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Measuring Perceptions of Various Forms of Rehabilitation and Re-entry Programs on Various Types of Offenders and Reducing the Likelihood of Recidivism: A Qualitative Study of Criminal Justice Professionals in Ohio

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Honors Thesis

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Department: Criminal Justice Studies

Advisor: Martha Hurley, Ph.D.

April 2021

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Abstract

Research suggests that rehabilitation and reentry programs reduce rates of recidivism for various types of offenders. The study, based on the constructivist paradigm, will use a phenomenological strategy to explain criminal justice professionals' perceptions of rehabilitation and reentry programs. Participants with experience working with at-risk populations in Ohio were selected for inclusion in the study. Participant experiences and feedback were analyzed to answer the research questions posed in the study. Data collected from each interview and the researcher's field notes were compared to identify themes.

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Introduction

Each year, almost 700,000 people enter and exit the criminal justice system. This means that hundreds of thousands are being released from jails and prisons, with offenses ranging from drug possession to murder (Serin, Lloyd, & Hanby, 2010, 1). These people can be juveniles or adults. Studies of rehabilitation and reentry programs have found that such programs can be effective, however, success mostly depends of the offender or delinquent and they work and effort they are willing to put in. However, that is only one part of the equation. While inmate effort matters, so does the opinion and perceptions of the people who run such programs. This area of research is important to understand because these opinions affect the efficacy and success of such problems. Much of the research suggests that if criminal justice practitioners are supportive of rehabilitation and reentry programs, then they are more likely to be successful. However, limited research has been conducted to find out what these perceptions and levels of support are.

This is an important field of study because if practitioners are found to be supportive programs, then more funding and efforts can go into improving their efficacy. However, if practitioners are not supportive, then efforts are not likely to be successful, and other routes should be pursued to reduce rates of recidivism. It is important to consider opinions at the law enforcement, courts, and corrections levels as the Criminal Justice System in mutually inclusive. Understanding how criminal justice practitioners feel about rehabilitation and reentry programs can influence the function and management of such programs, and this is an important perspective as they have first-hand knowledge of the dilemmas and successes of rehabilitation and reentry programs.

Literature Review

With such a large number of people involved in the criminal justice system, it is important to address why people offend, address criminogenic factors, and improve likelihood of success for reintegration. These efforts are known as rehabilitation and reentry programs. The efficacy and effectiveness of rehabilitation and reentry programs is debated among scholars and Criminal Justice Professionals. Professionals involved in running such programs have varying levels of support for the programs. If the

professionals who design, run, and implement these programs do not agree on likelihood of success, then they are more likely to be ineffective. Research on Criminal Justice Professionals' opinions and perceptions of rehabilitation and reentry programs is limited. This topic needs to be explored further to improve rehabilitation programs to increase the efficacy and effectiveness.

Prior to 1970, prisons were meant to rehabilitate. Prisoners were encouraged to develop skills and deal with psychological issues such as substance abuse and aggression. Many offenders received sentences that mandated participation in programs such as drug treatment, mental health counseling, and vocational training. In the 1970's, though, in an effort to reduce crime rates, the criminal justice system experienced a punitive turn, and punishment became the main focus (Benson, 2003, p. 2). Research conducted with the help of California Correctional officers found that 46% of respondents believe that rehabilitation should be a tenant of incarceration, 77% believe that both punishment and rehabilitation should be goals of incarceration, and 1/3 believe that both public safety and rehabilitation should be goals of incarceration (Lerman, 2007, p 4). More people were incarcerated and given harsher sentences, but crime rates continued to increase. Researchers theorized that the emphasis on punishment did not work because punishment was delayed, inconsistent, and did not address characteristics of a person and why they committed the crime (Andrews & Bonta, 2010, p 43). The lack of success from harsh punishment has led the criminal justice system to begin to transition back to having a rehabilitative focus.

