THE BARRIERS DIRECT SOCIAL SERVICE WORKERS FACE WHEN WORKING WITH INCARCERATED YOUTH

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THE BARRIERS DIRECT SOCIAL SERVICE WORKERS FACE WHEN WORKING WITH 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
Elizabeth Padilla
Valerie Mercado
May 2023
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Approved by:

Dr. Yawen Li, Faculty Supervisor

Dr. Yawen Li, M.S.W. Research Coordinator
ABSTRACT

This research examined the barriers direct social service workers face while working with incarcerated youth. Using an exploratory method with a qualitative approach. Researchers interviewed participants with experience in working with incarcerated youth and conducted interviews via Zoom. A purposive method was used and incorporated the snowball sampling technique and explored the barriers direct social service workers experience when working with families, probation, and the juvenile justice system. Data analysis identified three common themes: challenges in engaging families, lack of understanding between direct social service workers, probation, and their work, and challenges associated with collaboration between agencies. Limitations to this study include a small sample size, which limited its generalizability to a wider population in general. Recommendations include implementation of cross-training across agencies or better understanding of basic education in mental health and the impacts it has on youths' environment and decision making.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to our research advisor Dr. Yawen Li, for her invaluable knowledge, guidance, supervision, patience, and who served as an excellent role model over the duration of this research. Her advice and direction enabled us to reach our best potential. Thank you.

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-Elizabeth Padilla and Valerie Mercado

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-Elizabeth Padilla

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-Valerie Mercado
DEDICATION

To my loving mother, Virginia.

-Valerie Mercado

I would like to dedicate this research Project to my siblings, Irma and Max, who have been my pillars of strength throughout my academic journey. Your unwavering support and encouragement have helped me achieve my goals, and I am forever grateful for that. Your guidance, advice, and love have shaped my values and growth. I am incredibly proud and honored to be your sister. Thank you for always being there for me.

-Elizabeth Padilla
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CHAPTER ONE

PROBLEM FORMULATION

Direct social service workers face different barriers when working with incarcerated youth. These barriers pose many complexities and challenges for a youth’s future as they reenter society. Direct social service workers serve as liaisons between incarcerated youth and needed resources and services to aid in reestablishing functionality and acclamation upon re-entry into their communities and with their families. There is nearly 50,000 confined youth across the United States. For every 100,000 people, there is an average of 200 incarcerated youth (Sawyer, 2019).

Direct social service workers face various challenges when working with incarcerated youth and different agencies, which pose challenges to facilitating services. According to Family Engagement in The Juvenile Justice System (2014), it is imperative that incarcerated youth have the support of their family. It has been demonstrated that it improves youth outcomes and has beneficial effects that safeguard against harmful influences. In offering mental health services, connection to effective resources, and life coping skills, the goal is to encourage rehabilitation outcomes and have a better understanding and knowledge of the work that direct social services workers, probation, justice systems, and family share. These goals can be accomplished by cross-training and exercising cross-collaboration efforts.
Integrating family engagement within schools, communities, and community-based organizations with direct social service workers and law enforcement is a preventive component for youth incarceration and their success upon re-entry after incarceration (Ruch & Yoder, 2017). However, direct social service workers face barriers to family engagement due to different factors. Families experience feelings of shame for receiving services as they often are made to feel they are responsible for the youth's behavior that led to delinquency. Along with families facing blame, a cultural and stigma component also affects their involvement in the youth's re-entry process.

Families, especially in low socioeconomic communities, are exposed to constant stress due to the stigmas that follow the youth's actions and are labeled criminals (Burke et al., 2014). These factors cause families to feel shame and embarrassment, leading to them shunning away from their youth and even preventing them from returning home to a safe environment (Walker et al., 2015). Furthermore, many youths who experience incarceration come from home environments where they experience familial abuse and maltreatment, hindering parental engagement as they are the perpetrators (Goldkind, 2011). Direct social service workers continue to experience these factors as a perpetuating divide between family engagement and direct social services.

As part of re-entry for youths leaving the juvenile justice system, they must adhere to a court order probationary period. As youth navigate the conditions of probation, direct social service workers encounter barriers in collaboration with
probation departments. Such barriers are that direct social service workers are viewed as incompetent in enforcing punitive court recommendations and geared towards a more therapeutic and intermediation approach (Peters, 2011). Also, this is counterintuitive to the juvenile justice and delinquency prevention Act of 1974, which aimed to steer clear of children going through official disciplinary processes that adults face (Underwood & Washington, 2016). Instead of being incarcerated in large-scale centers, children would enter community-based programs (Underwood & Washington, 2016). However, a change of attitude toward offending juvenile youth and their treatment emerged in 1990 (Underwood & Washington, 2016). Punishment and criminalization, as opposed to rehabilitation for youth, was the new perspective (Underwood & Washington, 2016).

These new policies that individuals created within the justice system left room for social workers to observe but not participate (Reardon, 2021). The coercive climate of corrections has grown even less friendly for direct social service workers. This discipline continues to battle for legitimacy as a profession, with the perception that youth progress is unattainable (Severson, 1994). Probation departments avoided social service approaches due to the fear of losing their credibility as a profession (D. S. Young & LoMonaco, 2001). The continued issues at the macro level that direct social service workers face are the disconnect of needs for education, community-based services, mental health services, substance use recovery, probation, and the juvenile justice system.
(Howell et al., 2004). The macro level issues such as the lack of understanding of how to implement an all-inclusive knowledge-based collaboration between agencies, and a lack of understanding of service rendering that can promote positive rehabilitation outcomes and bridge the gap in services and resources, would stand to benefit from direct social service workers’ presence, competence, and skills.

