentry of an ex-offender should develop an in-depth understanding of the

dynamics associated with family member's experiences with assisting an ex-offender after release from incarceration from a more comprehensive perspective, where a plethora of factors are considered in the reentry phase, mainly the challenges of those expected to assist in the successful reentry of the ex-offender. It is more advantageous to evaluate the implication of reentry on all family members instead of highlighting the plight of the ex-offender and the challenges faced after incarceration. This can be measured by a survey asking family members to rate the significance of reentry programs that center on the concerns of the family members of the returning citizen; thereby, providing the data that indicate needed advancements in prisoner re-entry. Community-based practitioners should take an active stance in strengthening families upon the ex-offender's return by offering an array of assistance and service uniquely designed for the families of returning citizens and the returning citizens respectfully. Community-based organizations should provide ex-offender family members with resources to assist with housing, substance treatment, health care, employment, child-care, and mental health counseling. By doing so, family members are better equipped to address the systematic barriers encountered by the returning citizen after they are released while synchronously meeting their own needs which are vital to their health and general well-being. "Nevertheless, I will bring health and healing to it; I will heal my people and will let them enjoy abundant peace and security" (Jeremiah 33:6, 2011, NIV).

Delimitations and Limitations

Delimitations

Delimitations of a study include the limits the researcher placed on the study prior to the beginning of the data collection. They impact how the results can be applied to persons beyond those involved in the study. There were several key delimitations inherent in the present study.

The first of these was that the study was delimited only to biological adult family members of the returning citizen. This delimitation was selected coinciding with the research gap with limited research on the specific challenges of biologically adult family members of the returning citizen and with the researcher's research interests. The study was also delimited to participants who were currently involved or expected to be involved in the reintegrative process of the returning citizen not just family members in general. This delimitation was selected because of the expectation that these family members could provide firsthand accounts of their role and involvement in their loved ones' reentry plan based on their current experiences. Finally, the study was also delimited to participants whose loved ones were released one year or less. This time frame was important to the researcher as behavior patterns change frequently over time. The results of this study were not intended to be broadly generalized and can only be directly applied to the participants themselves.

Limitations

The present study also had limitations. Study limitations are weakness of the research that are beyond the researcher's control. Phenomenological approach allows for critical, in-depth analyses of data from a specific population. Participant accounts from the current study speak only to the subjects included in this piece of research instead of seeking generalizability. Therefore, broader claims about the applicability of the study findings are tentative. However, through in-depth analysis, original information has been accessed, which may be relevant in informing practice and policy pertaining to a relatively under-researched population. This researcher contemplated on utilizing a survey tool versus semi-structured open-ended questions as a data collection method. It was ultimately decided that face to face, semi-structured open-ended interview questions was one of the best data collection methods for this study as opposed

to a survey tool for several reasons: 1) survey tools generally refer to the selection of a relatively large sample of people from a pre-determined population; 2) utilizing survey tools, the researcher uses information from a sample of individuals to make some inference about the wider population; 3) data are collected in a standardized form, usually by means of a questionnaire or interview; 4) surveys are designed to provide a ‘snap shot of how things are at a specific time’; 5) the significance of the data can become neglected if the researcher centers too much on the range of coverage to the exclusion of an adequate account of the implications of those data for relevant issues, problems, or theories; and 6) securing a high response to a survey can be hard to control, specifically when the survey is carried out face-to face or over the telephone (Kelley et al., 2003). All the fore-mentioned points underscore the reason this researcher chose not to use the survey tool for this study.

From the beginning of the interview to the end, it was obvious that the participants had a lot to say as evidence by their responses and willingness to continue to share their experiences. A survey tool in this study with these participants and the phenomena being studied would have limited their ability to fully express their experiences. Utilizing a survey tool might have lacked the details or the depth of the experiences of these family members as this study’s data have indicated. Further, these participants thoroughly shared their experiences over several years of challenges resulting from their support or non-support to the returning citizen; consequently, not a ‘snap- shot’ over a specific period of time. Selecting the face-to face semi-structured open-ended interviews yielded more accurate results providing the family members the opportunity to place in context their challenges, barriers and issues relating to the returning citizen and the transitional impact on their lives which is the basis for the study. This researcher’s study consisted of 11 participants as opposed to a large sample of people from a pre-determined