Rehabilitation consists of different programs and therapies to give skills to incarcerated people so that they have a chance at a normal life upon release. Programs should be offered that will allow the inmate to live a worthwhile life upon release (Ward, 2011, p 104). Common rehabilitative programs are education, mental health treatment, cognitive behavioral therapy, and drug and alcohol treatment. The data suggests that most offenders could benefit from mental health services- a large number of inmates are mentally ill. Prisons and jails were not meant to deal with mentally ill people. Psychologists provide services such as group counseling and screening new inmates (Benson, 2003, p. 3) Research on rehabilitation programs suggests that direct intensive services for highest risk offenders, target criminogenic needs and in a way that is

appropriate for the offenders learning style and ability (Andrews & Bonta, 2010, pp. 44-45). The data suggests that high risk offenders benefit most if treatment is implemented well. However, rehabilitation is not a one-size fits all.

Understanding issues that lead to incarceration and the relationship with issues during incarceration and upon release is essential for developing rehabilitation programs. Research has been conducted about how knowledgeable Criminal Justice Professionals are about problems during incarceration, and consequences following conviction. Women offenders, for example, are more likely than incarcerated men to have substance use problems than incarcerated men. Upon incarceration, female offenders report lacking family issues, lack of skills and direction and job experience as major factors leading to their incarceration. Criminal Justice Professionals feel that trauma is a major risk factor for female offenders and feel that women that are jailed are more likely to have grown up in an unstable environment. Criminal Justice Professionals also think that low-self-esteem in female offenders contributes to issues during incarceration (Belknap, Lynch, & Denault, 2015, 81-96).

A study of California Correctional Officers demonstrates the varying opinions on rehabilitation programs. Opinions on efficacy of programs vary across programs- lower percentages believe drug and alcohol treatment is effective. Higher percentages believe vocational programs and psychological services are of decent quality. Around 84% believe they should have access to vocational training, 90% believe they should have access to drug and alcohol treatment, and 91% believe they should have access up to a GED (Lerman, 2007, pp 4-5).

Incarceration has consequences that make thriving upon release difficult. A growing field of research looks to understand how knowledgeable Criminal Justice Professionals are about consequences of incarceration. It is essential that they are aware of the consequences and understand the effects so they can inform offenders about the consequences of their actions, so that policy can be informed, and so that they can decide whether to enforce restrictions or not. Practitioners feel that civil rights, such as voting and jury duty, are minimally affected upon release. Professionals feel that job and employment are the most affected by incarceration. It is a consistent opinion that young, male, and minority offenders face the most consequences upon release (Goulette, 2014,

291-298). If Criminal Justice Professionals are aware of the consequences that ex-offenders face upon release, then this can influence the implementation of re-entry programs.

Data and research about re-entry programs is even more convoluted. Criminal Justice Professionals struggle to assist ex-offenders and protect the public with resources limited. Furthermore, much of the research on re-entry has been focused on what fails, not what works. More emphasis is being put on re-entry programs, as these rates of failures and lack of resources have prompted policy makers to address programs and program delivery (Gunnison & Helfgott, 2013, pp 2, 17). Upon release, offenders are met with medical and mental health issues, substance use, low educational achievement, and broken family ties (Source 2, page 62). For re-entry to be successful, there needs to be assessments done of programs offered, community intervention, and doing these services with humanity. Also need to address non-criminogenic factors, such as interpersonal factors, community factors, and situational factors. For re-entry to be successful it is important to understand and address “prior antisocial behavior, antisocial attitudes, antisocial personality, antisocial associates, problematic circumstances with employment, problematic circumstances in marriage/family time, problematic circumstances in leisure/recreation time, and substance issues” (Serin et al, 2010, pp 55-58).

The role of parole officers and Community Corrections Officers is essential to the implementation of effective reentry programs. Research suggests that positive relationships between offenders and parole officers can significantly reduce recidivism. The research also suggests that if parole officers are aware of the factors that affect successful reentry, then recidivism is less likely. However, some Community Corrections Officers think that offenders choose a life of crime, and that regardless of their life circumstances, they still made a rational choice. With this thought process comes a superior attitude, which can also negatively impact reintegration. Understanding the relationship between offenders and Criminal Justice Professionals and how this affects recidivism is important to proper implementation of effective reentry programs (Gunnison & Helfgott, 201, 287-299).

