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INCARCERATION EFFECTS ON ATTAINING HIGHER EDUCATION FOR FORMERLY INCARCERATED YOUTH

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INCARCERATION EFFECTS ON ATTAINING HIGHER EDUCATION
FOR FORMERLY INCARCERATED YOUTH

A Project
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Social Work

by
Daniela Garcia Robledo
Francey Oliva
May 2021

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ABSTRACT

Incarceration disrupts areas of a juvenile's life on multiple levels, including personal, social, and educational. Incarceration can present many obstacles for youth who are in pursuit of furthering their education. This research project sought to assess if the five identified factors, including quality of precollege education, mentoring, reentry services, family supports and socioeconomic status, played a role in adults, who were formerly incarcerated youth, pursuing higher levels of education. The study utilized an online survey to gather numerical data on the participant's perception of how they believe these factors influenced them. A bivariate analysis was used to analyze if the identified factors had an influence on the pursuit of higher education for adults who were formerly incarcerated youth. A frequency analysis was completed to determine which of the five factors were perceived to be influential to participants. A bivariate analysis was completed to see if there were any relationships to key demographic variables and level of education. The factors deemed most influential were mentoring programs and family supports. The factors that were deemed least influential were reentry services and precollege education. The research findings have the potential to inform social work professionals of what specific programs and services formerly incarcerated populations can be referred to in order to support them on their educational journey.

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-Daniela Garcia Robledo

To my research partner, Daniela Garcia Robledo, thank you for constantly encouraging me to be better. It is because of your hard work and organization that we were so successful in our project process. I am forever thankful because we have created an educational partnership that has turned into a lifetime of friendship. I would like to thank my cousins for being so encouraging throughout my educational process and my family for all their love and support.

-Francey Oliva

DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to my family but most importantly my parents, Jose Rafael & Martha Alicia Garcia. Thank you for always putting the educational success of my sisters and I as your number one priority in life. I could not be where I am today without your hard work and endless sacrifices throughout the years. You have truly inspired me to never give up and always work hard to accomplish my goals. Thank you to my sisters, Martha, Alejandra, and Claudia for being my role models and always supporting me throughout my educational endeavors. To my grandmother, Juana thank you for always praying for me and cheering me on throughout this process. Last, but not least I want to say thank you to my fiancé, Zachary, you have been my rock throughout this whole process. Thank you for motivating me when I needed it the most, and being my shoulder to cry on when I was most stressed. I could not have done it without your endless love and support.

-Daniela Garcia Robledo

This project is also dedicated to those currently and formerly incarcerated populations; may we all work toward effectively preventing recidivism, ending mass incarceration, and providing the needed support to evoke positive change.

-Francey Oliva

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Problem Formulation

Throughout the literature, 'juvenile' is defined as a person between the ages of 6-18 and can be considered criminally responsible for the consequences of their actions (Young, Greer, & Church, 2017). The juvenile correctional system aims to hold youth offenders accountable for criminal actions through providing rehabilitation services to ensure public safety (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2019). Involvement in the justice system can negatively impact areas of juveniles' lives, ranging but not limited to personal, social, and educational aspects. According to the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) as of 2017 there are an estimated 44,000 juveniles in residential placements and facilities in the United States (OJJDP, 2020). If a juvenile becomes involved with the legal system, a social worker can provide services that address the direct needs of the youth. Social workers cross paths with incarcerated juveniles through direct practice in the field. Social workers collaborate with a variety of legal agencies and court settings. In addition, they help these same clients through new challenges they face once outside of the legal system; social workers can have a longstanding relationship with clients of this population (National Organization of Forensic Social Work, 2020).

Despite the presence of barriers for youth who were formerly incarcerated, engagement in postsecondary education has shown to be important in protecting them against further criminal involvement as adults (Abrams & Franke 2013). Economist Steven Raphael (2007) found that using data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY), all racial and ethnic groups that were less educated were considerably more likely to be incarcerated, than those who were more educated (Abrams & Franke 2013). Furthermore, research conducted by Runell (2017) indicates that as postsecondary education increases, the rate of recidivism, relapse of criminal behavior decreases. Study participant's results show that the will to refrain from criminal actions decreased as higher education increased (Runell, 2017). Through postsecondary education, regardless of two-year or four-year college, allows for more opportunities to open and enhance earning potential which aids in reducing the risk of incarceration (Abrams & Franke 2013). Although results show postsecondary education can provide a solution, Abrams and Franke (2013) highlight how there is limited information published about juvenile enrollment rates.

Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA) contained provisions aimed to improve the quality of education for justice-involved youth (ESSA, 2015). Title 1 Part D of the ESSA requires state and local agencies to collaborate with correctional facilities the moment youth enter the system (Farn & Adams 2016). ESSA requires state agencies to establish procedures to assess youth, in hopes that it strengthens access to their education upon return into their communities

(Farn & Adams 2016). Policies such as ESSA serve to alleviate the high dropout rates of system-involved youth but present limitations (Sinclair, Unruh, Griller Clark, & Waintrup, 2017). The vagueness of ESSA policy's language and lack of understanding amongst those expected to enforce it could negatively affect youth's improvement (Sinclair et al., 2017). Based on research outcomes, one can speculate policies seek to prepare students for higher education but lack supportive services geared toward attaining a higher education.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study sought to assess what factors contributed to formerly incarcerated youth pursuing higher levels of education. Research on postsecondary education of formerly incarcerated youth is limited but has shown that no matter years of attendance, rates of recidivism are reduced (Abrams & Franke 2013). A continual cycle of reincarceration disrupts a youth's ability to receive a quality education. It is important to further explore the factors that contribute to formerly incarcerated youth in higher education in order to address the problem of low education enrollment rates amongst this population. Once the social work field is able to have imperative data provided regarding factors that contribute to attaining higher education, social workers will be able to understand better how to advocate and support formerly incarcerated youth.

