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Ex-Prisoners' Perceptions of the Availability And Effects of Services in Correctional Settings

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EX-PRISONERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE AVAILABILITY AND EFFECTS OF SERVICES
IN CORRECTIONAL SETTINGS

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This Thesis is Dedicated to my Father, Jim Houston

"My father was my teacher. But most importantly he was a great dad."

- Beau Bridges

"Noble fathers have noble children."

- Euripides

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Abstract

The U.S. system of retributive justice drives punitive measures, rather than interventions that could reduce recidivism. If prisoners' needs are not met while serving time within the penal system, their chances of re-offending are greater (Baillargeon, 2010). The purpose of this study was to gather information about correctional programming from male ex-prisoners who have been involved in community re-entry services at Span Inc. in Boston, MA. Furthermore, this study also examined whether or not the programming contributed to positive coping skills during their incarceration as well as to their adaptation upon reentering the community. Data was collected by conducting ten interviews, using a semi-structured interview guide, at a community reentry program, in Boston, MA. Interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, and analyzed for themes. Results indicate that prisoners describe a wide variety of needs while incarcerated. The

majority of participants reported that their needs were not addressed in prison through programming and services. All participants discussed that some form of programming helped them in adjusting to being separated from the community while incarcerated, as well as helping them to reenter into the community. Strong themes of 'prisonized', or institutionalized behaviors were apparent in the experiences described by participants. Of significance, given the high levels of motivation noted, if incarcerated individuals were to be provided with tools, resources, and empowerment, these individuals present themselves with the capacity to be successful in their rehabilitation and re-entry into the community. It is hoped this research will support and inform social work practice for programming as well as support and inform social work advocacy in correctional facilities.

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Keywords: male-offenders, incarceration, re-entry, adaptation, needs, institutionalization, prisonization, forensic social work services, strengths-based perspective

would have remained an unexplored avenue in my life. Thank-you for seeing my potential and pushing me outside my comfort zone.

Introduction

According to the United States Bureau of Justice Statistics (2012), almost 7 million individuals constituted the U.S. population under some form of correctional control in 2011. Of this group, 3,971,319 people were on probation and 853,852 were on parole. Over 2.2 million of these individuals were incarcerated in jails and prisons as of December 31, 2011 (Glaze & Parks, 2012). Of the 2.2 million; 1,504,150 are in federal and state prisons and 735,601 are in local jails. 87,200 individuals are considered to have multiple correctional statuses (Glaze & Parks, 2012). There are limited services offered to incarcerated individuals, due to lack of funding as well as a culture of non-acceptance of those who commit crimes (Baillargeon, 2010). More services are needed to adequately meet the complex needs of prisoners in order to reduce

recidivism and protect potential victims of crime. The Bureau of Justice Statistics describes recidivism as being measured by criminal acts that in turn result in the re-arrest, reconviction, or return to prison with or without a new sentence, within a three year time period (2012). During 2007, a total of 1,180,469 persons on parole were indicated to be at-risk of re-incarceration. Of these parolees 16% returned to prison (Glaze & Parks, 2012).

The aim of this study was to assess what prisoner's needs include and if they were met or not, as well as to determine if programming aided in adjustment while incarcerated and assisted in re-entry into communities. This study involved ten in-depth interviews with adult male ex-prisoners, completed at Span, Inc. in Boston, MA. A semi-structured interview guide was created to inquire about four main areas,

1) What are prisoner's needs during incarceration?

2) Do ex-prisoners believe their needs were met in prison?

3) Does programming foster positive coping skills while incarcerated?

4) How does programming help prisoners upon release into the community?

This thesis will offer literature relevant to these research questions and will outline the methods of the study, discuss the study findings and implications of these findings for social work practice. I will also discuss the limitations of this research and include this study's materials as appendices.

Review of Literature

Much literature has been conducted on the prison population in large. Yet, unlike this study, the majority of the literature does not explore prisoners' and formerly incarcerated

individual's perceptions of their time spent incarcerated. The areas in this literature review which will be covered include mass incarceration, 'prisonization' as an effect of mass incarceration, detailed descriptions of programming and services in prison and the evidence each puts forth, and also the strengths-based approach and its efficacy in prisons. This literature is significant due to its relevance to the study being discussed.

Mass Incarceration

According to The Sentencing Project, the United States has the highest incarceration rates in the world. Mass incarceration is a result of increased policies, implementation of strict laws, and a consequence due to the 'war on drugs' (2008). The movement to be 'tough-on-crime' began in the 1970s and has not lost momentum. The governor of New York, whom is considered leader of this movement, implemented the Rockefeller drug laws in response to the ongoing substance-abuse issues throughout the state in 1973. Ultimately, these laws were causal to the increased sentences for low- level drug offenses. The political impetus for the 'the war on drugs' was to support political campaigns. During the year of 1973 the population of incarcerated individuals was 330,000, and has been ever increasing (Morrison & Useem, 2008).

Mass incarceration has devastating impacts on personal, social, and economic levels. Not only does the incarceration of such a high number of individuals deplete community resources, it is socially pernicious, devastates national and state economies, perpetuates inequality, as well as contributes to mental- health issues and unemployment (The Sentencing Project, 2008).

Another issue with mass incarceration is the disproportionate numbers of impoverished people of color due to institutional racism in arrest, conviction, and incarceration rates. According to The Sentencing Project, in 2006 African- Americans accounted for 40% of persons

in jail, while Hispanics accounted for 20%. The Sentencing Project also indicates that in 2004,

82% of individuals committed to state prisons were convicted of non-violent crimes which

include 34% for drug offenses and 29% for property offenses (2008).

Prisonization as an Effect of Mass Incarceration

With the era of deinstitutionalization of mental and state hospitals long passing us, yet,

institutionalizing (or "prisonizing") behaviors continue to cultivate in correctional settings.

Goodstein (1989) wrote that inmates may attempt to cope with their environment by beginning to

view the prison as "home". A seminal work by Goffman (1961), suggested that once inmates are

placed in a correctional setting they are subsequently stripped of their identities and social roles.

