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Offender Reintegration in Nevada: A Longitudinal Study Focusing on Transitional Challenges, Reentry Capital, and Recidivism

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OFFENDER REINTEGRATION IN NEVADA: A LONGITUDINAL STUDY FOCUSING ON
TRANSITIONAL CHALLENGES, REENTRY CAPITAL, AND RECIDIVISM

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Abstract

Offender reintegration (reentry) depends on offender motivation, public policies, community efforts, and resources provided through government and nonprofit sectors. As individuals are released from incarceration and reintegrate into the community, they are often dependent on resources provided by different service providers and the community. The role of the community is crucial as resources are oftentimes not accessible. Lack of employment and housing, mental health issues, substance abuse, and the inability to reestablish personal relationships diminish the prospects of successful reintegration and increase the chances of reincarceration. Reentry capital delivered through community-based programs addresses the transitional issues justice-impacted individuals encounter post-incarceration. This dissertation explores the areas of reintegration, public policy, and social capital by focusing on reentry outcomes after previously incarcerated persons participated in a community-based reentry program (HOPE for Prisoners). To guide this research, I explored whether employment and participation in the program with a mentor affect reincarceration outcomes and whether individual characteristics and criminal history played a role. To determine whether or not individuals were reincarcerated after participating in a community-based reentry program, individual demographic information, reentry service provision and completion, and reincarceration data were collected at 2 intervals - 18-months and 5 years - post initial program participation. This quantitative analysis examined the program outcomes of employment and reincarceration (recidivism). Findings indicate that measures of program participation, employment attainment, and reincarceration rates were correlated. Also, there was a relationship between the outcome variables and race. This study shows that community support is associated with the trajectories of justice-impacted individuals. Because of the dynamic nature of reentry, it is important to assess how community resources and reentry

capital converge to provide the necessary supportive mechanisms to enhance reentry efforts and create successful reintegration.

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Finally, I thank God for His goodness and redemptive power. Knowing redemption is possible, despite my flaws and frailties, creates a cycle of reciprocity. I am reminded daily to not despise humble beginnings...

"Don't judge a man by where he is, because you don't know how far he has come" (C. S. Lewis).

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Chapter 1: Introduction

To begin, this chapter introduces the issue of reintegration and highlights the problems associated with mass incarceration and the revolving door of reincarceration. Overall, this chapter argues that incarceration leads to prison overcrowding and generates an excessive burden and cost to taxpayers. The strain placed on the criminal justice and penal systems promulgates reentry realities that are often manifested through the challenges justice-impacted individuals face and navigate daily. These challenges necessitate the formulation of solutions within the community to safeguard successful outcomes as justice-impacted individuals navigate the reintegration process.

The Issue of Reintegration Following Incarceration

Offender reintegration, also referred to as reentry, is defined as the process whereby individuals return to, and are acclimated into, their communities after a period of incarceration. This process is complex and contingent on several factors including offender motivation, public policies, community efforts, and resources provided through government and public sectors. As justice-impacted/justice-involved individuals are released after a period of incarceration, it is critical that opportunities are available to assist them while they reacclimate into their communities and become self-sustaining. Justice-impacted or justice-involved individuals

“...include those who have been incarcerated or detained in a prison, immigration detention center, local jail, juvenile detention center, or any other carceral setting, those who have been convicted but not incarcerated, those who have been charged but not convicted, and those who have been arrested” (Bodamer & Langer, 2021, p. #2).

After contact with the carceral system, the outcomes of those interactions create barriers and consequences that alter the experiences of justice-impacted individuals within their communities. The ability to reacclimate establishes the foundation for successful reintegration and disrupts the cycle of reincarceration, which drives prison overcrowding, heightens concerns about the risk to public safety, and amplifies the loss of human capital.

Over recent decades, researchers, legislators, practitioners, and advocates have placed focal emphasis on offender reintegration (reentry) from both a criminal justice and communal perspective. Interest has steadily increased due to the surge of individuals incarcerated, and released after serving time (Alper & Durose, 2018; Willison, Rossman, Lindquist, Walters, Lattimore, Reginal & Yahner, 2018). Approximately, 2.3 million individuals are incarcerated in local jails and prisons, with federal and state prisons housing 1.3 million of these individuals (Carson, 2020). Alper and Durose (2018) noted this level of incarceration equates to a staggering 600,000 people entering U.S. prisons yearly. Based on these numbers, the United States has the fastest-growing prison population and incarcerates more than 25% of the world's prison population (Austin & Irwin, 2012; Raphael, 2009). As result of the growing prison population, it is important to recognize that many incarcerated individuals, approximately 95 percent, will return home after exhausting their sentences with or without post-incarceration restrictions (Muhlhausen, 2016). As individuals return home, the reintegration process becomes complex; so much so that it creates a myriad of challenges for the reentry population post-incarceration.

Reintegration is a byproduct of incarceration. As such, both the criminal justice and penal systems are responsible for directly rehabilitating individuals during incarceration and continuing post-release. According to the extant literature, one of the primary goals of incarceration is to rehabilitate individuals who have committed crimes that harm their communities or others

(Bazemore, 1998; Bazemore & Stinchcomb, 2004). Rehabilitation refers to the process of reforming an individual after they have committed a crime (Skotnicki, 2019). For example, when individuals are incarcerated, their sentence should not only focus on exacting punishment but instead focus should be placed on providing programs and opportunities to assist them in leading a law-abiding life (Forsberg & Douglas, 2022). When incarceration ends, it is important that policymakers and the community step in to assist individuals. In other words, rehabilitation does not end at incarceration; In fact, it continues for years after a prison sentence has ended (Opsal, 2012). As individuals return to their communities, their reintegration is often considered to be a community-level process (Cullen & Gilbert, 2015; Morenoff & Harding, 2014). Therefore, it is important to understand the reintegration process and the challenges that exist. When individuals fail to reintegrate into their communities, they re-offend and return to prison (Muhlhausen, 2016). Such failure has detrimental effects, both on the community, and the already overburdened penal system resulting from mass incarceration (Pitts, Griffin & Johnson, 2014).

Incarceration Trends

National Incarceration Rates

For decades, the United States has held the highest prison population, previously reporting a staggering incarceration rate of 639 per 100,000 residents (Carson, 2018). Currently, the national incarceration rate is 358 per 100,000 residents (Carson, 2021). Within the U.S., national incarceration trends have been described as a massive build-up, with a moderate decline predicted over the next 10 years (Shandnoosh, 2019). However, the Prison Initiative (2020) predicted a mere 1% decline from year to year. According to Carson (2021), at the end of 2020, there was a 15% decline in the number of individuals held in state or federal prisons, compared

to 2019. These latter numbers supported a greater decrease than previously predicted, where 1.21 million individuals were incarcerated in prisons or jails during 2020 as compared to 1.43 million in 2019 (Carson, 2021). These incarceration figures demonstrate the lowest imprisonment rate in the United States for both state and federal institutions since the 1990s. Even with these decreased rates in the prison population, we still incarcerate the most per capita compared to other countries. The unprecedented and largest decrease noted in 2020 was directly attributed to the COVID-19 Pandemic, which created a backlog in the adjudication of cases, and administration of sanctions (Carson, 2021). Interestingly, if not for the pandemic, researchers would continue to detect negligible decreases in the prison population as predicted (Carson, 2021). Although national trends demonstrated a decrease, some states like Alaska showed a 2% increase in their prison population (Carson, 2020; World Population Review, 2023). These changes made no impact in addressing existing challenges or alleviating the overburdened criminal justice and penal systems (Carson, 2020).

High incarceration rates in the United States have led to the incarceration and confinement of a massive number of individuals to the penal system (Pitts, et al., 2014; The Federal Register, 2021). Referred to as mass incarceration, this trend has become one of the most challenging aspects of the criminal justice system within the U.S. Over the past decades, scholars have explored and discussed a myriad of challenges and causes associated with mass incarceration (Wagner & Rabuy, 2017). The discourse around this phenomenon encompasses several key tenets ranging from criminal justice policies, legislation, sociopolitical issues, and racial disparity (Clear and Austin, 2009; Duxbury, 2021). Nonetheless, this discourse has not been as effective as anticipated in addressing mass incarceration as a driver of the prison growth materialized in the United States penal system (Austin & Irwin, 2012; Campbell, Vogel &

Williams, 2015; Raphael, 2009). Practitioners and researchers continue to advocate for reform aimed at shifting incarceration trajectories and reducing the prison population with little success (Raphael, 2009).

Apart from the inherent challenges associated with mass incarceration (to be discussed in later chapters), the reincarceration of justice-impacted individuals has emerged as another challenge to the carceral system (Austin & Irwin, 2012). Reincarceration and mass incarceration are two sides of the same coin, where addressing one addresses the other. Therefore, providing substantive policies and resources to address challenges associated with reincarceration will directly influence the nation's incarceration rates. As stated by Clear and Austin (2009), "America will have whatever prison population its penal policy creates" (p. 312). In fact, over time, criminal justice policies are designed to grow prisons in the United States (Clear & Austin, 2009). More than 20 years after this assertion, the consequences of these policies, associated with the war on drugs and mass incarceration, still reverberate throughout the criminal justice and penal systems. Without any changes to the carceral system, reintegration and rehabilitation efforts will continue to produce fewer desirable effects, whereby prison trends and incarceration spending overburdens taxpayers and overflows into the community.

Prison Overcrowding

From a historical perspective, the United States' use of incarceration has always focused on the removal of a particular class of people from within society. Known as dangerous classes, these individuals are described as less desirable, marginalized, and criminogenic, creating a proposed threat to society (Alexander, 2010). Over time there have been specific periods where incarceration practices relating to these individuals were notably heightened and heavily enforced (Bonta & Gendreau, 1990). These periods of incarceration became known as the great

confinements, and first occurred in Europe during the fifteenth century when institutions were created to confine vagrants, the very poor, and those with mental health issues (Simon, 1998). In the twentieth century, the face of incarceration later changed where “imprisonment became a central measure against serious crimes” (Simon, 1998, p. 578). However, in the 21st century imprisonment measures continue to focus on incarcerating the dangerous class by attempting to exact punishment, and retribution to bring about deterrence with minimal emphasis placed on rehabilitation.

With this new perspective on imprisonment, the dangerous and less desirable classes within our societies are often targeted with these expansive measures (Alexander, 2010). Scholars have often considered individuals labeled as a dangerous class to be racial minorities, drug offenders, and underprivileged populations within our society. For instance, the marginalization of women in the colonial period, Native Americans, and African Americans during slavery and Jim Crow periods, has historically created a system where these groups were considered as undesirable classes (Alexander, 2010; Buff, 2008). Presently, this marginalization continues to be sustained by criminal justice policies reinforcing the status quo (Alexander, 2010). As a result, incarceration becomes the primary measure to address the dangerous class presently, as it was before.

Prisons have been described as barren landscapes devoid of even the most basic elements of humanity and considered to be detrimental to the humanity of the offender (Bonita & Gendreau 1990). These institutions are also not known for their rehabilitative efforts, yet the number of prison facilities has seen substantial growth. According to Clear and Austin (2009), the 1970s marked an era where the percentage of individuals incarcerated in the United States tripled at both the state and federal levels. This drastic increase was primarily driven by penal

policies that focused on exacting punishment and increasing public safety (Sundt, Salisbury & Hamon, 2016). More than 50 years later, penal policies continue to drive incarceration rates, thus reinforcing mass incarceration in the United States. Prison growth within the United States saw an increase of 450% over time (Campbell, Vogel & Williams, 2015). In their discourse, Campbell et al. (2015), draw attention to several historical periods marked by different events that created the trajectory of current criminal justice policies. During these eras, several policies focused on the war on drugs, sentencing, public safety, rehabilitation, and punishment.

In underscoring periods of growth resulting in prison overcrowding, the following eras will be discussed to demonstrate exponential growth, leading to an overburdened prison system. In 1970, the increase in the prison population was attributed to an increase in crime rates (Sundt, et al., 2015). During the 1980s and 1990s, policies and legislation were enacted to address the increasing crime rates resulting from the war on drugs (Austin & Irwin, 2012). According to Alexander (2010), less than two percent of Americans viewed drugs as the most important issue facing the nation, yet the war on drugs has been the predominant reason why many are incarcerated. Policies were geared toward enhancing public safety and created harsher sentences for drug crimes, like mandatory minimums (Raphael, 2009), as well as more restrictions for non-punitive sanctions. Consequences associated with these policies disproportionately affected individuals of color and had harmful ramifications for their communities and families (Alexander, 2010; Austin & Irwin, 2012). For example, 1986 marked the passage of the Anti-Drug Abuse Act by Congress establishing mandatory minimum prison sentences for certain drug offenses. This law received criticism, as it allotted longer sentences for crack cocaine as compared to powder cocaine. This disparity was observed as crack cocaine was used more often

by black Americans. In other words, considering similar offenses, blacks were being sentenced to longer prison sentences and harsher penalties (Alexander, 2010; Austin & Irwin, 2012).

After the 1990s, these policies continued to fuel mass incarceration as policies enhancing prison terms flourished within the criminal justice and legal systems. Judges were given unilateral power to sentence individuals to long sentences indiscriminately (Yu, 2020).

According to Clear and Austin (2009), these longer sentences created a backlog within the penal system where individuals with lengthy sentences were overpopulating correctional facilities even with the reported reduction in crime. These oppressive and discriminatory laws and policies have forced minorities out of mainstream society by eliminating certain rights and privileges (Alexander, 2010). As a society, this created an environment where certain individuals are marginalized, and yet there is an expectation of inclusion. Instead, a caste system is constructed with first- and second-class citizens (Alexander, 2010). Apart from the challenges discussed, mass incarceration is also fueled by the revolving door associated with reincarceration caused by recidivism and technical violations. According to Baumer, Vélez & Rosenfeld (2018), America has seen specific periods where crime rates decreased; however, this decrease created a negligible effect on the prison population.