Common re-entry programs include Work release programs, Community-based residential treatment programs, Day reporting centers, mental health and substance use treatment, and job assistance (Gunnison & Helfgott, 2013, pp 4-6). The data suggests that most attention during re-entry should be provided to high risk cases, and that both personal factors and criminogenic factors should be addressed. Furthermore, research suggests that education and employment programs are the least effective, with addiction programs as slightly more effective, but that intense supervision is the most effective (Serin et al, 2010, pp 59- 60). Generally, treatment needs to be provided immediately and long term. For example, participation in drug treatment is done properly, makes recidivism and relapse less likely. For sex offenders, continued Cognitive behavioral treatments appear to be the most effective, and this needs to continue long past release (page 884). For a variety of ex-offenders, Positive treatment such as identifying goals and desires and helping the offender meet these proves to be successful in mitigating the likelihood of reoffending. Regardless, of treatment though, people still reoffend. Reintegration often isn't successful because offenders fall through the cracks, services are interrupted, and there is insufficient data and treatment offered (Wormith et al, 2007, pp 883- 887).

The data and research suggest that rehabilitation and re-entry programs can be successful if implemented properly. However, there are inconsistencies in the opinions of the people involved in such programs. Not much research has been done on the perceptions and opinions of people involved in the criminal justice system- it is mostly limited to mental health professionals and correctional officers. During incarceration, prisoners have high rates of mental illnesses and psychologists provide services to them. However, the mental health professionals have such high caseloads that they can't properly offer services; resources are too limited and need more people to provide services. With such high caseloads and emphasis on punishment, it is hard to develop effective programs. They believe with proper implementation, along with work programs, education services, transition can be easier and more successful (Benson, 2003, pp 1-4). Opinions of correctional officers vary, but research suggests that they believe that offenders are likely to reoffend and that rehabilitation doesn't work (Willits et al, 2011, p 4). From a study that was conducted, 84% of respondents believe the offenders are not

motivated to change, around 60% believe that it is too late by time offenders enter prison, and 82% think it is only effective if you put them in programs when they are kids. A minority of officers believe that offenders do not have the right to participate in programs 71% believe these people end up in prison because of personal failures, and 29% believe offenders are good people who committed some mistakes (Lerman, 2007, p 5).

When looking specifically at why correctional officers think rehabilitation and re-entry is likely to be unsuccessful, there are clear trends. Respondents were likely to report believed that they were more likely to find a job but not steady employment. Respondents also reported believing that offenders with 3 or more prior arrests for violent crime are more likely to reoffend compared to those with no prior arrests or difficulties during incarceration. Correctional officers who believe that they worked with dangerous offenders and those who report more workplace stress are more likely to believe they will reoffend. Respondents also reported a belief that offenders with college education are more likely to be rehabilitated. If correctional officers believe that their job is to punish, then they will be less likely to believe that offenders can be rehabilitated. Finally, many correctional officers believed offenders with social support are less likely to find steady employment (Willitis et al, 2011, pp 4-10).

It is important to understand how Criminal Justice Professionals feel towards inmates, offenders, and ex-offenders. Research has shown that negative opinions by Criminal Justice Professionals increases the likelihood of failure for rehabilitation and re-entry programs. The Stanford prison experiment showed prisoners can become depressed, anxious, and aggressive when placed in prison-like situations. This experiment demonstrated the importance of positive relationships and positive attitudes (Benson, 2003, p 4). Motivational interview training has shown that offenders are more likely to be rehabilitated if correctional officers believe that all offenders are capable of change (Willitis et al, 2011, p 12). Other data suggests that an interplay of relationships between different professions and cooperation and flexibility versus punishment and dominance appear to be the most effective (Applebaum, 2001, p 1346). One perspective on incarceration is that certain rights and goods such as education, freedom of speech, and health care should not be taken away regardless of what they offenders have done.

Ensuring basic rights does not pose any threat to the community and can actually lessen the likelihood of harm to the public (Ward, 2011, pp 111- 112). Regardless of the reasoning, the research and data support the opinion that it is effective to give offenders the chance to change their life.

The purpose of the project is to assess Criminal Justice Professionals' perceptions of rehabilitation and re-entry programs, and their level of support for such programs. As stated, this research is limited, and if there is not research done on the general level of support across several different professions, then it is difficult to implement change or improve how services are offered. The data collected will build upon existing research and expand the data to a wider range of Criminal Justice Professionals.