The research method that was used in this research study is a quantitative approach. The study utilized a self-administered survey for participant responses.

This research design was used on individuals meeting study criteria because the study sought to collect numerical data regarding factors contributing to their educational experience. Due to the amount of time available for the study this research design was the most appropriate for the information needed. The research method protected participant's responses from the researchers' biases and values. The use of surveys allowed participants to provide input on factors based on their own experiences.

Significance of the Project for Social Work Practice

Further exploration would allow social workers to build upon their competencies with certain aspects of at-risk populations, such as formerly incarcerated youth and their higher education. The exploration findings have the possibility to bring awareness to what supports may or may not be working for or against formerly incarcerated youth pursuing higher education. If professionals have knowledge of what services work for this population, they can further support their decisions to strive for higher education. In turn, decreasing recidivism rates and increasing the outcome of successfully attaining higher education. Social workers, more so child welfare workers, are to benefit from this study because they are likely to work with formerly incarcerated youth in a variety of settings, such as court, detention facilities, foster care, and schools.

The study informs the planning phase of the generalist intervention process due to its ability to provide insight into the experiences of formerly

incarcerated youth. The findings could aid social workers in working alongside these youth in planning their future educational and life goals.

Through this perspective the research question is: What factors contribute to adults who were formerly incarcerated youth, to pursue higher education?

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This literature review will examine the relevant research studied surrounding factors and barriers faced by formerly incarcerated youth. This chapter's subsections will analyze five various factors identified as potential contributors to why this population might pursue higher education. The final subsection explains how Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory applies to the multiple factors that can influence a youth's environment and development.

Factors

Quality of PreCollege Education

It is evident that incarcerated youth face several disadvantages while obtaining their education. These obstacles can involve inconsistencies in education pre and post-incarceration (Leone & Cutting, 2004; Pace, 2018; Unruh, Gau, & Waintrup, 2009). Despite the legal requirements for juvenile facilities to provide an education to youth, the educational programs follow-through is not uniform across correctional facilities (Pace, 2018). Incarcerated youth can find themselves disengaged from their education because of a lack of connection to the realities of academic purpose (Houchins, Puckett-Patterson, Crosby, Shippen, & Jolivette, 2009; Pace, 2018). There should be a collaboration between the correctional facility and the States Department of Education in order

to implement the standards of education provided and improve the quality of education for youth (Pace, 2018).

Additional inconsistencies come in the form of learning disabilities, behavioral issues, and mental health needs. Youth incarcerated are more likely to face these learning challenges, putting them at a disadvantage to excel in the academic setting (Leone & Cutting, 2004; Pace, 2018; Unruh et al., 2009). Underwood and Washington (2016) reveal nearly 50 to 75% of those incarcerated meet criteria for mental health disorders in the juvenile system alone. As an alternative, the use of positive reinforcement to traditional discipline can aid in the prevention of youth dropout rates (Houchins et al., 2009; Pace, 2018). With proper knowledge, families can advocate using laws enacted to demand education services for their children that address their educational needs (Abrams & Snyder, 2010; Leone & Cutting, 2004). Higher levels of educational achievement and prompt return to the school setting have been found to be protective factors leading to a reduction of recidivism amongst incarcerated and formerly incarcerated youth (Blomberg, Bales, Mann, Piquero, and Berk, 2011; Bullis, Yovanossa, & Abel, 2004).

Mentoring

In the United States, there are approximately 5,000 organizations that provide mentoring services to youth (DuBois, Portillo, Rhodes, Silverthorn, & Valentine, 2011; Tolan, Henry, Schoeny, Lovegrove, & Nichols, 2013). These programs are for both prevention and intervention for youth at risk of

incarceration (Bouffard & Bergseth, 2008; Tolan et al., 2013). A key component identified for effective mentoring programs has been successful and intentional relationship building among youth and their mentors (Anthony et al., 2010; Bouffard & Bergseth, 2008; DuBois, Holloway, Valentine, & Cooper, 2002; DuBois et al., 2011; Lakind, Eddy, & Zell, 2014; Tolan et al., 2013). The use of volunteers has been the most common in mentoring programs; some studies have suggested that professional mentors may benefit youth more because they will better address their needs (Lakind et al., 2014; Unruh et al., 2008; Weinrath, Donatelli, & Murchison, 2016). Despite the popularity of the use of mentor programs for at-risk youth, effectiveness is varied.

A metaanalysis on youth mentoring programs conducted by Du Bois et al. (2002) and a follow-up meta-analysis by DuBois et al. (2011) found at-risk youth to benefit over other youth. Still, the overall long-term effect was low. In their findings, they concluded that components of the different mentoring programs were effective, but due to limited information on each program, there is no consensus (DuBois et al., 2002; DuBois et al., 2011). A study on the Spotlight Serious Offender Services program that targets high-risk gang-involved youth in Manitoba, Canada, found that their main component in reducing recidivism rates for youth involved in the program was the use of street mentors (Weinrath et al., 2016). Through these findings, it is evident in the literature that a positive adult figure is a key component in helping youth adapt to their environments post-incarceration (Anthony et al., 2010; Weinrath et al., 2016). Despite mentoring

programs showing positive results for helping youth desist from crime, researchers suggest further clarity on how programs are implemented and evaluated to better explain the effects of mentoring (DuBois et al., 2002; DuBois et al., 2011; Tolan et al., 2013).