Well beyond predictions, we continue to see the effects of mass incarceration, where the United States continued to incarcerate more individuals than other Western democracies (Austin & Irwin, 2012). This has created a revolving door within the carceral system whereby individuals are released from incarceration and returned to prison because of committing new crimes or having direct contact with the carceral state (Travis, Redburn, & Western, 2014). The revolving door creates a recycling of individuals between the community and prison (Cracknell, 2023).

Increasing incarceration rates and lengthy prison sentences have been key contributors to prison overcrowding (Austin & Irwin, 2012). Likewise, prison policies taking a tough-on-crime stance have sustained incarceration rates (Travis, et al., 2014). This prolonged sustainability is mainly due to the fact that the United States prison philosophy has not changed over time. Clear and Austin (2009), suggested that changing the prison population is twofold, as the size of the population is dependent on the number of people entering prison and the length of stay. Focusing on admissions and length of stay individually and/or collectively impacts the prison population. For example, federal, state, and local governments spend excessive amounts of money incarcerating low-level offenders instead of utilizing a rehabilitative approach (Policy and Program Report Corrections, 2006; Prison Policy Initiatives; Nevada Advisory Commission, 2019). Changing this practice reduces the number of low-level offenders entering the penal system as well as providing an opportunity for rehabilitation and lowering incarceration costs.

The revolving door associated with reincarceration keeps beds filled and the lengthy sentences created a situation where once beds are filled, they are occupied for longer a period. The state of prisons and the number of individuals incarcerated at any given time falls squarely on legislators and the judicial system. According to Pitts and colleagues (2014), criminal justice research extensively documents issues and challenges with prison overcrowding. They argue that prison overcrowding does not only affect incarcerated individuals but also adversely affects the prison staff in terms of policy decisions – when prisons become overcrowded, they are not able to implement and maintain programs aimed at reducing recidivism.

Prison conditions and safety issues due to overcrowding take precedence and often diminish the goal of rehabilitation. Incarcerated individuals often face challenges with violation of their constitutional rights; as well as accessing already limited resources, such as medical

attention, work assignments, programs rehabilitation, and reentry programs (Pitts, et al., 2014). Prisons are overcrowded when they exceed 80% of design capacity; at this point, it produces a strain on the operations of the facility (Austin & Irwin, 2012). As a result of the strain placed on the penal system – not only financially, but primarily due to challenges associated with overcrowding - alternatives to incarceration and changes within the judicial system have a greater impact on rehabilitative efforts as compared to incarceration (Vera Institute, n.d.; Cullen & Gilbert, 2015). Scholars like Aos, Phipps, Barnoski, and Lieb (2001), have gone even further to equate that crime prevention and intervention (resulting in lower incarceration) is like any business, and there needs to be a positive economic bottom line. This not only requires effective policies for crime reduction but so that the services and solutions provided are delivered cost-effectively. Strategies to reduce prison overcrowding are paramount. The bottom line is that if the penal system continues to be overburdened, taxpayers will bear the cost, and communities will continue to be affected.

Cost of Incarceration

The excessive cost of incarceration continues to be a major burden on taxpayers. As incarceration rates increase, the cost of incarceration increases. On the national level, the cost of incarceration is approximately 80 billion dollars yearly (Prison Policy Initiative, 2020; Vera Institute, n.d). Besides national spending, states also spend a huge chunk of their budgets on incarcerating individuals yearly. For instance, the state of Nevada spends approximately 2.6% of the state's budget on corrections, amounting to 344 million dollars yearly (Governor Recommends Budget, 2019). Average spending to house individuals in federal and state prisons ranges between \$30,000 to \$38,000 yearly (Nevada Department of Corrections, 2021).

Due to the sheer number of incarcerated yearly, the cost to house individuals takes up a huge portion of federal, state, and local budgets (U.S. Department of Justice Budget Request, 2020; Governor Recommends Budget, 2019; Wagner & Rabuy, 2017). As the proximate costs to incarcerate continue to increase, addressing reentry and reincarceration are ways to reduce the overburdened prison system (Policy and Program Report Corrections, 2006; Prison Policy Initiatives, n.d; Nevada Advisory Commission, 2019; Shandnoosh, 2019; Salins & Simpson, 2012). Studies continually demonstrated ways to address the overburdening effect of the carceral system, yet what has been done thus far seems to be ineffective as federal, state, and local budgets increase yearly.

Therefore, policymakers and stakeholders must explore alternatives to incarceration to address these issues. A widely suggested, and advocated policy change is to invest in community-based programs to reduce recidivism and overall incarceration (Policy and Program Report Corrections, 2006). This functional approach is practical both on the front end (pre-incarceration), and the back end (post-incarceration) – after an individual is released from incarceration and begins the reintegration process. The federal government, through the Department of Justice (DOJ), earmarks billions of dollars as a part of the annual budget to fund opportunities that address recidivism and reincarceration at the federal, state, and local levels. Annual budgets are based on priority goals pertaining to crime reduction and increased public safety (U.S. Department of Justice, 2022) and delineated by five categories: law enforcement; prisons and detention; litigation; grants; and immigration, administration, technology, and other (U.S. Department of Justice, 2020). These competing priorities vary in percentage depending on the current sociopolitical climate, legislation, policy agenda, and advocacy arena.

Table 1 demonstrates the total discretionary budget request for the Department of Justice for 3 years from 2020 through 2022. This table highlights the level of spending associated with housing individuals, reentry services, and addressing the war on drugs, now labeled as the Opioid crisis. Of note, upwards of 25% of the federal budget is spent on the prison system. An even greater amount is spent on the front end of the system, particularly in law enforcement. During the 3 years listed in Table 1, the law enforcement budget ranged from 46% to 51% of the Department of Justice budget depending on the year (U.S. Department of Justice, 2020). Annually, there was an overall decrease in the discretionary budget request for certain categories like law enforcement and prison detention. Even with this decrease, the amount not requested was negligible.

Table 1*U.S. Department of Justice Budget Request for 2020 through 2022*

Discretionary Budget Requests	Program Year		
	2020	2021	2022
Federal Prisons and Detentions (millions)	350.1	345.1	409.5
Operations Prison and Detention (millions)	8.65	9.25	9.47
Prerelease Reentry Services (millions)	14.0	319.5 ^a	409.5 ^a
Prerelease Opioid Misuse (millions)	1.0	Included in prerelease reentry	Included in prerelease reentry
Opioid Misuse Community (millions)	290.5	379.6	480.9
Total Budget Spent on Prison and Detention (%)	29.2 %	28.7%	26.8%

Note: ^a Funding for the expansion of medication-assisted programs, residential reentry centers, evidence-based reentry programs, and the implementation of the First Step Act.

With the intent to promote public safety and crime reduction, the federal government allocates almost 75% of its budget to incarceration, the war on drugs, and enforcement (Department of Justice, 2020). Managing the carceral system within the United States proves to be an immense burden to taxpayers. High rates of spending associated with federal, state, and local government organizations do little to alleviate prison overcrowding; a problem that can only be addressed through comprehensive policy reform and systemic change (Austin & Irwin,

2012). Scholars have suggested several strategies to reduce the increase associated with mass incarceration, including intermediate sanctions instead of incarceration, early releases, changes in sentencing structures, and addressing challenges encountered post-incarceration (Cullen & Gilbert, 2015; Pitts, et al., 2014).

Reentry Realities

The United States' current challenges with its carceral system are rooted in decades of policies and practices designed to enhance public safety and reduce harm (Forsberg & Douglas, 2022; Sundt, et al., 2015). However, these policies and practices have only exaggerated situations whereby its citizens are enduring a number of negative consequences physically – through the loss of freedom and financially – taxpayers bearing the burden to house the incarcerated. Lack of employment, housing, mental health, and substance abuse issues, as well as the inability to reestablish personal relationships, are a few of the many challenges system-impacted individuals face and often need support in addressing. Understanding the root causes associated with incarceration as well as the reintegration challenges justice-impacted individuals encounter provide an opportunity for the creation and implementation of viable solutions that can change trajectories and outcomes as it relates to the carceral system.

The post-incarceration experiences of justice-impacted individuals are riddled with uncertainty, restrictions, and unmet expectations. Approximately 600,000 individuals are released yearly after a period of incarceration in federal and state prisons (Abo, Salomon-Amend, Guerrero, & Jason, 2022; Carson, 2020). With these large number of releases, it is imperative that focus be placed on the reintegration process and transitional challenges faced while individuals are acclimating into their communities. One major solution this research discusses is the role community programs play in addressing reintegration barriers after

individuals return to their community from incarceration. According to the extant literature, reducing incarceration rates through successful reintegration alleviates the burden on taxpayers (fiscal), addresses public safety concerns (community), and helps decrease rates of overcrowding (Pitts & Griffin, 2014; Prison Policy Initiatives, 2017; Ware, Austin & Thomson, 2019).

When community programs function optimally, communities as a whole benefit both from a socioeconomic and human capital perspective. Successful reintegration is largely dependent on community efforts as an individual transitions from prison life and acclimates back into their community. This is not to say that the individual does not play a vital role, but that the support provided to the individual while in the community is life-changing (Maruna, 2001). Reentry support refers to resources within the community that function to alleviate barriers encountered during the reentry process.

An important aspect of the reentry process is to prevent the loss of both social and human capital (agency and self-efficacy). Incarceration has a dire effect as individuals leave their families, communities, and the workforce. This exodus from the community creates a myriad of challenges often not addressed – like unemployment, homelessness, undue financial burden, strained relationships, and restricted choice. For instance, when a mother is incarcerated, she leaves her children behind; the role she plays is often left unfilled. These children now become a caregiver's responsibility or wards of the state, where the fiscal responsibility for caring for the children is often placed on taxpayers – who are not only responsible for the incarcerated individual but also the children. Here we see the hidden costs and consequences of incarceration that encompass additional components of our society and not just the justice system. When potential challenges related to the reentry process are addressed, collateral consequences as mentioned above can be averted.

The solution to the myriad challenges faced by an individual and the society they return to is to provide the necessary resources needed to be rehabilitated and reintegrated into the community. Oftentimes, the government sector is not able to provide opportunities to foster rehabilitation and successful reintegration. Thus, the public sector steps in to provide relevant opportunities to individuals as they return home. Community solutions originate from programs within the community that directly assist individuals once they return home. The role of community programs is crucial in providing resources that are often not accessible.

Current Research Project

Based on the overarching challenges (discussed throughout this paper) associated with the reentry process, this research project attempted to assess support for overcoming transitional challenges to successful reentry and instances that led to recidivism. To accomplish this, the focus was placed on the reentry process, public policy, and the role community programs play in bridging the gap as service providers. This examination used information from a community program in Nevada that provides reintegration services to individuals who have been justice-involved and/or released from incarceration. The goal of this project was to examine whether community programs could be successful in connecting justice-involved individuals with reentry capital to address transitional challenges to promote successful reentry outcomes.

This current project was important because it builds upon existing literature underscoring principles that a rehabilitative approach (i.e., providing resources and reintegration support) lowers recidivism, as compared to those centered on retribution or incapacitation. When community programs provide opportunities, justice-impacted individuals are more amenable to utilizing and participating in these rehabilitative programs. There are greater benefits to the community in that individuals can contribute, while regaining their lives. The availability of

rehabilitative programs also reduces the burden on taxpayers as individuals are no longer wards of the state. Although critical, community support, and evidence-based outcomes as to what works, opportunities are not readily available for many individuals as they return to their communities (Petersilia, 2004). The scarcity of reentry capital – resources and support and opportunities are not unique to the state of Nevada; instead, it is a universal challenge (Aos, et al., 2001b; Scroggins & Malley, 2010). The absence of these opportunities creates a chasm in the reentry process, which further marginalizes justice-impacted individuals needing a second chance.

Because of the increasing cost of incarceration, the loss of human capital, and the plethora of challenges faced due to incarceration, practitioners need to have an unequivocal understanding of ‘what can work’ to reduce recidivism and subsequent re-incarceration. In offering insight into the utility of community programs in the overall process of reentry, policymakers can gain a better understanding of the reentry process, to address individual needs and change personal trajectory. Any change in offending or re-offending behavior has a direct influence on communities at all levels (Serowik & Yanos, 2013; Visser & Travis, 2011).

As the leading reentry program in the state where the research occurred, HOPE for Prisoners provides reintegration (reentry) services to individuals that are justice-impacted within Clark County, NV communities. These services include case management, personal development, vocational training, workforce development, and mentoring. The rehabilitative aspect of this program utilizes a person-centered perspective, where assisting the individual and providing opportunities are fundamental. A team of mentors, case managers, and workforce development staff provide guidance throughout the reintegration process, and this team supports justice-impacted individuals enrolled in the program. Language describing participants is also

person-centered as they are referred to as *Hopefuls* or *clients*. HOPE for Prisoners fosters an environment where clients can rebuild their lives and roles within the community. In examining this reentry organization, my goal is to add to the vast literature associated with the carceral system, while illuminating rehabilitative approaches within the community that works. Research questions specific to this project are presented within the methods chapter.

Organization of the Dissertation

Since the goals of most reentry programs are to provide reentry services and employment opportunities to justice-impacted individuals, this dissertation explores how participation in a community-based reentry program (HOPE for Prisoners) impacts reincarceration rates and improves employment outcomes. Therefore, this dissertation focuses on how reentry program outcomes like employment, program completion, and desistance fit into the existing theoretical frameworks as well as providing a foundation for discourse and policy change regarding many of the challenges plaguing America's criminal justice system. In introducing the topic in this Chapter 1, a synopsis of the state of prisons as an institution was discussed to set the landscape. Problems associated with mass incarceration including the revolving door of reincarceration and how reentry programs help to curb these challenges was also discussed.

The next chapter (Chapter 2) provides a detailed review of research on reentry and discusses key terms and definitions related to reentry, rehabilitation, and recidivism. In this chapter, what works as it relates to recidivism, risk factors (individual characteristics like race, gender, age, criminal history, etc.), insulators, and limitations of prior studies is also included. Strengths and limitation of prior reentry research help build connections as to how this current study helps to fill in the gaps of reentry research and research on recidivism.