Goffman contended that this created a process of "conversion" whereby the inmate will

internalize the views of one's self from the perspective of authority figures, such as the

administrative and correctional staff. People who are in these institutional settings are subject to

degrading experiences and have harsh limitations put on their freedom. The institutionalization

of the prisoner involves a lack of control over one's environment, a paucity of goods and

services, one's needs being handled in an uncongenial and bureaucratic fashion, a lack of

decision making occasions, and as a result the individual is forced to be dependent on their

environment (Goodstein, 1989; Haney, 2001; Weinstein, 1982). Consequently this renders the

inmate completely unprepared to re-enter their community where functioning independently and

taking initiative is vital. The idea of being 'institutionalized' is conceptualized as being

psychological, which in turn means its effects are reversible (Haney, 2001).

Lawson, Segrin, and Ward (1996), aimed to explore the interrelationships between

prisonization and prisoners' social skills. The researchers conducted this study using responses

from prisoners to 190 surveys in the Mid-West within a variety of low to maximum security

correctional settings. The surveys aimed to measure the regularity of inmates' external

communication, prisonization, sources of internal communication, feelings of powerlessness, and

social skills. Social skills involve the ability to properly and efficiently communicate with other

people. Conceptualized social skills which were measured in this study included initiating

relationships, emotional support, disclosing personal information, negative assertion, and conflict

management. Nevertheless, the researchers decided not to measure initiating relationships and

emotional support due to the severe limitations within prisons. People who lack basic social

skills are believed to be at increased risk for suffering from various psychological and social

problems. This study found that there are significant links between prisonization and the

frequency of internal/ external communication, yet prisonization was not found to be related to

social skills. This study also notes that the length of incarceration is not a factor that contributes

to prisonization, rather the researchers concluded that what does contribute as a factor is how

prisoners spend that time.

Programming and Services in Prison

The main areas of programming in prisons in the U.S. are substance-abuse treatment,

religious services, mental-health treatment, and educational programming. Failure to provide

prisoners these basic services while incarcerated contributes to increased recidivism rates

(Baillargeon, 2010) and simultaneously results in long-term warehousing costs at the taxpayers'

expense (Hall & Killacy, 2008; Soderstrom, 2007). Brief characterizations of the programs that

may be offered in a correctional setting are described below.

Substance-Abuse Treatment

Formerly incarcerated males who identify as having substance abuse problems which

remain either untreated or undertreated often return into society with little to no coping skills or

resources to remain alcohol and drug-free. Less than 18%-20% reentering prisoners who suffer from substance abuse problems report receiving treatment during their incarceration (Sentencing Project, 2013; Wormer & Edwards Persson, 2010). Wormer and Edwards Persson state that there is interconnectedness between substance abuse and crime (2010). Research indicates that more than half of all people who have been incarcerated in the United States test positive for illegal substances. Drug and alcohol abuse is also reported to directly contribute to heightened incidences of property crime, robbery, domestic violence, child abuse, and sexual violence (Wormer & Edwards Persson, 2010).

Although treatment needs have risen due to the numbers of those incarcerated for non-violent offenses, the number of prisoners enrolled in substance abuse programs has decreased. This can be attributed to several factors but it is primarily related to the scarceness of treatment staff and professionals to deliver such programs (Wormer & Edwards Persson, 2010). Also the lack of adequate training for correctional staff (i.e. guards and nurses) to recognize/report prisoners with on-going substance abuse issues and intervention strategies for prisoners that could used an alternative to punitive actions normally enforced. These factors contribute to ineffective treatment options and unsuccessful implementation of existing programs (Wormer & Persson, 2010). Early interventions in correctional facilities as well as comprehensive treatment programming strategies are essential to preventing recidivism for many of these individuals.

Wormer and Persson (2010) also indicate other factors which can contribute to successful drug treatment rehabilitation. These include individual attention, increasing the quality of the treatment options, implementing only short-term detentions for infractions, having staff observe for signs of drug use, including the family system in drug court, focusing on the individual

finding a job or the need to attend job training as well as implementing small rewards for successful completion/compliance of a the treatment program (2010).

Welsh (2010), conducted a study with 347 male prisoners at a 1200 unit correctional facility which specializes in substance-abuse treatment. The researcher employed general linear modeling repeated measures analysis to defend his hypothesis of (1) the participants will experience positive change over time, and (2) patterns of change will be dependent upon their initial baselines for risk and motivation. For example, it was hypothesized that low risk and low motivation in a participant would result in less responsiveness to treatment. The participants were measured at the first, sixth, and twelfth month of their treatment for psychological and social functioning in response to treatment. The results indicated many significant changes in psychological and social functioning in response to substance-abuse treatment which support Welsh's first hypothesis. One of the most noteworthy findings was the significant downturn in depression overtime as well as a significant down turn in risk taking and external pressures. This study also found that participants became more engaged with treatment, increased personal progress, increased trust in treatment groups, and present heightened ratings of the treatment staff. Welsh's second hypothesis was also supported by his findings that participants in the low-risk/ low-motivation grouping showed little to no change, while the high-motivation/ low-risk group displayed the most substantial responses from treatment. In conclusion, Welsh (2010) calls for an increase of quality for screening and assessment procedures, not exclusively to find a baseline of functioning, but also throughout treatment to measure psychosocial changes. If these measures were to be taken, perhaps the incidences of drug and/or alcohol induced crimes would decrease.

Faith-based Programs

Faith-based programs help prisoners discover or reconnect with their faith of choice and are found to be effective in reducing anti-social behaviors in extreme conditions, such as a prison (Kerley, Matthews, & Blanchard, 2005). Kerley et al., (2005) found involvement in religious programming directly reduced arguing between prisoners and indirectly reduced fighting. A separate study concluded that faith-based programs help prisoners deal with guilt; begin to find a new direction in life and aid in dealing with the loss of their freedom (Clear & Sumter, 2002). However, not all prisoners feel a connection to a 'higher power.' Many prisoners seek faith-based programming for other reasons such as material comforts and social support which helps them deal with the hostile environment of prison (Clear & Sumter, 2002).

