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Impacts of Post-Incarceration Programming for Women's Lives and Local Communities

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Impacts of Post-Incarceration Programming for Women's Lives and Local Communities

An Honors Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Honors Studies in

Criminology

By

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Criminology

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Abstract

Previous research on reentry programming has focused mostly on male inmates and less attention is given to female inmates. In Arkansas, where female reentry rates have recently increased, research is needed to add to the conversation surrounding effective programming for previously justice-involved women, its impact on their lives and behaviors, and how this can influence the likelihood of recidivism. This qualitative study also aims to discover whether reentry programming can have a positive impact on the local community. Residents and staff at a local Northwest Arkansas transitional housing facility for previously justice-involved women were interviewed to analyze the effects of the programming on women's behaviors and lives. In this research, I found the themes of structured living, emotional education, and intentional support networks to be of the most importance. These all had been a major impact on women's behavioral strategies and barriers to successful reentry. It was also found that utilization of community resources and giving back to the community increased opportunities for community outreach and education on previously incarcerated women and community relations and connections with the women.

Introduction

Evidence has shown the number of women in prison in the United States has been shockingly rising since 1980, as "...the number of women in U.S. prisons has increased by more than 700% and has outpaced men by more than 50%" (National Resource Center on Justice Involved Women, 2016 p. 1). Although overall male and female arrests have decreased in the last decade, the decrease is less pronounced in women and in 2019 1.2 million women nationally were under control of the criminal justice system in some aspect (The Sentencing Project, 2020). At the national level in 2019, 61 out of every 100,000 women were in prison alone, but in Arkansas that number was 91 per 100,000 (The Sentencing Project, 2020). There is a need for intervention with women offenders to prevent a return to the criminal justice system as the recidivism rate is also quite high.

In 2016, the recidivism rate in Arkansas for women 6-months post-release was 5.66%, 1-year post-release was 15.86%, and there was a dramatic climb at the 3-year mark with over one third (36.63%) of women reoffending (Arkansas Department of Corrections, 2021). Since 2016, on average, over 1000 women are released each year from correctional facilities in Arkansas. While the number of men released seems to be slowly declining, the number of women released remains steady (Arkansas Department of Corrections, 2020). This indicates there is a real need for sustained after-care for women in Arkansas reentering society.

Up until recently, research on post-incarceration programming and its effects on recidivism was mostly focused on male offenders and failed to recognize the gendered and different needs of women returning to communities. This focus on male reentry may be due to the higher volume of men reentering society than women each year-in 2020 in Arkansas alone, 6273 males were released compared with 1137 females (Arkansas Department of Corrections,

2020). However, the unique needs of women being released must not be ignored. Over 58 percent of women in prison and 80 percent of women in jail are mothers, so assistance with resuming a parenting role can be vital to their successful reentry (Bertram & Sawyer, 2021). Women who are involved in the criminal justice system are more likely to suffer from substance use in conjunction with mental health disorders, putting them at a higher risk for both relapse and recidivism (Miller, 2021). Women also have different pathways to drug use than men, as women's drug use and criminal behavior is more likely to occur within interpersonal relationships and the behavior of their romantic partners strongly correlates with their own drug use and criminal behavior. Criminally-involved women are also more likely than men to have suffered from child maltreatment, family dysfunction, and negative self-concept. (Miller, 2021).

These main factors are associated with the gendered reentry struggles. Women may face struggles that are different to men, or on a larger scale than male offenders, resulting in a bigger focus on gender-specific reentry programming. A review of the literature concerning the factors that increase the risk of recidivism in justice-involved women, as well as protective factors and analysis of some reentry programs and techniques resulted in several recurring themes and key points including the importance of housing and employment, drug and alcohol abstinence, motherhood and social support, and mental health treatment in women's successful reentry.

Secure Housing/Employment and Education

First, the experiences of women who have been previously involved in the criminal justice system are a valuable source of information regarding how successful reentry is determined. It can also reveal what might make reentry programming more successful. Heidemann et al. (2015) conducted a qualitative study involving interviews with 30 women recently released from prison and found that women determined post-release success by having a

place of their own or having a place where they can be safe. In a study of the effectiveness of a voluntary 8-week reentry assistance program, success of the program was determined by its ability to meet the gendered needs of ex-offenders. Social support of housing, employment, education, and transportation was found to be one of the essential factors contributing to the women's success in the program. Additionally, the gendered programming seemed to be effective since in the year prior to the study, approximately 83 percent of the women who graduated did not recidivate (Wesely & Dewey, 2018).