Chapter 3 reviews theories associated with reentry research as it relates to Desistance, Capital, and Restorative Justice. These theories are grouped as micro- and macro-level theories focusing on the individual and the community and provide a foundational basis for addressing reentry challenges as well as the social and economic benefits of reducing recidivism.

Chapter 4 describes the current project and gives a more detailed picture of what is going on in the state as it relates to previous research. This chapter provides a general overview of the research site and previous research conducted within the state. Methods, data collection and analysis, as well as demographic information about the study participants are also included.

The fifth chapter presents the main findings from the research and the effects of participation in a community-based program on employment and recidivism rates. Chapter 6 discusses findings related to program outcomes and program participation and then concludes with a discussion of what works within the reentry arena as it relates to the current research.

Chapter 7 recaps with conclusions from the current research as well as a discussion on the policy implications limitations and future research based on this project.

Chapter 2: Review of Research on Reintegration

Current challenges with incarceration and prison overcrowding in the United States has been a point of contention. The cost associated with housing individuals continues to climb yearly. However, the reality is that most incarcerated individuals return to the communities they were taken from. Because they return, there is a need to focus on the back end of the process – reintegration. The goal of this chapter is to discuss the reentry realities, rehabilitation, recidivism, risk factors, and what works for individuals returning home.

Overview of the Reintegration Process

The Reintegration (Reentry) Model

Offender reintegration is defined as the process whereby individuals return to and are acclimated into their communities after a period of incarceration. This process is complex as it involves both individual and community-level participation to ensure success (Barrenger & Draine, 2013). When individuals are released from incarceration and begin the process of reintegrating into their community, they often lack the necessary reentry and social capital necessary to be successful (Bergseth, Jens, Bergeron-Vigesaa & McDonald, 2011; Harding, Wyse, Dobsin & Morehouse, 2014).

Several reentry models focus on rehabilitation and restoration (Karp, 2001), while others incorporate inclusion – providing access, representation, and using personal narratives throughout the reintegration process – as a part of the model (Latimer, Dowden & Muise, 2005). There is no cookie-cutter approach to reintegration and formulating policies centered on reentry. There are vast differences in trajectories and in addressing existing challenges. Although there are differences in trajectories, justice-impacted individuals share a criminal background and

associated experiences that hinder them from being a part of their community due to the restrictions of having a criminal background (Collateral Consequences of Criminal Convictions, 2010; NIJ, 2018).

In addition, these restrictions must be removed as they create barriers and undue hardships that impede reintegration. When individuals are unable to transition within the social confines of their community, they are at a higher risk of reoffending and returning to prison (NIJ, 2018). A recent study on promising jail reentry programs showed that 73.3% of individuals not enrolled in community reentry programs recidivated or received a technical violation (Miller & Miller, 2015). Other studies have shown that up to 68% of individuals return to prison after 3 years of release (Carson, 2020; NIJ, 2018).

Both government sectors at the federal, state, and local level, as well as community programs, play a crucial role in ensuring that reentry capital – employment and housing, mental health and substance misuse counseling, and access to social networks are accessible to justice-impacted individuals (Baron, et al. 2013; Cloyes, et al., 2010; McKiernan, et al., 2012). When not available, the lack of resources diminishes the prospects of successful reentry and increases the chances of reoffending and re-incarceration. Reentry capital addresses the various transitional challenges faced post-incarceration. Extant literature emphasizes that transitional challenges related to recidivism outcomes are related to criminal history, demographic characteristics (age, race, and gender), education, (lack of) employment, housing, inability to reestablish personal relationships, mental health, substance abuse issues (Cobbina 2010; Shosham & Timor, 2014), as well as the loss of agency (Maruna, 2001). Transitional challenges present a plethora of problems preventing justice-impacted individuals from reestablishing social bonds and being a part of the

community (McGrath, 2012; Simes, 2019). Addressing these diverse transitional challenges has a direct impact on whether reintegration will be efficacious.

Understanding Reentry Realities: Key Terms and Definitions

Rehabilitation

According to Ward and Maruna (2007), a standard definition of rehabilitation has still not been universally agreed upon. For this project, rehabilitation will be defined in the context of restoring individual privileges, roles, character, social networks, and human agency (Maruna, 2001; Stinson & Clark, 2017). Institutional policies indicate that the goal of incarceration is to rehabilitate individuals who have committed crimes that harm their communities or others.

Although rehabilitation has been a central tenet of reintegration, scholars opposing this perspective indicate that this is not effective in reducing recidivism. Cullen and Gilbert (2015) discuss both sides of the coin, by indicating that rehabilitative programs represent a means of doing good for offenders; as a result, they also embody a rationale for humane treatment that opposes the conservative pressure to get tough on crime. Cullen and Gilbert (2015) describe rehabilitation as a rehabilitative ideal whereby “the primary purpose of penal treatment is to effect changes in the character, attitudes, and behaviors of convicted offenders, to strengthen the social defense against unwanted behavior, but also to contribute to the welfare and satisfaction of offenders” (p. 21). In the authors’ opinion,

“Individuals cannot be cured of their criminal tendencies through their efforts, it is for the good of society as well as for the offenders’ own that the state undertakes to rehabilitate them” (p. 21).

This is a responsibility undertaken by the carceral system and the community an individual returns to. When incarceration ends, communities need to step in and continue to assist individuals. In other words, rehabilitation does not end at incarceration; in fact, it continues for years after a prison sentence has ended. To encourage the rehabilitation process, the government and the public sector must provide specific reentry support and capital, to address the challenges justice-involved individuals face.

Rehabilitation is an individual process with collective benefits. The central premise of rehabilitation is to focus on the individual to correct subsequent deviant or maladjusted behavior (Aos, et al., 2001, Cullen & Gilbert, 2015; Miller & Miller, 2015). Once accomplished, the premise is that the individual will replace their deviant lifestyle and values with prosocial behaviors. In rehabilitating justice-impacted individuals, they are given an opportunity to successfully reintegrate into their communities and become vested in their families, the workforce, and the community (Barrenger & Draine, 2013; Harding, et al. 2014; McKiernan, et al., 2012).

Recidivism

Recidivism refers to a person's relapse into criminal behavior, often after the person receives sanctions or undergoes intervention for a previous crime (nij.ojp.gov, n.d; Ventura Miller, 2021). Both private and government institutions, including state and federal agencies assess levels of reoffending to measure recidivism. Even with the required elements to measure recidivism (reduction in recidivism and employment outcomes), scholars have indicated that there is no consensus in deriving at a definition (Aos, et al., 2001). The lack thereof has guided practitioners to formulate agency-specific definitions to evaluate programs and outcomes. This creates a plethora of challenges due to varying definitions amongst agencies. For instance, on the

federal level, recidivism is measured by rearrests, reconvictions, and reincarceration after three years.

Recidivism is measured by criminal acts resulting in a re-arrest, reconviction, or reincarceration with or without a new sentence three years following the person's release (NIJ, 2008). Based on this definition, National statistics indicate that 67.5% of offenders experienced one or more of these events within the 3-year recidivism window/timeframe (Alper and Durose, 2018). Of note, not all arrest events end with a conviction. The National Institute of Justice 2008) describes recidivism as a core concern and one of the most fundamental concepts in the criminal justice system. Likewise, Miller (2021) describes reentry as one of the most significant challenges the criminal justice system faces.

In the state of Nevada, recidivism is defined and measured as a new commitment after incarceration (Nevada Advisory Commission on the Administration of Justice – Justice Reinvestment Initiative, 2019). Nevada, and other states like California, do not consider mere arrest as a part of their recidivism definition, but extend a step further by measuring the adjudication of the arrest (Aos, et al., 2001). In these cases, recidivism measures are solely dependent on the outcome of the arrest and not the arrest alone. For that reason, Nevada's recidivism rate hovers around 28% (Prison Recidivism Analysis, 2015; Prison Policy Initiative, 2017; Recidivism by states, 2023), a number that reflects only new felony convictions resulting in a commitment to prison. Nevada's definitional elements of recidivism eliminate probation incidents, misdemeanor arrests, arrests not leading to a conviction, and technical parole violations (Prison Recidivism Analysis 2015; Release Cohort, 2019). Differences in definition underscore the variance in recidivism rates on both state and federal levels.

As discussed in recidivism literature, contradictory and inconsistent definitions have led to erroneous conclusions; as not all recidivism events are considered as a relapse into criminal activities (Ventura Miller, 2021; Prison Recidivism Analysis 2015; Release Cohort, 2019; Aos, et al., 2001). Scholars have also indicated that an operative definition of recidivism cannot rely simply on incarceration rates (Loza, Loza-Fanous & Heseltine, 2007; Morenoff & Harding, 2014). Many of these measures capture anecdotal evidence rather than institutional data (Maruna, 2001). While this is accurate, and often criticized, scholars and policymakers must have a thorough understanding of recidivism, to drive policies, and allow for agencies to address the larger social problem – incarceration.

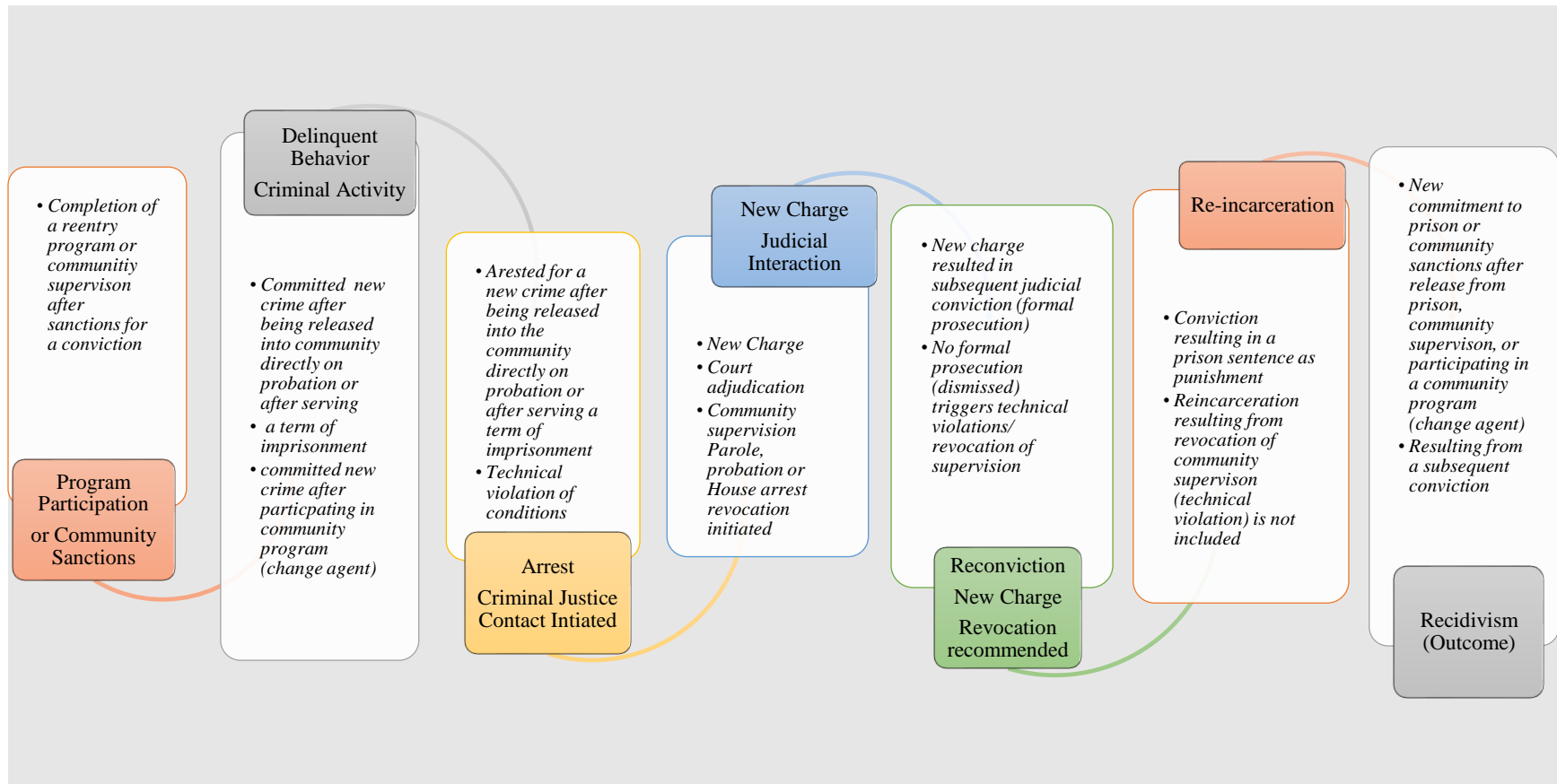
To ensure a clear and consistent definition of recidivism, for this project, recidivism will be defined as a new commitment to prison resulting from a subsequent conviction, after being released from prison, discharged from parole or probation, or participating in HOPE for Prisoners' reentry program. This definition will exclude instances where commitments to prison are for technical violations for individuals on parole or probation. In measuring recidivism rates for this project, the main qualifying event will be program participation in HOPE for Prisoners between January 2014 and June 2015. For this research, each instance where an individual is incarcerated will be described as a recidivism event.

Figure 1 provides an overview of a recidivism event. Recidivism events are measured after an individual has completed the HOPE for Prisoners 40-hour Workshop and begun participating in the program. It will be operationalized as having completed the program, then committing a new crime followed by criminal justice involvement and subsequent incarceration for the new charge that initiated the event. In this case, any new charges leading to a

commitment to a Nevada Department of Corrections facility will be considered and measured as recidivism.

Figure 1

Recidivism Event



No measure of recidivism is adequate as many crimes go unreported to police, or if reported, may not result in an arrest (Mears, Cochran, Bales, & Bhati, 2016). For these reasons, reporting several measures provides a broader and more nuanced picture of recidivism. The three measures as it relates to recidivism involve arrest, conviction, and incarceration. All three overlap in some areas—meaning all offenders who were reconvicted or reincarcerated also were rearrested. An individual’s inability to reintegrate may result in reincarceration, which continues to be a huge concern. Recidivism and reincarceration compound the already overcrowded prisons as they account for 20% to 30% of yearly incarcerations (Carson, 2020) and an aggregate incarceration rate of 50% within three years (Benecchi, 2021). The cycle of recidivism and reincarceration presents a substantial cost to taxpayers and creates a public safety concern (Aos, et. al, 2001; Mair, 2021).