Additional literature aids us by providing a greater insight into the role of religion in the prison environment. O'Connor and Perreyclear support the perception that religion can be an important factor in the process of offender rehabilitation while incarcerated (2002). This exploratory research study was conducted at Lieber Prison in South Carolina. The entire inmate population was used in this study (n= 1,597). It was found that Lieber prison ran twenty-three different religious programs, varying in topics and intensity, and that 49% of the inmates had attended some type of faith-based program within the year. O'Conner and Perreyclear then compared the religious attendees to the non-religious attendees based on their demographics and criminal histories (2002). There were two significant findings of this study, (1) religious programming in the Lieber prison setting was extensive, varied, and inexpensive to conduct; and (2) when a number of demographic and criminal history variables are controlled for, the strength of religious practice was contrarily related to in-prison infractions (O'Connor& Perreyclear, 2002). Although these findings are legitimate, thinking critically as to the limitations of these

findings will help to interpret these results. For example, the author found that one reason for high religious involvement because the prison was located in the "Bible belt" of the South; this region exhibits an unusually high number of surrounding churches (2002).

Mental-health Programming

A great influx of people living with mental illness into the prison system began with the deinstitutionalization of state mental hospitals over the past few decades (Soderstrom, 2007). Prisoners may experience symptoms of mental health disorders including but not limited to: loss of interest or pleasure in activities, insomnia or hypersomnia, feelings of worthlessness or extreme guilt, delusions, and hallucinations (James & Glaze, 2006).

Haney (2001) indicated that upward of 20% of male incarcerated individuals suffer from major mental health issues while incarcerated. This population accounts for the largest disabled population in correctional settings. Of many major issues that this statistic presents us with, particular attention should be given to how living with a mental health disorder impacts an individual's adaptation to their environment during their incarcerations. Adaptation is especially challenging for these individuals because they face the additional challenges of their mental health related symptoms. The consequences of untreated mental health disorders intertwined with the extremely stressful and dangerous environment of prison, may be that individuals engage in self harm or involved in conflicts with other inmates and correctional staff (Haney, 2001). Such conflicts result in segregation of individuals with mental health disorders, which result in mental health disorder's perpetuation to be untreated. Haney argues for prisoner oriented rehabilitative services for individuals who identify with having mental health disorders. The author also calls for increased availability of programming to create meaningful activities for work and an increase in positive interaction with others in their environments. Services

should then include therapeutic and habilitative resources for individuals which cater to their unique needs. Lastly, post-incarceration, offenders that either entered with a mental health diagnoses, or have manifested mental health symptoms during incarceration, require specialized transitional services to facilitate their re-entry into their community (2001).

Mental-health programming for prisoners provides evidence of effectiveness in addressing specific emotional and behavioral disorders. Soderstrom (2007), found that including mental- health programming in prison is an opportunity for clinicians to identify, diagnose, and begin treatment with prisoners. A study conducted in a county jail examined the impact of a mental-health program on over 240 prisoners with co-occurring mental health disorders and substance abuse . A statistically significant correlation between the higher number of treatment sessions and decreased recidivism rates was found (Rothbard, Zubritsky, Jacquette, & Chatre, 2009).

Educational Programming

Educational programming offered in prisons includes GED classes, adult literacy sessions, as well as vocational training (Hall & Killacy, 2008). Such programs have been found to dramatically reduce recidivism (Esperian, 2010). Job training in prisons is also significant to individuals' post-release success. It is believed that productivity inside prisons promotes productivity outside of prisons as individuals are released into society (Travis, 1999). Therefore educational job-training contributes to a reduction in recidivism while also aiding individuals in successful integration into their communities.

Hall and Killacy (2008) determined that while most studies are based solely on the effects of education on recidivism, this study would instead begin to focus on the perspective of the

prisoner on various topics of correctional education. The qualitative methods utilized in this study put effort to determine how prisoners perceive their correctional education experience such as in classes, interacting with prison staff in the classrooms, and how the prisoners believed they benefited from their experience in the classrooms. Male prisoners (n=10), and staff (n=2), were interviewed via surveys with open-ended questions. Results indicated themes of success, regret, and reexamining their correctional experiences. The theme of regret was found to be widely apparent in the results. It was established through the surveys that the 'prisoner-student' is filled with regret over past choices regarding their education. Hall and Killacy, later discussed that the lack of financial resources for correctional education programming, coupled by the negative stigma associated with being a former-prisoner contributes immensely to recidivism of these individuals. It is also argued that elementary and secondary education systems could greatly benefit by introducing early intervention programs to at-risk youth prior to offending (2008).

A Strengths Based Approach

Efficacy of Strengths-based Approaches in Correctional Facilities

Brunette and Maruna (2006) point out the lack of theoretical foundations in prison-based programs/services prior to their creation. Instead, the authors find prison programming to be based on the idea of 'earning redemption'. Popular practices with a 'population in need' prove to have many deficits.

Assumptions of Popular Practice (Staudt, Howard, & Drake, 2001):

1. The person is the problem or the pathology named

2. Distance, power inequality, control, and manipulation often mark the relationship between helper and helped

3. Problem-based assessments encourage individualistic rather than ecological accounts of clients' problems

4. The focus on what is wrong often reveals an egregious *cynicism* about the ability of individuals to cope with life or to rehabilitate themselves

5. The supposition of disease assumes a cause for the disorder, and, thus, a solution

6. This perspective's foundation is that each individual possesses the inherit ability and resources required to overcome challenges as they present themselves.

In contrast to the popular practice approach, Saleeby (1996) indicates that strengths-based approaches to social work practice call for a diverse way of 're-lensing' our understanding of individuals with a focus on assets . This approach emerged in response to the perceived inclination for professionals to focus on deficits of individuals rather than recognizing their strengths and resources (Saleeby, 1996; Staudt, Howard, & Drake, 2001). Instead of utilizing popular practice in interventions with individuals, this approach focuses on capacities, talents, competencies, possibilities, visions, values, hopes of individuals, as well as discovering the social institutions which surround them which may provide resources for them, despite how distorted past trauma or present life experiences renders the individual (Saleeby, 1996; Staudt et al., 2001). Despite the fact that some people may present themselves as 'hopeless,' it is believed that with some assistance a person can overcome their issues. This approach is especially effective in empowering an individual to re-gain control over their environment, which enables them to furthermore utilize their apparent strengths (Brun & Rapp, 2001; Brunette & Maruna, 2006).