A qualitative study investigated the perspectives of jail staff members from four regions in the U.S. which produced similar findings. The employees stated many women were unable to have their basic needs met on the outside, and jail provided the food and shelter these women were seeking. The employees consistently stated that a lack of resources on the outside post-release increased the likelihood of recidivism. From their experience, the most significant need for women's successful reentry was acquiring safe housing (Belknap et al., 2015).

Another study conducted to gain an insight into the reentry struggles of male adolescents and women offenders, found that having an income from illegal activities and the status of homelessness were two of the strongest factors positively associated with recidivism in women (Freudenberg et al., 2005). This study also found that job income was significantly related to a lower risk of recidivism so much so that each \$100 increase in weekly salary-up to \$500-was associated with a 24 percent reduction in the likelihood of rearrest. Freudenberg's (2005) research also revealed that participation in a job or education program and securing employment after release to be protective factors against drug use, which plays an important role in women's reentry and risk of recidivism.

Abstaining From Drugs/Alcohol

Most arrests of women are for drug and property crime (National Resource Center on Justice Involved Women, 2016). Therefore, the struggle with addiction is not only problematic leading up to arrest but can also be a roadblock to successful reentry for women after their release. One study by Huebner et al. (2010) found women with drug dependence/use were substantially more likely to fail and likely to recidivate within the eight-year study period. Another study concerning how previously justice-involved women defined a successful reentry, found the women viewed reentry as a journey, with an end goal of living a “normal life” free from controllers not only in the form of criminal justice surveillance, but from addiction, demonstrating the strong influence drug use and addiction has on justice-involved women and their reentry into the community (Heidemann et al., 2015).

There are drug and alcohol abuse related programs both available in correctional facilities and upon reentry. A qualitative study investigated women enrolled in substance abuse treatment and rearrest records for 18 months post-release. (Goodson et al., 2020). Results indicated that when engagement in the treatment is low, the perception of peer support of low engagement during the treatment program is positively associated with increased odds of substance-related recidivism. The treatment program was also mandatory, which resulted in a mix of both highly and weakly motivated participants, and peer support when motivation was lower negatively affected the program’s effectiveness on some individuals (Goodson et al., 2020). This could be an indicator that for substance abuse treatment to be most effective for women upon reentering communities, programming should be readily available, but perhaps not mandatory.

Another study involving substance abuse treatment with 276 women found results not only indicating the success of the program in reducing recidivism among the women, but also the

influence of motherhood on the number of women who attended (Robbins et al., 2007). The research found that women who successfully completed the program were significantly less likely to be rearrested and more likely to remain drug free than those who did not. Even women who still used drugs used less extensively than women who did not complete the program. (Robbins et al., 2007). However, there were little differences in drug use in women who did not complete the program and women who never entered the program, indicating the success of substance abuse treatment programs may be determined by successful completion of the whole course (Robbins et al., 2007). This emphasizes the importance of maintaining previously justice-involved women's motivation and dedication to reentry programming

Motherhood and Social Support

As previously noted, a study (Robbins et al., 2007) found mothers were more likely to start the substance abuse treatment program and have plans to live with children post-release. It can be inferred that having children and reconnecting with them after release is an important factor in justice-involved women's motivation to stay out of prison and have a successful reentry. It has been previously suggested that incorporating family components into transitional programming can positively affect the outcome (Huebner et al., 2010).

When justice-involved women were asked to define a successful reentry, being there for others-especially children-was a key factor of success and shows the unique needs of women ex-offenders who are mothers and may be primary caregivers (Heidemann et al., 2015). Within a three-year study period on 257 women probationers and their recidivism risks, women who were parenting were 62 percent less likely to miss a probation appointment than non-mothers, regardless of if their child was in foster care or at home, and the study showed being a mother

can be a protective factor against the risk of recidivism regardless of whether women have a non-conforming partner (Stalans & Lurigio, 2015).

While having a social support network can be key in women's successful reentry, it seems there are times where that can contribute to a higher likelihood of recidivism. A study of 497 women released from federal prison found most were reconvicted within the first six months after release, emphasizing the need for early intervention to prevent rearrests (Greiner et al., 2015). Having associations with people who were involved in illegal activities was one of the determinants that influenced how much time it took for women to fail reentry and recidivate. Family also had a greater predictive accuracy over recidivism, therefore having associates or family involved in criminal activity could hinder a woman's ability to reenter the community successfully (Greiner et al., 2015).