Current Study

Punishment, crime, and re-offending have been studied in great detail. Research also has found that rehabilitation and re-entry programs reduce likelihood of re-offending. There is not significant research on perceptions and levels of support for such programs from Criminal Justice Professionals. Interview questions and data will attempt to answer research questions such as what are Criminal Justice Professionals' opinions and overall level of support for rehabilitation and reentry programs? Interview questions will also attempt to answer what, if any, changes that Criminal Justice Professionals think should be made to rehabilitation and reentry programs.

If the study supports the research, then interview subjects who work in corrections and law enforcement should be less likely to believe that rehabilitation and reentry programs are successful. Mental health professionals, including those who influence court decisions and those who primarily serve a role during detention or transition, should believe that rehabilitation and reentry programs are effective.

Methods

Research Design

This project is a qualitative study. The goal of this type of study is to collect information and data through interviews. This type of study is suitable for the project as it

is used to understand opinions and perceptions, and the project aim is to understand the perspectives of Criminal Justice Professionals regarding rehabilitation and reentry programs. The general public often does not have much specific knowledge about rehabilitation and reentry programs, and the general public often are not involved with offenders and ex-offenders. This is an important perspective to understand because these professionals' opinions on these programs influence if money is put in, if such programs exist, and if they should be offered to all types of offenders and released offenders. The research also suggests that if Criminal Justice Professionals have a positive attitude and are optimistic about rehabilitation and reentry programs, then they will be more successful. The research intends to answer the following questions: what Criminal Justice Professionals' perceptions and level of support for rehabilitation and reentry programs are, and what they think could be done to improve such programs.

Setting

Data and information are being recruited through interviews with Criminal Justice Professionals. This includes, but is not limited to, lawyers and legal assistants, judges, social workers, mental health professionals, police officers, and victim advocates. This population is being interviewed because they run and are knowledgeable about rehabilitation and reentry programs, so their opinions affect the implementation of such programs. It is important that the professionals are representative of corrections, courts, and community, as the criminal justice system involves a spectrum of professionals. Both professionals within the juvenile justice system and adult criminal justice system were interviewed. Professionals were also included who have experience with a variety of types of crime.

Participant Eligibility and Recruitment

Participants were recruited in several ways. A majority of participants were recruited through a forensic psychology practice. Mental health professionals from that practice also suggested lawyers and judges who have experience working with the criminal justice system. Other subjects were recruited through Talbert House- a prevention, treatment, and integration organization for people involved in the criminal

justice system. Other subjects were recruited through researcher's social circles. All of the subjects involved had experience within the Ohio criminal justice system. Criteria for participants were that they worked with the criminal justice system and/or offenders at some point in their career.

Once contact was initiated, subjects were sent information about the project and were asked if they would be interested in participating. They were made aware that the project is an undergraduate, senior thesis project. Upon being invited to participate in the study, subjects were sent an "Invitation to Participate" document so that they could learn more about the project and understand what they were consenting to participate in. This detailed that their participation in the research is voluntary, how confidentiality would be maintained, and that they would not be compensated for their participation in the survey. Correspondence with subjects and scheduling of interviews was done over email and text. Prior to conducting the interview, the "Invitation to Participate" document was reviewed to ensure that they still agreed to participate.

Data Collection Procedure

The interviews were conducted via Zoom. Due to Covid-19, the University of Dayton was not comfortable with in-person interviews, and participants had no issue being interviewed via Zoom. Interviews are the best way to gauge opinions and thoughts. Subjects were informed that the interview would be recorded in the Zoom Cloud, then transcribed. Subjects were also told their names, place of work, and any identifying information would be redacted in the transcripts. Once consenting to participate after being reminded of these details, the recordings began. The participants were asked standardized interview questions in a semi-structured interview style. The questions were open-ended and allowed for participants to elaborate and provide examples from their own experience. Probing questions were asked if the researcher felt the answer would benefit from elaboration or to clarify their answer. Questions were divided into sections of background information, rehabilitation, and reentry. After the interviews were concluded, Zoom transcribed the information. Depending on the length of the interview, this could take a few hours. Once the transcription was completed, it was compared to the audio from the interview. Transcription mistakes were corrected, then the audio was

