Barriers to Reentry Following Incarceration

A graduate project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
For the degree of Master of Social Work

By
Sandy Patricia Arevalo

May 2020
The graduate project of Sandy Patricia Arevalo is approved:

_______________________________________  __________________________________________
Dr. Ioana Schmidt  Date

_______________________________________  __________________________________________
Dr. Wendy Ashley  Date

_______________________________________  __________________________________________
Dr. Maria Alejandra Acuña, Chair  Date
Dedication

To second chances

*Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord*

Acts 3:19
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Abstract

Barriers to Reentry Following Incarceration

By

Sandy Arevalo

Master of Social Work

The purpose of the systematic literature review is to determine the barriers reentering individuals encounter when returning to the community after incarceration. The literature shows that reentering individuals are faced with numerous barriers as they embark on the reentry process such as stigma, lack of employment opportunities, housing and education. The researcher hypothesizes that the more barriers individuals face upon attempting to reengage in society, the harder it will be for them to reintegrate successfully. To gather data, systematic internet searches of peer reviewed journal articles were conducted using databases available through the California State University system. The results revealed that reentry programs play an important role in generating positive outcomes for offenders. Though, there must be a good service-need fit and the programs must be of high quality. Unfortunately, the literature is clear in that there exists a lack of access of quality reentry and substance abuse programs. Employment and financial barriers were a prominent issue for reentering individuals, particularly for people of color and women. The review revealed the glaring need for increased access to quality reentry services and research that looks at how to best help reentering individuals. Social workers have a unique opportunity to advocate for policy changes that can mediate reentry barriers.

Keywords: reentry, barriers, incarceration, stigma, offender
Introduction

The purpose of this systematic literature review is to evaluate the barriers individuals face when returning to the community after incarceration. Barriers to reentry can include stigma, lack of quality reentry programs, housing, substance use and mental health issues, lack of sufficient education, lack of employment opportunities, and disenfranchisement through loss of civic engagement (Allender, 2004; Cowan & Fionda, 1994; Delgado, 2012; Gunnison & Helfgott, 2013; Harlow, 2003; Harris & Keller, 2005; Hunt, Bowers, & Miller, 1973; James, 2015; Nagin & Waldfogel, 1998; Paylor, 1995; Rodriguez & Brown, 2003; Starr, 2002; Whelan, 1973; Gunnison & Helfgott, 2017; Fox, 2010). According to Link and Phelan (2001), “stigma exists when elements of labeling, stereotyping, separation, status loss, and discrimination occur together in a power situation that allows them” (Moore, Stuewig & Tangney, 2013). A central component of stigma is the power element, which speaks to the tangible impact that it causes such as the difficulty ex-offenders face in finding employment (Pogrebin, West-Smith, Walker, & Unnithan, 2014; Pickering, 2014; Link & Phelan, 2001, Moore et al., 2013). Stigma can make the barriers reentering individuals are confronted with even more challenging and can cause a loss of social standing (Gunnison & Helfgott, 2017; Moore et al., 2013). Several studies have shown that members of the public hold negative attitudes towards ex-offenders and desire social distance from them that is achieved through the distinction between “us” and “them” (Rade, Desmarais, & Mitchell, 2016; Link & Phelan, 2001, Moore et al., 2013). Negative perceptions can result in social rejection, discrimination, loss of employment opportunities and loss of social status (Link & Phelan, 2001; Rade et al., 2016). Simply being aware of and perceiving stigma from members of society is consistently linked to poor psychological and social functioning (Moore et al., 2013). Among non-correctional stigmatized groups, perceived stigma is linked to
unemployment and income loss, depression, poor social functioning, low self-esteem and negative coping styles (Link, 1987; Markowitz, 1998; Staring, Van der Gaag, Van den Berge, Duivenvoorden, & Mulder, 2009; Moore et al., 2013). However, research has determined that perceptions of a negatively labeled group can be changed by educating the public about the group, thereby potentially reducing stigma (Pickering, 2014, Moore et al., 2013).

