Stigma of Incarceration and Motivation of Undergraduate Students for Service-Learning

Kapil Sharma
San Jose State University

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Abstract

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Keywords: Incarceration, stigma, collateral consequences, reentry, expungement, recidivism, service learning, criminal past, ex-offenders, motivation, undergraduate

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Approximately 19 to 24 million Americans currently have felony convictions on their records, while the exact number of people with minor convictions is unclear, it's likely to be significantly higher (Prescott & Starr, 2019). The significant expansion of prison populations in the late 1980s and 1990s resulted in a high number of male and female prison inmates being released from correctional institutions (Visher et al., 2005). A fundamental policy priority that has evolved is establishing measures to assist former inmates in successfully reintegrating into their communities and reducing the possibility of reoffending. However, an individual's chance of reintegrating into society is severely damaged by a publicly available criminal record, particularly in terms of employment and housing (Geffen & Letze, 2005). Restricting public access to criminal records is one way to address these issues.

Removing criminal records might lessen some outside influences that impede former offenders' abilities to advance through life milestones like obtaining lawful, productive employment and taking care of one's parental obligations (Adams et al., 2016). San José State University's Record Clearance Project (RCP) is a lifeline for ex-offenders who want to lead productive lives after being released from jail or prison. Undergraduate students are involved in this creative project under the supervision of an attorney, assisting those seeking to clear any criminal records they may have in Santa Clara County.

The two main research questions that this paper focuses on are as follows: First, how does the prevalence of criminal records hinder ex-offenders from successfully reentering society and to highlight the significance of dismissal of criminals in their attempts to reduce reoffending? Second, examining the motivation of undergraduate students for service learning.

Literature Review

The widespread availability and effect of criminal record information

Incarceration can be a long-lasting, stigmatizing life event that significantly impacts one's life (Brinkley-Rubinstein, 2015). Researchers have documented how widely available criminal records limit employment opportunities, voting rights, public housing access, student financial aid, and social service benefits. Furthermore, the personal, family, and community ties of ex-offenders may be jeopardized due to incarceration, and they are subject to increasingly sophisticated forms of public surveillance (Myrick, 2013; Ispa Landa & Loeffler, 2016). According to studies, decent work not only gives a means of basic survival but also plays an essential part in regaining self-esteem, attachment to a traditional way of life, and a feeling of belonging in society (Visher et al., 2005). In contrast, late American sociologist Devah Pager's 2003 study focuses on the stigma associated with criminal justice intervention and how employers respond to this stigma when considering job applicants (Pager, 2003).

In explaining the detrimental effect of persistent societal stigma, literature establishes a relation with a phenomenon known as self-stigma, which is linked to self-esteem, self-efficacy, and help-seeking behaviors (Brinkley-Rubinstein, 2015). Furthermore, incarceration stigma can have a direct impact on health. According to Turney, Lee, and Comfort (2013), incarceration-related discrimination is associated with higher levels of mental distress (Brinkley-Rubinstein, 2015). On the other hand, Significant research in occupational psychology has established a relationship between a fulfilling career and an individual's psychological well-being (Brown, 2011). Blustein (2008) argued that persons presume a social role through work, which allows them to "interact with the broader political, economic, and social contexts that frame their lives" (Blustein, 2008, p. 230)

Similarly, ex-offenders' ability to find and hold work is critical to effective reintegration and preventing recidivism (Brown, 2011). While most inmates experience similar obstacles upon release, women face additional challenges due to domestic obligations and gender-specific role expectations (Cobbina & Bender, 2012). Legal limitations on hiring ex-offenders for specific types of jobs are an example of a "collateral consequence" of an arrest. However, collateral repercussions are morally, if not lawfully, challenging since they intensify sentence beyond the penalties enforced by the criminal justice system (Kurlychek et al., 2006).

Potential advantages of expunging criminal records from history

Due to increased interest in criminal law reform over the last decade, numerous states have implemented special laws to broaden the expungement remedies available to individuals with publicly accessible criminal histories (Murray, 2016). Through the record clearance procedure, ex-offenders can now have minor convictions expunged from their criminal records (Adams et al., 2016). As a result, it is inaccessible to the public and does not appear in employment background checks, housing applications, education forms, or credit scores (Ispa Landa & Loeffler, 2016).