Direct social service workers strive to establish cohesive working relationships on a macro-level approach, centered on bridging a youth's support system between families and the juvenile justice system. However, history shows that there has been a long-standing divide between family engagement and the juvenile justice system because of the family's perception that the system is not credible in practice (Walker et al., 2015). A review of previous studies evaluating parents' impressions of the justice system suggests that many parents do not perceive the system as fair or convincing.

A recent national survey of parents was conducted, and according to Amani et al., (2018), many families feel chastised by the system and develop a sense of guilt because of the stigma of "poor parenting." When families make efforts to participate, they are frequently insulted, dismissed, and held responsible for their child's behavior without considering what external and systemic factors contribute to the behaviors (Walker et al., 2015). Direct social service workers constantly struggle with these barriers when attempting to
provide effective services and instead, find resistance amongst families and
continuity with the juvenile justice system.

This study's findings will have significant implications on a micro and
macro level for the barriers direct social service workers face when working with
incarcerated youth. Direct social service workers working with incarcerated youth
stand to contribute effective services to youths and families on a micro-level by
ensuring that their needs are being met by advocating and guiding healthier
interaction within the family function and therapies. Also, at the macro level,
Direct social services workers can have significant influence in fixing existing
social and systemic problems by working in conjunction with collaborating service
agencies such as probation departments, the juvenile justice system,
communities service providers, social welfare systems, and families (Jamir Singh
& Azman, 2020).

The NASW Code of Ethics for social workers is "The primary mission of
the social work profession is to enhance human well-being and help meet the
basic human needs of all people, with particular attention to the needs and
empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed" (Peters, 2011). This
Code of Ethics exemplifies what youth need upon re-entry into society and the
core of why a person becomes a direct social service worker. Furthermore,
developing cohesion and healthier professional relationships while maintaining
the integrity of sustaining the NASW ethical standards within their competence
and duty to service.
The current study will address the following question: What barriers do
direct social service workers face while working with incarcerated youth?
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will consist of four sections, including a synthesis of the literature on the barriers Direct social service workers face while working with incarcerated youth, identifying gaps in the literature and limitations, and a critical analysis of theoretical perspectives guiding this research.

The need for social work in working with incarcerated youth has been long-standing absenteeism due to a divide between agencies and families. The following studies indicate the barriers between direct social service workers and family engagement, probation, and family engagement within the Juvenile Justice System. The studies that are being reviewed span across the United States; however, a common theme seems to arise with direct social service workers struggling for acknowledgment in their profession (Severson, 1994). Consequently, with these struggles, incarcerated youth are also being affected upon re-entry due to the lack of cohesiveness between agencies and the lack of recognition and importance of direct social service workers within these three domains.

Lack of Continuity Among Facilities, Families, and Direct Social Service Work Involvement

There are inconsistencies among re-entry community-based providers, probation, and juvenile facilities in their approach to preparing juvenile offenders
for re-entry upon release (Frederick, 1999). These issues in divergent paths with family engagement have shown little difference in recidivism rates. Therefore, there needs to be more effort in lessening the divide between direct social service workers and developing continuity between facilities to strengthen institutional transition in youth offender’s re-entry back into their communities (Frederick, 1999). According to Nelson, Deess, & Allen (2011), youth offenders and parole officers expressed the need for pre-release planning services such as obtaining job assistance by helping gain job skills and connecting youth offenders to education, essential documentation for identification purposes, medical evaluations, and links for medical and mental health services, and community service providers. However, in the study conducted by Peters (2011), juvenile corrections and probation raised the tension that eventually discouraged direct social service workers from collaborating with these agencies.

Consequently, these agencies' lack of direct social service workers pushed probation to fill the responsibilities ambivalently with no training. Therefore, probation is at fault for not effectively delivering essential services that would enhance re-entry opportunities for youth offenders. The actions were taken by probation not to jeopardize credibility in their efficacy, and they decided to withdraw from reestablishing direct social service workers back into practice (Young & LoMonaco, 2001). Integrated services often work independently and are often unaware of what services they each provide (O’Neill et al., 2017). In assisting youth with the overarching issues, collaboration between agencies is
imperative to assist in the reemergence into society (Zajac et al., 2015). Continuity between juvenile facilities, probation, family engagement, and direct social service workers is essential in cross-referencing connections so incarcerated youth are helped upon release. Community-based organizations have access to help obtain needed documents and help prepare pre-release planning that is consistent with their mission statement and services (Nelson et al., 2011).

Gaps in The Literature and Limitations

Limited research that explicitly discusses the barriers direct social service workers face when working with incarcerated youth, such as the involvement within the juvenile justice system, probation, and family engagement, for youth upon re-entry into society. This study will conduct research on the barriers to direct social workers’ experience with a lack of collaboration within the juvenile justice system, probation, and family engagement, which involves education, after-care services, and family involvement upon re-entry.