Reentry Services

Upon reentry to their communities, incarcerated youth face many challenges brought by unaddressed needs and risks associated with returning to the environment they came from (Abrams & Snyder, 2010; Anthony et al., 2010; Bouffard & Bergseth, 2008). From the moment of release into the community reentry services are essential to improve outcomes for youth (Anthony et al., 2010; Bullis et al., 2004). The goal of reentry services is to help youth successfully transition back into society by assessing each youth's specific needs and the risk they present to society (Abrams & Snyder, 2010; Bouffard & Bergseth, 2008). As an alternative to programs focused solely on youth, the incorporation of families into reentry programs has shown promise in reducing recidivism rates (Abrams & Snyder, 2010).

The most common forms of reentry programs found in the literature have been the "Intensive Aftercare Program" (IAP) and the "Serious and Violent Offender Reentry Initiative" (SVORI) (Abrams & Snyder, 2010; Bouffard & Bergseth, 2008). Inconsistencies of the effectiveness of these programs are common among studies due to their variations, small sample sizes, implementation, and evaluation methods (Abrams & Snyder 2010; Bouffard &

Bergseth, 2008; Weibush et al., 2005). Despite these shortcomings, there is support that further research on specific components such as guidance from professional mentors, and proper implementation of services can aid in improving the effectiveness of reentry services (Bouffard & Bergseth, 2008; DuBois et al., 2002; DuBois et al., 2011; Tolan et al., 2013). In a metaanalysis conducted by Drake, Aos, and Miller (2009) on seven Functional Family Therapy programs findings suggested that a youth who participates in this intervention can have an 18.1% decrease in recidivism rates versus those who do not (Abrams & Synder, 2010). In spite of the positive results of these programs, the financial means to support them present a challenge for implementation across agencies (Abrams & Synder, 2010; Drake et al., 2009).

Family Supports

Successful reentry of formerly incarcerated populations back into their communities is highly influenced by familial support (Anthony et al., 2010; Howell, Kelly, Palmer & Mangum, 2004; Spencer & Jones-Walker, 2004; Unruh et al., 2008). Upon release, formerly incarcerated youth may require the support of family structure to adequately build a core base of healthy relationship functioning, leading to a potential future without reentry (Anthony et al., 2010; Howell et al., 2004). Familial use of wraparound mental health services provides the ability to increase access to care (Howell et al., 2004; Unruth et al., 2008) resources, training, and education links (Abrams & Snyder, 2010). Although supports may, but do not have to be direct family to the youth, adult mentors are

determined to be fundamental influences in a successful transition of reentry (Anthony et al., 2010; Baltodano, Mathur, & Rutherford, 2005).

Interventions involving family approaches, such as Functional Family Therapy and Multisystemic Therapy, have the potential to improve child-parent functioning and encourage youth to steer away from negative influences (Abrams & Snyder, 2010). The results of a study Survey of Youth in Custody (1987), indicate that incarcerated youth tend to come from homes in which a family member(s) have a history of incarceration (Anthony et al., 2010). Approaches to transitional support strategies include implementing familial reinforcement training on pro-social behaviors with those formerly incarcerated to intervene if and when maladaptive patterns arise (Anthony et al., 2010; Spencer & Jones-Walker, 2004). Lack of preparation on the family's end can lead to the inability to successfully intervene and develop those secure foundational supports within the youth's home (Anthony et al., 2010; Unruth et al., 2008).

Socioeconomic Status

Incarcerated youth have a higher chance of being adversely affected by their low socioeconomic statuses before, and after, entering the juvenile justice system (Anthony et al., 2010; Spencer & Jones-Walker, 2004). The likelihood of youth becoming incarcerated increases if they live in disadvantaged areas; if youth belong to a population of color, they are two times more likely to become incarcerated than their white counterparts (Rodriguez, 2013). Low socioeconomic statuses of youth and their families might lead to circumstances that make it

easier to lean toward a life of criminal activity despite the knowledge of negative outcomes (Anthony et al., 2010; Runnell, 2017; Spencer & Jones-Walker, 2004). The economic disadvantage that youth faced was has been used as rationale to incarcerate rather than seek alternative solutions (Rodriguez, 2013). Furthermore, the financial requirements accompanying incarceration, such as court fees and restitution payments, create further economic burdens for families (Rodriguez, 2013). In order to help youth improve their outcomes post-incarceration, transitional supports are needed (Anthony et al., 2010; Spencer & Jones-Walker, 2004). Transitional supports, such as college readiness and job placement programs, have been proven to be more effective when used with juveniles, rather than as adults (Aos, Phipps, Barnoski, & Lieb, 2001; Nurse, 2013). Federal law has enacted The Job Training Partnership Act to provide economically disadvantaged youth and adults the skills and support to enter the workforce and aid against those employment barriers (Abrams & Franke, 2013; Aos et al., 2001). Through the use of these services, youth can receive guidance and support in finding alternative ways to reach economic stability (Anthony et al., 2010; Farn & Adams, 2016).

Theories Guiding Conceptualization

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory discusses how the interactions of direct and indirect surroundings affect the human development of an individual. The theory is composed of intersecting levels of relationship systems consisting of micro (e.g. direct interaction with families and individuals),

meso (e.g. relationship interactions between micro systems), exo (e.g. outside events that affect immediate environment), and macro systems (e.g. cultures and setting) with consideration to chronology based on role of time and event (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In this theory there is emphasis on how the interactions between systems affect an individual's development and how multiple facets of a youth's life are impacted based on incarceration. Within the micro level, interactions between the youth and their immediate relationships are impacted when relocated out of their environment (Rodriguez, 2013). This can add additional stressors in the meso system now that youth can no longer attend their schools, where there are educational supports and opportunities to foster relationships (Rodriguez, 2013). In the exosystem, youth can be affected by history of incarceration and economic status of their family (Anthony et al., 2010; Spencer & Jones-Walker, 2004). On a macro level, a youth's involvement in the juvenile justice system can alter their ability for normal development in various areas, related to academic, social and family settings (Anthony et al., 2010; Pace, 2018). Assessment of an individual and their environment is important when transitioning back into their communities because adolescence is a critical part of development for individuals where their sense of self is influenced by their environments.