Expanding on this, prior research found that previously justice-involved women with justice-involved partners were 1.9 times more likely to miss post-release treatment appointments and missed 1.73 times the appointments as women with conventional partners, as well as being 2.7 times more likely to miss probation appointments, all of which can contribute to a higher likelihood of recidivism (Stalans & Lurigio, 2015). Programming in correctional facilities emphasizes the importance of having social support networks to help with reentry. However, in a study (Kellett & Willging, 2011) of 99 women who were interviewed in a Southwestern prison, many said their only social support network consisted of family members who abused drugs, alcohol, or sexual partners who were violent. This could narrow possibilities for women's lifestyles and behaviors to change if they are continually surrounded by risk factors to recidivism.

Women who are released back into rural areas especially, struggle without safe housing or transportation. They are subsequently forced to rely on old criminal social networks, inhibiting their ability to remain arrest-free (Kellest & Willging, 2011). It can be inferred that successful programming that reduces women's recidivism must provide resources that prevent women from being forced to rely on old social networks who are engaged in criminal behavior and substance abuse. Encouraging the creation of new, conforming networks as well as reconnecting mothers with their children could decrease the likelihood of recidivism.

Mental Health

Like substance abuse, experiencing mental health difficulties, especially trauma can be a significant risk factor for arrest in women. Villa (2017) outlined that 66% of the female prison population in the U.S. reported having a history of mental health struggles, which was almost twice the percentage of the male prison population. Additionally, one in five women had experienced recent serious psychological distress, compared to one in seven men. Jails have been compared to "holding tanks" for women with severe mental illnesses as community agencies become less available, and jails are unequipped to make a significant impact on women's mental health (Belknap et al., 2015). Mental health has been shown to be directly associated with recidivism. One study found women with a severe mental disorder were 20 percent more likely to recidivate compared to women without one, and they may struggle with coping with stress, impulse control, and have a lack of social skills (King et al., 2018). This can inhibit employment opportunities and the securing positive social networks which aid as protective factor against recidivism.

Post-release mental health struggles can arise and increase in women reentering communities. One study found anxiety and depression increased from 15 to 25 percent and the

use of mental health services increased from 14 to 28 percent among 476 women in a two-year period (Freudenberg et al., 2005). This demonstrates a need for post-release programs to target mental health struggles in women ex-offenders and to make mental health resources readily available.

Existing Programs

There are many existing reentry programs that aim to assist ex-offenders with their release in the community and studies have found mixed results concerning their effectiveness. One reentry program in a Southwestern community fell short in a few ways. Women reported the programming included “shaming statements”, teachings that the women were fully responsible for being incarcerated, misguided expectations on what the reality of reentry is like, and little preparedness for the overwhelming transition from correctional facilities back into communities (Kellett & Willging, 2011). Instilling shame in women could lead to new or worsening mental health struggles and a lack of honesty regarding the struggles of reentry could be detrimental to successful reentry due to the shock factor and unpreparedness to cope.

The Transition from Prison to Community Initiative (TPCI) program encourages system changes to reduce recidivism. Comparing programming in Michigan-a TPCI state- and Arkansas-a non-TPCI state, a study found Arkansas places little emphasis on reentry and release preparation was only said to be available upon request. Many programs were tailored towards men, and women’s programming was limited to literacy and parenting classes (Holtfreter & Wattanaporn, 2014). Presently, there is only one women’s transitional housing and reentry program licensed and approved through the Arkansas Community Corrections which allows the housing of more than one woman on parole and allows women to parole directly out to the program. This study aims to discover how this specific program affects previously justice-

involved women's behaviors and lives, risks of reincarceration, and also seeks to find how this program could benefit the local Northwest Arkansas community.

The Present Study

The previous literature is very informative on what factors in ex-offender women's lives affect their likelihood of recidivism. The discussed studies also weigh in on ways future programming could be structured to accommodate women's unique needs compared to men when reentering society. However, previous research has not addressed how long-term non-profit programming influences women's reentry journeys. More knowledge is needed on how longer programming can influence the potential risks of recidivism women recently released from correctional facilities face.

Also, while many factors which influence the likelihood of recidivism were studied, this research aims to find whether a local program in Northwest Arkansas changes women's behavioral patterns over time and the importance of those factors to a woman's individualized reentry journey and avoiding recidivism. Research found Arkansas has areas to improve on regarding reentry resources, particularly for women, but the question remains how effective women's programming is in changing behavioral patterns in justice-involved women and its potential effects on recidivism. This research aims to answer that and also discover whether reentry programming can have a positive effect on the local community.