In an extensive study of social work within the Juvenile justice system, Jamir Singh, & Azman (2020) looked to identify the gaps in services provided by direct social service workers. The authors achieve this by researching the barriers direct social service workers encounter within the system and engaging families. To effectively reunify youths with families and provide adequate services, with a non-punitive approach by probation, it must be done collaboratively across agencies. The previously mentioned barriers hinder the
youth's abilities to successfully reenter society when not addressed, and unfortunately, this is a common thread that eventually leads to recidivism. For purposes of this study, information from the Transition Services for incarcerated youth stated that there were some inefficiencies within the agencies and a lack of services such as life skills training that provided little assistance in obtaining adequate services for effective transition and sustainability and categorized this as a gap, (Abrams et al., 2008).

Youths, upon re-entry, need to fulfill a required court-appointed transitional rehabilitation-oriented program for 9-12 months (Abrams et al., 2008). This specific program focuses on anger management, substance abuse treatment, cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), educational rehabilitation (vocational and technical), and daily group meetings (Abrams et al., 2008). However, a limitation of this study found that the discrepancies derived from staff's lack of program development and after-care support are a common theme in developing mistrust and a lack of confidence in youth towards staff (Abrams et al., 2008). This limitation is congruent with the overall need for direct social service workers upon re-entry to serve as a liaison between the juvenile justice system and other services agencies, including probation (Abrams et al., 2008).

The gaps in the literature review provide evidence that is in line with the barriers direct social service workers face between probation, the juvenile justice system, and family engagement. The following section will examine the need for direct social service workers’ presence and the need to provide services. There
has been a long history of disconnect between social services, juvenile justice agencies, and families that youths need upon re-entry. Direct social service workers, in recent years, have pushed for a more active presence within the community, family engagement, and juvenile justice agencies; however, the sight has been stealth progress due to the perception that direct social service workers lack the ability to relate to barriers youth face during incarceration and the justice system processes (Peters, 2011).

Direct social services workers are viewed as having a negligible presence as a vital component of the system, making it difficult for direct social service workers to embed themselves in services. Literature throughout this review has shown that there is a misunderstood perception. However, with more support and knowledge of the positive impact direct social service workers have as service providers to incarcerated youth, direct social service workers will slowly continue to increase interest in incorporating services across the spectrum (Peters, 2011).

Theories Guiding Conceptualization

The theory used to conceptualize this study's ideas is Systems Theory. Systems theory is described as the intersection of the influence of multiple related systems (Bowers & Bowers, 2017). The practice of Systems Theory allows direct social service workers to take a comprehensive view of a client's circumstances and surrounding variables in order to better understand why they experience problems or struggles. When practitioners of social work or similar disciplines examine their clients, they view them through a wide lens and are
mindful of all the complexities that make them up (Bowers & Bowers, 2017). This means that certain traits of the whole—the complex system—cannot be simply explained or rationalized when looking at any one of its systems—its part (Bowers & Bowers, 2017). Instead, they must be considered in the context of how smaller systems interact with the larger complex system.

Systems Theory assists in understanding the complexities that direct social service workers face when working with families, probation, and the juvenile justice system. In order to better understand issues, interactions must be examined to determine how they arise, persist, and how patterns must also be examined to determine whether they can persist over time (Smith-Acuna, 2011). In order to maintain the harmful interaction patterns that prevent the agencies or family units that make up the specific system from moving on to more productive and fulfilling activities, direct social service practitioners must analyze the various repetitive links that, regardless of the agency in question, keep the loop locked in place (Bowers & Bowers, 2017). Direct social service workers can utilize this theory to better understand the agencies they interact with; and the steps needed to build better collaboration to provide supportive services for incarcerated youth.

Summary

The need for direct social service workers as liaisons as re-entry approaches for the youth is essential in collaboration with families and juvenile justice agencies. A pre-release plan is vital for preparing for re-entry and the success of the youth's prospects. Direct social service workers are the conduit
between the juvenile justice system, probation, community agencies, and family engagement (Peters, 2011). The macro-level experience of a direct social service worker is crucial in establishing relationships and cross-referencing services for the success of the youth. Direct social service workers have the knowledge and education to engage families and help reunify by providing the skills necessary for communication and understanding the potential barriers the youth may face after incarceration (Jamir Singh & Azman, 2020). Also, direct social service workers' ability to implement therapeutic modalities can be a driving force in the rehabilitation aspect of the youth's outcome and success. The overarching goal of a direct social service worker is to have the resources available and cohesive relationships with families, communities, service agencies, and juvenile justice agencies to meet the needs of each youth and lower the chances of recidivism (Jamir Singh & Azman, 2020).
CHAPTER THREE

INTRODUCTION

The method section discusses methodological choices and the design of the study. This chapter is comprised of the details of how this study was carried out. Sections discussed are study design, sampling, data collection & instruments, procedures, protection of human subjects, and data analysis.

Study Design

This study identified barriers that direct social service workers face when working with incarcerated youth in the United States. An exploratory research project conducted, and a qualitative study was employed to gather insight to help identify barriers direct social service workers face. Therefore, we utilized individual one-on-one interviews and used open ended questions as a tool to collect data.