As strengths-based approaches in practice are considered evidence-based, this current study puts forth evidence that such programs are necessary for rehabilitation in correctional

settings. An Australian study argued that it is imperative that all rehabilitative programs for moderate to high-risk offenders in prisons must be evidence-based (Hesteline, Sarre, & Day, 2011). This study's results were based on interviews with representatives, and their nominees, of each states or territories correctional administration. The programs being studied from each of the different administrations had to fit the criteria of being at least ten hours in total duration and where deliberately created to reduce recidivism. Hesteline et al. (2011) found that in deciding which programs should be implemented in prisons, there should be a sophisticated assessment and selection process. Therefore, in order to create and sustain programming, of any category, successful in reducing recidivism, creators must possess a system to analyze the evidence-based curriculum, and continue to evaluate it to monitor its effectiveness.

Staudt et al. (2001) reviewed a myriad of empirical studies of the strengths-based perspective in practice. The researchers aimed to find (1) how strengths-based approaches are implemented and utilized, and (2) if there is empirical support for effectiveness. The researchers examined nine separate studies with a variety of populations including individuals with chronic mental illness, veterans, at-risk youth, and individuals referred to in and out-patient rehabilitation programs. Strengths-based approaches provided these individuals with a variety of outcomes including hospitalization, individual goal achievement, satisfaction with services, social support, employment and income related outcomes, as well as decreasing depression, and increasing quality of life. Overall, strengths-based approaches evidenced great successes when employed in a variety of settings.

In order to conquer the deficits of institutionalizing behaviors in the prison environment, integrating a strengths-based approach in working with people in such facilities can be effective. A prisoner who is empowered to re-gain control over their environment may then also be able to

succeed in being having the capacity to be held accountable for their crime and furthermore, work actively to change such negative behaviors.

. The number of offenders in U.S. prison system continues to rise, and yet this population is not being given tools and resources required, such as evidenced-based programming, during their incarceration. These tools and resources would ensure this population's best possible chance at re-integration into our communities. Such tools and resources, are being dramatically reduced to the point where some prisoners are simply being released early to cut costs. However, the studies reviewed in this paper would indicate that there is a greater risk of recidivism

Motivation

When considering employing strengths-based approaches in prisons, it is important to assess and identify the strengths of individuals. Some literature suggests that prisoners have the potential to be insincere, and participate in programming and services solely due to extrinsic motivations (Clear, Hardyman, Stout, & Drammer, 2000; Clear & Sumter, 2002). Extrinsic motivations include, safety, material comforts, access to outsiders, and inmate relations or social support (Clear et al., 2000). Yet results of the same study, conducted by Clear et al., (2000), indicated that inmates also participate in programming as a result of intrinsic motivations. These types of intrinsic motivations include, helping to deal with guilt, finding a new way of life, and dealing with the loss of freedom.

Methodology

Ten in-depth interviews with adult male ex-prisoners were completed at Span, Inc. in Boston, MA. Span Inc. is an organization that provides re-entry services to people in prison and those

who have been in prison. A semi-structured interview guide was created to inquire about four

main areas, 1) What are prisoner's needs during incarceration? 2) Do ex-prisoners believe their

needs were met in prison? 3) Does programming foster positive coping skills while incarcerated?

4) How does programming help prisoners upon release into the community?

Participants were recruited using mixed avenues. The study was presented to groups of ex-

prisoners prior to scheduled group sessions, and flyers were posted in a frequented recreational

room at Span Inc. Interviews lasted from 40-60 minutes on-site in counseling rooms at Span Inc..

The interview guide consisted of open-ended questions. Refer to Appendix C: Interview Guide

for the completed interview guide. For example:

1. *Many individuals who have spent time in prison report that they identified needs such as*
   educational, mental health, spiritual/religious, or related to substance abuse.

2. *Please tell me about what kind of needs you experienced while you were incarcerated.*

The series of open ended questions were followed by probing questions on the same

topic. Such questions were used to attain greater insight on the participants' perspective of their

needs while in prison. For example: *What needs of yours in particular were met? What needs of*

yours in particular were not met? Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed in order to

interpret qualitative data.. Detailed field notes of the environment at Span, Inc. were consistently

completed, as well as prior and subsequent to each interview. Field notes were formatted

similarly by first recording subjective observations, followed by objective observations. A total

of ten individuals initially consented to interviews who were members of Span Inc., in Boston,

MA. However, the final participant declined to have his interview audio recorded therefore

reliance on accurate and detailed notes was required.

The study was guided by the phenomenological approach. The participants' complex experiences which were brought forth during interviews were simplified during coding to enable the results to be organized into themes and communicated effectively with others (Bentz & Shapio, 1998; Padgett, 2004; Padgett, 1998). Data analysis was guided by narrative themes which were evident throughout each of the nine transcripts, notes, and field notes. Coding included multiple analyses of each transcript to identify themes and comparison of transcripts. Each transcript was re-read multiple times for accuracy of the themes relevant to each of the research questions, as well as themes, such as motivation, which were unanticipated.

Results

Demographics

Participant's ages varied from twenty-five to fifty- eight. Of the ten participants, seven were African-American, one was Hispanic, and one was Caucasian. Locations in which the men were incarcerated included two Northeastern states and one Southwestern state. Levels of incarceration also were quite varied, including, county, state, and federal prisons. The length of participant's prison sentences dramatically varied from two months to twenty- two years. Seven of the participants were convicted of drug –related offenses and three of the participants were convicted of violent offenses. Participants also indicated varied lengths in which they had been living in their communities after being released from prison. These lengths ranged from two months to eighteen years.