The governor of Michigan recently signed a legislation permitting first-time offenders convicted of operating while intoxicated to have their criminal records expunged. She declared, "We must open doors for first-time offenders so that all residents can apply for jobs and make positive contributions to their communities" (Nelson, 2021, para. 1). Furthermore, expunging prior criminal convictions from a person's record after serving time in prison addresses several negative consequences of incarceration and lowers barriers to employment (Adams et al., 2016). However, despite the apparent benefits of expungement, only a few people - even among those who are qualified - obtain them (Prescott & Starr, 2019).

Social Integration and Social Disconnection

Reuniting with family is just one of the many difficulties that prisoners encounter upon their return home (Naser & Visher, 2018). An investigation into older men's social integration processes after being released from prison found that one common experience the subjects had was being cut off from essential relationships, roles, and neighborhood-based social networks (Wyse, 2016). However, a study found that receiving family assistance during custody decreased the risk of recidivism and future criminality (Martinez & Christian, 2008). Simultaneously, researchers have also discovered a connection between post-release success and general family acceptance and encouragement. While in contrast, these studies have also discovered that family relationships may become even more strained due to families participating in the reintegration process (Naser & Visher, 2018).

Secondly, the absence of a person due to incarceration causes emotional distress to the prisoner's family and harms the socioeconomic stability of his or her community (Martinez & Christian, 2008). Researchers, specialists, and legislators are realizing that family can be an essential part of the reentry process; however, severe gaps exist in our understanding of how families react to the arrival of an incarcerated family member (Naser & Visher, 2018). Although societal support is essential to understanding the reintegration process, and almost all offenders leaving prison expressed an ardent need to integrate into mainstream society, they faced significant obstacles to accomplishing their desired community involvement (Wyse, 2016). On the other hand, the impact of incarceration on a black woman is far more damaging and long-lasting, making the reentry process for her as criminalizing as the crime itself. When looking at the position of black women, their social support networks are frequently obstructed and hindered by institutional barriers and that they are frequently unable to rely on robust and helpful

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peer networks (Williams et al., 2020). As a result of the intersection of race and gender, reentry

for women returning from prison is more complicated, and reoffending becomes more likely

(Cobbina & Bender, 2012).

Students' motivation to participate in service-learning activities and their impact

Students are inspired to participate in service learning for a variety of reasons that are

based on their environments and experiences (Pearl & Christensen, 2017), this may include more

than just a desire to give back (Rovers et al., 2016). Numerous studies have examined why

college students engage in community service, and the reasons have been classified as altruistic,

egoistic, and obligatory (Jones & Hill, 2002). Additionally, volunteering, according to

Holdsworth and Quinn (2010), is intended to build a sense of duty and responsibility for others,

as well as to improve professional skills and increase the scope of the student's resume to

improve employability (Washington, 2018).

Furthermore, while examining the connection between ethics, degree of professionalism,

and the participation of students in community service courses, many studies looked at how

mentoring affects the perceptions and behavior of mentees. The findings of the analyses revealed

that when mentoring is done consistently and when relationships between the mentor and the

prisoner are cordial and professional, the experience can be a significant turning point in the

prisoner's life (Timor et al., 2022). However, universities should ensure that students' motivations

for honing their skills in practice do not outweigh any potential benefits for the community they

serve. Licensed professionals must properly supervise students (Rovers et al., 2016).

A study on the advantages of mentoring for inmates discovered that it increased their

social capital, decreased their self-centered fixation, and helped them develop tolerance.

Mentoring also gave them a better understanding of the problems that had contributed to their

criminal behavior and improved their self-image by changing their perceptions and behavioral patterns (Timor et al., 2022). Accessibility and visibility of community service programs had an impact on participation as well. Compared to students at large institutions, students at smaller institutions were much more aware of opportunities for community service (Jones & Hill, 2002).