The programming to be studied is from a local transitional housing facility in Fayetteville, AR which is a voluntary two-year program. This program is part of a national network of more than 40 programs modeled on Thistle Farms. Thistle Farms is a non-profit

organization which helps women survivors in recovering and healing from prostitution, trafficking, and addiction. They provide services such as safe housing, case management, counselling and meaningful employment and facilitate financial independence and lifelong support networks. The success can be noted as after five years after leaving Thistle Farms, 75 percent of graduates are living healthy, independent lives. All the women enrolled in this Fayetteville program have a history of addiction and incarceration. The Executive Director stated it is the only non-faith-based reentry center for women in Northwest Arkansas that is certified through Arkansas Community Corrections.

Methods

This was a qualitative exploratory study investigating reentry programming in Northwest Arkansas and its effects on previously justice-involved women. This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University of Arkansas after recruitment materials and guiding interview questions were submitted. Recruitment materials consisted of a flyer summarizing the study and participants needed, to be passed around the reentry facility. Also, an informed consent document detailing the study was signed by each participant prior to the interviews commencing.

Participants were previously justice involved women, or those who work with previously justice involved women and were recruited from a transitional housing facility and reentry program in Fayetteville, Arkansas, under the supervision of the Executive Director. 4 participants agreed to be interviewed including women who were undergoing or had completed the programming and staff members. Each participant was interviewed once separately. Interviews were conducted at the facility for the convenience and comfort of the participants. Interviews were semi-structured with open-ended questions and lasted approximately 20 minutes to 1 hour. Interviews were recorded on a recording device and later transcribed.

Analysis of the data included reading through the transcribed interviews multiple times and coding it, using methods by Fetterman (2009) and Emerson et. al (1995) to assist with interpreting and organizing the data. Interviews were read through multiple times with key concepts and ideas noted between the lines of the transcription. After organizing the coded data, several themes emerged which provided major points of interest and discussion on the topic. The interviews were coded and reread to keep track of how many times the same word, phrase, or idea was discussed in the interviews. Next, chunks of text were highlighted according to which theme they associated most closely with. After sorting through many ideas, four substantial themes became evident. Regarding the impact of the programming on women's lives, the themes of structured lifestyles, emotional education, and having intentional support networks were key talking points. In terms of community impact, examples of community service and acknowledgement were in abundance.

Analysis

Structured Living

Across all the interview with residents and staff, one of the most impactful changes on previously justice-involved women's lives that this programming provides is the tools to create a more structured life upon reentry. The program is two years long and provides free housing for the residents and their immediate needs are met. Within the first 90 days of the programming women are given things such as fresh mental health assessments, getting connected to providers, accessing physical and mental health care, and settling into their new environment. Having the time to work on themselves and settle in without having to immediately worry about finding accommodation, work, or familial responsibilities after coming out of correctional facilities allows for an initial solid foundation to help women achieve their bigger goals. The women

begin the recovery process without having the stressors that would exist if they were thrown back into their lives before incarceration, which allows the treatment of underlying causes of addiction. Women reported they were better able to receive help and set and achieve goals by having a peaceful environment, having daily programs, and scheduling so they could focus on their recovery step by step, realize how to reach those goals, and stay motivated to change. In February 2022, residents took part in a total of 37 group sessions dedicated to healing and change and 25 physical and mental health services were provided to assist with a healing and structured life.

Part of having a new structure life involves having employment and assets. After 90 days, women in the program are provided with help finding employment and identifying safe employers. The program also provides financial literacy education for women on how to save and budget. Having work and asset availability is huge for these women. Women reported having the feeling of stability in jobs that were their dream jobs or ones they felt valued in. Also, being equipped with the tools to budget and save money and seeing their investments pay off in real time inspired continued growth and motivation in the residents to continue to improve and stay committed to the reentry process. One woman reported:

I had already always done stuff where I didn't have to pass a drug test. So, I wanted to get a grown-up job and that was where I wanted to go work at because it's decent money... I've been there for the last four months and I'm hoping to go on full time for them and then I'll get up to almost \$17.00 an hour.

The women also benefitted from having work structure as they were able to pursue jobs with better working environments, safe employers, and see possibilities for growth and a true passion for what they do. Another woman had reached her goal of having her dream job, and when

referring to structure and stability noted that, "...I know going out into the world, I'll put it by myself. I'm not as nervous to go there because now I have values [and] things that I want to achieve". In February 2022, all 8 of the residents remained in the workforce and had developed a budget and savings account. Two residents had even received promotions at work which included raises.