Ecosystems theory will guide this study by taking into consideration the events of an individual's life and how environments affect human development. It is acknowledged that incarceration is a major event in a youth's life, and without

the proper intervention or guidance it can have lasting negative effects on the sense of self. All systems that make up a youth's environment are influenced by one another, no system works alone. How these systems have worked together will aid in understanding the individual's experiences in pursuing higher education. Knowledge of these factors can contribute to what interventions in their different systems have provided meaningful support.

Summary

Incarcerated youth face many obstacles in their pursuit of education. Reentry programs are a means to help youth reintegrate into the community with the proper support. The use of mentoring provides youth with a positive adult figure that can help guide them through the challenges presented post-incarceration. The incorporation of youth's families into these supportive services expand the ability to create lasting impacts on a youth's desistance from crime. Environmental factors share a relationship on the individual and intervention design should take into consideration all factors on the multidimensional system (Abrams & Snyder 2010; Spencer & Jones-Walker, 2004). Rather than assessing a youth through an individualistic approach, analysis should be refocused on system interactions through the Ecological lens which takes into consideration the identified factors, quality of precollege education, mentoring programs, reentry services, family supports, and socioeconomic status.

CHAPTER THREE:

METHODS

Introduction

This research study sought to identify and analyze what factors have contributed to formerly incarcerated youth who have pursued higher levels of education. Additionally, the study sought to learn from the participant's responses to the survey of what they believe aided them in attaining higher education. This chapter describes the format in which the study was conducted. The sections listed are study design, sampling, data collection, instruments, procedures, protection of human subjects, and data analysis.

Study Design

The purpose of this study was to identify and examine the factors recognized by formerly incarcerated youths that have played a role in their postsecondary educational engagement. This study was conducted through a descriptive approach as there is research around this population yet is limited regarding their higher education. Previous research has recognized that higher education reduces recidivism but lacks insight into "what" impacts this population's educational motives (Abrams & Franke, 2013; Runell, 2017). The study utilized surveys as the tool to collect data from participants.

The strength of using a quantitative approach of surveys is that it collects numerical data from participant's personal experiences relating to their education

(Barragán, 2020). Prior research has minimally sought out formerly incarcerated youth's thoughts on what has helped them in their educational achievement. In using this approach participants of this population were able to identify and share their experiences around factors they believe have helped them on their journey to postsecondary education. The survey provided numerical data surrounding factors that have been researched and proven effective. Through this approach participants were able to contribute new details that build upon previous research.

A limitation of using surveys as a source of data collection is that it restricts the extent to which a participant can share their individual experience (Barragán, 2020). Since this survey did not contain open-ended questions participants might have felt restricted in their responses. Due to the unprecedented situation of the COVID-19 Pandemic, surveys were conducted virtually, for safety purposes, bringing additional limitations. Although the survey was created in a manner that was clear and concise, due to its virtual method, researchers were not available to answer any questions. A virtual survey is susceptible to being compromised as others not within the target population may have access (Barragán, 2020). Due to the methods being strictly quantitative, all findings within this study should not be seen to fully represent all formerly incarcerated youth population's experiences with these factors in higher education.

Sampling

This study employed a non-random purposive sampling based on participants who met certain criteria as determined by the researchers. Criteria requirements included participants be over the age of 18, have been incarcerated as youth, have had or have involvement in higher education programs, and lived within the state of California. The study recruited participants who meet set research criteria through purposive and snowball sampling via emails and social networking websites such as, but not limited to, Facebook and Instagram. A range of 25 - 75 participants were sought. All participants were provided with the same survey to complete for data collection.

Data Collection and Instruments

Quantitative data was collected using participants from organizations and social networking websites such as Instagram, Facebook, and personal email. The data was collected in December 2020. This was a descriptive study with the independent variables being factors, quality of precollege education, mentoring, reentry services, family supports and socioeconomic status (Appendix C). The factors were measured using a 5 point Likert scale and a dichotomous scale, with the levels of measurement being ordinal. The dependent variable was the pursuit of higher education, which was measured nominally, due to higher education being pursued or not.

Participants were provided with a link that led them to the survey. The survey provided participants with the description of the study, informed consent, and research goal. Demographic information was collected as part of the study, which included age, gender, race/ethnicity, education level, socioeconomic status, and incarceration history as a youth. Researchers conducted procedures as permitted by current COVID-19 Pandemic guidelines. The survey was designed and developed to be used specifically for this research, with the intention of obtaining information about what factors adults who were formerly incarcerated youth believe helped them pursue their higher education. The most informative population to gather knowledge and data from, was formerly incarcerated youth, as they have experienced these factors firsthand.

To ensure the validity of the information collected from the use of this tool, researchers only used participant surveys that meet criteria requirements. A draft of the instrument was provided to individuals who work with the juvenile justice population to assess for reliability of the tool. Feedback from subject matter experts was used ensure that the most relevant data to the research was collected. By using a descriptive study, researchers aimed to find out which factors presented in the literature were most beneficial for youth of this population.

Procedures

An infographic was created describing the need for participants as well as containing information about the intended purpose of the study. The infographic was posted via virtual means of social media, which were created specifically for the study. The proposed date range of the survey timeframe was indicated on the infographic. For this study, the researchers aimed to recruit participants through purposive sampling, snowballing sampling, and social media outreach. Included in the survey was an informed consent and acknowledgment with a summary of research information addressing research purpose, description, participation, confidentiality, duration, risks, benefits, contact information, and results. Participants were informed that completing the survey was voluntary. The survey was administered virtually via an online survey, Qualtrics.