Offenders’ ability to reintegrate successfully is hindered by numerous obstacles and is a daunting endeavor for many. For instance, substance use is a pronounced concern for reentering individuals and plays a pivotal role in the onset of criminal involvement for many offenders (Gunnison & Helfgott, 2017; Wesley & Dewey, 2019). It is estimated that up to 75% of all ex-offenders have a history of substance abuse or addiction (Taxman, Young, Wiersema, Rhodes, & Mitchell 2007). It is also estimated that two-thirds of individuals in the criminal justice system have a substance abuse problem and are in need of treatment services (Taxman, et al., 2007). Similarly, persons with mental illness are overrepresented in the jail and prison systems, and 6 to 8% of incarcerated persons have a serious mental illness (National Alliance on Mental Illness, 2008). Every year in the United States approximately 700,000 individuals exit prison systems and what is more, research shows that quality mental health and substance abuse treatment programs are a critical factor in reentry success (Sabol, Minton, & Harrison, 2007; Lynch & Sabol, 2001; Taxman, 2004). Unfortunately, research suggests that there is a lack of access to quality treatment services during and post incarceration (Gunnison & Helfgott, 2017; Few-Demo & Arditti, 2013). This corroborates the staggering 68% recidivism rate for offenders with co-occurring mental illness and substance abuse problems (Wilson, Draineb, Hadey, Metraux, & Evans, 2011). Likewise, a study that measured recidivism over a 9-year period found that an estimated 68% of released prisoners were arrested within 3 years of release as barriers to
reintegration becomes too difficult (Alper, Durose, & Markman, 2018; Graffam, Shinkfield, Lavelle, & McPherson; Uggen; Visher, Debus, & Yahner, as cited in Rade et al., 2016).

The disenfranchisement of people of color and women through incarceration presents an opportunity for social workers to advocate for policy changes as it underscores several social justice issues. Notably, there has been a significant increase in the rate of the incarceration of women over the last 30 years. Between 1980 and 2017, the number of incarcerated women increased by more than 750% rising to 225,060 in 2017 (The Sentencing Project, 2019). Likewise, the racial makeup of incarcerated women shows that women of color are incarcerated at much higher rates than white women. In 2017, compared to white women, African American women were incarcerated nearly twice as much, and Latina women were incarcerated 1.3 times as much (The Sentencing Project, 2019). In addition, research highlights the need to equalize funding streams between the costly criminal justice system and the poorly funded social service agencies that struggle to provide a modicum of support to formerly incarcerated women (Wesley & Dewey, 2019).

There are policies in place that create barriers for people with criminal records through the reduction of employment and housing opportunities, and restrictions on voting rights (Clear et al., as cited in Rade et al., 2016). The discrimination in employment and lowered chances for economic success for reentering individuals has been well established (Western, Kling & Weiman, 2001). Ex-offenders experience reentry barriers through having to pay criminal justice fees associated with parole conditions, such as payments for drug testing, treatment, and monitoring (Bannon, Nagrecha, & Diller, 2010). The additional requirement to pay these fees coupled with the pressure of finding employment that pays a living wage is overwhelming for many reentering offenders (Bannon et al., 2010). Employment opportunities, access to
governmental benefits, stable housing, treatment programs, family support, access to health care, and a positive parole experience are needed for successful reentry (Naser & LaVigne, 2006, Travis & Petersilia, 2001).
Method

The researcher conducted a literature review of barriers individuals encounter when returning to the community after a period of incarceration. The researcher conducted numerous searches using databases available through the California State University of Northridge Oviatt library. The researcher conducted a search through One Search using the key words “reentry” “offender” “reintegration” and “barriers,” while setting search parameters for peer reviewed articles within the last 10 years. The search provided 445 hits. The researcher narrowed the search results by excluding the term “HIV” from the results, which rendered 123 hits. There were 13 useful hits chosen from the search as the articles focused on different aspects of barriers to the reentry process in regard to program effectiveness, education and employment. The investigator conducted a search through PsychINFO using the terms “stigma” “incarcerated” and “women”. The search revealed 24 hits of which one article was chosen due to the information presented about how women who return to the community can feel more connected and accepted within their communities. Next, the researcher performed a search through the EBSCO database using the terms “reentry” and “women”, which resulted in 2,913 hits. In order to narrow the search results, the examiner added the search term “stigma” and only searched peer reviewed articles within the last 10 years. Three useful hits resulted and articles that specifically focused on the impact of stigma on reentering women were chosen. Lastly, the researcher conducted a search of the Sage data base using the terms “women” incarceration” and “stigma”. This search resulted in 53 hits. The articles explained the negative attitudes of community members towards women returning to the community post incarceration and how the attitudes affected the women’s ability to successfully reintegrate to their respective communities.
Identification

Screening

Eligibility

Included

Records identified through database searches (n=3,435)

Records after duplicates removed (n=187)

Records screened (n=42)

Full-text articles assessed for eligibility (n=17)

Studies included in qualitative synthesis (n=11)