Needs in Prison

Each of the ex- prisoners identified needs which had been met and/or unmet during the time they were incarcerated. Each of the recurring themes about needs was mentioned across all

of the ten interviews. Note that all names included in these quotations have been changed to ensure confidentiality.

Met Needs

Three out of the ten ex-inmates believed that their needs had been adequately addressed during the time they were incarcerated. The needs that were most frequently reported to have been met were: programming as comfort, having routine/ structure, having 'something to do', positive influence from professionals, and talking about their emotions. Yet the most frequently reported met need that was described was programming as a means of 'something to do.'

> *"If they didn't have no programs or jobs or minimums or no good time, I'd probably still*
> *be sitting in the state prison right now. I'm just grateful they had something for me to do.*
> *I didn't sit around talking about 'poor me'. I put myself in here, I'm getting myself out".*
>
> *- James*
>
> *"I would mop the floors, clean the offices, do the garbage, do the laundry, stuff*
> *like that. Which helped because it passed time". - Nick*

Many of the other needs that were met were due to the ex-prisoners 'helping themselves'. The majority of the participants reported that they took initiative to meet their own needs during their incarceration. The participants explained that this was accomplished by teaching themselves, building their own support systems, protecting themselves, and running their own programs.

> *"Yeah, what happened was instead of them helping me, I helped myself". - Havier*

> *"I went to the library a lot and read. I actually taught myself some of the math*
>
> *stuff. I took out some math books and just kinda got busy on my own". - Matthew*

Notably, the three participants who reported that their needs were met in prison all had been convicted of drug and/or alcohol related crimes. The participants' needs were met due to the available drug and alcohol programs which are made accessible only by the prisoner's choice to attend. Yet, these specialized programs are not always accessible, or sometimes had strict admission guidelines, only admitting inmates who report having substance abuse issues.

> *"Well I was very fortunate. When I was there I was in the drug unit. So being there*
>
> *there's counselors there, so it's about recovery. You know they bring in meetings, people*
>
> *from the outside to teach you about drugs and alcohol and how to stay off drugs and*
>
> *alcohol. With the counselors there they kinda lead you in the right direction on where to*
>
> *go afterwards". - Will*

Unmet Needs

Seven of the ten participants reported that their needs were inadequately addressed by programming and services during their incarceration. Participants reported numerous barriers to getting their needs met including: not being given the tools to succeed, programming that was not geared specifically toward their needs, program criteria as a barrier for participation, the lack of programs, and programs being imposed upon them. Many of the participants reported that these unmet needs were due to the unprofessional conduct of authoritative figures and professionals alike. Participants also reported their own internal obstacles to getting their needs met in prison which included: resistance to structure, not participating due to fear of showing emotion and furthermore being labeled, feeling a lack of support, and lack of social skills.

Participants frequently reported that the misconduct of correctional and professional personnel was a barrier to using time in prison programming constructively. These types of misconducts included labeling and categorizing the inmates. For example:

[On feeling labeled by a psychiatrist.]

> *"Yeah, I felt like that was their opinion. And that was their opinion coming from officers, the officers would tell them what was going on. And they wouldn't spend the time to evaluate me and talk to me about a lot of things". - Glen*

Another report of lack of professional standards is below.

> *"Yeah. I've been out of prison almost nine months. When I went to the caseworker and said, "I'm leaving in two weeks," half the time they were like, "And so?" I'm like "And so? I need help. I'm not trying to come back to prison". - Anthony*

Many participants also reported that their needs were not adequately met because others determined what their needs were without seeking feedback from the inmates themselves.

[On personal mental health issues.]

> *"All they wanted to do is heavily medicate me and throw a label on me. You know, 'Anti-social personality disorder". - Alan*

Another frequently reported unmet need was not having or experiencing lack of socially supportive relationships.

> *"If they could come up with a program that's really geared towards helping people to really transition back into society that really don't have family and*

things like that. Cause if you don't have that, those really loving type situations,

it's really difficult". - Mike

"Well kind of. I lost my mom while I was in there. She passed away. So I was

unable to get in contact with my children. So needs like that contact. So I can get

in touch with my children and find out where they were. Unable to reach out or

get any information about my mom when she passed away. Like those kinda needs

cause like, I said I had no one to help me from the outside". - Marcus

<div align="center">

Programming/ Services and Adjustment in Prison

</div>

Programming in prison was noted by participants to help them adjust to being separated from the community. A common theme in participant's description of programming was the reciprocity between inmates and programs. Various participants discussed taking away from programming only what they put into it.

"If you want something out of it, you have to go for it". - Neil

Participants were able to apply skills they learned in programming to their life while incarcerated.

"I learned how to turn my survival skills into coping skills". –Ed

"I learned patience, tolerance, and acceptance of other people. I learnt how to deal with

it, at first I wasn't good with it, I was in segregation an awful lot". - Thomas

"Yes, because I incorporated whatever I was picking up. In groups, or meetings, in

individual counseling and so-on and so-forth. I was incorporating that with my

surroundings. I would put some positive affirmations on my wall, little piece of paper.

They'd tear it down, but I'd put another one up later on". - Sal

<center>*Programming/ Services and Re-entry*</center>

Although many individuals expressed that their needs were not met in prison, they did nevertheless report that programming aided in their reentry to the community. It is notable that various study participants described that creating routines while incarcerated assisted them in their adjustment to the community.

Several participants expressed that they would have been more successful in re-entry if they had acquired basic education or vocational education during their incarceration.

"If there was more programming. More educational type programming, that way

they could cope with coming out". - Sylvester

Of the ten participants, one participant spoke on the positive impact educational programming had on his life post-incarceration.

"I was employable when I got out. The first job I got when I got out was a job in our

office. Well actually my first job was cutting trees down. Never did it in my life. Then like

45 days later, I was in the office dispatching people to go to work at a staffing agency,

working on computers and everything. Stuff I picked up in prison". - Dan

Several participants also expressed the impact of inadequate programming and how it relates to their reentry.

"It's like they take you to a destination, they say "Go." Some people have been in

prison for 15 years, and they don't have a clue what's going on back in society –

just to get you better acquainted with society. Instead of just pushing you out the

door. I did eight years, I didn't know how to use a cell phone when I got home.