The strength in using a qualitative exploratory approach allowed for exploring concentrated professional expertise and experience on this topic. This provided the ability for the participant to have a safe place that allowed unrestricted free responses. Individual one-on-one interviews allowed participants to share insight into barriers they face and not limit their viewpoint while working with incarcerated youth. It allowed greater depths to access their own personal beliefs and opinions on the barriers they face. One limitation to this study was that one-on-one interviews were time consuming. Such that each interview required a minimum of 45 minutes to one-hour of data collecting.
Sampling

A non-probability sampling of employed and retired direct social service workers that have worked in the field with juvenile justice clients were utilized in this study. Direct social service workers who participated were from the United States. Interviews were requested from willing participants. A total of 8 participants were interviewed for one-on-one interviews.

Data Collection and Instruments

Qualitative data was collected by utilizing Zoom meeting space, where one-on-one interviews responses were recorded visually as well as transcribed through features within Zoom. At the beginning of each interview, the participants were introduced to the study and given a description of the purpose. Data collection of demographic information was solicited (see appendix B), by each participant and covered age, gender identification, ethnicity, number of experienced years working with incarcerated youth.

Researchers utilized open-ended questions during one-on-one interviews as listed in the one-on-one interview guideline sheet in Appendix C. Development of the one-on-one interview guideline tool was created specifically for this study. The purpose of the interviewing tool was to extract individual experiences and insight with social workers within this domain.

The one-on-one interview guideline focused on three areas where direct social service workers face barriers when working with incarcerated youth. These areas in question are family engagement, a collaboration of services with
probation, and the disconnect between the juvenile justice system and family engagement.

Researchers clarified questions needed by participants as well as probed participants with questions to gather more insight. Additional steps were taken by researchers to ensure that participants did not deter away from probed questions so much so that it took away time from the established research questions.

Procedures

Researchers created a flyer for the purpose of introducing the study and what goals were achieved. An additional purpose of the flyer was to request participation from direct social service workers who have previously worked with incarcerated youth or who are currently working with incarcerated youth. Contact information for both researchers are listed on the flyer so participants can schedule their one-on-one interview times. Researchers scheduled time slots to introduce the study and answered any questions participants had prior to starting the study. Emails were sent out with a schedule link so that participants can reserve a designated interview date and time that worked best for their schedule.

Zoom links were created to reserve the designated date and time for one-on-one individual interviews. Participants were given the option of choosing a morning or afternoon time slot for their interview time. Each individual interview lasted approximately 30-45 minutes.

Participants logged into their individual Zoom interviews and received a link in the chat box where they filled out a demographic and consent form. A brief
introduction was conducted as well as the confidentiality within the study. Researchers collected completed consent and demographic forms. Researchers announced when the recording was in progress and stated that the interview had begun. Participants completed the interview and researchers thanked them for their participation and debriefed each interviewee. Participants were emailed the debriefing statement for their records.

Protection of Human Subjects

Protection measures were taken to ensure that participants’ rights and privacy are protected in this study. Participants were briefed prior to the study’s purpose and goals. Participants were informed that they are voluntarily participating in this study and that they may choose to opt out of this study or decline to answer questions at any time. Participants were asked to sign an informed consent (Appendix A) form for their participation in this study as well as consent to the interview being recorded in its entirety. Each video interview recording was given a pseudonym to protect the identity of each participant.

Data collected from each interview including demographic data, is kept confidential and stored on the California State University, San Bernardino Cloud. Participation in Zoom interviews required a meeting identification number to access the site to ensure security of the interview. All recorded records including paper, video, and electronic, are held by ethical standards and are kept confidential and safe by using passcodes to access data.
Participants were informed that Master Social Work students, Elizabeth Padilla and Valerie Mercado were conducting this study and worked under the supervision of Dr. Yawen Li. All participants were made aware that this study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Participants were informed that recorded interviews, demographic data, and any additional documentation is to be destroyed after 3 years from the completion of the study.

Data Analysis

Data collected in individual one-on-one interviews was analyzed using thematic analysis. Video recorded interviews were transcribed in written format using transcription features within Zoom application. Researchers reviewed each interview transcription to ensure that transcribing feature within Zoom application transcribed verbatim. Participants interviews were designated a code to differentiate from other interviewees responses. Descriptive statistics from demographic surveys were analyzed and include age, gender identification, ethnicity, number of experienced years working with incarcerated youth, job title, and county placement.

Statements were classified and coded under three domains which include agency/organization barriers, inconsistency of collaboration across agencies, and family engagement. Codes were assigned to themes that arose within each domain and transcribed to a key code list. Additional coding was assigned to the differences found in between the domains. Each individual statement was
classified under their corresponding domain and transferred into a document with their assigned codes.

Summary

This study examined the barriers that direct social service workers faced while working with incarcerated youth. Interviews engaged direct social service workers in dialogue and their viewpoints as to where barriers lie and therefore this information contributes to the limited data available. The collection of data was facilitated through one-on-one interviews as well as the gathering of demographic information through a survey. This chapter explained the interview guide as well as the analysis that took place. Also, protected participant information and the security measures used to ensure data is protected and confidential were described in this chapter. A qualitative method was used which facilitated this study.
CHAPTER FOUR
RESULTS

This chapter outlines the findings of the research project. 8 (5 female, 3 male) participants were recruited during a three-month period: December 2022 through February 2023. Demographic information was collected for all 8 participants as well as an in-depth interview. Ages ranged from 31 to 60 years old with (M=40.5, SD=9.01). Participants consisted of two Hispanic, two Caucasian, one African American, one African American/Caucasian, one Filipino, and one Hispanic/Caucasian. Participants' work experience ranged from 3 to 15 years (M=7.31, SD=3.67). A series of 8 open-ended questions were asked to each participant, and interview times varied between twenty-five to thirty-eight minutes long. Questions regarding working experience with incarcerated youth, family engagement, collaboration between agencies, as well as personal experiences working with probation were asked.