Recidivism and Risk Factors

Prior research has shown that there is a well-established association between demographic risk factors (age, gender, and race) unmodifiable aspects of an individual’s history, and directly correlated with delinquency and crime (McGrath, Lasher, & Cumming, 2011). Since these factors play a significant role in the lives of justice-impacted individuals, effects can be measured when examining instances of reincarceration and recidivism. Studying factors associated with recidivism is critical for offender reintegration.

Van Voorhis and Salisbury (2016) categorize risk factors for identifying and reducing criminogenic needs. Static risk factors are immutable and include both historic (criminal history) and demographic (age, race, gender) characteristics associated with an individual. These risk factors are predictors of an individual’s potential to re-offend as well as the types of

programming or resources the individual needs to prevent reoffending. Within the reentry arena, these factors impact recidivism and drive incarceration rates.

Demographic Risk Factors

Age

Age is a strong predictor of criminal behavior, desistance, and recidivism (Piquero, et al., 2015). Although it has been established that age is a strong predictor of events leading to incarceration, it can also be considered a strong predictor of successful reintegration. Criminal justice literature often posits that as an individual gets older, they experience life course experiences and trajectories which lowers the ability and desires to commit a crime; leading to lower rates of recidivism (Simes 2019; Sampson & Laub, 2003). Referred to as ‘aging’ out of crime, older individuals are more likely to lead a more prosocial lifestyle (United States Sentencing Commission, 2021). Studies have shown that individuals between the ages of 18 and 24 participate in deviant behavior at a higher rate than the other age groups (Glueck & Glueck, 2013; Moffit, 1993).

Although true, age along with other factors like length of time incarcerated can also have an adverse effect on the reentry process. For instance, an individual who has been incarcerated for a prolonged period may find it difficult to reintegrate depending on their age. This difficulty may be seen among individuals that are 65 years and older. The reason is, they may not be able to utilize reentry capital provided such as employment.

Race

In examining race, scholars have noted that African Americans are disproportionately incarcerated as compared to any other race (Austin & Irwin, 2012; Carson, 2020; United States

Sentencing Commission, 2021). This disparity is highlighted by the fact this demographic comprises only 13% of the U. S. population but makes up 38% of the prison population (Piquero, Jennings, Diamond & Reingle, 2015; Wessler, 2022). According to the Bureau of Justice, African Americans were incarcerated at a rate of 1096 per 100,000 as compared to their Hispanic and White counterparts, who were incarcerated at rates of 525 per 100,000 and 214 per 100,000, respectively (Carson, 2021; Wessler, 2022). These alarming numbers demonstrate there is a greater need for reentry programs in communities with a higher African American population, as compared to any other race. Carson (2020) asserts that the number of participants in community programs needing to navigate the reentry process should reflect the disparity associated with incarceration. If 95% of individuals return to their communities, then it would be reasoned that there will be a higher number of African Americans with convictions returning to impoverished neighborhoods and communities.

The United States has a history where race has played a prominent role in policy creation, determining socioeconomic status, as well as access to the American Dream. Issues regarding race have created such a damaging experience for many individuals exposed to the criminal justice system. According to Alexander (2010), ethnic minorities are targeted disproportionately because of subsequent legislation relating to the war on drugs. Certain behaviors related to drug use are criminalized and the consequences are irreversible and affect entire communities.

Gender

Although men and women have similar experiences with the carceral system regarding overcoming the stigma associated with incarceration, women tend to have higher incarceration rates than men (Van den Broek, Black & Nicki, 2021). Arrest rates for women tend to increase at a higher rate than those for men. Within the last decade, incarceration rates for women increase

by 450% as compared to men (Campbell, et al., 2015). As incarceration rates increase, so does the number of women release to the community. According to Miller (2021), 78,000 women are released from correctional facilities within the U.S. which equates to 200 women being released daily.

Many women have experienced mental illness, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as well as intimate partner violence before and after incarceration (Salisbury & Van Voorhis, 2009). In comparing reincarceration rates by gender, 60% of women are arrested within 3 years and 70% within 5 years (Durose, Cooper & Snyder, 2014). These numbers are staggering as they closely mirror incarceration rates for men. Women face a variety of challenges both pre- and post-incarceration (Burton, Lynn, & Alexander, 2019). Notably, the challenges confronting women returning from incarceration are formidable and complex, pointing to a need for specialized and appropriate re-entry programming (Miller, 2021; Salisbury & Van Voorhis, 2009). Upon release from incarceration, some challenges are gender specific and include employment, addiction, mental illness, housing, transportation, family reunification, childcare, parenting, and poor physical health (Miller, 2021). With all these challenges, one would make the inference that women would be reincarnated at a higher rate than men.

Challenges women face are often mitigated by the fact that upon returning to their communities, women are more adept at reestablishing relationships and returning to their former roles as mothers and caregivers. This adaptability provides a direct conduit to desistance through access to social networks and the establishment of social bonds. Current literature highlights the gender difference where women navigate the criminal justice system and reentry process differently than men (Ramirez, 2021; Van Voorhis, Bauman, Wright, & Salisbury, 2009). In

doing so, women are less likely than men to re-offend and be reincarcerated after being released from prison.

Scholars have indicated the fact that women's pathways into criminality are different from those of men (Bloom, Owen & Covington 2004, Brennan 2021; Salisbury & Van Voorhis, 2009). Salisbury and Van Voorhis (2009), state that women experience unique and different pathways to crime; one that is riddled with trauma, victimization, and economic deprivation. Likewise, their reintegration path is riddled with learning how to pick up the pieces after incarceration. Women are socialized in a specific way to be nurturers, and caregivers and often carry shame and guilt when not able to live up to societal expectations (Gottlieb & Mahabir, 2022, Mair, 2021; Van den Broek, Black & Nicki, 2021). According to Van Voorhis, Bauman, Wright, & Salisbury (2009), the gendered pathway framework describes women who:

- (1) Flee abusive relationships – street women
- (2) Experience extreme victimization – battered women
- (3) Experience physical and sexual abuse – harmed and harming women
- (4) Use or traffic drugs
- (5) Those who commit crimes because of economic reasons

Women often experience one or more of these pathways that lead to their criminality; these pathways are often associated with trauma, abuse, poverty, and drug use (Salisbury & Van Voorhis, 2009).

The gendered pathway perspective is extremely critical to the reentry process when addressing the challenges women face (Ramirez, 2021). According to Salisbury and Van Voorhis (2009), the gendered pathway permits focus to be placed on the gender-responsive needs of women, while taking into consideration other factors that need to be addressed. Likewise, it

gives an understanding of the needs that are predictive of future recidivism or further involvement in a life of crime. Without understanding the root causes it is difficult, if not near impossible, to provide reentry services and more importantly provide rehabilitative support to women. Furthermore, research shows substantial differences between men and women; therefore, gendered pathways emphasize distinct theoretical and methodological approaches to address these differences (Brennan, et al., 2012). This approach provides for a person-centered holistic approach as compared to traditional ways of viewing reintegration (Brennan, et al., 2012). For example, gendered pathways highlight differences in risk needs among justice-involved women, who might appear to be normally functioning, even when trauma is non-existent (Owen, Wells & Pollock, 2017; Brennan, et al., 2012). However, discovering specific pathways allows for practitioners to focus on specific issues by identifying triggers, and recommending treatment.

Understanding these pathways provides an individualistic approach to treatment and supervision by examining risk factors both independently and dependently, by capturing a wide range of life experiences that characterizes life trajectories (Brennan, et al., 2012; Salisbury & Van Voorhis, 2009). Providing services for an individual lacking social capital is substantially different from providing services for those lacking human capital (Owen, Wells & Pollock, 2017; Brennan, et al., 2012), or having experienced victimization, abuse, or trauma (Salisbury & Van Voorhis, 2009). For this reason, pathways need to be recognized within the scope of providing services.

Before incarceration and once released, women experience a myriad of challenges that often marginalizes them. For instance, women experience unemployment, limited educational opportunities, issues with childcare, abuse, and physical and mental health challenges (Baron, et

al., 2013). According to Heimer, Malone, and Decoster (2023), women tend to have greater economic, social, and psychological hardship. Also, women battle with negative stereotypes of being labeled as bad mothers, particularly African American and Native American women (Opsal, 2012; Van den Broek, Black & Nicki, 2021). These negative experiences often present a challenge as women reintegrate into the communities and their roles as nurturers, mothers, and caregivers. “Women often struggle to rebuild broken relationships, particularly with children they have become separated from while incarcerated” (Van den Broek, Black & Nicki, 2021, p. 970). Men, on the other hand, may not have been in their children’s lives; therefore, the struggle to rebuild relationships with children may not be as equal a challenge for men as the men reintegrate. Ascribed roles dictate human behavior, since gender identity plays a significant role in criminal behavior, it can be expected that it will play a significant role in reintegration.

Protective Factors

Protective factors are considered to be social, human, and financial capital, made accessible within the community that assist an individual in successfully navigating the reintegration process. These include employment, education, housing, and having a mentor. Having access to these protective factors is important in addressing transitional challenges individuals encounter. However, the absence of protective factors constructs additional barriers as justice-impacted individuals reintegrate into their communities. Workforce development opportunities through education and vocational training help to reduce barriers to employment (Blitz, 2006; Van den Broek, Black & Nicki 2021). According to Berg and Huebner (2011),

“Extant research shows that the social capital obtained through relational ties is of paramount importance in connecting people with jobs. This capital is especially beneficial for jobseekers that are at a relative disadvantage in terms of their marketable

qualifications (i.e., work history, education) and reputations. Most offenders leaving prison lack a competitive resume, they are under-skilled relative to the general population, and they shoulder a debilitating stigma that is attached to their criminal history. Owing to these deficits, parolees face significant challenges in finding work. Some, however, rely on family members to procure job arrangements, and it is through this mechanism of job attainment that family ties are thought to be instrumental in altering post-release behavior” (p. 383).

Securing Employment

Employment is also important in the context of reentry as it disrupts criminal behavior and gives an individual autonomy. Time spent engaging in deviant behavior is replaced by prosocial activities (Blitz, 2006; Petersilia, 2004; Cobina, 2010). In changing routines, employment provides an opportunity for justice-impacted individuals to successfully reintegrate into their communities (Crow & Ortiz; Van den Broek, Black & Nicki 2021). By securing and maintaining employment justice-impacted individuals address transitional challenges like securing housing and preventing housing insecurity; child support arrears; paying parole fees and restitution (Morenoff & Harding, 2014). Policies focusing on making employment accessible, like Ban the Box, provide opportunities for justice-impacted individuals to be placed on a level playing field and not having a background becoming a hindrance (Doleac & Hansen, 2020).

Educational Attainment

Justice-impacted individuals experience higher rates of literacy challenges (Magee, 2021). Studies show that over two-thirds (68%) of justice impacted-individuals have less than a 12th grade education or a high school diploma (Magee, 2021). This lack of educational

attainment presents unique challenges within the reentry arena as it created barriers to obtaining and maintaining employment. Entry-level positions often require that candidates possess at least a high school diploma, with a median salary of approximately \$21,000. In attaining vocational training certification or college degrees, justice impacted individuals are provided with opportunities to secure employment with higher-paying wages. Education attainment is considered a protective factor that addresses existing skill gaps and reduces recidivism (Hall, 2015). As justice-impacted individuals participate in vocational training or higher education, their reincarceration rates decrease. For instance, those receiving vocational training show a 30% rate of return, bachelor's degree shows a 13.7% return rate, while master's degree or above showed a return rate of 0% (Roger, 2017). Reentry literature shows that education increases the odds of employment even when a background creates challenges (Valentine, 2015).

Mentoring

Apart from the physical and financial barriers associated with being justice-involved, when individuals return home, they seek to reestablish relationships within the community. Due to previous behaviors and criminal history, many individuals have burnt all their bridges and relationships. Kjellstrand, Matulis, Jackson, Smith, & Eddy (2023) describe the absence of bridges or relationships as having an “eroded or caustic support network” (p. 568). The absence of a support system or network highlights the importance of ensuring that justice-impacted individuals can establish meaningful relationships as they reintegrate (Leim & Richardson, 2014). Scholars and practitioners have noted that mentoring or having a mentor plays an important part in a person's life (Morris, 2017). Building a relationship with a mentor can be the first significant relationship a justice-impacted individual may have post-incarceration. Mentors can provide references, additional community resources, a new network of friends, assistance

with securing and maintaining employment, as well as individualized assistance with accomplishing goals (Duwe & Johnson, 2016).

Morris (2017) describes mentoring as a form of social intervention, whereby certain populations can access social capital that reduces negative outcomes like loss of employment, incarceration, and recidivism. The role of mentoring is also crucial as it provides a space where justice-impacted individuals are not judged on their past, but instead, feel a level of inclusion. This new relationship is often seen as the first step to building a new foundation within their community. Mentoring is one of the protective factors that increase in value with time. Research has shown that individuals being mentored ongoing have a higher likelihood of reintegrating successfully as well as giving back and becoming mentors themselves (Duwe & Johnson, 2016). According to Kjellstrand, et al., (2023), mentoring influences both the mental and physical health of a person; it also provides a buffer to many stressors that justice-impacted individuals face as they reintegrate. For many justice-impacted individuals, mentors are akin to family members through shared experiences. Mentors are privy to the daily struggles that justice-impacted individuals face. For instance, mentors play a more hands-on role in the reentry process by assisting individuals with even mundane activities like learning how to operate a cell phone for the first time. These protective factors help to build capacity by ensuring that justice-impacted individuals have support within the community. This support is what leads to successful reintegration.