Some of the things, I didn't know how to do. I had to teach myself. They don't

teach you that type of stuff in prison". -Jerry

Motivation

This current study contradicts previous literature and puts forward evidence that some ex-prisoners appear to be motivated. Particular areas in which the participants described being motivated included: getting out of prison, staying out of prison, learning new skills, receiving a quality education, and putting in time and work in programming. Participants believed that their motivation in these areas ultimately contributed to a better quality of life in and out of prison.

"I was there to learn and get what I can get out of it and not just be there for good time. I

was just there to see about how I got myself in here". - Miguel

"You don't wanna sit there and do nothing. You wanna do something purposeful.

Something that will make you feel good and stuff like that. Something that will give you a

positive future. Cause the negative is so easy to get". - Paulo

Not only did the participants report a high level of motivation while incarcerated, they report that they continue to be motivated post- release. After release, participants reported having gained meaningful and competitive employment, completing vocational course-work, strengthening familial relationships, and continued to attend constructive programming in the community.

"I put myself back in treatment and continued the treatment, even going back to the treatment as a clean, recovering addict. I've been at my halfway house over 10 months. I just told myself I really need to work on me just to understand it better". - Sao

"But I believe upon re-entry, you can really make a difference in the thinking process. And the whole experience of incarceration can make a difference". - David

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to gather information about correctional programming from male ex-prisoners who were involved in community re-entry services at Span Inc. in Boston, MA. It is hoped that this research will aid in understanding the following: 1) what prison programming was offered and utilized, 2) if this programming addressed the prisoner's perceived needs, and 3) if this programming had perceived positive effects on adaptation in the hostile environment of prison, as well as successful re-entry into the community.

Participants included in this research were forthright in discussing the oppression, deprivation, and unique challenges set-forth during their incarcerations. Study participants were able to directly indicate during the interviews what their needs were, if their needs had been met or unmet, and continued by addressing how they believe their needs could have been satisfied. The findings of this research indicate that the prison environment and programming contributed to institutionalizing the participants in this study and that programming was not designed to engage prisoners in identifying their own needs or to meet those specific needs.

Formerly incarcerated individuals who participated in this study were not given the opportunity to identify their own needs as well as not given the attention required to locate appropriate resources. Many of the study participants had been harshly and inaccurately

categorized by diagnoses, sexual orientations, and behaviors or infractions. The participant's reported that this was problematic due to the implication that not only are the prisoner's proper needs not being addressed, but also unrelated and/or non-existent needs are being treated which takes time and funds away from appropriate interventions. Factors which contribute to the fulfillment of needs experienced by the study participants included smaller populations, personalized care, and by acquiring trust from officials. Yet, this research suggests that such opportunities are not evident in traditional prisons.

The participants of this research indicated that the number one reason for entering into prison programming was to 'pass time', yet, many skills, values, and lessons were acquired during their time in programming. Participants reported that these skills, values, and lessons aided each participant in positively coping with their environment. Even if the participant did not obtain the concrete information from programming/ services, each participant was still able to list at least one thing that had learned, or learned about themselves.

Also worthy of attention was the blatant invasion of confidentiality which was noted by many of the individuals. Participants reported not being able to adequately adjust emotionally to their environment due to feeling unsafe and feeling unable to express their emotions. One participant described his counseling intake taking place in the 'mess hall' along side of twenty other men. Such a violation of autonomy rendered the participant to be much lower functioning in his environment because he was not given an opportunity to fully disclose issues to the counselor.

Several participants reported that re-entering back into their communities was difficult. A few participants reported that their discharge planning was inadequate and suitable resources had

remained unresolved at the time of release from prison. Yet, many of the participants were also able directly identify skills, lessons, or values they had acquired from programming/services and apply it to how then continued to use them in re-entering their community.

This current study puts forth evidence that prisoners may be more motivated then is popularly perceived. Understanding that these individuals have the competence to be so highly motivated, in a less than optimal environment, speaks volumes as to the potential, resiliency, and strengths of these participants. Therefore, using a strengths-based approach in working with these individuals should be a highly considered avenue.

In summary, it was learned that in present prison culture, inmates must 'help themselves' to meet their specific needs. Yet, these individuals are not given the tools, resources, and empowerment to succeed in meeting their needs. Also, needs were not being met due to prisoners being told what their needs are and were subsequently harshly categorized. Needs also were most apparently unmet due to the formerly incarcerated individuals not having access to proper social support, such as family. Of significance, in regards to programming and adaptation during incarceration, the experiences were described to present us with the theme of prisonization. Yet, participants were able to speak to how they were able to apply skills they learned through programming during their incarcerations. Several participants also called for more educational programming in prison to aid them in re-entry, as many described this as an essential factor for successful re-entry. Lastly, it was found that some formerly-incarcerated individuals possess a myriad of strengths. Aside from exhibiting motivation, the participants appeared competent, unique, and resilient.

Limitations

Perceived limitations of this study include the small sample size, and the narrow focus of location. These hinder the capacity to generalize results to the inmate population in sum. Yet, these findings remain helpful to program creators and advocacy workers in constructing more effective programs and services and furthermore by gaining an understanding of unique needs in which men experience within prison in this locale. Another limitation is that the study participants were already enrolled and voluntarily taking advantage of re-entry services. Therefore, they may have been a self-selected exceptionally motivated group. Yet, this also speaks to just how motivated some formerly incarcerated individuals as well as have the capacity to be. Another limitation of this study is the all-male focus. Men and women have very different and complex needs, yet perhaps some of the general data may still apply to their unique programming and services.

This research can be of use by giving the ex-prisoners an opportunity to be advocates for other prisoners. Participants do this by giving first hand data on what they perceive are useful elements of prison programming to better inform program creators as well as inform the public of their needs and how to better address them.

Implications

Policy Implications

Prisoners and formerly incarcerated individuals are highly stigmatized. Due to the negative stereotype of being an 'offender', society views these individuals as dangerous, inadequate, and unremorseful. They are directly discriminated against via institutional racism

and when they re-enter our communities. According to the National Association of Social

Workers, social workers are ethically obligated to be advocates for our clients.