population. Due to the emotional aspect of this subject and the potential themes that could emerge, it was very important to this researcher that the participants could adequately convey their thoughts on this subject. There was the expectation by this researcher that during these semi-structured interviews that other topics and themes would emerge, contributing further to the phenomenon being studied. This is the reason this type of data collection was chosen in comparison to surveys. From the onset of the first interview to the last, the face-to-face open-ended interviews provided a more pliable format for the participants to expound on their responses as opposed to the rigidity of a survey tool. As a result, utilizing the qualitative interview as opposed to a written survey was the best choice. The data in survey tools that are produced are likely to lack details or depth on the topic being investigated (Kelley et al., 2003). In comparison to written surveys, qualitative interviews have the advantage of being interactive and letting unexpected topics emerge and to be taken up by the researcher (Busetto et al., 2020).

After completing this study, this researcher is confident that the best decision was made in choosing open-ended questions. The themes generated through the open-ended questions enabled this researcher to have a clearer understanding of the challenges and barriers of these family members and their concerns for the future. This researcher is not convinced that a survey tool would have been *as* successful in doing this. Since a plethora of participants expressed the need for transitional services solely for family members of returning citizens to help them during the critical period of reintegration, a survey tool in another study could be used to determine what these services should be and how these services would benefit the family members of the returning citizen recently being released from incarceration. A secondary reflection on phenomenological approach concerns the researcher and interviewer role. It is important to recognize the subjective stance all individuals occupy, and the ways that this may have impacted

upon both the development of the research project itself, for example the construction of the interview protocol, as well as the facilitation of the interview itself. Smith et al. (2019) reflected on the fact that there may be multiple possible interpretations of the data, and that phenomenological studies are an invitation for readers to attempt to understand the researcher's endeavor to make sense of participants' experiences. Therefore, despite an awareness of one's own subjectivity, the positioning of this research can only be influenced by the researcher's own approach.

On the theoretical model, the criticism of Bowen's family systems framework is about its universal application in the context of race, culture, gender, and ethnicity. For example, Carter and McGoldricks (1988) argue that the multiple roles of family therapy, focuses on the role of pluralism and cultural diversity in interpreting the family life cycles. As such, this study lacks the etic approach to understand the family process of interacting with returning citizens in a provided cultural context. Besides, adopting solely this view of family is problematic, and could prevent useful data being accessed which may give a more holistic overview of the current role in the returning citizen's re-entry or reintegration back into society. As highlighted by Jardine (2018), family life has changed rapidly in recent years. In recognition of the varying models of family, Morgan (2011) argued that the defining criteria of contemporary family life should not be decided upon by researchers but should be determined by the research participants themselves. While the study included all biologically related adult family members, a more nuanced account of familial support may have been accessed had the returning citizen been invited to determine who they viewed as family members, beyond the predefined boundaries of the study. Different results may also have been achieved by expanding Bowen's family systems framework using cultural framework.

Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the study's findings, its implications and limitations, key recommendations for future research are derived. The first and most critical recommendation is that future studies should build upon this study's modernity and address further the complexity of the family's role in the returning citizen's reintegrative process by examining their personal challenges and barriers resulting from their support to the ex-offender, societal perception, financial strain, and lack of support groups exclusively for family members. Although previous research has considered some aspect of familial support and the role family members have in reentry, the plethora of challenges and barriers these family members encounter have not been adequately studied.

Another direction for future research might be to explore specific causes and stressors affecting family dynamics between the returning citizen and family members. Studies exploring families of returning citizens have been non-existent in the family sciences literature. More research is needed in this area that focuses on the complicated social processes underlying the relationship between the family and the ex-offender using a family theory methodology that highlights the essences of family life and the interactions, when families encounter stressful situations brought on by changes in the family system. The Family Adjustment and Adaptation and Resiliency model may be better suited to capture how families face, cope and adapt to stressors based upon the family typographical make-up.

A third direction in which future research might be conducted would be to study the impact of family members of returning citizens being actively involved in the pre-release process as their loved ones prepare for reentry by addressing potential issues they may face prior to the offender's release. Further, tracking these family members post-incarceration for at least a year

as these offenders live in the free world may be integral to successful reentry for both the returning citizen and family members. Having these family members actively involved during this phase places them front and center of the reentry debate and enables them to play such a pivotal role in the development of criminal justice policies as it relates to prisoner reentry.