Themes

Three major themes emerged from the data which included challenges in engaging families, lack of understanding between direct social service workers, probation, and each other's work, and challenges associated with collaboration between agencies. (See table 1)
Table 1.  
*Three major themes identified in this study.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
<th>Quote</th>
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| 1. Challenges in Engaging Families | Direct social server workers face challenges engaging families which hinders the continuity of family support for the youth | **P1** "With certain family members or with some of these youth, having consistent and reliable communication was probably one of the biggest issues."  
**P3** "It's limited resources for transportation."  
**P6** "A lot of parents say, you know, my kids are in jail, but the parents don't really understand the process." |
| 2. Lack of Understanding Between direct Social Services Workers, Probation, and Each other's work | There is a lack of understanding between direct social services workers and probation in how they view each other's service approach due to different training and education backgrounds. | **P1** "Some of the attitudes with some of the probation officers is a little bit, for some of them, less than sympathetic in some ways where in our mental health, our direct social services, we're looking at so many different factors as the reasons for their involvement with us or why they are on probation."  
**P2** "Not a priority, not a need but in general, there is not a good understanding of therapeutic needs or rehabilitation."  
**P4** "There are some probation officers that just don't want to hear about mental health like they did a crime, they need to do the time."  
"So, if they're open to get the education. Like I said, wraparound was a mental health program, and you need us, right? So, let's work together. If you're willing to learn our system, we definitely will be willing to learn yours." |
| 3. Challenges Associated with Collaboration between Agencies | Different goals and priorities with direct social services, probation, and the justice system can lead to conflicts in collaboration efforts in rendering services to youth. | **P6** "Sometimes you can connect with one and not with the other, not all probation officers are readily available.  
**P7** "The justice system and the judge kind of okays that the collaboration starts there, because then the probation officer will present the case, talk about the case, and then social services, probation and the family all go to juvenile hall and meet with the youth and start the process of how we are going to be able to make this successful."  
**P4** "And there was even a time when, as a department and in our bigger program, our supervisor were like, let's try to set up meetings with the judges and district attorneys to see if they are willing to just sit at a table with us and ask us questions and stuff." |
**Theme 1: Challenges in Engaging Families**

Direct social service workers have trouble connecting with families, which interferes with the youth’s continued access to family support. Participants were asked about ways they were able to engage families of incarcerated youth. One of the most significant difficulties participants mentioned was how challenging it was to identify how direct social service workers would communicate with a family member or caretaker of the youth. Participant 1 stated:

“With certain family members or with some of these youth, having consistent and reliable communication was probably one of the biggest issues. And then also making sure that they are equipped and operate with a level of transparency that they understand not only what I’m saying to them, but it’s understood that they’re able to respond back and they are equipped to respond.”

Participant 1 also expressed that not all family members or caretakers have a consistent or reliable means of communication due to their socioeconomic status.

“One of the biggest things, especially with some of our families that were maybe in a lower socioeconomic situation, they had issues with maintaining a phone bill or maintaining the phone service.”

Additionally, participants expressed that families often don’t understand the system or the services available to the youth or how their participation is vital to the outcome of the youth’s success. Participant 6 stated:
“A lot of parents say, you know, my kids are in jail, but the parents don't really understand the process. All they see is, it's a punishment for a crime they committed, which in essence, it is. But let's look at why they did it, and if we had a role in it, what can we do differently if they come out, as opposed to what we did last time or, you know, how can we sort of facilitate some change in these young adults, so they don't become part of that revolving door.”

Furthermore, Participant 3 expressed that the system can be more inclusive of families, such that they would make facilities and transportation more accessible so that families would be able to have more contact with the youth and render support. Participant 3 stated:

“It's limited resources for transportation. And then a lot of the areas at these camps, at least where I worked, were located there. Not like the bus is going to take you to the top of the hill. They are going to leave you a mile away, and then you figure out how to get over there. They didn't really have anything set up to make that easy either.”

**Theme 2: Lack of Understanding Between Direct Social Service Workers, Probation, and Each Other's Work**

The importance of having continuity between direct social service workers and probation in rendering services, is to support rehabilitative outcomes to enhance the youth’s success. Probation officers may underestimate the
significance of resolving underlying social conditions that contribute to criminal behavior. Similarly, Social workers may be unaware of the legal limits and procedures that probation officers must follow when working with youths. Participants expressed that there was a lack of understanding and knowledge between direct social service workers and probation regarding the importance of rendering mental health services to support rehabilitation outcomes. Participant 4 shared:

“There are some probation officers that just don't want to hear about mental health like they did a crime, they need to do the time. So, if they're open to get the education, like I said, wraparound was a mental health program, and you need us, right? So, let's work together. If you're willing to learn our system, we definitely will be willing to learn yours.”