With work and the ability to save came asset availability. For one woman, she was able to get her driver's license and secure her own vehicle so she could get to work. A huge result of women working was a feeling of autonomy and independence. Being able to provide for themselves meant they have possibilities and options that were not available to them before the programming. Women who had been previously incarcerated multiple times described how things had not changed before this programming because they had no choice but to rely on the same connections in their old communities for things. These people were often involved in criminal behavior and substance abuse, which distracted from the women's individual recovery journey. Now, by having their own job, place to live, savings, and assets, the women quoted having independence, possibilities, and choices available to them, so they no longer have to go back to old connections in order to live. When referencing the life skills the program has equipped her with, one woman explained, "...they're teaching me how to be a grown up. And in that there's some independence in that and I don't have to go back to that old life. It's a choice now."

The program also provides legal advocacy for women after incarceration. Staff told how they assist the women in navigating legal fees, court dates, DHS, and obtaining legal documents such as Social Security cards and birth certificates. Helping women navigate the justice system can help prevent further justice involvement and assist with the structure of a new life without

the associated stressors. According to the program's newsletter, in February 2022, the program conducted 50 case management, peer support, and aftercare sessions with residents. Women reported being overwhelmed with things when they were first released and the stress of dealing with things they left behind before incarceration. Now, having structure they have less fear of the criminal justice system and things such as being pulled over and talking with police officers because they are living legally every day and feel more productive to society.

Emotional Education

Having a new structure to life with things such as work, budgeting and addressing criminal history affects previously justice-involved women's behaviors and provides alternatives to criminal behavior. However, emotional education also has an influence over their reentry journeys and behavioral changes. One key aspect that came up in all interviews was the concept of self-worth and love. Staff members detailed how the program establishes early on that the women are deserving of a house and of unconditional support and respect and that they are worth fighting for. This part of emotional education facilitates establishing trust and relationships with staff. Women also noted that remembering who they are and taking time for self-care made it possible for them to find their true selves, create their set of values and live a life where their decisions reflect their values.

Also, when the women prioritized self-care, they learned not to be so hard on themselves and to allow themselves grace. For women this helped them overcome internal stigmas and stereotypes they acknowledged others may have about them so they can overcome any that exist outside of themselves. Along with this came acceptance. Women had been taught to accept the past and learn to grow from it. One woman expressed how she could not heal from things she was hiding in the past. This is another example of how the program changes women's behaviors

and treats the underlying causes of addiction and barriers to successful reentry. Another woman noted:

I had to reengage with a man who I was comfortable with once in order to realize that's not a good idea and I had to accept friend requests on Facebook with people I used to use with before I saw how toxic they were.

She was able to see old associations' behaviors and actions in a different light and realize she did not want that for herself after being exposed to them again. She also recalled, "...processing through those things and feeling safe enough to talk about those things even through they're embarrassing, and I feel like I fell short and feeling some regret." This exemplifies how addressing the past and processing actions and emotions were important steps in her recovery.

Acceptance also included accepting that not everyone will like them and not everything will go well in life but that is normal. The women learned to be accepting of that and have enough confidence within themselves that they are doing the best they can and continuing to grow. One woman summarized:

For one they've taught me acceptance about [how] it's really none of my business what you think about me. So, they just taught me just to shake it off and to keep going. And they've put me in a spot to where I'm confident enough with myself that I don't really even worry what other people are thinking about me no more because I know that I'm doing the best I can do.

With acceptance came the recognition of their past lives and how they would not want to go back to that because they would lose all they had gained while being in the programming, demonstrating dedication and motivation.

Teaching acceptance also included recognition of people and situations that did not reflect who the women are or respect their values. Another concept brought up in all interviews was creating boundaries. This included for themselves and others. Having boundaries with people from their lives before prison allowed the women to have clarity with unhealthy relationships and an acknowledgement of their growth and progress that others may lack. Creating boundaries for others also helped women gain control back over their lives where addiction had previously had control. One woman explained:

I'm more confident in myself. I know that I have boundaries now, personal boundaries and boundaries for others. I'm able to stand on my own two feet and be able to make it through a day just a day at a time instead of living in my addiction and my life not being where it needed to be and me simply having my mind on addiction.

Boundaries were also created with the women themselves. One example was of setting boundaries of disclosure with people and learning how to talk about their past as an addict or parolee and when that is appropriate. One woman felt,

Sometimes I feel obligated to let them know where I'm coming from because I feel like I do identify as a previously incarcerated person and a person in recovery. Those are huge components to who I am today. But learning how to talk about my past, learning when it's appropriate to talk about my past...are really important. But also learning my worth has to do with a lot of that...

Boundaries such as this helped women have more confidence in themselves and have less fear or anxiety in social situations. This further connects to the change in these women with the ability to create a new life with possibilities and not be tied to people or situations that take away from their growth and positive reentry journeys.