A fourth direction in which research might be conducted would be to conduct a study looking at family members assisting the returning citizen versus non-family members assisting. The purpose of this study would be to determine if non-family members had feelings of obligation to help the returning citizen as the family members in this study did.

Summary

In conclusion, the purpose of this qualitative transcendental phenomenological study was to examine the personal challenges and barriers of family members of returning citizens released from incarceration and the impact of these challenges in the reintegration process of the offender. The study was guided by two research questions: 1) What have been your experiences since your family member has returned home from prison seeking to reintegrate into society? and 2) What are the general societal perceptions towards the family members of recently released returning citizens from incarceration reentering their community? The researcher answered these two central research questions through five themes that emerged from the phenomenological analysis of 11 participants. These themes were: 1) Choosing to help the returning citizen was based on perceived need and sense of obligation; 2) Negative post-release experiences made helping the returning citizen difficult; 3) Impacts on relationships depended on family acceptance of the returning citizen; 4) Stigma has harmed family members and family relationships; and 5) Coping strategies tended to be solitary because support organizations for families were unavailable.

By using Bowen's family system theory to study incarcerated families, the study discovered that family members make a deep commitment to the ex-offenders as they provide a high level of family involvement with the reentry process despite low support from the community and government. The key takeaway from this study is that the participants had exceptional challenges that resulted from both the ex-offender and the family being unprepared for the needs and demands of the ex-offender and the changes experienced within the family as family members attempted to adapt to the ex-offender's return. Support from extended family members, the community, and government agencies are essential to the successful reintegration of the ex-offender, yet most families reported sparse support from these groups. Family members must be included in the pre-release planning stage of the returning citizen where they can adequately address any concerns or potential issues they may have. It cannot be overstated that family members are integral to a successful reintegration. Criminal justice polices must be reformed to include training and educating family members on their role in the reintegrative process. Prisoner release specialists must see families as a necessity in reducing recidivism; thereby, making the necessary adjustments to ensure their concerns are addressed prior to the returning citizen being released. Returning citizens must also recognize the challenges and barriers of their family members who have been given the task to assist them in their reentry efforts and to be patient with them as they navigate through an arduous process that unfortunately, many, as indicated in this study have difficulty doing. "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way, you will fulfill the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:2, 2011, NIV).

Spiritual Restoration of the Returning Citizen and Family Reconciliation from a Biblical Perspective

In Chapter One, this researcher addressed the significance of the returning citizen being restored through the redeeming power of the Lord Jesus Christ. “In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace” (Ephesians 1:7, 2011, NIV). What is evident in the findings of this study is the concern by some family members of the returning citizen’s continuous involvement in criminal activity, struggles of addiction, ungodly behaviours and patterns, and the challenges of mental health; causing strain on family relationships and how they interact with one another. It is God’s will for the returning citizen to be afforded the same grace as anyone else, being free of their desire to be involved in criminal activity, struggles with addiction, and challenges of mental health. “Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well” (3 John 1:2, 2011, NIV). This researcher sees this study integral to the spiritual restoration of the returning citizen and family reconciliation. The returning citizen must have a desire not only to make the necessary changes needed to become a productive, contributing member of society, but must surrender their personal will to God’s will. “Submit yourselves then, to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you” (James 4:7, 2011, NIV).

Since this study’s findings underscore the fragmented relationship between the returning citizen and family members, specifically those family members in this study who have accepted the task to assist these individuals in their reintegration efforts, focus on restoring the family unit to God’s original plan is critical. Further, since majority of the study’s participants professed some type of spirituality, placing emphasis on the redeeming and transformational power of the Lord Jesus Christ can lead to a new beginning for these family members. This can only be done through forgiveness, including releasing past hurts and scars that have caused family strains and divisions, often resulting from the recurring criminal activities committed by these offenders.

“For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive other their sins, your father will not forgive your sins” (Matthew 6:14-15, 2011, NIV). This study’s findings present a clear opportunity for the returning citizen and family members to begin a new chapter; thus, building on a new foundation. “Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:13-14, 2011, NIV).

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: IRB Approval

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

May 20, 2021

Leon Rankins
Douglas Orr

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY20-21-678 The Family Connection: Examining the Transitional Impact on Family Members of Returning Citizens Reentering Society

Dear Leon Rankins, Douglas Orr:

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required. Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:101(b): Category 2(iii).

Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met: The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

Your stamped consent form(s) and final versions of your study documents can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. Your stamped consent form(s) should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document(s) should be made available without alteration.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account. If you have any questions about this exemption

or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional
Research Ethics Office

APPENDIX B: REQUESTING SITE PERMISSION

January 26, 2021

Florida Reentry Coalition
Attention: Center Director

⋮ •

Dear Center Director:

As a doctoral candidate in the Helms School of Government at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a PhD in Criminal Justice. The title of my research project is “The Family Connection: Examining the Transitional Impact on Family Members of Returning Citizens Reentering Society”. The purpose of my research is to define and measure the personal barriers of family members of returning citizens recently released from incarceration reentering their communities and how their personal challenges and barriers impact their desire or ability to provide transitional support to the offender.

I am writing to request your permission to conduct my research at Florida Reentry Coalition facility. Data will be used to achieve a greater understanding of the transitional challenges and barriers of family members of returning citizens, potentially reducing recidivism, and to gain a greater awareness on improving existing criminal justice and reentry policies.

Thank you for considering my request. If you choose to grant permission, please provide a signed statement on official letterhead indicating your approval. A permission letter document is attached for your convenience. I can be reached at (---) ----- or by email at -----.

Sincerely,

Leon Rankins, Doctoral Candidate
 Helms School of Government, Liberty University

APPENDIX C: SITE APPROVAL

F
R
C

Florida Reentry Coalition
“Providing Support Services to the
Community”

February 19, 2021

Leon Rankins
Doctoral Student
P.O. Box -----
City, State -----

Dear Leon Rankins:

After careful review of your research proposal entitled “The Family Connection: Examining the Transitional Impact on Family Members of Returning Citizens Reentering Society”, I have decided to grant you permission to conduct your study at Florida Reentry Coalition. Please contact me either by phone or by mail to confirm dates and times of the study so that we can make the appropriate arrangements to accommodate you and the participants.

Sincerely,

Center Director
Florida Reentry Coalition

APPENDIX D: RECRUITMENT FLYER

Research Participants Needed

The Family Connection: Examining the Transitional Impact on Families of Returning Citizens Reentering Society

- Are you a family member of a loved one who was just recently released from incarceration in the past year?
- Are you 18 years of age or older?
- Are you a part of their reentry or transition to the community?

If you answered **yes** to either of these questions, you may be eligible to participate in a reentry/community transition reentry study.

The purpose of this research study is to define and measure the personal transitional barriers of family members of returning citizens recently released from incarceration reentering their communities. This study intends to explore the lived experiences of these family members and their impact on reentry for the returning citizen and the family members themselves. Benefits of the study include a forum for family members to express themselves in a confidential manner. If you are interested, please contact Leon Rankins at ----- . A telephone screening will be conducted via the telephone to determine eligibility. If you are selected for the study, you will be asked to participate in a one hour in-person interview. Participants are asked to sign a consent form if selected and will receive a \$30 VISA gift card upon completion of the study.

The study is being conducted at Florida Reentry Coalition
Leon Rankins, a Doctoral Candidate in the Helms

School of Government at Liberty University is conducting this study. Please contact Leon Rankins at ----- or email at ----- for more information.

APPENDIX E: PRELIMINARY INVITATION

May 24, 2021

(Potential Research Participant)

Numeric Address

City, State, and Zip Code

Dear Potential Research Participant:

As a Doctoral student in the Helms School of Government at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a PhD in Criminal Justice. The purpose of my research is to examine the transitional impact on family members of returning citizens released from incarceration reentering society by hearing their personal barriers and challenges encountered during the reintegration process and how this impacts their ability to provide transitional support to the former offender. I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants must be 18 years of age or older, biologically related to the returning citizen, and the returning citizen must have been released in the past 12 months. Participants, if willing, will be asked to complete a one- hour audio recorded face-to-face interview consisting of questions centered around the participant's relationship with the returning citizen and personal experiences encountered prior to and during the return of the former offender.

At the completion of the interview, each participant will be debriefed on the purpose of the research study and asked if they have any comments or suggestions. A follow-up call will be made only if the participant has further questions or concerns after the debriefing takes place. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

To participate, please call Leon Rankins at ----- . A screening conducted over the telephone will determine your eligibility for the study.