## Results

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<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Study Design</th>
<th>Sample</th>
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<th>Purpose</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Allen, E.K.</td>
<td>Justice-Involved Women: Narratives, Marginalization, Identity and Community Reintegration</td>
<td>2018</td>
<td>Qualitative, exploratory study</td>
<td>N=185</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>To explore whether identification with the label of persistent offender and/or career criminal together with a marginalized status (ethnicity, poverty, and education) would mediate the effect of personal resources and environmental factors on the redemptive self, agency for desistance, and anticipated desistance for justice-involved women.</td>
<td>Self-identifying as a persistent offender and/or career criminal, together with marginalization (ethnicity, poverty, and education) impact redemptive narratives of justice-involved women and their ability to create successful lives after incarceration.</td>
<td>Women with longer criminal careers and higher numbers of previous incarcerations had increased housing instability, lower employment rates and higher amounts of monthly income obtained through illegal means. Justice-involved women need to feel empowered to create change in their lives as well as have hope in their ability to create new stories for themselves. They need to be able to change their narrative so they can overcome stigma and shed negative identities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bergseth, K., Jens, K., Bergeron-Vigesaa, L. &amp; McDonald, T.</td>
<td>Assessing the Needs of Reentry Women Recently Released from Prison</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Qualitative, the study uses survey data</td>
<td>N=50</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>To examine the needs of female offenders while they are reentering the community from the perspective of community service providers who work directly with recently incarcerated women.</td>
<td>Most women identified the need with the most urgency as housing followed by mental health. Employment needs and interpersonal skills were tied for third most urgent need. Family-related needs ranked fifth followed by societal acceptance and substance abuse.</td>
<td>Community service providers identified 7 domains of need for reentry women: employment, housing, family-related needs, mental health, interpersonal functioning, substance abuse, and acceptance/support.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Few-Demo, A.L. &amp; Arditti, J.A.</td>
<td>Relational Vulnerabilities of Incarcerated and Reentry Mothers: Therapeutic Implications</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Qualitative exploratory study involving follow-up interviews</td>
<td>N=10</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>To explore the influence that women’s close relationships have on their reentry experiences with their families.</td>
<td>Reentry success of women depended on their relational vulnerabilities and histories of trauma. Relational and resource-related interventions that focus on addressing the effects of victimization and</td>
<td>Three themes emerged that characterized relational vulnerabilities (a) disempowerment due to family and intimate relationships characterized by violence, trauma, and substance abuse; (b) the presence of</td>
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<tr>
<td>Authors</td>
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<td>Year</td>
<td>Study Type</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fox, K. J.</td>
<td>Second Chances: A Comparison of Civic Engagement in Offender Reentry Programs</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Qualitative, the study relies heavily on observation, especially for the perspective of offenders. Survey data was also collected.</td>
<td>N=95</td>
<td>To analyze three reentry program models and their ability to enact a civic engagement model of reentry.</td>
<td>The findings were mixed in that each program had a method that it focused on. The program that focused on building prosocial offender identities found difficulties in that participants felt scrutinized. The other programs were either too focused on the practical needs of the offender or the offender felt that there was too much social distance between community members to feel that they were a part of the community.</td>
<td>Reentry programs were evaluated based on how they attempt civic engagement in the following capacities: helping offenders to develop &quot;prosocial identities,&quot; changing &quot;the community’s image of such persons,&quot; and marshalling &quot;community capacity&quot; to supply emotional support and concrete help. Reentry programs’ structure affects the capacity for civic engagement.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gill, C. &amp; Wilson, D.</td>
<td>Improving the Success of Reentry Programs</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>Quantitative, secondary analysis of data using propensity score modeling and logistic regression</td>
<td>N=2,054</td>
<td>Independent Variable-Criminal recidivism. Dependent Variable-&quot;service-need fit&quot;</td>
<td>Increased fit was significantly associated with reduced recidivism for both types of outcomes. Fewer than half the participants received the services they said they needed.</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gunnison, E., &amp; Helfgott, J.</td>
<td>Critical Keys to Successful Offender Reentry: Getting a Handle on Substance Abuse and Mental Health Problems</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>Exploratory study using interviews</td>
<td>N=40</td>
<td>To assess the impact of the &quot;service-need fit&quot; on self-reported and official recidivism.</td>
<td>Ex-offenders need help to address substance abuse and mental health issues while incarcerated and when returning to the community. Lack of access to treatment providers and quality treatment are key obstacles to the reentry process.</td>
<td>Both ex-offenders and Community Corrections Officers (CCO’s) identified having basic needs met, receiving quality substance abuse and mental health treatment that is individualized as being important in the reentry process. Barriers to access treatment need to be eliminated by implementing policy changes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mancini, C., Baker, T., Sainju, K., Golden, K., Bedard, L. &amp; Gertz, M.</td>
<td>Examining External Support Received in Prison and Concerns About Reentry Among Incarcerated Women</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>Quantitative, survey data collected from inmates at a medium security prison in Florida</td>