Another way this programming helped with impacting the behaviors of women to reflect positive reentry journeys was providing them with coping skills and allowing them to be vulnerable. All previously justice-involved women spoke about vulnerability and how opening up made them establish trust with others, share their experiences and grow from them, and to heal. Staff members noted that when women become more vulnerable, their true passions come out and more individualized ambitions and dreams are created, and they can help the women reach them.

In terms of emotional education on coping skills, staff emphasized the importance of women not acting on emotions all the time and being less impulsive. By educating women on alternatives to acting out and equipping them with other strategies to cope with stress or emotions, women are again provided with choices and alternatives other than using again. Instead of acting on emotion and going back to some comfort of old associations and ways of life, women can replace old comforts with more constructive ones. Women expressed that not being impulsive meant they could trust in the process and make clearer decisions not based purely on emotion. When women were provided with alternate coping strategies, they were able to avoid relapse, which the majority of women interviewed said was the biggest barrier to avoiding further justice involvement.

Support Networks

Another benefit of the programming that effects women's lives is the provision and encouragement of intentional support networks. From the first few weeks at the programming and throughout the two years, residents are required to attend recovery groups. This could be in the form of Narcotics Anonymous, Alcoholics Anonymous, SMART Recovery, Celebrate Recovery or more. Women immediately begin to form and extend support networks in recovery outside of the programming. Women reported having social support networks as essential in helping them in their recovery journey as well as helping them find their core values and examples of how to conduct future relationships with people. The program's newsletter reported that in February 2022, residents attended 15 recovery meetings. Having social support networks with people from similar backgrounds helps women as people in them have a common understanding of what they're going through, and women can have an open and honest dialogue to be confident in their recovery.

Creating connections with support networks also allows the women to become more open and eloquent in sharing their stories and gives them the ability to impact others in these communities to assist with other recovery journeys. A huge impact these connections have on women's lives is again providing them with safer support networks to reach out to if they need help instead of relying on old people in communities they knew before being incarcerated. Encouraging these networks again provides choices and alternatives for resources for the women, so they aren't forced to rely on previous connections which could be a risk to their successful reentry.

Family reunification is also facilitated through the programming. Staff help residents navigate regaining relationships they may have lost while incarcerated when it is appropriate,

which is determined on an individualized basis. Working on regaining trust and relationships with family and friends instilled motivation in the women to continue their reentry journey and served as a reminder of what they would lose again if they stopped working on recovery and reentry. A woman reflected,

Growing up I had my mom, and I had my sister, but whenever I was in my addiction, I lost them, so I had to pretty much find my way on my own and it wasn't working out. So, whenever I made it to this program and I had that support system, I then was able to regain a relationship with my mom and sister after learning a support system and what it's there for.

When asked how important regaining relationships was, one woman answered:

It was super important because I can work on myself all day but if I feel like I've failed my child and that I'm still not being accepted by my child, I question am I growing, am I doing better, is this worth it if the person who is most important to me isn't able to acknowledge it.

Relationships within the facility also have a big impact on the women's lives. For many, the staff are the first core support network the women have, and connections often begin immediately after leaving correctional facilities. Staff members serve as female role models to the residents and help women have the realization of what they can become and work towards. Having trusting relationships with female staff members solidified women's motivation and also provided a foundation of trust and a first example of how to conduct and identify meaningful relationships after incarceration. The women reported how impactful it was that female staff provided unconditional support without wanting anything back from them, further developing

the women's perspective on what a healthy relationship is. Also, establishing trusting relationships with staff meant criticism and advice was easier to receive and more likely to be implemented because the women had respect for them.

Having eight women living in the house together resulted in them forming their own community. Residents referred to being part of a sisterhood for life and expressed how coexisting with the other women was beneficial to their reentry journey in multiple ways. First, women are at different stages of their reentry journey. Also, as one woman expressed, they are all on different paths but on the same collective journey. This is impactful because even after staff have gone home, women can assist each other and form connections of support to aid in their reentry.

It is also beneficial to each woman to see each other through different stages of the programming. Women who are further along can assist newer residents and also see first-hand their own progression and growth from when they first started, which again helps increase motivation. Being able to live peacefully with eight other individuals can be difficult, so having the self-managed community increases social skills. It was reported how many women who have a history of addiction or incarceration do not believe they can get along with other women.