Barriers and Transitional Challenges

Barriers and transitional challenges associated with reentry are varied. They are analogous to collateral consequences of a criminal conviction; in that, they affect an individual long after incarceration. These challenges produce barriers that are unique to justice-impacted

individuals (Collateral Consequences of Criminal Convictions, 2010). There are more than 40,000 collateral consequences associated with incarceration and criminal justice involvement (National Institute of Justice, 2018). These consequences are tied to civil penalties governed by state and federal legislations that create barriers that contribute to higher recidivism rates and prevent individuals from rebuilding their lives (Collateral Consequences of Criminal Convictions, 2010). According to the National Institute of Justice (2018), many of these collateral consequences are deemed to be harsh as they:

1. Restrict access to housing, employment, and higher education.
2. Require lifetime supervision based on criminal history
3. Require the publication of criminal records, notifications, and create residency requirements restrictions.
4. Create financial obligations (restitutions, supervision fees, fines, forfeiture, bonding, credit, and banking restrictions).
5. Restrict public benefits and access to public housing.

In navigating the reentry arena, these challenges need to be addressed in a comprehensive way (Goulette, Reitler, Frank, Flesher, & Travis, 2014). Oftentimes, justice-impacted individuals require support from family and the community to navigate these challenges. More extensively, navigating these challenges may require changes in policy and legislation, to remove the barriers created.

The stigma associated with being formerly justice-involved creates barriers to employment, and the development of pro-social identities (Morris, 2017). When these barriers are removed, through community partnerships and job placement, individuals can assume their roles within the community as providers, law-abiding citizens, taxpayers, and employees

(Burton, et al., 2019; Harding et al., 2014). This provides a renewed purpose and facilitates the re-establishment of community ties and social bonds. Strong social bonds are a deterrent to reoffending, and they reduce recidivism (Laub & Sampson 2003). Because human interaction is relational, family reunification is a key component of the reintegration process as it facilitates ways for the individual to completely reintegrate and reestablish their roles in their families, as well as the community (Mowen, Stansfield, & Boman, 2019). The re-establishing of roles continues to foster and promote strong relationships and inclusion, supporting the importance of reentry.

Background Restrictions, Skill Gaps, and Employment

Employment is one of the main barriers that justice-impacted individuals face and is both a protective and risk factor. Once employment is secured, employment functions as a protective factor as it leads to self-sustainability (Uggen, 2000). Background restrictions and lack of vocational skills hinder employment opportunities, and become criminogenic risk factors (Lockwood, Nally, Ho, & Knutson, 2012; Grommon, 2013). A felony conviction, or even an arrest, often disqualifies individuals from being granted licensure for certain professions like barbering, nursing, providing financial services, or obtaining higher-paying jobs (Collateral Consequences of Criminal Convictions, 2010). When this occurs, justice-impacted individuals are forced into securing employment in less restrictive careers like construction general unskilled labor, landscaping, or warehouse (Denver & DeWitt, 2023). These lower-paying jobs impede self-sufficiency.

Although criminal justice policies like Ban the Box were meant to alleviate some of the challenges justice-impacted individuals face, there are still a plethora of challenges when entering the workforce. As background requirements restrict, so does not having the required

skill set to secure employment (Doleac & Hansen, 2020). When navigating the reentry arena, having a criminal record, and lacking skills for employment presents a two-fold set back that not just affects employability, but also shapes social and financial determinants related to attaining personal goals – acquiring assets, paying off debts, and securing housing.

Homelessness and Housing Instability

Justice-impacted individuals face housing insecurity challenges at higher rates than the general population (Schneider, 2018). This is mainly due to property owner requirements, background checks, and housing legislation (Collateral Consequences of Criminal Conviction, 2010). As a result, justice-impacted individuals are marginalized and disproportionately placed at a disadvantage when attempting to secure stable housing. Another factor that leads to housing instability has to do with co-occurring disorders like mental health and substance misuse (Hector, Khey, 2022). These challenges are augmented by the fact that individuals experiencing these challenges are unable to secure and maintain employment (Wallace, 2015). Individuals on parole or probation face additional challenges as they are not able to reside with family members who themselves are justice-involved (Baron, et al., 2013). With the skyrocketing cost of housing post-pandemic, justice-impacted individuals may encounter challenges renting on their own. In seeking a roommate or living with a family to offset the cost, their parole and probation restrictions create a barrier.

Not being able to secure safe and stable housing disrupts the reintegration process. For instance, when an individual is homeless and they secure employment, it becomes challenging to maintain employment when housing is not stable. Without employment, an individual is unable to secure stable housing. Both types of reentry capital are interdependent and vital to successful reintegration.

What Works to Lower Recidivism?

With over 640,000 individuals returning to our communities each year (Goger, Harding, & Henderson, 2022), communities must focus on what is working to reduce recidivism.

Providing adequate assistance to justice-impacted individuals is essential as they reintegrate. In advocating for successful reintegration opportunities, individuals returning home need adequate support and social capital (Cobbina, 2010; Mowen, et al., 2019). Studies have shown that focusing on family reunification, employment, education, stable housing, counseling for mental health and substance misuse challenges, as well as an opportunity to build up the human agency, produces encouraging outcomes (Bergseth, et al., 2011; Van den Broek, Black & Nicki, 2021; Opsal, 2012). Scholars have noted that social capital like employment and social networks have a positive impact on recidivism rates (Maruna, 2001; McKiernan, Shamblen, Collins, Strader & Kokoski, 2012). Other scholars have noted that to assess the needs of justice-impacted individuals, risk assessments need to be completed prior to administering treatment or programming. These risk assessments should be gender responsive in nature (Salisbury & Van Voorhis, 2009).

Although extant research on offender reintegration is extensive, there are some limitations in explaining certain aspects and examining concepts. For instance, there is no clear or cohesive definition of recidivism (Muhlhausen, 2016). As a result, there are different measures and approaches to what works. This creates disproportional challenges in ascertaining policies and best practices to address one of the most concerning and critical aspects of the reintegration process. Many scholars have highlighted that their research showed mixed results due to inconsistencies with operationalizing and defining concepts like recidivism, successful reentry, and rehabilitation (Baron, et al., 2013; Crow & Ortiz, 2014; Seiter, 2003). Within this

field of research, there is also a lack of consistent data and a reliance on anecdotal evidence. Although anecdotal evidence may have some challenges, and its acceptance may be met with skepticism, it is important, nonetheless. Maruna (2001) highlighted the importance of using a narrative framework to identify processes and successful outcomes.

Community Programs

After incarceration, returning citizens are deemed institutionalized, whereby they have become acclimated to the prison subculture (Liem & Kunst, 2013; Culbertson, 1975). Upon release, it becomes necessary for individuals to reacclimate into the community. This is where community programs bridge the gap and fill in where government agencies, like prisons, no longer have access to rehabilitate an individual. Some justice-impacted individuals need more time to acclimate into their communities (Cloyes, Wong, Latimer & Albarca, 2010), and community programs provide a safe structured way for individuals to reintegrate successfully. Once released from prison, there is an expectation that justice-impacted individuals will be able to pick up the pieces and become productive citizens. This expectation is often not met because of the challenges individuals face upon release, as well as the lack of resources, or reentry capital.

An important aspect of the reentry process is to prevent the loss of both social and human capital (agency and self-efficacy). The solution to the myriad challenges faced by an individual, as they return home, has to do with the availability of reentry resources needed during the reintegration process. The inability to provide necessary resources perpetuates a new cycle of victimization by alienating the offender (Martin, 2017), forging a separation from the very community that can aid in their reintegration. Community programs can bridge this gap by

providing resources often not accessible to governmental agencies at the federal, state, or local levels.

By focusing on transitional challenges, community programs provide support and access to reentry capital, allowing individuals to acclimate into their community. Miller and Miller (2015) looked at community in-reach programs and found they were more effective in providing access and a seamless transition after release. Lack of employment, housing, mental health, and substance abuse issues, as well as the inability to reestablish personal relationships, are a few of the many challenges system-impacted individuals face and often need support in addressing. Community-based programs are adept and structured in such a way that address the transitional issues of formerly incarcerated individuals. Subsequently, these programs impact recidivism and reduce the burden on the criminal justice system (Fewer People Going Back to Prison, n.d.; Willison, et al., 2018).

Throughout the reentry process, community programs have provided a continuum of care for individuals post-incarceration. When community programs function optimally communities as a whole benefit. By providing resources, access to employment, financial support, access to social networks, and family reunification, these programs demonstrate that successful reintegration is dependent on community efforts. As an individual transitions from prison life and re-acclimates into their communities it is imperative, they are embraced by organizations that 'sees and hears' them.

Justice-involved individuals face several barriers, particularly with employment and the development of pro-social identities. When these barriers are removed through community partnerships and job placement, individuals can assume their roles within the community. The removal of barriers fosters renewed purpose and facilitates the re-establishment of community

ties and social bonds. Strong social bonds are a deterrent to reoffending, and they reduce recidivism (Laub and Sampson 2003). Because human interaction is relational, family reunification is a key component of the reintegration process as it facilitates ways for the individual to completely reintegrate and reestablish their roles in their families, as well as the community (Mowen, Stansfield & Boman, 2019). The re-establishing of roles continues to foster and promote strong relationships and inclusion, supporting the importance of reentry.

Reintegration Policy Changes

Considering the myriad of challenges associated with offender reintegration, policymakers focus on finding ways to ensure that the process produces the expected outcomes to reduce its effect on the carceral system. Practitioners are leading the charge regarding restorative justice, whereby the identification of harm and not the exacting of punishment is one of the functioning components of the criminal justice system (Bazemore, 1998; Herman & Wasserman 2001). Public policies have begun to shape how sanctions are implemented. According to Silva (2017), approximately 32 states adopted legislation supporting a restorative justice approach. With this move, it is important to understand the role policymakers play in bringing about these changes in the reentry arena. Although challenging, Silva (2017) argues, “restorative justice practitioners are one source of political capital that may be organized for dynamic policy change. Whether via advocacy coalitions, interest groups, a key policy entrepreneur, or a combination, policy maker should find a way to harness political will” (p. 270). In other words, when political will is harnessed, it creates and shapes legislation and policy change providing an arena for advocacy, whereby reentry policies are supported

Hardcastle, Bartholomew, and Graffam (2011), concluded that reintegration policies are also affected by social climate. Support for criminal justice policies waver in instances when

media coverage or criminal justice policy highlight threats to public safety, surges in criminal activities, or inhumane aspects of prison overcrowding (Heimer, et al., 2023). These factors often determine the intensity of support for reentry efforts. Depending on the narrative harnessed, the government and private sectors might band together to promote and support populations marginalized due to incarceration. This support or lack thereof by the community is dependent on perceptions and is reflected in the legislative and community dialogue. In many ways, public perceptions significantly affect cooperation for legislation and policy change.

Furthermore, Hardcastle, et al. (2011) observed, “that current rehabilitative and punitive efforts to reduce reoffending are not performing at levels that justify expenditure” (p. 127). Even with the level of investment over time, states are implementing policies and spending more with no favorable rehabilitation outcomes or validation as to what constitutes successful reintegration. As a result, some scholars have proposed a different approach, rationalizing that the focus should be on post-release issues, particularly employment, and housing to increase public safety (Davis, et al., 2012; Thompson, 2004).

To focus on reintegration (reentry) services, federal, state, and local governments have closely examined policies centered on incarcerating and restoring an individual to their community. With the number of individuals being incarcerated and re-incarcerated yearly, policymakers are beginning to identify ways to reduce the carceral system’s revolving door. For instance, the Department of Justice (2022) indicated that the recent COVID-19 pandemic continues to affect American communities, and the need for smart solutions to reduce prison populations and root out systemic inequities in the justice system has become even more pressing. The recent pandemic highlights the need to address both incarceration and reentry from a rehabilitative perspective, rather than exacting punishment. Apart from the pandemic, justice

reform and penal policies have been at the forefront of criminal justice discourse and research for more than half of a century (Alexander, 2010; Austin & Irwin, 2012). Although examined and underscored, it has been challenging to gain a consensus as to what justice is within the criminal justice system based on current policies.

Bipartisan support led to the passing of legislation addressing recidivism and the challenges individuals face as they return from incarceration (Pogorzelski, Wolff, Pan, & Blitz, 2005). Known as the Second Chance Act of 2005: Community Safety Through Recidivism Prevention, this act provided innovative reintegration policies focusing on housing, public assistance, education, job training, health, and mental health. Reentry support is provided to individuals while incarcerated in (pre-release) or after release (post-release) from jails or prisons. The aim of this legislation is to address the overarching problems that have plagued the carceral system – prison overcrowding, reincarceration, recidivism, racial and gender inequality, as well as the overall failure to rehabilitate.

The current study helps to fill in the gaps in reentry research and research on recidivism by providing a clear and concise definition of recidivism that mirrors that of the state's definition. Having similar measurements in recidivism will provide a foundational reference point for this measurement. In doing so, a comparison will be made between the recidivism rates for individuals returning to the state of Nevada Department of Corrections; by identifying those that have participated HOPE for Prisoners program and measuring the recidivism rates for this group. This study will also examine three theories centered on desistance, social capital, and restorative justice to identify a framework within which all three intersect to promote successful reintegration.