<td>N=1,256</td>
<td>Independent Variable-Family, employment, financial and stigma concerns</td>
<td>Visits reduced all concerns; receiving letters had a less consistent effect, but they too, were associated with reduced worry. In addition, experiencing multiple types of support influenced reentry concerns among women.</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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<tr>
<td>Study</td>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Design</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Variable</td>
<td>Independent Variable</td>
<td>Dependent Variable</td>
<td>Findings</td>
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<tr>
<td>Moore, K., Stuewig, J., &amp; Tangney, J.</td>
<td>Jail Inmates’ Perceived and Anticipated Stigma: Implications for Post-release Functioning</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Quantitative, longitudinal study of jail inmates using interviews in detention, pre-release and 1-year post-release</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>Level of support such as visitation (visits from significant others, parents and friends) and receiving letters (from friends, children, parents and others).</td>
<td>incarcerated women.</td>
<td>Perceived stigma positively predicted post-release employment for African American inmates, but not for Caucasians. Anticipated stigma negatively predicted arrests for Caucasian inmates, but not for African Americans.</td>
<td>NA</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pogrebin, M., West-Smith, M., Walker, A., &amp; Unnithan, N. P.</td>
<td>Employment Isn’t Enough: Financial Obstacles Experienced by Ex-Prisoners During the Reentry Process</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Exploratory study using interviews</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>To describe barriers to obtaining employment and explore financial obligations that may significantly prevent ex-offenders from gaining an economic foothold, even when employed.</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Parolees need employment to survive and to successfully complete parole mandates. However, parolees have difficulty finding work due to their criminal record causing potential employers not to consider hiring them. Individuals who used connections for finding work through family and friends had more success. Financial obligations incurred pre-incarceration and obligations post-incarceration created financial hardship for parolees. Parolees do not want to rely on family and friends for support. Instead, they would like to be financially independent. The toll of repeated rejection can create stigma that results in discrimination and a negative self-concept, a burden on ex-offenders as they attempt to return to society.</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visher, C., Lattimore, P., Barrick, K., &amp; Tueller, S.</td>
<td>Evaluating the Long-Term Effects of Prisoner Reentry Services on Recidivism: What Types of Services Matter?</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>Quantitative, quasi-experimental design</td>
<td>1,687</td>
<td>Impact of pre-release service receipt and reentry programming on two measures of recidivism: (1) time to rearrests and (2) the number of rearrests up to 56 months post-release for male offenders.</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Services that focused on individual change were more beneficial than services that focused on practical skills and needs. Services could improve outcomes if individuals received the necessary services.</td>
<td>NA</td>
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<tr>
<td>Walker, H.L.</td>
<td>Extending the Effects of the Carceral State: Proximal Contact, Political Participation, and Race</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Exploratory study using interview data</td>
<td>N=1,667</td>
<td>Dependent Variable - Political engagement. Independent Variable - Indicators of receipt of 12 individual pre-release service items and participation in a SVORI program.</td>
<td>To explore the political effects of the carceral state on those who have proximal contact with the criminal justice system.</td>
<td>Proximal contact mobilizes individuals. An effect that is most pronounced for non-whites.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wesely, J., &amp; Dewey, S.</td>
<td>Confronting Gendered Pathways to Incarceration: Considerations for Reentry Programming</td>
<td>2019</td>
<td>Qualitative, using data from semi-structured in-depth interviews conducted at a women’s reentry program.</td>
<td>N=30</td>
<td>Dependent Variable - Perceptions of pathways to incarceration. Independent Variable - Intersectional vulnerabilities.</td>
<td>To examine women ex-offenders' perceptions of their pathways into crime and related struggles upon reentry.</td>
<td>Reentry efforts pay slight attention to women’s gendered pathways to incarceration. Reentry program success focuses on narrowly defined recidivism, in harsh contrast to program participants' definitions of success as living independently, helping family, internally shifting away from old ways of living, and persevering through challenges. Staff’s individualized emotional attunement to the participants success was just as important, if not more than, the services themselves.</td>
<td>NA</td>
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Mass incarceration has led to a host of problems for reentering offenders and the communities to which they return (Fox, 2010). Still, longer sentences and fewer rehabilitation programs than in decades prior have left offenders with few skills, resources, and structural supports to reenter successfully (Garland, 2001; Petersilia, 2003; Travis, 2005). Reentering individuals have numerous needs upon returning to the community. Among them are practical needs such as housing, transportation and employment. In addition, reentering individuals face numerous barriers. Barriers include limited employment and educational experience, training to prepare them for employment, drug and alcohol addictions, mental and physical health problems, strained family relationships, limited opportunities due to stigma and higher mortality rates often due to drug overdose, cardiovascular disease, infectious diseases, homicide or suicide, loss of social capital, and limited access to social welfare goods (Visher, Lattimore, Barrick & Tueller, 2017; Walker, 2014, Gunnison & Helfgott, 2017; Fox, 2010). Reentry strategies that use a continuum of care approach may be necessary to achieve positive outcomes (Vishner et al., 2017).