deleted. The transcripts were then downloaded as a word document and saved in a locked laptop file. The researchers worked from the anonymous transcripts.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis often involves initial familiarization with the data reading, reviewing transcripts, developing themes, and then grouping themes based on connections. Once the interviews were completed and the audio was transcribed, the transcripts were printed out. The answers were analyzed by sections of the questions. Upon reading the transcripts, trends were noticed in responses about both rehabilitation and reentry programs. Words and phrases that were repeated frequently were highlighted, and a list was kept with things that were most frequent and how often they were mentioned. The more a phrase or word was mentioned, the more professionals who mentioned it, meant that it is an important factor to consider with rehabilitation and reentry. For questions about what professionals' thought were best, the answers were written down and grouped together in themes. These themes were then ranked by which appeared to be the most important based on the number of times they were mentioned. The final question asked was level of support for both rehabilitation and reentry programs, so responses to that question were listed and ranked by level of support.

Validation

To ensure participants were able to participate, it was important to get background information about their position. They were also sent an "Invitation to Participate" document so that they understood what they were participating in. After the interview was conducted, notes of any time the subject seemed reluctant or hesitant to answer. A few participants also noted at the end of the interview that these are their personal opinions and do not reflect their place of work- they were assured that would not be an issue. Not many participants brought up politics, it was noted whenever they were. To ensure that my own bias would not influence the data, the questions were designed to be open ended and allowed for the participants to state and explain their opinions. Because the interviews were conducted over Zoom with cameras on, the researcher ensured that her facial expressions and body language did not display any opinions. To

make the participants feel the study is reliable, the researcher also looked presentable for the interviews.

Interviews are a reliable method for collecting data. The researcher followed best practices for drafting interview questions and conducting the interviews.

Results

A total of 15 interviews were conducted. Subjects were divided into three categories: law enforcement, courts, and corrections. One police officer categorized the law enforcement group. The courts category was composed of two lawyers, two judges, and one pretrial services worker. The corrections category had four probation officers, both for adults and juveniles, and one clinical care coordinator. Also interviewed were four behavioral health specialists and psychologists. Subjects were asked questions about the rehabilitation and re-entry programs they are aware of being offered, if they think they are effective, what changes should be made, and if offenders and delinquents have the right to partake in such programs. They were also asked what type of offender or delinquent benefits most from rehabilitation and re-entry programs. A complete interview guide can be found in the appendix, however, some of the central questions were:

1. In your opinion, are rehabilitation/reentry programs effective?
2. Do you think that offenders have the right to participate in rehabilitation/reentry programs?
3. Do you think any group or category of offender benefits most from any sort of rehabilitative/reentry services?
4. Do you think any one type of rehabilitation/reentry is the most effective?

Overall, subjects had high support for rehabilitation and re-entry programs and felt that offenders have the right to participate in such programs, and that it is a disservice to society if they are not offered. This is somewhat consistent with the previous research- most of the research suggests that mental health professionals were highly supportive, but corrections staff and professionals within the court would have lower levels of support.

One lawyer stated that his level of support for rehabilitation and reentry programs was high because:

“If you don’t provide these services, then people that are coming out of prison are just destined to reoffend.”

A clinical psychologist who was interviewed was supportive of rehabilitation and reentry programs stated:

“If we want people to change, we have to give them the opportunity to change. So absolutely, every person involved in the criminal justice system should have the right to participate in these programs.”

A law enforcement officer also expressed high levels of support for rehabilitation and reentry programs and argued that inmates and released offenders should have the right to partake in such programs, stating:

“Once you’re released, we as a society, we owe it to them to give them the sort of access to the services they need to continue to be successful. None one benefits, it does not help the offender, it does not help the victim, it does not help the government, it is the right thing to do, it’s a smart thing to do, and it makes complete sense to me.”