Methodology

Semi-structured interviews with three undergraduate students were conducted via Zoom on November 14, 15, and 16, 2022, at 08:00 PM, 08:00 PM, and 07:30 PM, respectively. While the Zoom sessions on November 14 and 16 were conducted from home, the November 15 interview was conducted from MacQuarrie Hall 523 on the San Jose State University campus. Moreover, my first semi-structured interview lasted about 40 minutes. However, the interview sessions on November 15 and 16 lasted approximately 50 minutes each. So, all three semi-structured interviews took 02 hours and 33 minutes.

Since the beginning of the Fall 2022 session, when I enrolled for JS 140 as an intern at the San Jose State University Record Clearance Project (RCP) and started attending my classes, I have known all three respondents for about three months. My respondents are JS 142 advanced students who occasionally served as facilitators in JS 140 workshops to give primary students helpful information about reading and analyzing RAP sheets, conducting speed screeding and legal interviews, etcetera. In addition, since the beginning, I have been very impressed with their breadth of knowledge regarding the record clearance project and expungement procedure at San Jose State University and their ardent desire to give back to the community. Furthermore, their commitment to inspiring passion in the JS 140 students to give their all in the fight for the good cause and teaching and preparing them for future success in handling RCP responsibilities is unmatched.

In addition to the information provided above, each of the three respondents I selected for my semi-structured interviews thoroughly understands the roles and practices associated with the RCP function. As a result, their profiles greatly improved my interview skills and results. It not only encouraged me to prepare by carefully considering my survey questions, staying within the allotted time, and other necessary obligations, but it also compelled me to organize the interviews in accordance with the IRB's rules. As a result, my interviews went very well, and my interactions with them were enriching. Moreover, all three of the interviews with the respondents were more conversational in nature than formal interviews in the traditional sense, and the results were excellent. There were moments when, rather than adhering to a predetermined structured format, our conversation shaped the interview's flow and touched on several unintended subjects that gave the interviewer different hints and sparked in-depth conversations with the interviewee.

Lastly, conducting semi-structured interviews for my qualitative study was a unique experience and difficult initially because of specific challenges I self-imposed on myself. Although fellow RCP students were friendly and helpful, being an international student at San Jose State and my unfamiliarity with the local culture restrained me from approaching other project members concerning my research work. Additionally, even though I was working on the Record Clearance Project as a student intern then, the class I was enrolled in, JS 140, was for undergraduates, and I was the only graduate student there. Therefore, I had limited interaction with the other members outside our regular RCP meetings, leaving little room to socialize with my peers. Consequently, there was a time when my study almost came to a deadlock, as my initial hesitation hindered me from approaching my potential respondents. However, I received much assistance finishing my study from RCP project director professor Margaret (Peggy) Stevenson and project assistant Cesar Gonzalez. Cesar helped me overcome my anxieties, regain

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my confidence, and suggested a few perspectives; JS 142 advanced students can best fit my

semi-structured interviews. Initially, I chose five candidates to move forward with, and I sent

each one an email outlining the purpose of my study and asking for their time. However, only

one person replied with his consent to the invitation mail. Eventually, I met the rest of the

prospects personally to convince them to be part of my study and finalized those two respondents

who agreed first to help me in my study.

Critique of the Interview Guide

The final interview guide included thirty questions. Initially, I intended to conduct my

semi-structured interview with RCP staff members. However, following a discussion in class

about my proposal, I decided to include the advanced students in my study because it examines

undergraduate students' reasons for enrolling in a service-learning course and their interactions

with former inmates who are now RCP clients. As a result, I had to redesign my survey questions

to include students instead of RCP staff members. For example, how has service-learning

education influenced them now, and what role will it play in their future career choices? Is RCP

just an internship requirement for them, or does it mean something else? Survey questions about

RCP function, motivation for taking RCP as an internship, and future career or education goals

were well received during the interview. Respondents, on the other hand, had difficulty

answering questions about clients' mental trauma, integration into society, and family-specific

issues.