Chapter 3: Review of Theories Utilized in Reentry Research

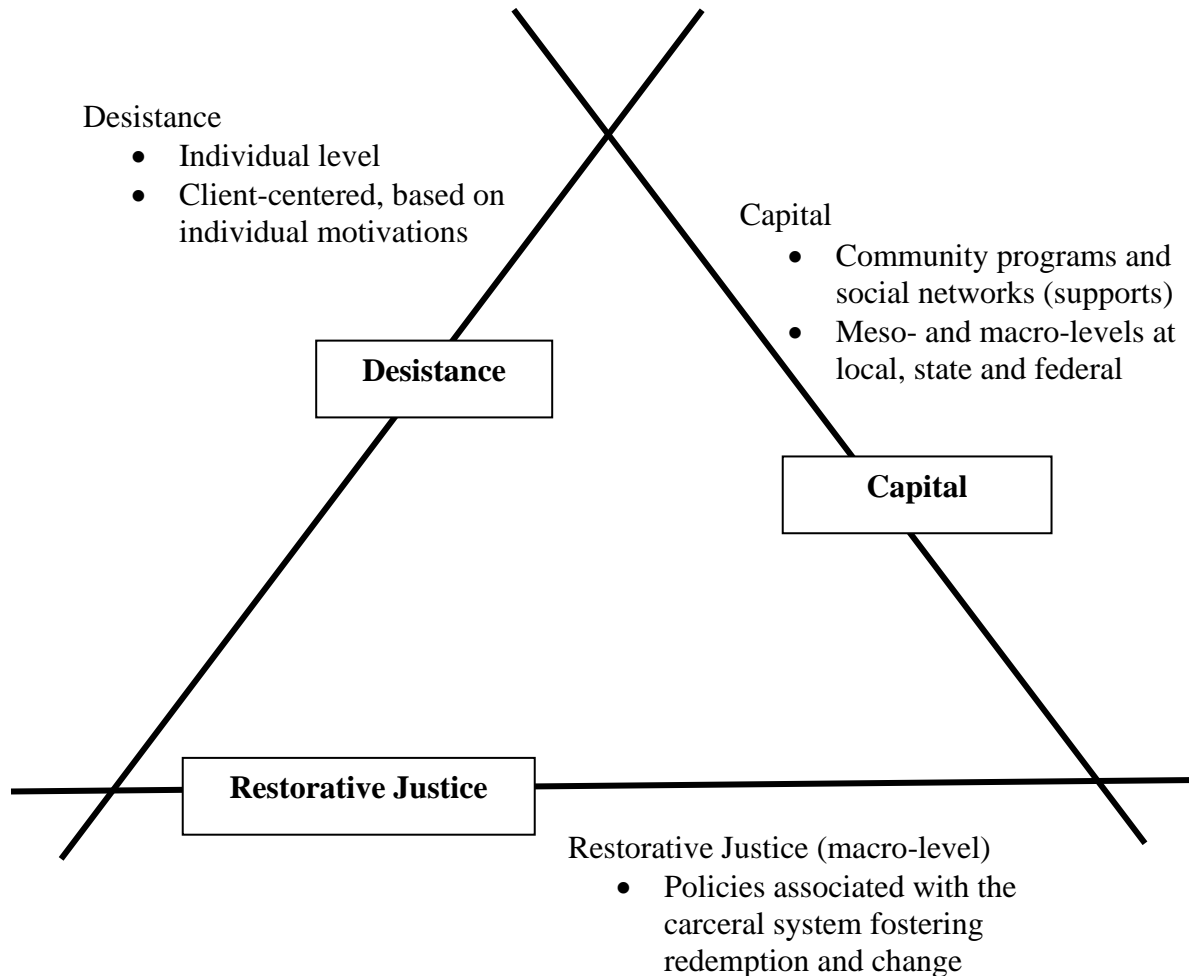
Offender reintegration primarily focuses on affording formerly incarcerated individuals an opportunity to be a part of their communities by addressing the alienation often experienced by this population (Burton, Lynn, & Alexander, 2019; Cullen & Gilbert, 2015). Apart from the alienation experienced, reintegration addresses the myriad of challenges created because of incarceration and interactions with the carceral system. These challenges are multilayered and encapsulate the lives of justice-impacted individuals at the micro and macro levels.

Community programs, like HOPE for Prisoners, provide what are considered reentry support (i.e., case management, vocational training, counseling, family reunification, workforce development, etc.) to address individual transitional challenges. The extent of these services offers evidence for successful reintegration (Miller & Miller, 2015). Throughout the reintegration process, a major challenge justice-impacted individuals face is largely due to the lack of reentry capital, human capital, and social capital within their communities (Burton, et al., 2019; Opsal & Foley, 2013). To assist justice-impacted individuals, community organizations need to focus on reentry at the micro- (individual), meso- (community capital), and macro-levels (restorative justice policies and legislations). HOPE for Prisoners acts as a conduit in providing services to individuals, while bridging the gap within the community. These services include case management to address risk, as well as mentoring to support and create social networks where justice-impacted individuals can be embraced.

Community-based programs, like Hope for Prisoners, provide support to justice impacted individuals by ensuring reentry capital is available with the communities they return to. Paired with, and supported by desistance, reentry capital helps to amalgamate the triad (desistance, capital, restorative justice) associated with reintegration.

Figure 2

Reintegration Triad



Desistance

Although desistance literature came into prominence in the 1990s, there has been growing interest in utilizing this framework as a way address re-offending (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990). Over the years, extensive work on reintegration has demonstrated that as individuals successfully reintegrate, their risk of reoffending diminishes (Hirschi, 1969; Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990; Cobina, 2010). When risks diminish, the process of reintegration

directly assists with addressing the revolving door of incarceration. One major driver of successful reintegration is desistance, where individuals leave a criminal lifestyle, or set aside delinquent behaviors and no longer commit crimes (Moffitt, 1993). According to Liem and Richardson (2014), desistance is the replacing of the old criminal self with a new law-abiding self. Best, Musgrove and Hall (2018) describe desistance as a process involving the long-term abstinence from criminal behavior. This act of abstaining or replacing of the old criminal self is particularly important for individuals with lengthy criminal histories (Doleac & Hansen 2020; Stinson & Clark 2017; Ward & Maruna, 2007).

According to Best, Musgrove, and Hall (2018), the theoretical perspectives (definitions and concepts) associated with desistance are multifaceted. Desistance literature places emphasis on individual trajectories, as well as community collaboration; to such degree where capital (discussed later in the chapter) is a major part of the discourse. Capital refers to resources available in the community that can foster change. As both an intrinsic and extrinsic factor as it relates of reintegration, capital includes access to resources, networks, and organizations. It is pivotal that justice-impacted individuals can access capital, as the lack thereof s within the community creates its own barriers and impedes change (Best, et al., 2018).

Literature focusing on desistance states the act of desisting from a criminal lifestyle usually results from an individual coming to terms with self (Maruna, 2001; Ward & Maruna, 2007). In focusing on self, desistance may occur as an individual ages out of criminal behavior, acquires hooks for change (employment, marriage, or education), and experiences motivation to change (Flores, 2019). Within the context of desistance, there are several levels of concepts that advance the theory including the concept of self, motivation, and agency (Cheliotis, 2006; Maruna, 2001).

Agency is defined as an individual's capability to act independently and make their own choices within a social structure or environment (Liem & Richardson, 2014). The agentic aspect of desistance is consequential to reoffending when individuals are motivated to make better life decisions and exercise agency. Motivation now becomes an agent for change, where change fuels the broader reintegration process. This level of motivation forms cyclic conditions and opportunities for individuals to know that a new way of living is possible. Change is then manifested in the choice made to refrain from antisocial behavior and in the adaptation of prosocial behavior.

As individuals desist from a criminal lifestyle, they are afforded the opportunity to secure their roles within the community (Best, et al, 2018). As they do, it changes the criminal justice landscape as justice-impacted individuals no longer engage in behaviors that perpetuate incarceration outcomes. Apart from the individual, community-level acceptance and inclusion are another important aspect of the desistance narrative. When individuals establish or reestablish bonds within the community, they become more vested (Maruna, 2001). Over time, desistance has a profound effect on recidivism rates, as stepping away from crime to a more prosocial lifestyle is central to this principle (Flores, 2019). Fundamental theories, providing discourse on life course persisters and desisters, support the notion that change in criminal lifestyle is possible and can lead to a prosocial lifestyle (Bushway & Apel, 2012; Sampson & Laub 2001). As a prosocial lifestyle is materialized, it will have a dynamic impact on reoffending, reincarceration, and recidivism (Maruna, 2001). This impact will promulgate through the carceral system, as any reductions in instances of reoffending will lead to a reduction in reincarceration rates. For this reason, the desistance framework is important to reintegration and may be the most crucial.

Identified both as a theory and process, the desistance framework provides great insight to criminal justice practices. Many of the foundational theories highlight the process of desistance by concentrating the individual and the social bonds created within the spaces they occupy – family and community. More recent, theories on distance have begun to focus on personal narratives as it relates to how individuals see themselves within the spaces they occupy (Liem & Richardson, 2014; Maruna, 2001). To make sense of this theoretical framework, I will examine both foundational and contemporary theories defined within the desistance framework.

Foundational Theories of Desistance

Foundational theories of desistance have been discussed as far back as the early 1900s (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990). Some of these theories will be discussed in the context of desistance as it relates to age – aging out of crime and a criminal lifestyle – and establishing social bonds and social capital. Early theories of desistance particularly focused on age and maturation as ways to identify whether individuals would desist or persist (Glueck & Glueck, 2013; Moffit, 1993; Laub & Sampson, 2001). According to Sampson and Laub (2003) ‘true’ desistance occurs because of specific events in an individual’s life course trajectories that lead to an individual staying crime free after the event. For decades, literature on crime and criminal behavior suggested that with time, individuals involved in criminal activities would change their delinquent behaviors (Moffit, 1993). The central premise of this perspective is that younger individuals are more likely to be involved in delinquency, while older individuals experience a period of maturation, leaving delinquency behind (Sampson & Laub, 2001). Although an extensive body of literature supports these assertions, some scholars have identified that the notion of age does not allow for the explanation as to why some individuals desist and why some persist (Moffitt, 1993). Sampson and Laub (2001) focused on desistance from a life course

perspective and contend that the cessation of criminal behavior may not be a broad experience. In fact, within the life course perspective the focus on persisters and desisters continue to be of great contention to this body of literature (Immarigeon & Maruna, 2004).

Despite this contention, other theorists have taken a different approach in explaining desistance. Gottfredson and Hirschi's (1990) assertion is that desistance is rooted in one's ability to establish social bonds. Moreover, it is the establishment of some meaningful bonds that cause a person to desist from offending. According to social control theories, there is an assumption that the bond of affection for conventional persons is a major deterrent to crime (McKiernan, et al., 2012). The stronger the bonds, the more likely a person would take the bonds into account if contemplating a criminal act (Hirschi, 2001). Within this social bond framework, Hirschi (1969) established three principles that foster desistance. The first is attachment to something outside of oneself – family, friends, and religion promotes individual level desistance (Hirschi, 1969; Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990). The second aspect of desistance discussed by Hirschi (1969) supports the premise that desistance is rooted in commitment, referring to an individual's investment in self, education, career, or their community. Lastly, involvement, which is referred to as the interaction experienced through participation in certain activities like employment, school, and family plays an important part in desistance (Hirschi, 1969; Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990).

Contemporary Theories of Desistance

Agency

The process of desistance is complex and mutually dependent on core self, generative motivation, and agency (Liem & Richardson, 2014; Maruna, 2001), all of which play a vital role in reintegration. Agency is defined in the context of an individual's capability to act

independently and make their own choices within a social structure or environment (Immarigeon & Maruna, 2004). Additionally, agency is viewed as being reactive rather than purposive (Liem & Richardson, 2014). From their perspective, agency is situational and is only exercised when it is called upon or when a situation arises. As with Maruna (2001), Liem and Richardson (2014) support this idea of viewing agency as reactive; they explain that it flourishes in certain social contexts. Furthermore, these authors state that social actors make choices based on the structures that surround them, and agentic individuals can shape their lives within these structures.

The ability to make choices promotes a level of agency, by annexing the desistance process, thus, leading to lower recidivism rates and successful reentry outcomes. For justice-impacted or incarcerated individuals, agency – the ability to choose and make decisions – may be the most difficult to regain (Liem & Richardson, 2014, Kemshall, et al., 2021). Incarceration is described as a means of not only taking away an individual's freedom but also creating a space where there is an absence of agency (Bonta, 1990; Gottlieb & Mahabir, 2022). It is important to note that a crucial factor for desistance lies in an individual's ability to be motivated to desist.

Personal Narratives and Desistance

Maruna (2001) states transformation narratives lead to instances of desistance with internal motivations or agency being a critical factor. Liem and Richardson (2014) discuss desistance, or the lack thereof, from the perspective of agency. In their study, they included Maruna's concepts of core self, generative motivation, and agency. Here, the authors discussed the role agency plays in the reentry process and the difference between desisters and non-desisters.

Maruna (2001) describes desistance as a social movement, occurring on the community level and not just individual level. Maruna describes desistance as having a transformational

impact on criminal justice policies. The overall premise of desistance is that individuals can change, and once they do, they leave behind their old criminal lifestyles. This transformation ties into desistance as individuals choose a prosocial life that enables them to change their cognitive landscapes (Giordano, Cernkovich & Rudolph, 2002). The ability to make choices promotes a level of agency and augments the desistance process leading to lower recidivism rates and successful reentry outcomes. Moreover, desistance literature emphasizes inclusion and opportunities for justice-impacted individuals to access social networks and organizations (Maruna, 2001). Within these spaces, individuals find social capital and develop a social identity that leads to long-term desistance (Best, et al., 2018).

Capital

Reentry, Social, and Human Capital

Reentry capital provides both a social and economic benefit to lowering recidivism and incarceration rates. Studies have shown that both educational attainment – through traditional means and vocational training – reduces recidivism (Wallace, 2015). It also alleviates skill gap barriers that justice-impacted individuals often face and increases employment opportunities (Doleac & Hansen, 2020). For example, when an individual is provided with training opportunities, and they secure employment, they are now placed on a path to self-sustainability. In becoming independent, they can advance new pathways of their lives – moving into better neighborhoods, meeting financial responsibilities, and establishing prosocial networks.

Reentry capital describes the resources an individual requires to navigate the reentry process. This includes housing, employment, membership in social networks (family, community, workplace), and access to human and social capital (Rose & Clear, 2002). Reentry capital is multidimensional as it addresses individual barriers, helps to create a new self, alters

life course trajectories by providing hooks for change, and increases motivation. Reentry capital significantly addresses the myriad of transitional challenges individuals encounter post incarceration to ensure they can continue a transformative path (Liem & Richardson, 2014). When viable options are provided where individuals can engage in personal development, it changes the way they see themselves. Developing oneself permits an individual to see themselves differently, they become more vested in their relationships and community.