> "6.04 Social and Political Action (d) Social workers should act to prevent and
> eliminate domination of, exploitation of, and discrimination against any person,
> group, or class on the basis of race, ethnicity, national origin, color, sex, sexual
> orientation, gender identity or expression, age, marital status, political belief,
> religion, immigration status, or mental or physical disability"(nasw.org, 2013).

In order to eliminate this ongoing discrimination, which can be attributed to a culture of

non-acceptance of formerly incarcerated individuals, as social workers we must challenge and

change this culture. Without advocacy and interventions, little progress will be made towards

changed perceptions and policy.

The results from this study can inform social workers on the need for increased evidence-

based practices within correctional facilities in order to reduce recidivism and victimization

through crime, and to increase opportunity for this underserved and marginalized population.

The results of this study indicate that, at least for this small sample of formerly incarcerated

men, prison programming to date is ineffective in meeting the needs of incarcerated individuals.

Therefore, these individuals require advocates with a responsibility to indicate this to policy

makers and inform the public on how this impacts communities. The strength of communities is

bolstered when those people returning from prison are able to contribute in a positive way.

Direct Social Work Practice and Implications for Programming

The results of this research indicate that prisoners may have an untapped potential for

motivation, and that they also have a myriad of strengths. The results of this study suggest that

the stereotypes many people hold about prisoners and formerly incarcerated people are not

entirely accurate and can be detrimental. Were a strengths-based approach employed by social

workers and/or correctional programming and services staff, this unseen motivation and

previously unrecognized strengths may be surfaced. Using a strengths-based approach will

address the institutionalizing, or 'prisonizing', behaviors which participants in this study report

to hinder their functioning. Strengths-based approaches address these behaviors due to its focus

on strengths, resources, as well as departing from the norm of labeling. Figure 1 below gives an

overview on how social workers can apply a strengths-based approach in working with this

population. These strategies are referenced from Manthey, Knowles, Asher, & Wahab (2011).

Goal Orientation	Strengths-based practice is goal oriented. Social workers should help these individuals set goals they want to achieve in life. Setting goals also serves as a background for the intervention, in which the person's strengths will be assessed and activated.
Strengths Assessment	The strengths assessment is a systematic way for social workers to assess strengths including talents, assets, resources, and skills. Attention should also be given to current coping strategies.
Seeking Environmental Resources	The social worker should help the individual to identify naturally occurring resources such as relationships and support. Locating resources will bring the individual opportunity and the tools to achieve their goals. Goal attainment is said to be accomplished when the social worker matches the person's desires with naturally occurring resources.
The Relationship	Having a helping relationship with these individuals induces hope. The social worker should be accepting, empathetic, and collaborate with the individual. The relationship is said to be deteriorated through labeling, categorizing, pathologizing, and by focusing on deficits. Instead, the social worker should empower the individual. Empowering these individuals increases their views on their abilities, increases choice, increases options, and also gives the individual confidence to choose.

Guiding Meaningful Choice	Social workers should give individuals the authority to make choices and should see the person as the expert in their own life. Social workers guide the meaningful choice process through clarifying, expanding, and encouraging the individual.
Collaboration	As the social worker remains open to new insights, the social worker can offer the person their skills, knowledge, and experience. The main concept in collaborating with the individual is to work *with* them. Hearing and valuing the person's opinions is essential to a strengths-based approach.
Recognizing Trials and Opportunity	The social worker should acknowledge past trauma, abuse, illness, and struggle, and 're-lens' these situations. A social worker does this by helping the individual to view these situations as a source for challenge and opportunity. In recognizing that these individuals are resilient, it is hoped that they can overcome such adversity.
Belief in Change and Growth Potential	The social worker should intentionally avoid labels and stigmas involved with the incarcerated population, and/ or mental illness. Instead, the social worker should keep close alliance with the individual's hopes, values, and accomplishments. Social workers should see these individuals as having the capacity to grow and change, with no upper limit.

Figure 1

The results of this study indicate that social workers must begin to engage differently with prisoners and formerly incarcerated individuals in practice and interventions. As noted above, when applying a strengths-based approach the client should be treated as 'the expert'. This study's results include that some formerly incarcerated individuals have the ability to identify their own needs while incarcerated. Therefore, social workers should recognize that

these individuals have the capacity and 'expertise' to identify what they require to be successful in the rehabilitation process.

Also noted above, a central concept in strengths-based approaches is the relationship between the social worker and the individual. This study indicates that ex-prisoners report needs being unmet due to the lack of socially supportive relationships, furthermore, results indicate that needs become met when they are positively influenced from professionals. Thus, social workers should engage in a meaningful and professional relationship with prisoners and formerly incarcerated individuals. In these socially supportive relationships the social worker should be accepting, empathetic, and collaborative with the individual they are working with. This will not only provide the individual with hope, but will also meet their needs for having a socially supportive relationship.

As discussed in figure 1, the process of seeking environmental resources is imperative to strengths-based approaches. This research indicates that ex-prisoners report not having their needs met due to not being given the tools and/or resources that they require to be successful. Although correctional facilities are a purposely restrictive environment, offering little to no naturally occurring resources, social workers can begin to strive to identify what is available, and how to help their clients maximize these resources.

Continuing to employ strengths-based approaches in these environments will begin to defeat occurrences of 'institutionalizing' behaviors and will help to guide these individuals down a path of rehabilitation, confidence, and success.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Informational Letter

Jenna Houston
BRIDGEWATER STATE UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK
95 Burrill Avenue Bridgewater, MA 02325
508-531-2773 or 508-531-2256

INFORMATIONAL LETTER

Dear Potential Participant,

This letter is designed to tell you about the research study I am inviting you to participate in. The name of the study is: Ex-Prisoners' Perceptions of the Availability and Effects of Services in Correctional Settings

I am an undergraduate student at Bridgewater State University School of Social Work and this project is being carried out, in part, to meet the requirements of the Departmental Honors Program on campus as well as the Adrian-Tinsley Summer Research Program. Interview transcripts, will (with identifying data deleted) be shared with professors in this summer research program as part of my ongoing training and education.