Self-Critique

I was nervous and apprehensive about the semi-structured interviews project since I knew

it would be challenging. After all, it would force me to face the outside world, which is not my

strong suit. However, I would not say that I was terrified of this qualitative research approach

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because I had a leap of faith that assured me that I could complete this task with flying colors as I had in the past, and this optimism kept me going. Additionally, it is worth mentioning here that from the first day of our qualitative analysis class (JS 207), a series of related qualitative research projects have been part of the course structure, involving us completely and preparing and providing students with practical hands-on experience with almost all major qualitative research tools. Secondly, the course curriculum was meticulously designed, so that past assignments prepare you for the next one. I was confident I had all the tools necessary to complete the semi-structured interview project. Lack of clarity leads to confusion, and there is complete clarity on every aspect of course requirements and assignments from day one. Students were given assignment guides with step-by-step directions clearly stating how to complete a specific assignment. Without assignment guides, things would have been quite different for the class and me.

Furthermore, the nature of the semi-structured interview project requires you to stretch yourself from the start. This project cannot be completed without a significant amount of effort. From thinking about the research question to selecting respondents, preparing an interview guide, conducting a successful interview, capturing the interview verbatim, analyzing the data, and extracting themes, you will be involved throughout and will require a lot of effort. Additionally, because the entire process involves a lot of planning and networking, I had a calendar chart with the exact timelines of each activity in front of my study table at home. I will always remember how carefully I followed up with my respondents to make sure they would show up for the interview and avoid making them annoyed.

I was fortunate to be able to complete my interview in one sitting and faced only a minor network issue. However, I soon realized that completing successful interviews was only the

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beginning, and that more tedious tasks awaited me after interviews, such as verbatim transcription of the interview. Transcribing speeches into text was one of the most time-consuming and exhausting activities during my research paper. It took about 12 hours to prepare a clear, fully understandable, and meaningful script for each respondent, which was spread across 28 A4 pages.

Although my semi-structured interviews went well because of my familiarity with the Record Clearance Project and the respondents, I still need to improve my interviewing skills. Secondly, taking practical notes is crucial to a successful interview because your entire findings, interpretation, and policy implications sections heavily depend on your notes. A lack of note-taking skills can lead your study to inaccurate results. I could get better at taking notes, and semi-structured interviews were no exception. Moreover, I also have trouble taking notes while speaking, so that is something else I could work on. I discovered that I would have gotten into trouble if I had not used a recording device for my interviews. During my previous field observation exercise, I practiced taking live notes while observing senior center participants. However, unlike a field observation study, a semi-structured interview project heavily relies on interview transcripts.

Additionally, my inability to take handwritten notes made me aware that my interviews could have been more interactive if I had not spent so much time taking notes, asking pre-planned questions, and attentively listening to the responses. If I had known what a terrible note-taker I was, I could have spent more time following up on leads where I needed more details by putting follow-up questions.

In addition, there were a few instances where I can proudly say that I was able to research the subject to gain a deeper understanding of it, but there were also a few failures on my part.

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Starting with my accomplishments, I was interested in learning about the effects of having a criminal record on an individual's history as well as the potential advantages of record clearance, and I spent enough time studying this subject to fully comprehend it. Second, one of the main goals of my research was to determine the motivations behind undergraduate students' participation in service-learning programs. The respondents also demonstrated a keen interest in giving me the necessary insight because they initially joined this program to fulfill course requirements, but they did not realize how gradually it changed the way they viewed the formerly incarcerated people in the area and stood up for their rights.

On the other hand, I believe I should have learned more about how to improve RCP and its client's outreach efforts. But rather than going into greater detail, I believe that I only briefly touched on the issues. In addition, given the stigma associated with incarceration and their failures at successful integration, it is evident that RCP clients must also be dealing with various mental health issues. I assumed that when interviewing clients, students would be experiencing these issues, but sadly, my interviewees could not be able to provide any significant insight on the pertinent issue of mental trauma facing ex-offenders.

My research could not have been possible because of the valuable support and encouragement of my respondents and RCP staff members. I believe that my face value as a graduate student in the Justice Studies department and as student intern in the Record Clearance Project helped me initially gain the RCP staff's favor and later win the respondent's support. Moreover, I will always remember the pleasant personalities and amiable demeanor of the three research participants who helped me with my work and never gave me any trouble. I was absolutely at ease during the interviews and could successfully uncover many such aspects of ex-offenders' life, which had not been fully explored earlier.