Criminal involvement post-incarceration is due to justice-impacted individuals experiencing financial hardships, returning to impoverished neighborhoods (environments), and the same criminal lifestyle (Ward & Maruna, 2007; Simes, 2019). The availability of reentry capital provides alternatives to the current trajectories most justice-impacted individuals are on, by building up new networks and furthering inclusion.

Social Capital

According to Rose and Clear (2002) social capital “is a byproduct of social relationships that provides the capacity for collective understanding and action” (p. 361). Forming of these relationships create social networks, where individuals have a shared common interest and benefit from the relationships formed. As a result, people are bonded together by their values, beliefs, and perspectives (Jones, Hesterly & Borgatti, 1997). In the furtherance of social networks, individuals act based on their network environment and make decisions on their plan of action, depending on their need (Maslow, 1943). Social networks are important as they define human behavior and subsequent interactions (Wright, et al., 2013). According to Rose and Clear (2002) social networks also provide a level of safety and influence where actors can build both social and human capital.

Within this theoretical framework of capital, the importance of human capital necessitates a discussion. Human capital refers to individual agency and motivation and it plays a vital role in the reintegration process and desistance framework (Laub & Sampson, 2002). Human agency affects both the individual as a unit and the community collectively (Cheliotis, 2006). When individuals see themselves in a positive light, they are more likely to change, as their behaviors are demonized to a lesser extent by the community and self (Liem & Richardson, 2014). This motivated change promotes desistance. As with other theories, like labeling theory, how an individual views themselves has a direct impact on who they associate with and how they live their lives. Maruna (2009) has extensively tied to agency as an important catalyst fostering desistance.

Restorative Justice Theories

According to Zehr (2002) restorative justice is a process that involves, to the extent possible, those who have a stake in an offense to collectively identify and address harms, needs, and obligations, to heal and put things right as possible. This involves bringing the victim, offender, and community together to address the harm done. Katz and Bonham (2009) describe restorative justice as:

“A philosophy that focuses on the harm that comes to the victim because of a criminal act. It holds the offender accountable and seeks to involve him or her in repairing the damage caused to victims. This relatively new approach to dealing with offenders is used most often with juvenile offenders who, due to their youth, are more likely to feel remorse for the pain and suffering they inflicted on their victims, and, as a result, change their future behavior. Within the various restorative justice models, the victims include not only the people directly

harm, but also the wider community, whose sense of safety is compromised when a crime occurs in the neighborhood. Thus, both the primary victim and members of the community are encouraged to become part of the healing process” (p. 17).

As a theoretical framework, restorative justice principles are aimed at understanding the harm caused, who caused the harm, all while addressing the reparation of the harm done (Gerkin, 2009). Zehr (2002) states restorative justice is an emerging philosophical orientation that is not only useful in addressing crime and harm done, but it provides a pathway to address and reduce recidivism. Addressing crime, harm, and recidivism is embedded in the principles of retribution justice as it relates to punishment (Brubacher, 2018). In the 1990s, restorative justice became a popular alternative to punishment due to the challenges being experienced within the criminal justice system (Zehr, 2002). Over the past decades, criminal justice policies have changed to promote a rehabilitative approach to crime and criminal behavior (Kemshall, et al., 2001; James, 2015). As a result, there has been a shift in policies towards restorative justice rather than the former priority of incapacitation. Restorative justice policies are more inclusive as they invite all parties affected – victims, offenders, and community members – to address crime and criminal behavior together (Brubacher, 2018; Gerkin, 2009). This approach affords the offender and community an opportunity to come together to develop both human and reentry capital (i.e., resources related to employment, education, housing, and family reunification).

According to Piggott and Wood (2019) restorative justice practices are supported by assertions made by earlier theorists. For example, this research noted prior theories established by Hirschi (1969) – social bond theory and Braithwaite (1989) – reintegrative shaming theory, suggest the inclusion of support for justice-impacted individuals has a major impact on

recidivism. As discussed in prior sections, creating prosocial bonds through relationships is a central premise of desistance and moving away from a criminal lifestyle (Sampson & Laub, 2001). It is the desire to maintain social approval of significant others that motivates conformity more than indeterminate threat of legal sanctions (Piggott & Wood, 2019).

From a theoretical perspective, restorative justice provides justice-impacted individuals an opportunity for restoration, by making amends and repairing relationships. As discussed within the body of research, when individuals can make amends, and restore relationships, it not only permits the accumulation of social capital, but has a huge effect on agency (Maruna, 2001). Restorative justice addresses criminal behavior and the cessation of criminal behavior from various levels:

- a. Institutional components (macro-level): prior to incarceration, pre- or post-release provides an opportunity redemption and rehabilitation on the macro-level (Latimer, et. al, 2005).
- b. Community component (meso-level): increasing social capital by providing cognitive behavioral programs; educational and vocational programs; employment opportunities; and personal development programs (Aos et al., 2006; Lipsey and Cullen, 2007; MacKenzie, 2006; National Research Council, 2007).
- c. Individual-level change (micro-level): directed at cognitive change, education, treatment, and counseling to develop agency and self-motivation. These programs are likely to be more effective than other strategies, as they increase the chance of regaining agency, reestablishing relationships, and employment opportunities (Andrews & Bonta, 2006; Lattimore et al., 2012; MacKenzie, 2006).

The reintegration process and associated policies have taken more of a restorative justice approach for a variety of reasons (Braithwaite, 2002). Policymakers have come to realize that as a society we cannot ‘incarcerate our way out of crime’ or incarcerate to provide public safety. Instead, the causes, needs and risks associated with criminal behavior need addressing if there is to be any reduction in crime. Alternatives to incarceration have brought stakeholders to the table creating the shift from enforcement to an advocacy perspective, which fosters policy alternatives. These policies and perspectives are reflective of providing ‘second chances’ and reducing the prison population through restorative justice, sentencing reform and reentry alternatives.

Community theories, encompassing restorative justice, provide an alternative to incarceration both pre- and post-release. These alternatives include a number of policy adaptations as they relate to the carceral system. A restorative justice approach reduces the harm done to both the individual and community (Braithwaite, 2002; Gerkin, 2009; O'Mahony & Doak, 2017). This approach is sometimes controversial in many ways; it is seen as being soft on crime when the carceral system's primary function is to exact judgment and increase public safety. The availability of capital provides access to turning points that establishes the opportunity to produce hooks for change (Laub & Sampson, 2003; Liem & Richardson, 2014), resulting in desistance and a reduction in recidivism.




Thematic Components

Based on prior discussions, several thematic elements emerged in relation to desistance and recidivism (see Figure 3). One prevalent theme is that change is possible and the ability to change is generated from self – an individual's ability to exercise agency, which allows justice-impacted individuals to choose an alternative, law abiding lifestyle. In developing agency, justice-impacted individuals change their self-narratives and remain motivated to select and

reestablish prosocial relationships, fostering long term desistance. Relationships within the community lead to the establishment and inclusion in social networks and access to social capital (social bonds). The ability to establish social bonds within the community is another central theme that emerged in this chapter. Lastly, capital – social and human capital are major themes within this discourse. For all three theoretical perspectives, providing capital at any level empowers individuals as they reintegrate. Within the confines of the restorative justice framework, providing capital and a space for justice-impacted individuals to recognize the harm done fosters opportunities to make amends. This furthers the development of social bonds within the spaces they operate. Moreover, it fosters agency and the way they see themselves. The community gets a chance to see the individual in a different light as well, leading to inclusion and a change in narratives associated with justice-impacted individuals. As the carceral system plays a part in the community level theories, policies and practices designed to address the individual and community by providing the opportunity to restore and rehabilitate. The overarching themes within all three theories are self (agency) and establishing social bonds to create capital. Once bonds are established, individuals can be motivated to change (desist from criminal behavior).

Figure 3

Thematic Components

Desistance	Capital	Restorative Justice
		
<input type="checkbox"/> Individual (agency and motivation)	<input type="checkbox"/> Individual (agency and motivation)	<input type="checkbox"/> Individual (agency and motivation)
<input type="checkbox"/> Changing narratives (by self and others)	<input type="checkbox"/> Changing narratives (by self, others and community)	<input type="checkbox"/> Changing narratives (by self, others, community and carceral system)
<input type="checkbox"/> Development of social bonds on individual and community level	<input type="checkbox"/> Development of social bonds on individual and community level	<input type="checkbox"/> Development of social bonds on individual and community level
	<input type="checkbox"/> Capital is important in fostering desistance - social, human, and reentry capital	<input type="checkbox"/> Capital is important in fostering desistance - social, human, reentry, and carceral capital

Strengths and Limitations

Theories examined in this chapter indicate that the act of moving away from a criminal lifestyle (desistance) is reflective of an individual wanting to change and exercising agency to do so. I consider these theories to be individual level theories and the fact that foci are placed on the individual as an entity, it allows for practitioners to address unique circumstances and challenges experienced by each justice-impacted individual. Contemporary theories tend to focus on individual narratives to articulate desistance and change. For instance, Maruna (2001) suggests “the study of desistance might be constructed as the study of continuity rather than change - continuity of nondeviant behaviors” (p. 28)

According to Fox (2022), the desistance framework is often difficult to operationalize as it is a state observed rather than a single theory. Other scholars have noted the difficulty in conceptualizing the theory of desistance because of definitional incongruence and spatial measurements (National Research Council, 2008). Similarly, Rose and Clear (2002) discuss the same challenges as it relates to the restorative justice theoretical framework.

Components of the desistance theory, like motivation, are subjective and vacillating; meaning, days may differ whereby one day an individual can be highly motivated to change, and the next there can be a rapid change in motivation levels. Also, issues with cognitive behavior and learning challenges, like mental health and substance misuse, do not take into consideration motivation. In experiencing these challenges an individual may be not amenable to embrace change (Ward & Maruna, 2007). Foundational theories alone do not entirely explain desistance, as they are based on specific aspects of the individual's life – self, relationships, and employment. However, when placed in context of the challenges justice-impacted individuals face, they collectively add to the reintegration process and overall change.

Another limitation noted across all theories was measuring whether an individual returned to a criminal lifestyle and the intensity if they returned. Social control theories disregard the capacity of individuals to exercise agency and focus more on control through relationships and practices. Theoretical limitations do not necessarily signal that a theory in its entirety is limited. Instead, it highlights areas within the framework that can benefit from being augmented using the vast body of research within the criminal justice field.

This current research frames a paradigm centered on desistance, capital, and restorative justice to create a lens that examines differences in reincarceration rates and recidivism. This lens will measure reincarceration rates (staying away from a criminal lifestyle) after participating

in a community-based program that provided reentry capital (employment, case management, family reunification, and mentoring). It is my belief that most people want to change; the problem is that they do not know how. By providing the conduit for change, individuals can step into those spaces and create a prosocial lifestyle. As discussed within this section, change is a natural occurrence as individuals age out and undergo maturation. The establishment of social bonds and capital provides an opportunity for individuals to change their personal narratives and the way they see themselves.

Based on the overarching challenges (discussed throughout this paper) associated with the reentry process, this research project will attempt to assess support for overcoming transitional challenges to successful reentry and/or instances leading to recidivism. To accomplish this, focus will be placed on the reentry process, public policy, and the role community programs play in bridging the gap as service providers. This examination will use information from a community program in Nevada that provides reintegration services to individuals who have been justice-involved and/or released from incarceration. The goal of this project is to examine whether community programs are successful in connecting justice-involved individuals with reentry capital to address transitional challenges to promote successful reentry outcomes.

This current project is important as it expands existing literature demonstrating that a rehabilitative approach lowers recidivism as compared to retribution or incapacitation approaches. This research intends to bridge the gap between agency, social capital, reintegration, and recidivism. When community programs provide opportunities to formerly incarcerated individuals, they are more amenable to utilize and participate in rehabilitative programs. This approach provides greater benefits to the community in that individuals can contribute and regain

their lives quickly; thus, reducing the burden on taxpayers. Although critical, opportunities to access reentry capital, community support, and evidence-based outcomes as to what works, are not readily available for individuals as they return to their communities. The lack of reentry opportunities is not unique to the state of Nevada, but instead is a national issue (Aos, et al., 2001). The absence of these opportunities creates a void in the reentry process, which further marginalizes returning citizens needing a second chance.

Because of the excessive cost of incarceration, the loss of human capital and the plethora of challenges associated with incarceration, practitioners need to have an unequivocal understanding of what can work to reduce recidivism and subsequent reincarceration. Insight into the utility of community programs in the overall process of reintegration provides policy makers with better understanding on how to address individual challenges and change personal trajectory. Where change is possible that change in behavior has a direct influence on communities at all levels.

Chapter 4: Current Research Project

Overview of Research Site

State data have shown that over time, 95% of individuals incarcerated will be released to the community (Carson, 2020). Once released, approximately 29% will be reincarcerated with a year of release for a new crime (Carson, 2020; Nevada Department of Corrections, 2021). Surprisingly, this number excludes individuals being returned to incarceration because of technical violations. These astonishing numbers place the spotlight on the revolving door associated with (re)incarceration, as well as the need for reentry capital, support, and resources for individuals returning to their communities to ensure they successfully reintegrate and never return to prison. This research is exploratory and aims at examining rates of incarceration in the state where this research was conducted.

Within the state of Nevada, HOPE for Prisoners is an innovative reentry program that focuses on providing client-centered reentry services to reduce recidivism. Through its novel reentry efforts, HOPE can spearhead change within the reentry arena.

Incarceration Trends in the State of Nevada

State incarceration trends usually mimic national trends; however, despite the projected decrease on the national level, states like Nevada project a gradual increase over time (Nevada Advisory Commission 2019). Ware, Austin & Thomson (2020), stated that incarceration trends in Nevada for 5 years, between 2015 and 2020, were marked by a steady increase. During this time, the state demonstrated an increase in its prison population (Nevada Department of Corrections, 2022). However, in 2020, the state recorded an unprecedented and unexpected decrease in its prison population (Nevada Department of Corrections 2021). As noted previously, this decrease was a result of challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic and not

directly as a result of reform to criminal justice policies (Carson, 2021; Nevada Department of Corrections 2021). For this project, the discussion, as it relates to incarceration rates, will focus on comparing years before 2020, as the recidivism window observed by the researcher captured periods between 2015 and 2020.