Many of the practitioners recognized the shift that occurred within the justice system from rehabilitation to punishment and felt that this was ineffective. A subject who worked in pre-trial services described the justice system as:

“The purpose of the justice system, in my opinion, should not just be to punish- that is clearly not working, that’s why we have so many reoffenders. The purpose of the justice system should also be ‘here’s how to do better’.”

Opinions varied on the effectiveness of rehabilitation and reentry programs, and which ones were the most beneficial. The most commonly cited factor to success was that the offender was motivated. A lawyer, when speaking to the right to participate in such programs and if they are effective, stated:

“They’re available to everybody, and you know, if someone doesn’t want to do it, then that’s on them. I mean, you have to want to help yourself.”

Perceptions of Rehabilitation and Reentry Programs

A common consensus was that it is important to teach inmates life skills, and many of the practitioners cited inmates and offenders having issues with substance abuse disorders and mental illness, which is consistent with what the literature suggests. They also pointed out that a majority of offenders are undereducated and do not have basic daily skills. There were high levels of support for Cognitive Behavioral Therapy and drug treatment amongst interviewees. A clinical psychologist described this treatment, saying:

“If a Cognitive Behavioral Intervention is correctly taught and reinforced, people of youth, adults, gain the knowledge, skills, and support they need to not reoffend and to be rehabilitated. It’s about skill building they can use and go on and become productive citizens. It’s about helping them understand if they have the skills that they need to proceed and to be able to get better and to ask for help and receive help and change their thinking. If they learn those skills, they don’t reoffend.”

A majority of the subjects described educational and vocational programs as the most helpful. This is consistent with previous research- most of the data suggested that substance abuse treatment and mental health treatment were the most effective for a wide variety of offenders. A clinical care coordinator expanded upon the importance of life skills, stating:

“When you think about offenders, a lot of these people don’t have basic life skills...so you’re talking about a population that’s very undereducated. So, getting them a job can be difficult, especially as our jobs become more and more education driven, where it’s not just manual labor.”

In terms of reentry, all of the practitioners stated that the lack of support systems and chaotic environments lead to reoffending. A probation officer explained that juvenile

and adult offenders, when released, go back to their families and peer groups. Due to this, she stated:

“I think some offenders would genuinely be more successful not living with their families again.”

To combat this, they advocated for continued and transitional care to aid in reintegration. to combat continued issues, such as substance abuse issues, employment, and housing difficulties, and the stigma of incarceration. This is also consistent with previous research- the most cited problems during reintegration include housing and employment difficulties. These can also translate into reoffending behaviors.

A judge suggested step down services to combat difficulties reintegrating into society, explaining upon release:

“Offenders come back out, and it’s kind of like, ‘alright here you have enough money to pay rent on an apartment. They now have a record that limits where they can get an apartment, and you know, there are programs that can help with that, but it’s not teaching sustainability, it’s not teaching those life skills...So I think you need some sort of step down.”

A clinical psychologist also stated that the highest risk of reoffending occurs right after release. She explained:

“A lot of times, in the adult system, they don’t have an ID, they don’t have an address- people are homeless. When they don’t have their basic needs met, and they don’t have a place to go as soon as they are let out, we have a risk factor that increases the chance that they are going to reoffend quickly. I would have a hope in the sky that reentry programs would have people prepared before they leave the building.”

Another common consensus was that people who had been incarcerated longer faced more difficulties upon release. Many of the Criminal Justice Professionals discussed how much has changed over the last two decades, and how that would make

release and reintegration more difficult. A lawyer compared the researchers experience over time to someone who was incarcerated:

“Typically, some of the people we prosecuted, they were in there for a long time. And it seems the longer they were in, the harder it is coming out...Inmates coming out have a big adjustment problem. You know, just this, I mean a lot of them have never been on a Zoom call. If you were in prison for fifteen years, just think how old you were fifteen years ago, what has changed. I mean, it’s very difficult.”

These trends are consistent with the data. Previous research suggests that offenders who had been incarcerated for longer periods of time would have a harder time upon release. The research also finds that inmates struggle with mental health and behavioral issues along with substance abuse that contributes to offending. The interview subjects fortified this argument.