Data collection was stopped abruptly due to the following factors. In the process of collecting data the researchers encountered spamming of the survey on December 22, 2020. Due to the survey being distributed on social media platforms, participants who did not meet research criteria could have potentially been provided with the survey link. The survey was closed as soon as researchers noted that participants, who had not met criteria, were taking the survey. Researchers then cleaned the data by identifying the time of when these responses began, and geolocation of where these surveys were submitted from. During the process of getting IRB approval researchers were awarded a grant to place funding toward an incentive for research participation. Spamming may

have been attributed to the incentive of gift cards given to research participants who met criteria.

Protection of Human Subjects

The researchers obtained the necessary measures to ensure the protection of the participant's identity, questions posed, and results found throughout the entirety of the study. In efforts to maintain participant's information secure and confidential, no name or identifying information was requested of the participants, keeping as much anonymity as possible throughout the study. Participants were provided informed consent and acknowledgement of their rights as a measure of their security and privacy. Researchers advised participants to take this survey on a trusted electronic device, in a space they felt was confidential and protected. All participants were informed that this survey was voluntary, and that they could withdraw before completion of the survey, if needed. To ensure participant agreement of the research, acknowledgement was required by reading and clicking the "next" button to proceed. Participants were notified that the study had IRB approval. Researchers disclosed information of self and why the study and further research is required. In accordance with ethical practice, documentation, digital records, and information collected will be properly disposed of three years after the study.

Data Analysis

This study was conducted using a survey designed to find out which factors influenced formerly incarcerated youth to pursue higher education. The researchers used the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) to analyze data gathered from the participant's responses to the survey. The independent variables, factors (e.g. mentoring, reentry services, family support, socioeconomic status, and precollege education), were measured as intervals. These independent variables were measured on a Likert scale range of Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. The dependent variable, the pursuit of higher education, was measured on a nominal scale. The dependent variable was measured dichotomously based on a yes or no response. The responses of the data were analyzed using bivariate analysis.

Summary

The study aimed to identify beneficial factors and examined experiences among formerly incarcerated youth who have entered higher education programs. Using surveys, participants were able to rank factors that have been previously identified within the literature to benefit them. The quantitative approach was best utilized in this study in order to obtain the necessary data needed for this research. Researchers followed ethical and social work principles to ensure that proper measures were taken to protect participants and the study.

CHAPTER FOUR:

RESULTS

Introduction

This chapter will discuss the general findings of the study. A total of 105 participants from the state of California contributed their responses to the study in a period of one week in December 2020. First, the researchers will review the descriptive statistics of the study. Secondly, the researchers will review the data analyzed. Lastly, the researchers will discuss the results of the study.

Demographics

In the study, there were a total of 105 participants. Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of all the participants in the study. From 105 participants, 58.1% identified as male, 40.0% identified as female, and 1.0% identified as transgender female. The participants' ages ranged from 18 to 44 years old. From the sample collected, 24.8% of the participants were between the ages of 18-24 years old, 66.7% of the participants were between the ages of 25-34 years old, and 8.6% were between the ages of 35-44 years old. When asked what ethnicity participants primarily identified with, 56.2% of the participants reported to be Caucasian, 18.1% were Latino or Hispanic, 14.3% were African American, 5.7% were Native American, 2.9% were Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, 1.9% were Asian, and 1.0% reported Other. When asked about their household income, participants reported, 43.8% had an income

ranging from \$40,001-60,000, 23.8% had an income ranging from \$60,001-80,000, 17.1% had an income ranging from \$80,001-100,000, 10.5% had an income ranging from \$20,001-40,000, 2.9% had an income under \$20,000, and 1.9% had an income ranging from 100,001 or over. When asked about marital status 53.3% of participants reported to be single, and 46.7% were married.

Additionally, the participants were asked about their educational background, relating to their highest level completed. 29.5% of the participants reported to have completed some trade or vocational school, 27.6% reported to have completed some college or university, 26.7% reported to have completed a degree program (Associates, Bachelors, Masters, PhD), and 16.2% completed a certificate program. When asked if the participants had any experience with the juvenile justice system, 100% confirmed experiencing juvenile incarceration. When asked about incarceration as an adult (over the age of 18), 37.1% reported have been incarcerated as an adult, while 62.9% reported to not have been incarcerated as an adult.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Variable	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Female	42	40.0
Male	61	58.1
Transgender Female	1	1.0
Missing	1	1.0
Age		
18 – 24	26	24.8
25 – 34	70	66.7
35 – 44	9	8.6
Ethnicity		
African American	15	14.3
Asian	2	1.9
Caucasian	59	56.2
Latino or Hispanic	19	18.1
Native American	6	5.7
Pacific Islander	3	2.9
Other	1	1.0
Household Income		
Under \$20,000	3	2.9
\$20,001 – 40,000	11	10.5
\$40,001 – 60,000	46	43.8
\$60,001 – 80,000	25	23.8
\$80,001 – 100,000	18	17.1
\$100,001 or over	2	1.9
Marital Status		
Single	56	53.3
Married	49	46.7
Education Level		
Some College or University	29	27.6
Some Trade or Vocational School	31	29.5
Completion of Certification Program	17	16.2
Completion of Degree Program	28	26.7
Incarcerated (Youth, Under 18)		
Yes	105	100
No	0	0
Incarcerated (Adult, Over 18)		
Yes	39	37.1
No	66	62.9

Involvement of Factors

Participants of the study were also asked about their involvement with the five factors. Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics on whether or not participants engaged with any of the five factors. When asked about mentoring, 74.3% reported that they participated in a mentoring program. On the contrary, 24.8% of participants reported having no mentoring experience. Of the participants in this study a majority (75.2%) reported that they had family support, while 21% of participants reported not having family support. When asked about receiving reentry services, 54.3% reported participating in reentry programs. 41.9% of participants reported having not participated in reentry programs. When asked about socioeconomic status, 66.7% reported that their socioeconomic status had an influence in their pursuit of education. While 32.4% reported their socioeconomic status not having an influence on their pursuit of education. Over 70.5% of participants reported that their precollege education had an influence on their pursuit of higher education. On the other hand, 28.6% of participants indicated that their precollege education did not have an influence on their pursuit of education.