Subsequently, Participant 2 expressed how there was a lack of humane behavior in the way probation conducted violations with little regard for input from direct social service workers.

“There was a lot of bittersweets, I guess. I can't find a word to exactly explain it." "Obviously, we believe in rehabilitation. Let's get services, let's address the issue. But for probation, that was a totally different thing. It was like, no, you tested dirty, you violated, you're out. There was no rehabilitation. And within that it was more the law.”
Furthermore, participant 5, shared the perceptions placed on them by probation and how it digresses common knowledge and hinders the opportunities that promote a better understanding of each other’s work.

“In my opinion, I think they think, were emotional, like cupcakes, I don’t know how else to describe that, I think they think that we are lenient, and I also think they think that we're overly cautious. I was going to say overly dramatic, but the way they view a kid’s situation or a crime that they committed compared to how we view it and what we're looking at as far as risk for our service providers, risk for us and staff, risk for other peers in the home, risk replacement, they may feel and see it a little differently.”

**Theme 3: Challenges Associated with Collaboration Between Agencies**

A considerable challenge communicated by participants was that scheduling was found to be difficult across agencies. Trying to set up meetings to collaborate and gain a better understanding of each agency’s processes was essential but difficult to assemble. Participant 4 stated:

“And there was even a time when, as a department and in our bigger program, our supervisor were like, let's try to set up meetings with the judges and district attorneys to see if they are willing to just sit at a table with us and ask us questions and stuff. Because if they could understand a little bit, it worked for a little bit, but scheduling was always really tough.”
In contrast, other participants stated that they were able to establish consistent collaboration between agencies, where the goal is to work for the common good of the youth.

“There is a kind of like a referral process, right? So, a juvenile who is at juvenile hall and on probation would be kind of referred through the probation department to wraparound. The justice system and the judge kind of okays that the collaboration starts there, because then the probation officer will present the case, talk about the case, and then social services, probation and the family all go to juvenile hall and meet with the youth and start the process of how we are going to be able to make this successful. We develop a safe plan. We talk about what's going to happen when the youth come out. We basically kind of develop a plan and collaborate together from the beginning on what this looks like and what what's it going to take in order for this to be successful.”

In addition, Participant 8 had similar experiences in collaboration with probation.

“Similarly, the probation officers would also make recommendations, you know, because they kind of know they've developed some, especially the probation officers inside, they've developed this rapport with the youth. And so, if they're going to go back to the neighborhood where they got in trouble and where their gang is from, they might request an alternative. Even though they may have family support, sometimes family support and
the environment where the family lives are not necessarily the best option for them.”

Summary
This chapter compiles and summarizes the findings of individual interviews. Participants' demographic information was provided. During the interviews, the following themes were identified: challenges in engaging families, a lack of understanding between direct social service workers, probation, and each other's work, and Challenges associated with collaboration between agencies. The researcher employed a qualitative technique to learn about the barriers that direct social service workers experience when working with incarcerated youth.
CHAPTER FIVE

INTRODUCTION

This chapter outlines the discussion, its significance for direct social service workers and their collaboration between probation, families, and the juvenile justice system, limitations, recommendations, future research, and a conclusion.

Discussion

This research was conducted to expand the understanding of the barriers direct social service workers experience while working with incarcerated youth. From the research that was conducted it was found that three major themes emerged, which include challenges in engaging families, lack of understanding between direct social service workers, probation, and each other's work, and the challenges associated with collaboration between agencies.

Theme 1: In the current study, the results conclude that family engagement has numerous challenges for various reasons. Some being that parents lack an understanding of the juvenile justice system and how the system works. This falls in line with findings from Family Engagement in Juvenile Justice (2018), where many families lack a basic understanding of the legal system's procedures and hold misconceptions about the system's goals and the obligations of the professionals they come into contact with. Participants in the current study expressed that parents are unaware of how systems work and that
because they do not know their rights as a parent, they do not attempt to advocate for their child.

According to Family Engagement in Juvenile Justice (2018), families can also lack the financial and social resources required to care for their kids and fully engage in the services the legal system provides. This was consistent with participants that expressed the majority of the families they worked with came from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Participants expressed that some families struggled to keep up with monthly phone bills that would allow them to engage in weekly contact with youth who were incarcerated. Other participants expressed that family members did not have reliable transportation, that family members shared one car, or that families did not even own a car. This made it challenging for parents to engage not only with their child but to attend mandatory meetings with direct social service workers, probation, and the courts. Participant 3 also expressed that family members often had other younger children at home and expressed the difficulty in finding and paying for childcare in order to make in-person visits with their child that was incarcerated.

Theme 2: The results of this study show persistent challenges in the lack of understanding between direct social service workers, probation, and each other’s work. The view that each entity has of each other has become a barrier in rendering services to youth and has continued to divide potential collaborations. This falls in line with the finding by Peters (2011) the social work nature for therapeutic approaches is incompatible with the coercive nature of probation,
therefore hindering rehabilitative outcomes due to the lingering ambivalence of the punitive approach probation has exercised within corrections and the justice system.

Direct social service workers continue to strive to integrate the core essence of their educational practice of rehabilitation through mental health therapeutic approaches and cross-training ideals in order to merge gaps between agencies and establish effective cross-collaborations. Participants in the current study expressed a lack of understanding and knowledge between direct social service workers and probation regarding the importance of providing mental health services to support rehabilitation outcomes. Other participants expressed that the perception placed on direct social service workers by probation hinders their ability to be taken seriously and is not taken into account as a collaborative effort when working with youth.