Research Sample

Three respondents were recruited from RCP advanced study and community involvement class JS 142, which entails aiding RCP mentors (former clients) in working with clients who have been released from custody. Additional responsibilities include mentoring RCP students in client interviews, organizing project tasks and events, collecting data from former clients and students, assisting with RCP community involvement, and other tasks. In addition to getting the detailed consent forms signed, participants were verbally explained that participating in the study was completely optional. They are free to leave the study at any time without incurring any penalties, even if they consent to participate in it. Additionally, they have the choice to skip any survey questions they do not want to answer. Furthermore, I took diversity into consideration and included a group of male and female subjects from various backgrounds and ethnicities.

Findings

The three undergraduate students from San Jose State University's *Record Clearance Project* (RCP) were interviewed in this paper. The participants were asked about the stigma associated with incarceration, how expungement helps ex-offenders successfully reintegrate into society and significant factors that motivate undergraduate students to volunteer in their communities. Four major themes emerged from the interviews, illustrating the impacts of incarceration and the motivation of SJSU undergraduate RCP students.

Stigma of Incarceration

Ex-offenders are among the most stigmatized people in America. State and national governments uphold an enormous information system to determine ex-offenders for various restrictive purposes, including limiting incarcerated people's career and housing options, welfare eligibility, availability of higher education, the capacity to acquire a driving license, and voting

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rights (Geiger, 2006). James (a 24-year-old JS 142 student, Justice Studies major) explained the

damaging effect of criminal records, "Our society and the criminal justice system still very

highly stigmatize past behaviors and I don't think that a person's past should ever really define

who they are." (James, personal communication, November 15, 2022). Oscar (a 23-year-old,

first-generation college student) added to James' explanation of the challenges that ex-offenders

face by stating:

> After completing their sentences, they can come into a lot of barriers. In fact, it's these
>
> barriers that may prevent them from leading a life that they really believe is good for
>
> them. Because a lot of the times a client will come out of prison. They'll realize that the
>
> opportunities that are available to people without records are not available to
>
> them...(Oscar, personal communication, November 16, 2022)

Explaining the collateral consequences of incarceration, Kurlychek et al. (2006) claimed that

incarceration amplifies the punishment beyond the sanctions imposed by the criminal justice

system. Moreover, reentry has proven challenging for many returning females, as the average

woman who leaves prison "lacks a home, financial support, employment, socially accepted and

rewarded skills" (Cobbina & Bender, 2012).

Moreover, regarding the mental health issues of RCP clients, Martina (a 22-year-old first-

generation college student, doing bachelor's in justice studies and a minor in Forensic Studies)

said "Sometimes there are clients that have disabilities, or they have mental health issues. We

just must be very patient with them. We feel like as students it's too difficult for us to handle and

we need extra support." (Martina, personal communication, November 14, 2022) On the other

hand, Oscar shows his helplessness:

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> It's very important to establish that it's an attorney client relationship, meaning that it's really just business as far as you know, being able to motivate, although, like we would like to. There is a limit to the extent that we that we can interact with our clients. (Oscar, personal communication, November 16, 2022)

Likewise, post-incarceration effects on black women and mothers have been multifold. They continue to face a slew of social oppressions because of the stigma of being convicted criminals, which causes extra trauma, resulting in the loss of their children at the hands of the state, with catastrophic psychological and intergenerational consequences for them (Williams et al., 2020).

A client's self-esteem suffers because of a prior criminal record. According to Oscar, "there are some clients that I've come across, it's very hard for them to kind of open up about their past because they view it as embarrassing." (Oscar, personal communication, November 16, 2022). Martina expressed similar views:

> I think it does affect their self-esteem. Sometimes they feel regret, or they feel guilt for what they did. And they feel bad that they have to show their records, or they have to tell people where people find out about their records. (Martina, personal communication, November 14, 2022)

According to research, self-stigma is defined as "the loss of an individual's self-esteem or self-worth" (Brinkley-Rubinstein, 2015), and regaining self-esteem depends on having a successful career (Visser et al., 2005).