Table 2. Involvement of Factors

Variable	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Mentoring Program		
Yes	78	74.3
No	26	24.8
Missing	1	1.0
Family Support		
Yes	79	75.2
No	22	21
Missing	4	3.8
Reentry Services		
Yes	57	54.3
No	44	41.9
Missing	4	3.8
Socioeconomic Status		
Yes	70	66.7
No	34	32.4
Missing	1	1.0
Precollege Education		
Yes	74	70.5
No	30	28.6
Missing	1	1.0

Opinions Toward Influence of Factors

The participants in the study were also asked their personal opinions about the five factors and how influential they were toward pursuing higher education. Table 3 demonstrates the statistical data on the opinions participants had on how influential the five factors were on their pursuit of higher education. A majority of the participants (41.9%), agreed that mentoring was an influential factor, 21% of the participants reported feeling neutral toward mentoring. Almost half of participants (43.8%) agreed that family support was an influential factor, while only 3.8% of participants disagreed. 35.2% of the participants responded “agree” on reentry services being influential, while 7.6% of participants disagreed, and only 2.9% of participants strongly agreed. When asked about socioeconomic status, 39% of participants agreed that it had an influence on their pursuit of higher education. On the other hand, 6.7% of participants disagreed with this. A significant number of participants (42.9%) agreed that precollege education was an influential factor, while only 1.9% of participants disagreed.

Table 3. Opinions Toward Influence of Factors

Variable	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Mentoring Program		
Strongly Agree	10	9.5
Agree	44	41.9
Neutral	22	21.0
Disagree	7	6.7
Missing	22	21.0
Family Support		
Strongly Agree	20	19.0
Agree	46	43.8
Neutral	20	19.0
Disagree	4	3.8
Missing	15	14.3
Reentry Services		
Strongly Agree	3	2.9
Agree	37	35.2
Neutral	22	21.0
Disagree	8	7.6
Missing	35	33.3
Socioeconomic Status		
Strongly Agree	13	12.4
Agree	41	39.0
Neutral	22	21.0
Disagree	7	6.7
Strongly Disagree	1	1.0
Missing	21	20.0
Precollege Education		
Strongly Agree	12	11.4%
Agree	45	42.9%
Neutral	22	21.0%
Disagree	2	1.9%
Missing	24	22.9%

Ranking of Individual Factors

Participants of the study were asked to rank the individual factors on a scale of most influential (1) to least influential factor (6). Table 4 indicates the ranking of factors based on individuals personal opinions on which factors were most and least influential. The majority of participants' responses (37.1%) indicated mentoring programs were most influential in pursuit of higher education. Family support was listed second, with 25.7% of participants placing it as their most influential factor. Socioeconomic status was ranked third, with 12.4% of participants listing it as their most influential factor. The fourth factor participants ranked as most influential was precollege education with 11.4% reporting this. The least influential factor as indicated by participants were reentry services with 6.7% of participants listing it as their most influential factor.

Table 4. Ranking of Individual Factors

Variable	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Mentoring Program		
1	39	37.1
2	21	20.0
3	17	16.2
4	15	14.3
5	6	5.7
6	1	1.0
Missing	6	5.7
Family Support		
1	27	25.7
2	23	21.9
3	20	19.0
4	19	18.1
5	8	7.6
6	2	1.9
Missing	6	5.7
Reentry Services		
1	7	6.7
2	10	9.5
3	18	17.1
4	30	28.6
5	30	28.6
6	4	3.8
Missing	6	5.7
Socioeconomic Status		
1	13	12.4
2	20	19.0
3	23	21.9
4	15	14.3
5	25	23.8
6	3	2.9
Missing	6	5.7
Precollege Education		
1	12	11.4
2	20	19.0
3	17	16.2
4	18	17.1
5	27	25.7
6	5	4.8
Missing	6	5.7

1 being most influential to 6 being least influential

Presentation of the Findings

Three non parametric tests were performed on the data: Mann-Whitney U, Kruskal-Wallis, and Spearman Rho Test. The following are significant findings from the data collection.

A Mann-Whitney U test was performed to examine the relationship between gender and how the factors influenced their pursuit of higher education. The test showed that there was no significant relationship between the variables. This shows that no matter the gender, participants from this study pursued higher education at a similar rate.

A Kruskal-Wallis test was performed to examine the relationship between ethnicity/race and how the factors influenced their pursuit of higher education. The test showed that there was no significant relationship between the variables. This shows that no matter the ethnicity/race, participants from this study pursued higher education at a similar rate.

A Spearman Rho test was performed to examine the association between the participants' age, income, education level, and their pursuit of higher education. The test showed that there was no significant association between the variables. This shows that no matter the participants age, income, or education level there was no significant effect on their pursuit of higher education.