Programs

In reviewing the effectiveness of reentry programs, there are several barriers to reentry present. Participation in reentry programs was associated with longer time to arrest and fewer arrests even after release from incarceration (Visher et al., 2017, Gunnison & Helfgott, 2017). While this may sound like commonsense, the type of programing that individuals receive in reentry programs matters. Services that focus on individual change such as cognitive focused programs, programming to improve personal relationships, educational classes, and programs that focus on criminogenic factors are more effective for reducing recidivism, and improving maturity and moral development, than services focused on practical skills and needs such as life
skills groups (Gill & Wilson, 2017; Visher et al., 2017). In contrast, practical services that were evaluated in the study such as reentry classes, life skills assistance and employment services had detrimental effects on recidivism (Gill & Wilson, 2017; Visher et al., 2017). In-prison programs had similar negative outcomes as they were found to be ineffective and can even cause increased crime due to the correctional system not being equipped to deliver successful treatment programs (Visher et al., 2017; Gunnison & Helfgott, 2017). In the study, Gill and Wilson conducted a secondary analysis of data from the Serious and Violent Offender Reentry Initiative (SVORI) multisite evaluation that was intended to explore the reasons for the mixed effectiveness of reentry programs. The SVORI was a federal multiagency funding initiative created jointly by the U.S. Departments of Justice, Labor, Education, Housing and Urban Development, and Health and Human Services. It provided up to $2 million over 3 years to 69 corrections agencies across the country to develop programs for effective reentry that emphasized collaboration between corrections and community services (Gill & Wilson, 2017). A national multisite evaluation of the initiative studied 12 adult and 4 juvenile programs in 14 states that did not include California (Gill & Wilson, 2017). The present study used the logic of propensity score matching to identify the relation between participants’ risk/need profiles and the services they received to assess how these factors are related to reentry outcomes (Gill & Wilson, 2017). A valuable component of the study was that participants were interviewed in-person in four waves: 30 days prerelease and 3, 9, and 15 months post release, which can render a more nuanced understanding of reentry outcomes (Gill & Wilson, 2017).

Research shows that programs are more effective than control or deterrent approaches such as surveillance and contact driven supervision, like parole or probation, in reducing recidivism (Visher et al., 2017). Notably, much of the data was taken from varying states and
there is no standard measurement of the effectiveness of treatment programs that can be used to standardize results. In addition, the challenges ex-offenders face can vary from state to state, which is not accounted for in the research. A common limitation in the literature was the small sample size of the studies, which makes it difficult to make determinations about which programs have better outcomes. Moreover, many of the studies were conducted in states other than California. Thus, results may not be applicable to the unique social factors at play in a complex environment.

Data consistently shows that more services are not necessarily better but in fact it is the type of service that is delivered that determines the possible impact on successful reentry (Visher et al., 2017; Fox, 2010). The level of connection or “fit” between the services individuals need and those they receive—in terms of both effectiveness and quantity—could be a key factor that influences the success of reentry programs in reducing recidivism (Lattimore et al., 2010; Gill & Wilson, 2017; Gunnison & Helfgott, 2017). Similarly, increased “fit” between needs and received services was associated with meaningful and statistically significant reductions in both self-reported offending and official arrest reports from the National Crime Information Center (Gill & Wilson, 2017). Also, the evidence-based Principles of Effective intervention (PEI) and related risk–need–responsivity (RNR) treatment models indicate that effective programming should be targeted toward the key criminogenic needs and the highest-risk populations (Andrews & Bonta, 2010; Andrews, Bonta, & Hoge, 1990; Lipsey, 2009; Lowenkamp, Pealer, Smith, & Latessa, 2006; Petersilia, 2004; Taxman & Thanner, 2006; Gill & Wilson, 2017). The PEI and RNR treatment models propose that services should be delivered according to theory and evidenced based models that are matched to individuals’ personal characteristics, while taking into account criminogenic need (Gill & Wilson, 2017). The idea is that if there is a better “fit”
between the individuals’ needs and the treatment that is provided, then reentry outcomes will be improved. Researchers found that there was a significant degree of unmet need across participants, and also a substantial number of individuals receiving services they did not believe they needed (Gill & Wilson, 2017; Gunnison & Helfgott, 2017). Consequently, having a voice in the reentry process may enhance individuals’ motivation and readiness to change, which are key determinants of treatment engagement and success (Farabee, Prendergast, & Anglin, 1998; Friedmann et al., 2008; Sung, Belenko, Feng, & Tabachnick, 2004; Taxman, 2004; Gill & Wilson, 2017; Gunnison & Helfgott, 2017).