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Life after Expungement

There is a general lack of understanding regarding how persons with a criminal past attempt to overcome the negative repercussions of having a visible criminal record while applying for jobs, housing, and financial aid. However, record clearing can help ex-offenders overcome external constraints that restrict their advancement through life's milestones, such as finding productive and lawful work and completing parental duties (Adams et al., 2016). Oscar explained to me the advantages of expungement as follows:

> After expungement, when they apply to jobs. The majority of jobs they don't have to worry about what the employer is going to think of them when the background check comes, because they're not going to see anything on the background check. Still, there's some jobs like government jobs like the police. They're going to see that right as well. (Oscar, personal communication, November 16, 2022)

Additionally, expungements are only awarded and proved to be a blessing boon to former offenders who can demonstrate that they have changed for the better and merit another chance (Wayne, 2012; Jacobs, 2015). Martina mentioned the very first JS 140 class for Fall 22 and recalled that:

> We had a past client come in and talk about his experience how he has a very good paying job. He has (got) a (job in) Tesla, when he had his convictions, people didn't want to give him a job. But now that he doesn't have a criminal record, everyone you know, is respecting him. Everyone is wanting to give him a job. So, I do think that they did it one hundred percent. (Martina, personal communication, November 14, 2022)

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However, even after expungement, people may still be subject to the aftereffects of their crimes because expungement orders do not apply to nongovernmental sources (Adams et al., 2016).

Need of Familial & Social Integration

According to the research findings, family support is critical for avoiding re-incarceration. However, more needs to be learned about these connections, including how service is exchanged, why it encourages achievement, and what assistance is relevant (Martinez & Christian, 2008). Almost all three respondents agreed that jail time taught incarcerated people the value of relationships and that they had already strengthened relationships with their families before embarking on the record clearance initiative. According to Martina:

> Before they went to prison, or jail, they did have problems. But while they were in prison or jail, they wanted to do better, and they wanted to be better for their family. So, when they got out of jail, their relationship got better. (Martina, personal communication, November 14, 2022)

While describing the experience of one of his clients, James stated, "I guess she has sort of mend[ed] her relationship with her father, so I think it this process really does help people mend well, not mend, but it really does help people" (James, personal communication, November 15, 2022). On the other hand, there is compelling evidence that imprisonment considerably affects familial attachments by dissolving intact families and lowering post-incarceration matrimonial prospects and interactions with children (Wyse, 2016).

Although almost all inmates released from prison indicated a solid urge to reintegrate into mainstream society, they encountered significant obstacles (Wyse, 2016). James said that when asked whether society would accept an ex-offender, "That's hard to answer because of how much

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we stigmatize a person's criminal history." (James, personal communication, November 15, 2022).James further explained ex-offenders' impediments:"for some of these people, society may still stigmatize the fact that they have a criminal history." (James, personal communication, November 15, 2022). One of the most common experiences of formerly incarcerated persons was feeling disconnected from essential relationships, positions, and neighborhood-based social networks (Wyse, 2016).

Motivation of undergraduate students for Service-Learning

Motivation regularly influences a person's decisions about what to do and why, and motivation is subsequently influenced not just by a person's thinking but also by his or her surroundings. In groundbreaking research of work principles among US university undergraduates, Rosenberg (1957) identified three central value complexes: "people-oriented," "extrinsic reward-oriented," and "self-expression-oriented" (Lunnan Hjort, 2015). Berger and Milem contend that knowing students' motivations to serve is essential for fostering outcomes favorable to community service and boosting the number of students engaged in such activities; however, almost every student has some motivation to serve (Jones & Hill, 2002). Oscar, who acknowledged experiencing RCP fatigue occasionally, said:

> No, no I can't say that I feel frustrated, because you know it's super motivating to know that you're doing this for other people, and you know that you're responsibly to other people is greater than the responsibility to yourself at times, and so that really motivates you to not think of it as time tediously spent, but time well spent. (Oscar, personal communication, November 16, 2022)