Conclusion

This chapter reported the demographics of the surveyed participants and the significant findings from the data collection. The findings show that no matter

the gender, ethnicity/race, age, income, and education level of the participants studied, no significance was found in relation to how they perceived factors to influence their pursuit of higher education.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

Introduction

This chapter will present an overview of the data collected from the surveys of formerly incarcerated youth and its implications to the social work profession. This section will further explain the study's findings and how they relate to the existing literature on formerly incarcerated youth and higher education. Additionally, this chapter will discuss the limitations of the study, recommendations for future research, and how the findings can be used to improve social work policies and practices with formerly incarcerated youth.

Discussion

The literature shows that formerly incarcerated youth face many challenges in their pursuit of higher education, which leads to lower educational attainment and higher rates of recidivism. In facing these challenges formerly incarcerated youth are more likely to drop out of school, and continue to engage in criminal activity (Runell, 2017). In this study the research question sought to address: what factors contributed to adults, who were formerly incarcerated youth to pursue higher education. The literature highlights five factors which include family supports, mentoring programs, precollege education, reentry services programs, and socioeconomic status.

In line with the literature participants surveyed identified the rates at which each factor had an influence in their educational attainment. The results of this study show that participants acknowledge identified factors within the literature to be influential. The most influential factor in pursuing higher education within this study was mentoring programs with 37.1% of participants ranking this as their number one factor. On the contrary, the least influential factor found in the study was reentry services, with 6.7% of participants responses indicating these results. These results indicate that programs and services offered to youth in schools and their communities have the ability to improve the likelihood of furthering their education. The literature further indicates that youth who live in disadvantaged areas and belong to a minority group are more likely to be negatively affected by their low socioeconomic status (Anthony et al., 2010; Spencer & Jones-Walker, 2004). Based on the results of the study only 12.4% of participants, regardless of ethnicity/race, attributed this factor to be an influence to pursuing higher education. This finding demonstrates the resiliency within this population to prevail over economic and environmental challenges.

Another finding that emerged from the study was the importance of demographic factors on how influential participants would find the five factors to be in their experiences. The results of this study show that regardless of demographic factors of age, gender, ethnicity, household income, and marital status, the rate of which these factors were influential were not affected. Regardless of participants' ranking of level of influence factors all presented an

influence on the surveyed population. Although participants of this study were able to identify the significance of these five factors in their personal experiences, the rate at which this is applicable to this specific population on a larger scale is not known. This research focused on participants in the state of California, which does not allow for a full representation of formerly incarcerated youth and their experiences with pursuing higher education. Further research into how these factors influence the pursuit of higher education on a larger and more diverse scale can add more depth to the understanding of this population's experiences.

Limitations

The study used primarily virtual methods that presented various limitations. The use of social media platforms, Facebook and Instagram, was the primary method of survey distribution. This caused the researchers to have limited control over who had access to the survey, who shared the survey, and who responded to the survey. In turn, creating a discrepancy in the authenticity of participant surveys because data was collected anonymously. Due to the online method of survey distribution, geolocation could have been impacted as participants outside of California could have accessed the survey. Additionally, researchers faced spamming during data collection, which could have skewed the results of the study.

Despite limitations, there were strengths found in the study. The researchers were able to collect a higher sample size than expected for the study. Furthermore, with support from organizations with this population who

have this lived experience, data was collected within the span of a week. Lastly, there was a range of diverse demographics amongst the participants, including but not limited to, their age, ethnicity, income, and education level.

Implications for Social Work Practice and Policy

This study can be informative to professionals working with formerly incarcerated youth because it identifies factors that have been helpful for this population to pursue higher education. The findings of this study can aid the youth of this population in having knowledge of what resources have assisted formerly incarcerated youth in the past to obtain their higher education. This population faces barriers of social and financial support, along with a lack of educational resources, amongst others. In light of the study's implications, social work professionals are able to use the information found in this study to better assist formerly incarcerated youth through the obstacles they face when pursuing higher education. The results of the study provide professionals with opportunities for growth and areas of improvement in order to further advocate and expand services to the youth of this population. It is by these means that professionals can link those of this population to the required resources to propel them into their education. Additionally, results from this study's research can expand the knowledge and skillset taught to future social work professionals on how to engage, assess, and identify the needs of this population. Continued research can provide a better understanding and awareness of this population's educational experiences on a broader scale.

Conclusion

The intended purpose of this study was to further investigate the recurring factors within the literature that impacted formerly incarcerated youth in pursuing higher education. The study included this population's perspectives on their experiences with each of the identified factors. The results of the study found that demographic information did not have a major influence on the impact the five factors had on participants. The results of the study align with the literature as the five identified factors were all mentioned by participants to have had an influence in their educational pursuit. Researchers suggest further studies be conducted with this population in order to expand the limited body of knowledge around formerly incarcerated youth and their pursuit of higher education.

APPENDIX A
INFORMED CONSENT

INFORMED CONSENT

The study in which you are asked to participate is designed to evaluate factors that have been identified to aid formerly incarcerated youth to pursue higher education. These factors have been found within previously researched literature and studies. The study is being conducted by Daniela Garcia-Robledo and Francey Oliva, graduate students, under the supervision of Dr. McAllister, Director of the School of Social Work at California State University, San Bernardino (CSUSB). This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at CSUSB.

PURPOSE: The purpose of the study seeks to assess what factors contribute to formerly incarcerated youth, who are now adults, to pursue higher levels of education.

DESCRIPTION: Participants will be asked to complete a survey on their experiences with these factors, demographics will be collected but with no personal identifying information.

PARTICIPATION: Your participation in the study is completely voluntary. You can refuse to participate in the study or discontinue your participation at any time without any consequences.

CONFIDENTIALITY: Your responses will remain confidential, and data will be reported in group form only.

DURATION: It will take 5-10 minutes to complete the survey.