Opinions of Law Enforcement, Courts, and Corrections

As stated earlier, each of the practitioners supported rehabilitation and reentry programs, however they each had different reasons. Law enforcement officers supported rehabilitation and reentry programs because they had person interactions with the high rates of recidivism. They saw the offenders who were released and reoffended because of continued substance use issues and problematic peer groups. A law enforcement officer argued offenders need to be given access to such programs because:

“We deal with the same people oftentimes, over and over. We arrest them, they cycle out, and we do the same thing again. So, to me, it’s smart politics and policy, because if you can somehow intervene so that this person isn’t introduced back into the system, that’s the most efficient way to do it.”

Practitioners within the court systems had the most varying opinions. The judges were rehabilitation and reentry services, and the lawyers were supportive, but one expressed doubts about the efficacy of such programs. One lawyer referenced seeing people who he had prosecuted and stated:

“Speaking to people who have been through that system and out, it benefitted quite a few of them.”

Another lawyer, however, stated:

“There clearly are systems in place to try to address some of these issues, the success of them is questionable.”

Corrections practitioners had the most positive outlook on rehabilitation and reentry programs- they had seen success stories. One significant difference was that corrections officers who worked with children were more likely to believe that rehabilitation and reentry programs are more likely to be effective. The also noted the high rates of staff turnaround in corrections work, which hampered the success of such programs. One probation officer described this staff turnaround, saying:

“It’s hard for the placement facilities to retain employees, so that makes it hard for the guys to really even build trust with who they’re working with as their case manager, their therapist. So, I think if we could find out a way to make their retention a little better, I think we could get better results.”

As stated earlier, the previous research stated mental health professionals would be the most supportive of rehabilitation and reentry programs, and this research confirmed that. What differed though was that the law enforcement officer had high levels of support for rehabilitation and reentry programs. The varying opinions of the judges and lawyers is also consistent with previous research.

Perceptions of Adult Offenders versus Juvenile Delinquents

The practitioners all attributed external factors to offending. A judge stated:

“Most people are not born bad. Behaviors can be unlearned.”

However, they had different expectations of effectiveness of rehabilitations and reentry programs. This same judge stated:

“Not everyone is savable, especially if there are a lot of obstacles in their way.”

Practitioners who worked with adults were less likely to believe that they could be rehabilitated; they all felt that they had already fallen too deep into the criminal justice system to be able to be completely rehabilitated. They also noted that adults within the criminal justice system were more likely to have been repeat offenders, which also contributes to rates of recidivism for adult offenders. Adults within the criminal justice systems also had criminal justice system also had more criminal peers and connections which make reintegration less successful. They all attributed offending behavior to growing up in unstable home environments that taught criminal behavior, which also related to more difficulties with rehabilitation.

Practitioners, however, felt that juveniles were more likely to be rehabilitated and can be prevented from becoming repeat offenders. Due to this, they placed more emphasis and importance on rehabilitation services for juveniles. All of the practitioners agreed that it is important address childhood trauma and offending early and begin interventions at a young age to increase the likelihood of rehabilitation. A lawyer who also served as a victim advocate pointed out that:

“We are not focusing on the trauma that kids go through ...then we’re surprised when we have all these issues ten, twenty, thirty years down the road...the entire system is flawed.”

The same lawyer further explained:

“If you’re not addressing juvenile offenders the correct way when they offend, you’re just biding time until they become adult offenders. All you have to do is look at people’s presentence investigation reports, and you see it.”

These trends are consistent with the previous studies- research suggests that rehabilitation is more effective for first time offenders, whereas adult offenders had already learned the behavior and it has become a way of life.

Limitations

This study was limited in terms of participants. As discussed in the Results section, only one law enforcement officer was interviewed. He reported working in a

very low-crime area, so opinions and perceptions may vary based on crime rates. It would be useful to expand the data to include more law enforcement officers. In addition, no prison guards, or correctional officers were interviewed. This was due to the design of the study. If prison employees were to be interviewed, the study would have had to gone through a separate review board.