However, the women's behavior and perspective changed when they entered into this "sisterhood", and they felt more relaxed and confident in extending their network beyond the recovery community after having this experience. One woman emphasized:

Whenever I felt like I was alone I didn't strive for my goals. Coming here and having that support system is not only motivation but it drives you. To know you have people that are

still on your side, and you have people that you can count on regardless if I graduate or not, that's what the sisters for life gives me.

Referencing living with other women, another woman said:

I believed that I couldn't get along with females before I came here. And I think that's a common misconception with female drug addicts. But coming here I've learned that I can function...and I've learned how to do it in a respectful manner and in a way that's going to carry me through life. Just being able to socialize and be OK in my own skin with the people around me...I've learned how to be a part of that group and not be set aside. ...it's taught me how to have relationships that are worth having versus just having a relationship that I could benefit from.

Community Impact

Throughout the interviews many examples of how this programming effects the local Northwest Arkansas community were found. First, residents volunteer with many local non-profit organizations such as the food pantry and homeless organizations. This also has an impact on the women as they reported feeling good about giving back to places where they once took. One woman reported, "They put us in places where we can give back to the community and get to know people in the community like the food pantry...That was a good experience, and we were doing something good for other people.". Another woman echoed:

...we do volunteer work in the community so we're working at the food bank, we volunteer with Lifestyles or with other non-profits and so it's really nice to give back to the services that we've utilized in the past. So, feeling like we have something to contribute where we would have taken in the past is really beneficial.

This also increases community relationships and opportunities for women to share their experiences and stories with the larger community and raise awareness of the unique needs of this population of women as well as showing people that successful recovery and reentry is possible. One staff member noted:

Once our residents have been here a minute, they want to help other addicts, other people with addiction issues in the community. So they get to give back in that way and to be like a role model or to be a support person for somebody who's struggling can be really beneficial for...previous communities.

Another way this programming increases community relations with previously incarcerated women is its utilization of volunteers. Volunteers provide things such as transport and group sessions. The women reported this to be impactful as they could get to know more people in the community and establish roots in Fayetteville instead of old communities. Women also reported that being exposed to different people in the community with different backgrounds helped them have more worldly connections and set a precedent that although people come from different backgrounds, they may still be able to connect with them in some way. Again, by using volunteers, community outreach and education are achieved on the needs of previously incarcerated women, which assists in reducing stigma and stereotyping that may have existed beforehand.

It is important to note that the women going through the program also benefit the community financially. While working through the program, women are paying off fines and fees they owe, cleaning up their criminal history, preventing future justice involvement, and they are becoming employed. All of this contributes to the local economy through paying outstanding

court and criminal fees which allows them to gain employment where they can accumulate assets and have spending power in the community, while also paying taxes.

While the program and women benefit the local community through volunteer work and the creation of volunteer opportunities, the wider community has a large impact on the program itself. A lot of the money that allows the programming to continue comes from private donors in the community, local foundations and corporations, local church missions, and grants. It takes a community to keep this work ongoing, and that local financial support is incredibly important. Receiving donations from the community also represents that outreach is working and the community is responding to the need of reentry assistance for women.

Discussion

The results of the study conclude that the biggest behavioral changes in previously incarcerated women undergoing reentry programming were lifestyle changes towards more structured living, using emotional education provided to change reactions to and perceptions of people and situations, and seeking out more intentional social support networks and being able to recognize those through the program's teachings. It was also discovered that the programming does directly benefit the local community through volunteer work and financial outgoings, and the local community in turn also plays a role in maintaining the program and its success.

These findings show that the effects this program has on previously justice-involved women are beneficial and meeting the needs of this unique population. These needs have been found to be essential to women's gendered reentry success and include addressing trauma, pathways to addiction, mental and physical health concerns, securing housing and employment,

regaining familial identity, and recreating social networks and social support avenues (Opsal & Foley, 2013).

This study attempted to go further into researching that when these needs are met, how they change women's behaviors and subsequent possibility of recidivism. The most significant outcome of the needs of previously justice-involved women's reentry needs being met was that their behavioral changes allowed them clarity, possibilities, and alternatives which were not available before. All of the behavioral changes discussed in this paper had the benefit of allowing women to see possibilities for the future and alternative options to relying on old networks and communities. Not only did the vision of possibilities to grow maintain motivation in the women, having alternatives was highlighted as a huge resource by the women and staff in preventing future justice involvement by association.