RISKS: Although not anticipated, there may be some discomfort in answering some of the questions. You are not required to answer and can skip the question or end your participation.

BENEFITS: There will not be any direct benefits to the participants, although conducting this study will contribute to the body of knowledge in this area of research.

CONTACT: If you have any questions regarding this study please feel free to contact Dr. McAllister at cmcallister@csusb.edu.

RESULTS: Results of the study can be obtained from the Pfau Library ScholarWorks database (<http://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/>) at California State University, San Bernardino after July 2021.

I understand that I must be 18 years or older to participate in your study, have read and understood the consent document, and agree to participate in your study.

Place an X mark here

Date

APPENDIX B
INFORMATIVE TERMINOLOGY

INFORMATIVE TERMINOLOGY

Thank you for your participation in this research on formerly incarcerated youth and higher education. Multiple choice/scale questions are used for participants in this study. The goal of this survey is to gather information regarding what factors adults who were formerly incarcerated youth believe contributed to their pursuit of higher education.

For the purpose of this survey, these factors are defined as follows:

Mentoring: An older person who has knowledge and experience that is willing to guide someone younger. The goal of this relationship is to support the younger person in a positive way. This can occur through a program, in a school or community setting, as well as an informal relationship, such as a teacher, counselor, coach, religious leader, etc.

Family Supports: This can include positive family relationships that motivated an individual to succeed in their education. Family supports can be relationships with parents, siblings, grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins, etc.

Reentry Services: This can include any programs or services offered to a youth when returning to their communities after incarceration.

Socioeconomic Status: A combination of financial, educational, and work status that can positively or negatively impact a persons life.

PreCollege Education: Any education before college, university, or trade school. This can include elementary, middle school, and high school.

APPENDIX C
SURVEY

SURVEY

Demographics

1. What gender do you identify as?
 - a. Male
 - b. Female
 - c. Do not wish to self-identify

2. What is your age?
 - a. 18-24
 - b. 25-34
 - c. 35-44
 - d. 45-54
 - e. 55+

3. What ethnicity do you primarily identify with?
 - a. African American
 - b. Asian
 - c. Caucasian
 - d. Latino or Hispanic
 - e. Native American
 - f. Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
 - g. Two or More
 - h. Other

4. What is your household income?
 - a. Under \$20
 - b. 20,000 – 40,000
 - c. 40,001-60
 - d. 60,001-80
 - e. 80,001-100
 - f. 100,001 or over

5. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
 - a. High School
 - b. Some college
 - c. Trade/vocational school
 - d. Completed Degree program (Associates, Bachelors, Masters, PHD)

6. What is your marital status?
 - a. Single
 - b. Married
 - c. Divorced/Widowed
 - d. Cohabiting

7. Were you incarcerated as a youth (under the age of 18)?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

Survey Questions

Were you involved in a mentoring program at any point before pursuing higher education?

(If you select no, skip the next question)

Yes

No

Mentoring programs helped me on my journey to pursue higher education (Rate below)

Strongly Agree - Agree - Neutral - Disagree -Strongly Disagree

Did you have family support at any point before pursuing higher education?

(If you select no, skip the next question)

Yes

No

Family support helped me on my journey to higher education

(Rate below)

Strongly Agree - Agree - Neutral - Disagree -Strongly Disagree

Did you have support from reentry services at any point before pursuing higher education?

(If you select no, skip the next question)

Yes

No

Reentry services had an influence on my journey to higher education

(Rate below)

Strongly Agree - Agree - Neutral - Disagree -Strongly Disagree

Did your socioeconomic status have an influence on you at any point before pursuing higher education?

(If you select no, skip the next question)

Yes

No

My socioeconomic status had an influence on my journey to higher education
(Rate below)

Strongly Agree - Agree - Neutral - Disagree -Strongly Disagree

Did your precollege education have an influence on you at any point before pursuing higher education?

(If you select no, skip the next question)

Yes

No

My precollege education had an influence on my journey to higher education
(Rate below)

Strongly Agree - Agree - Neutral - Disagree -Strongly Disagree

Created by Daniela Garcia Robedo and Francey Oliva.

APPENDIX D
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL LETTER

IRB #: IRB-FY2021-60

Title: Incarceration effects on attaining higher education for formerly incarcerated youth

Creation Date: 10-11-2020

End Date:

Status: **Approved**

Principal Investigator: Carolyn McAllister

Review Board: Main IRB Designated Reviewers for School of Social Work

Sponsor:

Study History

Submission Type	Initial	Review Type	Exempt	Decision	Exempt
Submission Type	Modification	Review Type	Exempt	Decision	Exempt

Key Study Contacts

Member	Francey Oliva	Role	Co-Principal Investigator	Contact	francey.oliva3294@coyote.csusb.edu
Member	Daniela Garcia-Robledo	Role	Co-Principal Investigator	Contact	daniela.garciarobledo4650@coyote.cs
Member	Carolyn McAllister	Role	Principal Investigator	Contact	cmcallis@csusb.edu
Member	Carolyn McAllister	Role	Primary Contact	Contact	cmcallis@csusb.edu

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ASSIGNED RESPONSIBILITIES

This was a two person project where authors collaborated throughout. However, for each phase of the project, certain authors took primary responsibility. These responsibilities were assigned as listed in the manner that follows:

1. Data Collection: done as a joint effort between partners.
2. Data Entry and Analysis: Assigned leader Francey Oliva assisted by Daniela Garcia-Robledo.
3. Writing Report and Presentation of Findings: Assigned leader Daniela Garcia-Robledo assisted by Francey Oliva.
4. Methods: done as a joint effort between partners.
5. Results: done as a joint effort between partners.
6. Discussion: done as a joint effort between partners.