**Substance Use**

Substance use and addiction also present significant challenges to successful reentry (Belenko, 2006; Solomon et al., 2006; Taxman, Byrne, & Young, 2002; Gill & Wilson, 2017; Gunnison & Helfgott, 2017). Scholars found that drug or alcoholic intoxication can impact cognitive processes such as decision making, inhibition, and risk perception (Horney, Osgood, & Marshall, 1995; Lipsey, Wilson, Cohen, & Derzon, 1997) and can interact with other biological, developmental, and social risk factors for crime (Gottfredson, Kearley, & Bushway, 2008; Gill & Wilson, 2017). Further, mental illness is associated with problems such as substance use, homelessness, and length of criminal history, which in turn increases the risk of recidivism (Lurigio, Rollins, & Fallon, 2004; Gill & Wilson 2017; Gunnison & Helfgott, 2017). Gunnison & Helfgott used narrative analysis to dissect the multifaceted dimensions of the lives of people who have successfully reentered their communities utilizing 21 interviews with offenders who had served time in Washing State and 19 Community Corrections Officers (CCO). The study is unique in that it solicited and analyzed the perspective of the CCO’s, which helps to understand
factors that may contribute to successful reentry from the perspective of a service provider. The interviews varied in length from forty-five minutes to over an hour (Gunnison & Helfgott, 2017).

Mental health problems may also be a barrier to individuals receiving needed services such as employment and housing. Ex-offenders need assistance to address substance abuse and mental health issues while incarcerated and, in the community, but a lack of access to treatment exists both in prison and as ex-offenders embark on reentering the community (Gunnison & Helfgott, 2017). Still, certain drugs such as cocaine and heroin, were strongly linked to crimes of acquisition, suggesting that individuals may also offend to generate income to support a drug habit (Anglin & Perrochet, 1998; Uggen & Thompson, 2003; Gill & Wilson, 2017). Substance use and crime can also lead to involvement in the illegal economies associated with drugs, which may expose individuals to other crime opportunities and minimize the effect generated by positive social bonds from family, work, and school (Gottfredson et al., 2008; Horney et al., 1995; Gill & Wilson, 2017). Interestingly, the U.S. Department of Justice’s CrimeSolutions.gov website rates the majority of specific treatment programs for substance abuse as effective or promising (Gunnison & Helfgott, 2017). However, few individuals receive these programs in prison and still fewer are able to continue their treatment in the community (Solomon et al., 2006; Gill & Wilson, 2017; Gunnison & Helfgott, 2017). Ex-offenders and Community Corrections Officers both cited lack of access to quality mental health and substance abuse treatment that is available in a timely manner as a hindrance to reentry (Gunnison & Helfgott, 2017). Treatment for offenders needs to be available sooner rather than later, both in prison and after release as this is a critical time during the reentry process.

Education
Employment and education programs were found to reduce recidivism for certain subgroups of people such as high-risk offenders or individuals over the age of 26 (Vishner et al., 2017). Moreover, employment, education, family, and substance abuse were indirectly related risk factors for successful reentry (Gill & Wilson, 2017). Scholars found that education is crucial to employment success and reduced recidivism (Gill & Wilson, 2017). Additionally, research shows that educational attainment and cognitive skills play a role in forming rational decision making about legitimate and illegitimate workforce participation and availability of opportunities (Bushway & Reuter, 2006; Gill & Wilson, 2017).