Theme 3: Lastly, participants reported that a significant issue was attempting to schedule meetings to collaborate and better understand each agency’s operations. Nonetheless, the majority of direct social service workers in the current study reported having trouble with scheduling meetings and follow-ups pertaining to the incarcerated youth’s questions in regard to court documents and reports as well as questions direct social service workers had for probation. Some participants expressed that probation officers weren’t always available for updates or follow-up information needed to provide services, therefore some participants found it challenging to establish and communicate in order to
collaborate with all agencies. The same concerns were described in the study conducted by O'Neil et. al., (2017) in that when integrated services operate separately, they frequently aren't aware of the services that each one of them offers. Therefore, in order to cross-reference links and assist incarcerated youth, there must be continuity between the juvenile justice department, probation, family involvement, and direct social service workers.

Conversely, in contrast to a few participants who stated that the collaboration between the juvenile justice system, probation, families, and direct social service workers cohesively worked together in efforts to support the youth. Some participants expressed that it was necessary for probation and supportive families of the youth to be in all meetings conducted by direct social services workers since both agencies shared the same client and the same goals. It was also expressed that direct social services workers were integrated into probation meetings for the same reasons, which is to build a collaborative relationship and for the genuine success of the youth completing their probation.

Limitations

One of the limitations found in this study was the small sample size of eight participants. The sample size that was gathered can be utilized as a preliminary foundation, yet it cannot be applied to a wider population in general. The lack of participants can be due to time constraints and the unforeseen rescheduling of interview times by participants. Acquiring participants with extensive experience working directly with incarcerated youth, probation,
families, and the juvenile justice system would prove to be beneficial to future research. Propositions for future researchers may be to continue utilizing the snowball effect when searching for participants.

Recommendations

By developing interconnected and healthier professional relationships, direct social service workers maintain integrity and sustain the NASW ethical standards within the competence and duty to service by engaging in inclusivity. It is imperative that cross-training needs to be implemented across agencies so that there is a better understanding of basic education in mental health and how it impacts a youth's environment and decision-making. Therefore, implementing cross-training provides for open communication and a more productive collaborative effort between agencies. Participants continually expressed the need for collaboration between probation, the juvenile justice system, and direct social service workers in that it would ultimately be a huge step in understanding the commonalities within agencies and developing continuity in rendering services to youth. Direct social service workers strive to cohesively establish working relationships and be centered on bridging a youth's support system between families, probation, and the juvenile justice system.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the barriers direct social service workers face while working with incarcerated youth. The importance of
offering mental health services is to promote rehabilitation outcomes and the lack of understanding and knowledge between direct social service workers and probation were the key concerns participants mentioned. Furthermore, the lack of cross-collaboration and cross-training continues to accentuate gaps in services and resources rendered to youth. This study recognizes that further studies would be beneficial in understanding the lack of continuity between agencies and the need for exploring alternative approaches to better understand and implement an all-inclusive knowledge base collaboration between agencies.
APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT
A Qualitative Study of Social Workers in the United States

INFORMED CONSENT

The study in which you are asked to participate is designed to explore the barriers Direct Social Service Workers face while working with incarcerated youth in the United States. The study is being conducted by Elizabeth Padilla and Valerie Mercado, Master of Social Work students at California State University, San Bernardino (CSUSB). The study will be supervised by Dr. Yawen Li, Associate Professor in the School of Social Work at CSUSB. This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at California State University, San Bernardino.

PURPOSE: The purpose of the study is to examine the barriers Direct Social Service Worker face while working with incarcerated youth.

DESCRIPTION: Participants will be asked a few questions about the impact of social services and family engagement, probation, and the Juvenile Justice System, and some demographics.

PARTICIPATION: Your participation in the study is totally voluntary. You can refuse to participate in the study or discontinue your participation at any time without any consequences. You may also choose to skip any of the questions.

You can participate in this interview if you are:

1. At least 18 years of age or older.
2. A Direct Social Service Worker currently working with incarcerated youth or have previously worked with incarcerated youth

CONFIDENTIALITY: Your responses will remain confidential, and data will be reported in group form only. Your identity will be protected by keeping all records and materials confidential with coded numbers on California State University, San Bernardino Google Drive that is password protected. Your name or contact information will not be used in any data entry or analysis.

DURATION: It will take about 30 - 45 minutes to complete the interview. Our conversation may be digitally audio recorded, transcribed, and analyzed.

Please write your initials if you approve to be digitally audio/video-recorded ________.

RISKS: Participation in this interview exposes you to minimal risk of breach of confidentiality. However, all records and research materials that identify you will be de-identified and held confidential. 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, but the results of the study will provide critical insights on the barriers that Direct Social Service Workers face while working with incarcerated youth.
CONTACT: If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Dr. Yawen Li through email at Yawen.Li@csusb.edu

RESULTS: Results of the study will be presented in social work conferences and published in a peer-reviewed journal and/or book.