A consent document is attached to this letter. The consent document contains additional information about my research. Please sign the consent document and return it to me at the time of the in-person interview if you are selected for the study.

At the completion of the interview, participants will receive a \$30 VISA gift card.

Sincerely,

Leon Rankins

Doctoral Student, Helms School of Government

Liberty University

APPENDIX F: FOLLOW-UP LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS

June 7, 2021

(Potential Research Participant)

Numeric Address

City, State, and Zip Code

Dear Potential Research Participant:

As a Doctoral student in the Helms School of Government at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a PhD in Criminal Justice. The purpose of my research is to examine the transitional impact on family members of returning citizens released from incarceration reentering society by hearing their personal barriers and challenges encountered during the reintegration process and how this impacts their ability to provide transitional support to the former offender. I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants must be 18 years of age or older, biologically related to the returning citizen, and the returning citizen must have been released in the past 12 months. Participants, if willing, will be asked to complete a one- hour audio recorded face-to-face interview consisting of questions centered around the participant's relationship with the returning citizen and personal experiences encountered prior to and during the return of the former offender.

This letter is a follow-up from our previous discussion with you indicating an interest in the study. You were sent a consent form two weeks ago. Just a friendly reminder to bring the signed consent form with you during the face-to-face interview.

At the completion of the interview, participants will receive a \$30 VISA gift card.

Sincerely,

Leon Rankins

Doctoral Student, Helms School of Government

Liberty University

APPENDIX G: SCREENING INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Thank you for indicating your interest in being a part of this research study. I must inform you that this phone call is being recorded to ensure accuracy and for the purposes of research integrity. Are you okay with this phone call being recorded? **YES NO**

Name: _____ Date: _____
 Numerical Code: _____ Primary Contact Phone: _____
 Address of Residence (for mailing of forms and transcripts, if preferred):

 Email address (for sending forms and transcripts, if preferred):

-
1. What is your gender? MALE FEMALE
 2. What is your age? _____
 3. Do you have a family member who has been recently released from incarceration within the past 12 months? YES NO
 3. To which of the following ethnic groups do you identify?
 White/Caucasian Asian Black
 Hispanic or Latino Native American or Pacific Islander American Indian or Alaska Native
 4. What is your relationship to the returning citizen? _____
 5. Are you biologically related to the returning citizen? YES NO

Please comment how comfortable you are participating a potentially emotional interview:

Researcher Notes

Candidate meets inclusion requirements	YES	NO
Candidate excluded from study	YES	NO
Candidate informed of exclusion on telephone	YES	NO
Reason (s) for exclusion		

APPENDIX H: CONSENT FORM

Title of the Project: The Family Connection: Examining the Transitional Impact of Family Members of Returning Citizens Reentering Society

Principal Investigator: Leon Rankins, Doctoral Candidate, Helms School of Government, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be 18 years of age, biologically related to the returning citizen, and the returning citizen must have been released from incarceration no more than 12 months ago. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research project.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of this study is to explore the challenges and barriers of family members of recently released citizens from incarceration returning to their communities. Additionally, the study will examine the family members' perspectives of their personal issues relating to the return of their loved ones reentering society. The study is being conducted to gain greater insight on the familial impact on the transition of the returning citizen and the transitional impact on the family members themselves.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:

- 1) Participate in semi-structured, recorded, and in-person interview. This will take approximately 1 hour to complete.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. Data collected from you may be shared for use in future research studies or with other researchers. If data collected from you is shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed before the data is shared.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms.
- Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.

- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

Participants will be compensated for participating in this study with a \$30 VISA gift card, which will be given to you at the conclusion of the interview.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Leon Rankins. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at -----.

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

APPENDIX I: PARTICIPANT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS/DATA COLLECTION

Participant Pseudonym: _____

Date: _____ Time: _____

Interviewer: _____

Location: _____

Hello. My name is Leon Rankins, and I am the researcher for this study. Thank you for taking the time to be a part of this important research. Throughout my own research to support the need for this study, I have found little information about the impact that family members of returning citizens encounter once their loved ones are released from incarceration and reenter society. There exists even less information on specifically how the personal challenges and barriers of the family members of returning citizens affect the reintegration of the returning citizen and the family members themselves.