I am hoping to better understand the needs of the ex-prisoners, to learn if they believe their needs were adequately addressed through programming in prison, if the programming helped in fostering positive coping skills, and lastly, whether the programming the participants received continued to be effective during thier reintegration into the community.

I hope the research results will enable ex- prisoners to be advocates for current and future prisoners by making suggestions towards what they believe could be more helpful in prison programming based the needs and experiences they encounterd.

You, in particular, are being asked to participate in this research study so as to explore the experiences of ex-prisoners and their perceptions of prison programming/services. It is rare that people who have been incarcerated get to tell their story. I think it is important for programming to begin to become more effective in coping with hardships during incarceration and during re-integration   into the community.

Your involvement would consist of agreement to participate in a one-hour interview with me that will be taped recorded. You will be invited to share your ideas, insights and experiences during your incarceration as well as after your release.

Your participation in this research study would be completely voluntary and you could decide to end your participation at any time.

If you are interested in participating in this study or if you have questions about the study please contact me at 508-858-6768.

Sincerely,

Jenna Houston

Appendix B: Informed Consent Form

Jenna Houston
BRIDGEWATER STATE UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK
95 Burrill Avenue   Bridgewater, MA 02325
508-531-2773 or 508-531-2256

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Ex-Prisoners' Perceptions of the Availability and Effects of Services in Correctional Settings

1. The purpose of the study:

You are being asked to participate in a research study designed to explore ex-prisoners' perceptions of availability of the services they received while incarcerated.

I am an undergraduate student at Bridgewater State University School of Social Work and this project is being carried out, in part, to meet the requirements of my honors thesis. Interview transcripts, will (with identifying data deleted) be shared with my mentor, a professor of social work, and classmates in my honors thesis class as part of my ongoing education. I may also present this research at educational forums such as conferences.

2. What your participation involves:

Your involvement consists of agreement to participate in a one-hour interview with this researcher that will be taped recorded if you allow me to tape record it. You will be invited to share your ideas, insights and experiences of services you received while in prison, and your ideas about how these services affected your reentry into the community. You will be asked to talk about services such as job training, mental health treatment, religious programming, and educational services.

3. Possible risks and benefits associated with your participation:

Please be assured that your decision to participate or not participate in this study is entirely voluntary and if you decide not to participate, there will be no consequences. If you decide to participate, you may experience emotional discomfort in recounting events related to the time you spent incarcerated. You may decide to skip any questions that you would prefer not to answer and to stop the interview at any time. You may also be concerned that I may share information that identifies you personally. To protect your confidentiality, all interview tapes will be maintained in a locked cabinet in the researcher's office. No one other than the researcher

will have access to or listen to the audiotape of the interview. All audiotapes will be destroyed within two years of this study. You will never be named in any written or spoken presentation that I make from this research, to protect your confidentiality. The potential benefits to your participation in this study include contributing to a better understanding of your experience with services and how it has positively affected you today. The results of this research may be useful to inform other researchers and social work professionals about what services in prison are helpful to reentry to the community.

4. Your rights as a participant:

Your participation in this research study is completely voluntary. You may choose to skip any questions you do not want to answer or to discontinue the interview at any time. You may discontinue your participation in this study at any time without penalty or cost of any nature.

5. To get more information:

If you have questions about this study or your rights as a research participant you may contact me at 508.858.6768. You may also contact this researcher's mentor, Judith Willison Ph.D., LICSW at 508.531.2843

I have read the Informed Consent Form, and have had the opportunity to fully discuss any concerns or questions. I agree to participate in this study, **Ex-Prisoners' Perceptions of the Availability and Effects of Services in Correctional Settings,** conducted by Jenna Houston, an undergraduate candidate at Bridgewater State University School of Social Work. By signing this form I indicate that I understand my participation is voluntary.

_____   _____

Participant's Signature   Date

_____   _____

Investigator's Signature   Date

Appendix C: Interview Guide

Jenna Houston
BRIDGEWATER STATE UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK
95 Burrill Avenue Bridgewater, MA 02325
508-531-2773 or 508-531-2256

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Ex-Prisoners' Perceptions of the Availability and Effects of Services in Correctional Settings

I.   Needs while in prison:
3. Many individuals who have spent time in prison report that they identified needs such as educational, mental health, spiritual/religious, or related to substance abuse.
4. Please tell me about what kind of needs you experienced while you were incarcerated.

Probes:

- What needs in particular were met?
- What needs of yours in particular were not met?

II.   Needs being met/ unmet in prison:
1. Please tell me about services/programs that helped to address any of the needs we just talked about

Probes:

- What services/programs in the prison directly helped you to address these needs while in prison?
- Do you feel if your needs had been addressed you would have had more positive experience? In what ways?
- What needs were unmet?
- What skills, lessons, and values did you learn from services you received?

III.   Services/ programming that fostered positive coping skills:
1. Did taking part in these services/ programs help you to adjust to your surroundings in prison
2. Did taking part in these services/programs help you to adjust being separated from your life in the community while you were in prison?

Probes:

- What services/programs in particular helped you being in prison?
- In what ways did the services/program(s) help you being in prison?
- Do you believe prison would have been harder to get through without these services/programs?

IV.   Services/programming that helped ex-prisoners reintegrate into society post-release:

1. When you think about the services you have discussed being involved with in prison, what helped you when you left prison and re-entered the community?

Probes:

- Which program(s)/service(s) helped you the most? Which program(s)/service(s) helped you the least? Why?
- What skills/ lessons/ values were most useful to you? Why?
- How did you apply [skills/ lessons/ values] you learnt from programming/services after you were released?

Overall Questions:

1. What is your overall view on programming/services while in prison?

2. Based on your experience, do you have any recommendations for types of programs/services to be included in the prison system?

3. Is there something else about programming/services or your impression of it that you would like to tell me?

4. What is the most important thing you would like me to understand about you and your experience with programming/services in prison?