Future Research

As stated earlier, research should be expanded to include more law enforcement and correction guards. These would be useful perspectives to expand upon. The research would also benefit from efforts to understand perceptions and opinions about rehabilitation and reentry programs. These thoughts could vary based on politics, crime rates, and rates of employment. It would also be useful to consider how long people had worked in the professions- more years working in the criminal justice system could lead to more jaded opinions or more realistic perceptions. These perceptions and opinions could be used to influence policy and funding regarding the criminal justice system, so the research could also benefit from a comprehensive understanding of each states' standings on rehabilitation and reentry programs.

Conclusion

As previously stated, almost 700,000 people enter and exit the criminal justice system each year. It is important not only to understand why people offend, but also what can be done to prevent further reoffending. The rates of recidivism can be reduced through participation in rehabilitation and reentry programs. However, to make these programs successful, it is important to have the support of criminal justice practitioners. In order to gain their support, it is useful to understand what they think works, what changes could be made, and if offenders have the right to partake in such programs. Understanding these perceptions and opinions can have strong implications for the running and functioning of rehabilitation and reentry programs, and ultimately influence rates of recidivism. It was found that a variety of Criminal Justice Professionals have high levels of support for such programs, and there is much agreement on what works and what changes could be made. Therefore, reform to such programs could be

implemented to reduce rates of recidivism with the support of Criminal Justice Professionals.

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Appendix

Invitation to Participate

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Opening Survey

Research Project Title: “Measuring Perceptions of Various Forms of Rehabilitation and Reentry Programs and the Likelihood of Reducing the Likelihood of Recidivism: A Qualitative Study of Criminal Justice Professionals.”

You have been asked to participate in a research project conducted by Jasmine Riechmann from the University of Dayton, in the Department of Criminal Justice.

The purpose of the project is to assess Criminal Justice Professionals’ perceptions of rehabilitation and re-entry programs, and their level of support for such programs.

You should read the information below, and ask questions about anything you do not understand, before deciding whether or not to participate.

- Your participation in this research is voluntary. You have the right not to answer any question and to stop participating at any time for any reason. Answering the questions will take about 15-30 minutes.
- You will not be compensated for your participation.
- Only the researcher and faculty advisor will have access to your responses. These responses will be confidential, and no identifying information will be associated with your responses. The data will be kept in a secured computer file.
- I understand that I am ONLY eligible to participate if I am over the age of 18.

Please contact the following investigators with any questions or concerns:

Researcher: *Jasmine Riechmann, riechmannj1@udayton.edu*

Faculty Advisor: *Dr. Martha Hurley, mhurley1@udayton.edu*

If you feel you have been treated unfairly, or you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please email IRB@udayton.edu or call (937) 229-3515.

Interview Guide

Employment

1. What is your position?
2. What level of education, training, or work experience is necessary for this position?
3. How long have you been in this position?
4. In what capacity do you work with inmates or released offenders?

Rehabilitative Services Offered While Incarcerated

1. What type and category of offender do you work primarily with?
2. What, if any, services are you aware of that are offered to these individuals while incarcerated?
 1. Describe them
 2. Are the programs mandatory or optional?
 3. If they were offered, were they executed well?
3. Is there anything that could be done to improve these services?
4. In your opinion, are rehabilitation programs effective?
 1. Describe why or why not
5. Do you think that offenders have the right to participate in rehabilitation programs?
 1. If no, why?
6. Are there specific types of offenders that you think should be excluded?
 1. If yes, why?
7. Do you think any group or category of offender benefits most from any sort of rehabilitative services?
 1. If so, why?
 2. If no, why?
8. Do you think any one type of rehabilitation is the most effective?
 1. Do you think different types of rehabilitation programs work more for different types of offenders?

Transition to Reentry

1. What do most offenders struggle with most upon release?
2. Do you believe participation in re-entry programs make the transition easier?

1. If no, why not?
3. Do you think they could be improved to better aid reintegration?
 1. If yes, why?
4. Do you think they could be improved to better aid reintegration?
5. Do you believe a certain type or category of offender benefits most from re-entry programs?
6. What re-entry assistance programs do you feel is most beneficial?
 1. Does this vary for different types of offenders?
7. Do you think that offenders have the right to participate in reentry programs?
 1. If no, why?
8. Are there specific types of offenders that you think should be excluded?
 1. If yes, why?

Overall, what is your level of support for re-entry and rehabilitation programs