At the time that you indicated an interest in this study, I sent you a Consent to Participate form. I would like to review it with you at this time. (READ FORM AND ACQUIRE CONSENT)

Consent to Participate Form Signed? YES NO

Before we begin the interview, I would like to remind you that our session will be audio-recorded, as you have given your consent for this procedure. Additionally, I will be writing down some of your responses and making notes as we progress through the interview. The first several questions will provide background information about you and the returning citizen, which will be reported in the study results in a numerical fashion. If you have any questions throughout the interview, please do not hesitate to ask. Do you have any questions, before we begin?

1. Returning Citizens' Background

- 1.1 What is the gender of your returning citizen family member? _____
- 1.2 What is the age of your returning citizen family member? _____
- 1.3 Is this the first time your family member has been imprisoned and released? _____
- 1.4 If no, how many times has he/she been incarcerated and released? _____
- 1.5 How often do you see your family member? _____
- 1.6 How often do you speak with your family member? _____

2. Current State of Relationship

- 2.1 Describe your current relationship with the returning citizen.
 - i. How would you describe your closeness?
 - ii. Can you describe some events that you have experienced with this person prior to him/her being incarcerated, during incarceration, and since he/she has been back home?
- 2.2 Please detail your feelings that you experienced once you discovered your family member was returning home.
- 2.3 In as much detail as possible, please describe the emotions you have felt since your family member has returned home.
- 2.4 Describe any changes in your relationship from the beginning of the incarceration period up until his/her release.
- 2.5 How has the returning citizen's return to society affected you financially?
- 2.6 How has his/her return impacted other family relationships?

- 2.7 Describe your current feelings toward the returning citizen.
- 2.8 Describe how you managed your life during the returning citizen's incarceration period.
- 2.9 Describe how you have adjusted since the returning citizen has been home.
- 2.10 At the beginning of this interview, I asked you to describe your closeness. Describe how this closeness has been impacted since the returning citizen has been home.

3. Personal Barriers and Challenges

- 3.1 Describe any personal barriers or challenges you have encountered during the incarceration and release of your family member.
- 3.2 Describe how these personal barriers or challenges have impacted your desire or ability to assist him/her in the reentry process.
- 3.3 How would you define your role in your family member's reintegration process?
- 3.4 Describe your personal feelings towards this role.
- 3.5 How are you currently finding support for your own needs during this transitional period?
- 3.6 What other tools or support do you feel you need to help yourself and the returning citizen with reentry?

4. Society's Perception and Impact

- 4.1 Describe how you believe society looks at family members of returning citizens.
- 4.2 How have these views (society's perception) impacted the family relationship between you and the returning citizen?
- 4.3 What have been your coping mechanisms during the reintegration efforts of your loved one?
- 4.4 Describe what you believe should be done to shape public opinion towards the returning citizen and his/her family members.

4.5 The next question is hypothetical and seeks to describe one component of the reentry process for the returning citizen.

If part of the returning citizen's post-release and reentry plan included a meeting requiring family members to be present with the returning citizen upon release, how do you see yourself participating in this process? _____

APPENDIX J: CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT FOR TRANSCRIPTION

SERVICES CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT TRANSCRIPTIONIST

I, _____ transcriptionist, agree to maintain full confidentiality regarding any and all audiotapes and documentations received from (researcher's name) related to his/her research study on the researcher study titled (name of research study). Furthermore, I agree: 1. To hold in strictest confidence the identification of any individual that may be inadvertently revealed during the transcription of audio-taped interviews, or in any associated documents. 2. To not make copies of any audiotapes or computerized titles of the transcribed interviews texts, unless specifically requested to do so by the researcher, (name of researcher). 3. To store all study-related audiotapes and materials in a safe, secure location as long as they are in my possession. 4. To return all audiotapes and study-related materials to (researcher's name) in a complete and timely manner. 5. To delete all electronic files containing study-related documents from my computer hard drive and any back-up devices. I am aware that I can be held legally responsible for any breach of this confidentiality agreement, and for any harm incurred by individuals if I disclose identifiable information contained in the audiotapes and/or files to which I will have access. Transcriber's name (printed)

_____ Transcriber's signature

_____ Date

_____ Printed Subject Name

_____ Signature & Date