INFORMED CONSENT:
- I have read the contents of the consent form and have listened to the verbal explanation given by the investigator
- My questions concerning this study have been answered to my satisfaction. This protocol has been explained to me at a level that I can comprehend.
- Signing this consent document does not waive my rights nor does it release the investigator, institution from their responsibilities
- I hereby give voluntary consent to participate in this interview

This is to certify that I read the above and I am 18 years or older.

Place an X mark here ________________ Date ________________
APPENDIX B

DEMOGRAPHICS
Demographics:

Age: What is your age?
   a. 18-25
   b. 26-35
   c. 36-40
   d. 41-50
   e. 51 and older

Ethnicity (or race)
   a. Hispanic/ Latino
   b. American Indian or Alaska Native
   c. Asian
   d. Black or African American
   e. Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
   f. White
   g. Two or more races
   h. Other: (please specify) __________________________
   i. Prefer not to answer

Gender:
   a. Male
   b. Female
   c. Specify: ______________
   d. Prefer not to answer

How many years of experience do you have working with incarcerated youth?
APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
Interview Questions:

1- Tell us about your experience working with this youth.
2- How is your experience working with incarcerated youths’ family or relatives?
3- What kinds of things have you done to engage family or relatives of incarcerated youth?
4- What has been your experience working with probation while working with incarcerated youth upon reentry?
5- What differences or similarities do Direct Social Service Workers and probation share?
6- What services were utilized to engage families with the Juvenile Justice System?
7- How is Direct Social services viewed by probation?
8- Can you describe your level of collaboration between Juvenile Justice System, probation, and family engagement?
APPENDIX D

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL
October 7, 2022

CSUSB INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
Administrative/Exempt Review Determination
Status: Determined Exempt
IRB-FY2022-241

Yawan Li Valerie Mercado, Elizabeth Padilla
CSBS - Social Work
California State University, San Bernardino
5500 University Parkway
San Bernardino, California 92407

Dear Yawan Li Valerie Mercado, Elizabeth Padilla:

Your application to use human subjects, titled "Exploring the barriers social workers face when working with incarcerated youth" has been reviewed and determined exempt by the Chair of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of CSU, San Bernardino. An exempt determination means your study has met the federal requirements for exempt status under 45 CFR 46.104. The CSUSB IRB has weighed the risks and benefits of the study to ensure the protection of human participants.

This approval notice does not replace any departmental or additional campus approvals which may be required including access to CSUSB campus facilities and affiliate campuses. Investigators should consider the changing COVID-19 circumstances based on current CDC, California Department of Public Health, and campus guidance and submit appropriate protocol modifications to the IRB as needed. CSUSB campus and affiliate health screenings should be completed for all campus human research related activities. Human research activities conducted at off-campus sites should follow CDC, California Department of Public Health, and local guidance. See CSUSB's COVID-19 Prevention Plan for more information regarding campus requirements.

You are required to notify the IRB of the following as mandated by the Office of Human Research Protections (OHRP) federal regulations 45 CFR 46 and CSUSB IRB policy. The forms (modification, renewal, unanticipated/adverse event, study closure) are located in the Cayuse IRB System with instructions provided on the IRB Applications, Forms, and Submission webpage. Failure to notify the IRB of the following requirements may result in disciplinary action. The Cayuse IRB system will notify you when your protocol is due for renewal. Ensure you file your protocol renewal and continuing review form through the Cayuse IRB system to keep your protocol current and active unless you have completed your study.

- Ensure your CITI Human Subjects Training is kept up-to-date and current throughout the study.
• Submit a protocol modification (change) if any changes (no matter how minor) are proposed in your study for review and approval by the IRB before being implemented in your study.
• Notify the IRB within 5 days of any unanticipated or adverse events are experienced by subjects during your research.
• Submit a study closure through the Ceyuse IRB submission system once your study has ended.

If you have any questions regarding the IRB decision, please contact Michael Gillespie, the Research Compliance Officer. Mr. Michael Gillespie can be reached by phone at (909) 537-7588, by fax at (909) 537-7028, or by email at mgillesp@csusb.edu. Please include your application approval number IRB-FY2022-241 in all correspondence. Any complaints you receive from participants and/or others related to your research may be directed to Mr. Gillespie.

Best of luck with your research.

Sincerely,

King-To Yeung

King-To Yeung, Ph.D., IRB Chair
CSUSB Institutional Review Board

KY/MG
REFERENCES


ASSIGNED RESPONSIBILITIES

Work was split evenly between both research partners for the entirety of the project. Elizabeth and Valerie collaborated on each chapter and disbursed tasks. Chapter 1, Elizabeth was responsible for the problem formulation section and Valerie was tasked with the purpose of the study and its significance to social work. Both research students contributed to the literature review and worked collaboratively on synthesizing the material to complete chapter 2, literature review. For chapter 3, Valerie was assigned the introduction, study design, sampling, and data collection instruments, while Elizabeth was assigned procedure, protection of human subjects, data analysis, and summary. All interviews were conducted by both research partners where Valerie covered informed consent, confidentiality, and the purpose of the study, and Elizabeth collected demographic information on each participant and led the interviews. Chapter 4 was split evenly and both research partners created themes, organized the data for review, and created the data table. Chapter 5 was divided evenly, and Elizabeth was responsible for the discussion and limitations and Valerie was responsible for recommendations and the conclusion. Both student researchers communicated with each other repeatedly during the process to work collectively on the project and to meet with the adviser for direction.