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Oscar's experience was echoed by other respondents as well. James explained, "It is very time-consuming for some time, but for the most part I can try to make a small difference in people's lives." (Oscar, personal communication, November 15, 2022) On the other hand, Martina told me her RCP experience was fulfilling, but much hard work was involved as they must devote 125 minimum hours to serving society as a course requirement. Furthermore, the service-learning methodology improves students' mastery of the academic components of the program through community service activity (Muñoz-Medina et al.,2021). James, one of the respondents, spoke about his educational experience as follows

> You learn a lot about legal theories, theories of criminology, theories of crimes and it's one thing to learn a lot about these things through books, but it's another thing when you are actually able to meet people go through the justice. So, there's really a profound difference between learning it through the words in a textbook, and then actually meeting and talking to a client, right? (James, personal communication, November 15, 2022)

According to Holdsworth and Quinn (2010), volunteering is intended to help students develop professional skills and broaden their resumes to increase their employability (Washington, 2018). Out of three participants, Martina and James said that initially, they took RCP as an internship but now it means a lot to them. Answering a question, Oscar told me, "Through the RCP the amount of personal growth, both professionally, emotionally is unparalleled to most things that I have done in the past." (Martina, personal communication, November 16, 2022) On the other hand, universities must ensure that students' personal goals do not outweigh the community benefits, and students must be adequately supervised by licensed practitioners (Rovers et al., 2016).

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Conclusion

This study used interview data taken from undergraduate students enrolled in the record clearance project of San Jose State University. Due to the small size of the sample, the research findings are not broadly generalizable yet support prior studies regarding the stigma attached to incarceration and its collateral consequences, potential benefits of criminal records expungements, and significant factors that inspire undergraduate students to be a part of service-learning classes. This research provides valuable perspectives on the challenges experienced by those who have been incarcerated in finding legal employment and achieving effective reintegration into society by relying on the testimonies of advanced students. Although interactions with family members are essential for effective reintegration, this study has discovered persuasive data that contradicts the student's account. It asserts that former inmates encounter significant difficulties when reintegrating with their families after release. In addition to charity, the article demonstrated that students are driven to engage in service-learning courses for a range of reasons.

Almost all respondents in my sample promoted that dismissing a prior criminal conviction may open some employment opportunities for ex-offenders; however, the stigma attached to incarceration has not yet been addressed. Additionally, the ongoing and continuous socioeconomic stigma can also result in the phenomenon of self-stigma (Brinkley-Rubinstein, 2015), which is essentially lifelong punishment. Marks left by persistent rejection and humiliation are challenging to remove and require a cultural shift in attitudes on a larger scale. Trauma and distorted mental health are serious issues that ex-offenders face as well, and state-level action is needed to address these issues. These issues should have been addressed while the ex-offenders were still incarcerated and after their release. Social connectivity benefits for health

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include decreased rates of depression, improved immunological and cardiovascular health, and decreased overall mortality (Wyse, 2016).

Upon release, one crucial barrier that former inmates face is reintegrating into ties with their families. Most ex-offenders have close familial ties that are probably impacted by their imprisonment and ultimate return to their homes (Naser & Visher, 2018). Nearly all three respondents agreed that incarcerated people learned the value of relationships during their time in jail and that their relationships with their family members had improved even before their release. Scholarly literature, however, disputes this notion and explains that when ex-offenders return to the community where they lived, they have difficulty starting families and integrating into society (Wyse, 2016). Existing empirical findings also show that the long-term absence of an individual due to incarceration causes emotional anguish to the prisoner's family and harms the financial stability of his or her community (Martinez & Christian, 2008).

Based on the paper's findings and a review of pertinent literature, it is abundantly clear that the collateral consequences of incarceration are an invisible form of punishment and severely impact ex-offenders and their families. There is, however, a considerable shortage of research on ex-offenders' lives and their employment status after their criminal records are expunged, as well as how their family and the greater community assist them upon their release. The government and society have a significant role in ensuring the successful reintegration of ex-offenders into society. Without this, we will not be able to achieve the goal of rehabilitation for people who have served their time in prison, changed their lives, and deserve a second chance unless we address this issue. We need a two-tire approach, including government bodies and society, to effectively address the stigma associated with incarceration and post-release rehabilitation.

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