**Employment and Financial**

Returning offenders often have few prospects for decent employment and limited resources to secure suitable housing (Fox, 2010). Finding gainful employment poses many barriers and employers discriminate against individuals with a record even when they are qualified for the position (Fox, 2010). This illustrates the informal enforcement of stigma as it incorporates the power element through the denial of opportunities to build social capital (Pager, 2003). However, research indicates that perceived and anticipated stigma was unrelated to employment status (Moore, Stuewig & Tangney, 2013). People who lack the education and training employers value have difficulty finding employment but as Pager (2003, p. 956) notes “criminal records close doors in employment situations.” (Pogrebin et al., 2014). Similarly, inmates who receive vocational training are significantly more likely to find employment than inmates who do not receive vocational training. However, many inmates do not get that opportunity (Gill & Wilson, 2017). The returning individuals stigmatized backgrounds, their deficiencies in education and appropriate skills, and their lack of prosocial contacts can affect many ex-inmates’ ability to find work, which can inhibit both their current and future economic
status (Pager, 2003; Western, 2006; Western et al., 2001; Pogrebin et al., 2014). In a study of formerly incarcerated persons’ perception of stigma, more than one third of the study participants reported they had avoided disclosure of their criminal histories on job applications in an attempt to avoid rejection based on their ex-inmate status (LeBel, 2012; Pogrebin et al., 2014). Also, returning citizens face a “catch-22”—the stigma of their conviction which may limit their ability to secure a job and increase the appeal of the illegal labor market, while participation in the legitimate workforce has the potential to improve reentry outcomes and facilitate abstinence from crime through the development of prosocial bonds and social capital (Gill & Wilson, 2017). Still, nonwhites pay a greater penalty for a conviction record than their white counterparts as they are more frequently and strongly stereotyped, stigmatized and locked out of economic opportunities (Walker, 2014). Even though employed parolees are up to three times more likely than their unemployed counterparts to remain arrest free, securing employment is difficulty and overwhelming (Gill & Wilson, 2017). It is in the best interest of the community and there is a tangible economic benefit to ex-offenders being gainfully employed upon returning to society.

Family can play a prominent role in assisting returning individuals with employment goals. Scholars note that reentering individuals found jobs more easily when they resided with family and family helped with connections to employment (Pogrebin, West-Smith, Walker, & Unnithan, 2014). Without the help of family and friends, returning ex-inmates are likely to face much longer periods of time before finding employment, if they find it at all (Nelson et al., 1999). A common theme was that of using connections parolees had in their communities prior to their imprisonment.

In addition to the barriers posed by finding employment, returning individuals also face other financial hurdles. Parolee financial barriers such as having to pay child support, rent,
restitution, and costs of parole was found to make reentry more difficult (Pogrebin et al., 2014). For some, the requirements of parole, pressure of paying supervision fees and finding employment, led them to abscond or return to criminal activity because they were overwhelmed by the payments they couldn’t make. Not meeting parole program requirements such as paying rent at halfway houses, urinalysis tests, and other parole related expenses could lead to a parole technical violation (Pogrebin et al., 2014).

Civic Engagement

Reengaging formerly incarcerated individuals with the communities to which they return is a challenge only recently recognized by funding agencies and human services (Fox, 2010). In one study, the researcher hypothesized that personal and proximal contact with the legal system affect political engagement at varying levels (Walker, 2014). Research has shown that personal contact with the legal system that leads to a criminal background demobilizes individuals at all levels of political engagement, which essentially removes a large group of people from the voting process and civic engagement (Walker, 2014). The researcher conducted individual surveys that were collected through a statewide poll in Washington State and used 2011 census data on crimes per capita where the survey respondents live (Walker, 2014). Demobilization follows from decreased political engagement and increased alienation as a result of powerful, negative interactions with the criminal justice system (Walker, 2014). Conversely, people who had proximal contact with the criminal justice system tend to mobilize politically. This can include friends and family of the person directly involved with the legal system. The level of mobilization is related to the closeness of the relationship to the person who has had contact with the criminal justice system (Walker, 2014). The findings are important in that it highlights the
often-neglected fact that the offender is not the only person affected but in reality, entire family systems are impacted by the incarceration of a loved one.
Discussion

Mass incarceration has countless consequences and has led to a complexity of problems for individuals transitioning out of prison as well as for the communities to which they return (Petersilia, 2003; Travis & Visher, 2005; Western, 2006). Reentry services and programs that address criminal attitudes, personal relationships, anger management and educational deficits may need to precede practical services (Visher et al., 2017). Scholars argue that many reentry programs lack specificity in matching services to individuals’ unique risk and need profiles and that a continuum of care approach is necessary to achieve positive outcomes for reentering people (Visher et al., 2017; Gill & Wilson, 2017; Gunnison & Helfgott, 2017). Future program development and funding initiatives in this area should focus on enhancing service provision models, including provider training and orientation toward evidence-based, rehabilitative practices that align with the principles of effective intervention to create quality programming.