This study investigated programming for women who have previously experienced addiction as well as incarceration. This expands on previous literature that acknowledges women are less likely to succeed in reentry programming if they use or are dependent on drugs (Huebner et al., 2010). This study discovered how mental health treatment and equipping women with alternatives to old networks and strategies of coping was effective in changing women's behaviors and perspectives. This could be major when addressing addiction in incarcerated women, especially when women are twice as likely as men to suffer from co-occurring substance abuse and mental health struggles and a higher percentage of female prisoners have met the DSM-IV criteria for drug dependence or abuse (National Resource Center on Justice Involved Women, 2016 p. 4). Also, 26 percent of women in prison had been convicted of a drug offense in 2019 compared to 13 percent of men in prison (The Sentencing Project, 2020).

This study discovered ways in which reentry programming for women can meet the needs of previously justice-involved women after their release from correctional facilities. The previous literature found secure housing and employment, abstinence from drugs and alcohol, motherhood and social support, and mental health all play a role in women's successful reentry to society after incarceration. Secure housing and employment needs were met through structured living the program provided; abstinence from drugs and alcohol and mental health needs were met through the provision of emotional education; and the driving factors of motherhood and social support were facilitated by the program's encouragement and creation of intentional support networks.

Nevertheless, this study is subject to several limitations. First, there were only 4 individual participants from which to gather data and only one example of programming in the area was investigated. Also, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the start of the study was delayed and there were time constraints in which to gather data for the research. Therefore, the amount of research had to be cut down from its originally intended length and depth of investigation. Future studies would benefit from a larger sample size across multiple program types to discover whether the same behavioral changes and effects in the women are noted and as largely impactful upon the possibility of recidivism.

This research adds to the conversation on ways reentry programming can have positive effects on both previously justice-involved women and the local communities in which reentry programming is offered. This study could be referenced in terms of public policy if reentry programming is going to be expanded into a new community as it investigated possible benefits for community members. This research could also be used to evaluate the effectiveness of other types of reentry programming for women in terms of behavioral changes and how risks to

recidivism are being addressed and limited. This study further indicates how female successful reentry journeys differ from male's, especially where a history of addiction is present. Results of this study could be useful in public policy and correctional facility programming in further attempting to decrease the recidivism rates among women.

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Appendix A

Guiding Interview Questions Submitted to University of Arkansas IRB

Example Interview Questions

Interviews will take place in a private room in the facility so the research subjects can be in a familiar, comfortable environment.

Residents

1. How long have you been a resident?
2. Why did you want to be a part of this program? How is it different from other programs you have been to?
3. How many times have you previously been incarcerated? When were you last incarcerated?
4. What have you learned in this program that you will use in your future job, improving your relationship with your family, and preventing justice-involvement?
5. What have been the biggest changes you've seen in yourself since coming here?
6. Does completing this programming make you feel like a bigger part of the community? How has that affected your social identity?
7. How has this programming affected your connection to your local community?

Employees

1. How long have you been an employee?
2. How is this programming connected to the local community and how does it impact it?
3. What is the biggest change you see in the residents within their first 12 months here?
4. Why do/did you want to work with previously incarcerated women?
5. What is this facility's programming focused on and what should women expect to learn here?

Appendix B

IRB Expedited Approval Letter



To: Megan Emily Rose Greenslade
From: Douglas J AdamsJustin R Chimka, Chair
IRB Expedited Review
Date: 01/12/2022
Action: **Expedited Approval**
Action Date: 01/12/2022
Protocol #: 2109356565
Study Title: Impacts of Post-Incarceration Programming for Women's Lives & Local Communities
Expiration Date: 11/02/2022
Last Approval Date:

The above-referenced protocol has been approved following expedited review by the IRB Committee that oversees research with human subjects.

If the research involves collaboration with another institution then the research cannot commence until the Committee receives written notification of approval from the collaborating institution's IRB.

It is the Principal Investigator's responsibility to obtain review and continued approval before the expiration date.

Protocols are approved for a maximum period of one year. You may not continue any research activity beyond the expiration date without Committee approval. Please submit continuation requests early enough to allow sufficient time for review. Failure to receive approval for continuation before the expiration date will result in the automatic suspension of the approval of this protocol. Information collected following suspension is unapproved research and cannot be reported or published as research data. If you do not wish continued approval, please notify the Committee of the study closure.

Adverse Events: Any serious or unexpected adverse event must be reported to the IRB Committee within 48 hours. All other adverse events should be reported within 10 working days.

Amendments: If you wish to change any aspect of this study, such as the procedures, the consent forms, study personnel, or number of participants, please submit an amendment to the IRB. All changes must be approved by the IRB Committee before they can be initiated.

You must maintain a research file for at least 3 years after completion of the study. This file should include all correspondence with the IRB Committee, original signed consent forms, and study data.

cc: Lauren Sabon, Investigator