Returning prisoners’ perceptions and desires should play a complementary role within the evidence-based, actuarial framework of risk/need assessment. However, comprehensive studies of general reentry initiatives designed to prepare inmates for transition to the community are limited and their results are mixed. Typically, studies focus on reentry failures instead of what is working for reentering individuals. Overall, reentry program implementation is poorly documented in evaluations and there is no standardized measurement tool that can be used to evaluate the effectiveness of programs. Even when tailored services are offered, there may be gaps between reentry plans and actual service delivery due to limitations in resources and capacity or poorly managed continuity between prison and the community (e.g., Lattimore, Visher, & Steffey, 2011; Gill and Wilson 2017; Gunnison & Helfgott, 2017). Still, bureaucracy is a barrier for people to get substance abuse and mental health treatment as it creates a delay in
the reentering individual getting treatment at a critical time in the reentry process (Gunnison & Helfgott, 2017).

Employment that pays a living wage has been linked to successful reentry (Travis & Petersilia, 2001). Criminal justice fees associated with parole conditions, such as payments for drug testing, treatment, and monitoring, are increasingly being assessed and may reduce available funds to pay for basic expenses (Bannon, Nagrecha, & Diller, 2010). Restitution, child support, and additional mandated expenses may also be contributing to financial barriers to successful reentry that available employment cannot overcome. Employment opportunities, access to governmental benefits, stable housing, treatment programs, family support, access to health care, and a positive parole experience are needed for successful reentry (Naser & LaVigne, 2006, Travis & Petersilia, 2001; Pogrebin et al., 2014). Policy changes are needed in order to remove barriers to reentry such as costly supervision fees that place undue stress on the offender at a time when the they are focused on housing and other basic needs. Thus, the heavy toll of repeated stress and rejection can create a stigma that results in discrimination (Branscombe, Schmitt, & Harvey, 1999) and a negative self-concept (Goffman, 1963), added burdens on ex-offenders as they attempt to return to society (Pogrebin et al., 2014).

Overall, the studies reviewed were exploratory in design and several limitations emerged. Most of the studies comprised of participants who were white male serious offenders, so research on the reentry experience and barriers of women and people of color was lacking. In addition, most of the surveys relied on the participant’s self-report, which trusts heavily in the individuals recollection of events and experiences. This could be potentially unreliable data if it was collected over a long period of time as memories can become vague. Moreover, some studies that conducted surveys asked minimal questions instead of using the opportunity to produce
more in-depth questions that could have led to the collection of richer data. Additionally, the classification of responses in some surveys were loose, which results in a wide and very generalized interpretation of the data. Furthermore, many of the studies were conducted out of state and with small sample sizes, which may not reflect the unique intersectional factors present in Southern California such as gangs, poverty, large wealth gaps, and many other social, political and financial factors. So, more research that takes place in large metropolitan cities with a larger sample size is needed. Further research is needed on the effectiveness of reentry programs in general but specifically for disenfranchised groups such as women, people of color, the undocumented, the LGBTQIA+ community and other marginalized groups. Unfortunately, there is a glaring gap in literature. More research presents an opportunity to understand the path to incarceration for disregarded groups and presents ideas for more effective services that can assist reintegration back into society.

Implications

There is still a lot that is unknown about what works in regard to reentry programs and much more research in this area is needed. Especially, when it comes to knowing whether programs and services focused on motivating an individual to want to change compared to services focused on providing opportunities and addressing practical needs work equally well in reducing recidivism (Visher et al., 2017). Furthering research in this area can be difficult as there are no measures of program quality that can be applied consistently across programs. The development of a tool that measures the effectiveness of reentry programs could change the landscape of how programs are developed and in what way services are delivered. Additional research should also take into account a greater understanding of the intersection of the experience of reentry and the management of mental health and substance abuse issues.
Research shows that the criminal justice system is a mechanism by which racial hierarchy is maintained. This poses an opportunity for social workers to address the incongruence as it affects vulnerable populations (Walker, 2014). African American men are the most significantly incarcerated population in the U.S. and are six times more likely than their white counterparts to spend time in prison (Walker, 2014). The pattern among racial groups holds for women. In reviewing the literature on barriers to reentry there appears to be an insufficiency in literature that explores the unique experience that reentry individuals who also belong to other stigmatized groups encounter. There is a need for further research into how the reentry experience can be improved for disenfranchised individuals such as people of color and women so that systematic changes can be developed. Social workers play a key role in these measures at the micro, mezzo and macro levels. Social workers must diligently advocate for policy changes and intervention methodologies that can profoundly help individuals successfully reenter the community. Social workers have a duty to fight against these established systems of oppression as it is affirmed in the NASW Code of Ethics and to help vulnerable individuals progress towards recovery and a meaningful existence.
References