According to Carson (2021), Nevada's incarceration rates in 2019 and 2020 demonstrated a decrease of 11%, where the rates for 2020 were lower than those for the year before. In 2020, Nevada had 11,422 individuals housed in prisons; while in 2019, the total number of individuals incarcerated was 12,840 (Nevada Department of Corrections, 2021). These numbers do not account for individuals in jails or under some type of community supervision. To this point, the local jails book approximately 38,000 individuals yearly (Prison Population by State, 2023). Incarceration numbers from the jail's population are excluded from Nevada's recidivism count due to the quick cycle through, and the fact that an arrest may not lead to a conviction or long-term confinement.

Over the past decades, Nevada's imprisonment has grown by 40% (Federal Registry, 2021). Even with this growth, the state's prison population is lower than the contiguous states of California (122,417) and Arizona (40,951) (Prison Population by State, 2023). Although the prison population is lower, Nevada reports an incarceration rate per capita of 713 per 100,000 residents; a rate considered to be one of the highest per capita among the states (National Institute of Corrections, 2020). This rate accounts for individuals incarcerated in prisons, local jails, immigration detentions, and juvenile facilities. Of note, reports produced by Carson (2020) and the Prison Policy Institute (2018), indicated that in 2018 there were a total of 23,000 individuals incarcerated in various facilities: state prisons (13,000), local jails (7,200), federal prisons (1,800), juvenile (630), and other (70).

In breaking down Nevada's incarceration number by jurisdiction and neighborhood, the Prison Policy Initiatives (2020) focused its yearly report on neighborhood differences, arrests by race, racial disparities, and over-policing. Data consistently showed that there were higher rates of incarceration in neighborhoods having a larger concentration of people of color. The city of Las Vegas, Nevada's most populous city and where the research site is located, held the highest incarceration rate of 330 per 100,000 residents, as compared to the city of Henderson where the incarceration rate was 120 per 100,000 residents (Prison Policy Initiatives, 2020). These incarceration rates serve as a reminder of the number of individuals being funneled into the penal system yearly.

Prison Admissions in Nevada

Although there was a notable decrease in prison admissions in 2020, trends in 2018 and 2019 did not demonstrate a drastic decrease as in 2020. Table 2 demonstrates 3-year trends for admissions within the Nevada Department of Corrections facilities. Admissions numbers account for admissions only, but not for individuals already serving their sentences. The table includes types of admissions – total admissions, commitments for new offenses, technical violations (supervision violation), and new offenses for individuals on supervised release. According to the Nevada Revised Statutes regarding Probation and Suspension of Sentence, a technical violation or supervision violation occurs when an individual fails to comply with sanctions or conditions of supervised release – the imposition of conditions while on parole or probation. As a result, individuals may experience consequences ranging from graduated sanctions to revocation of supervised release; subsequently, leading to reincarceration (NRS 176A.3510).

With incarceration trends as projected, it is important to highlight that an average of 42.6% of those incarcerated within 3 years from 2018 and 2020 resulted from technical

violations (Recidivism by State, 2023, Nevada Department of Corrections, 2021). From the number of admissions for technical violations, only 1.6% of those individuals, on supervised release, were admitted for a new crime. Similarly, in the state of Nevada, the number of admissions for technical violations steadily increased, although the total number of new admissions decreased during the same time.

Table 2

Nevada Yearly Admissions from 2018 through 2020

Types of Admissions	2018	2019	2020	3-Year Average
Total Admissions	6522	5971	4372	5622
Total Violation Admissions	2580	2515	2100	2398
<i>Violation Admission (%)</i>	39.5%	42.1%	48.0%	42.6%
Total Technical Violations Admissions	2500	2447	1983	2310
<i>Percentage (%)</i>	38.3%	41.0%	45.3%	41.1%
New Offense Admissions on Supervised Release	80	68	117	88
<i>Percentage (%)</i>	1.2%	1.1%	2.70%	1.6%

Stakeholders are aware of the key issues and collateral consequences associated with any increase in the prison population (Aos, et al., 2001). Nevada's admission numbers support the national trend, where reincarceration directly impacts the prison population and mass incarceration, whereby, new admissions for a term of commitment continue to add to the state's already overburdened penal system.

Rehabilitation in Nevada

According to the Nevada Department of Corrections (2021) correctional facilities advance a rehabilitative approach whereby offenders are encouraged to complete a variety of treatment programs intended to assist in acquiring coping and life skills to overcome addictions, anger, and violent tendencies; earn a high school diploma and general education certificate; and learn job training and vocational skills. The purpose of these programs centered on rehabilitation is to ensure the individual's success once released in the community; programs focus on instilling discipline, goal setting, and work ethic, and provide structure in their daily lives. In providing these programs, the aim is to assist individuals to be successful during – reducing incidents in the facilities and after incarceration – preparation to rejoin the workforce and reducing recidivism (Nevada Department of Corrections, 2022).

Utilizing a rehabilitative approach within the criminal justice system is critical from a transactional cost perspective. A community approach to rehabilitation involves merging government agencies, community-based programs, and service providers to provide the reentry capital needed (Kemshall, Burroughs, Mayes, & Thorogood, 2021). In providing resources and reintegration support, these agencies can reduce recidivism in a cost-effective way.

Rehabilitation in this instance is favored as compared to retribution and incapacitation (Latessa & Lowenkamp, 2006). On average, incarcerating an individual costs approximately \$39,158 and \$31,000 annually at the federal and state level, respectively (The Federal Register, 2021).

Conversely, these costs are significantly reduced when a rehabilitative approach is utilized.

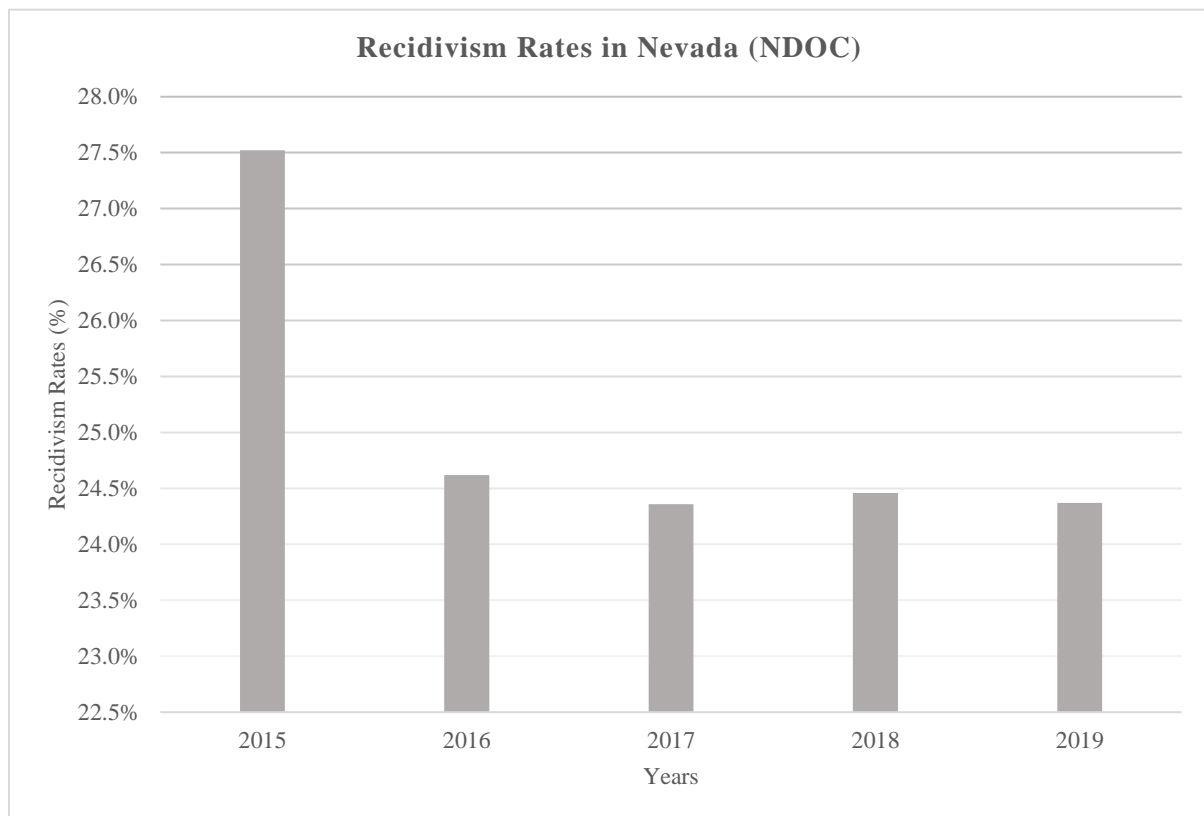
Rehabilitation has greater benefits to the community in that individuals can contribute and regain their lives quicker, lessening the burden on taxpayers (Davis, et al., 2012).

Recidivism Rates in Nevada

Within the state of Nevada, the correctional focus is placed on rehabilitation. Based on annual release trends, current recidivism data collected by the state shows an average of 28.63% of individuals are returned to custody within 36 months of release (Nevada Department of Corrections, 2021). An overview of past incarceration trends within the state between 2015 and 2019 demonstrated an average of 25.07%. As seen in Figure 4, during a five-year period, there was a marked decrease in incarceration rates between 2015 and 2016. In comparing recent data in 2023, Nevada's recidivism rates show an approximate increase of more than 3.5%.

Figure 4

Recidivism Rates Nevada Department of Corrections



Cost of Incarceration in Nevada

Over the past decade, as incarceration rates have increased, so has the cost to taxpayers. According to the National Justice Institute (2021), Nevada's budgetary spending for corrections was \$267.9 million in 2010 and \$373.2 million in 2020 (Vera Institute, n.d.). This reflects a 28% increase over the past 10 years. The state spent approximately \$28,000 in 2020 and \$36,000 in 2021 to house individuals incarcerated at various facilities (7 prisons and 4 camps). The average spending across states is \$45,700 per incarcerated individual. States like New York and New Jersey spend \$91,000 and \$74,000 annually, respectively. As compared to other states, Nevada is one of the lower-spending states when it comes to incarceration. For instance, states contiguous states like California spend \$131,000 yearly per incarcerated individual. The annual cost of incarcerating an individual in Arizona is \$30,000. Although the cost varies across states, the reality is that the cost of incarceration creates a huge burden on taxpayers.

Research Site Location: HOPE for Prisoners

The research site for this project is HOPE for Prisoners (HOPE) a non-profit organization located in Nevada's most populous city, Las Vegas. According to the US Census Bureau, there was an estimated 3.17 million people living in the state of Nevada in 2021. Based on the population data Nevada has an incarceration rate of 713 per 100,000 (Prison Policy Initiative, n.d.). These incarceration rates are among one of the highest in the nation (Carson, 2021). Approximately, 6,000 individuals are released from Nevada's Department of Corrections facilities yearly, and 200 individuals are released from the county jail daily (Prison Policy Initiatives, n.d.). High rates of incarceration and releases in Nevada highlight the realities that many incarcerated individuals will be returning to communities, oftentimes with no available resources or idea on how to navigate the reentry arena.

HOPE for Prisoners (HOPE) reentry program has been in operation since 2009. The program was birthed from the experiences of its Founder and CEO Jon Ponder. During his teenage and adult years, Jon had several instances where he was incarcerated and had to navigate the reentry process once released. After serving an 8-year sentence for his last conviction for bank robbery, Jon returned to Clark County, Nevada where he started HOPE for Prisoners. Jon utilized his personal reentry experiences, and evidence-based practices, as well as leveraged relationships within the community, to build a reentry organization that centers on guiding individuals through their reentry journey.

As a non-profit organization, HOPE for Prisoners assists men, women, and young adults to successfully reenter the workforce, their families, and the community (HOPE for Prisoners' Mission Statement). This undertaking is achieved by providing reentry services and resources to clients released from incarceration as they begin the journey to reintegrate into their community. Clients are 'met where they are at' and provided the necessary reentry capital needed to be successful. In line with HOPE for Prisoners' mission and vision, "HOPE for Prisoners works to empower the formerly incarcerated and their families to create a successful future built on strategic leadership and character development. By assisting those fighting for second chances, we strive to serve, build, and strengthen our community" (<https://hopeforprisoners.org>). The program aims to reduce recidivism, increase public safety, and develop opportunities within the community to facilitate the greatest probability of successful reintegration for individuals returning home after incarceration.

As the only reentry program of its kind in the state of Nevada, HOPE for Prisoners focuses on transforming individuals from wards of the state to thriving members of the community. HOPE for Prisoners is different from other programs because of the length of the

program, which is 18 months, and the programmatic pieces where case managers and mentors remain engaged in clients' lives for the duration of the program or longer. The team 'walks' alongside clients to address transitional challenges like housing insecurity, lack of employment, substance use disorder, and family reunification by ensuring clients are afforded the opportunity to participate in vocational training, obtain employment, secure housing, reintegrate into their communities, and reconnect with their families.

Currently, HOPE for Prisoners offers ongoing pre- and post-release case management services. Pre-release services are made available to individuals within 6-months of their release from the Nevada Department of Correction (NDOC) and/or Clark County Detention (CCDC) facilities. Delivering pre-release services to this target population creates an opportunity for HOPE to assess individual risks and needs, as well as develop a post-release case plan. In utilizing this approach, incarcerated individuals are provided with reentry support while incarcerated to reduce instances of recidivism and promote reintegrating back into the community post-release.

Program staff works in tandem with the client, parole/probation staff, and NDOC/CCDC staff, to provide pre-release services as well as a post-release transitional case plan. Such collaborative efforts allow HOPE for Prisoners staff to develop both a post-release plan and offer a continuum of care to individuals once released. Follow-up services include targeted case management, mental health, and substance use counseling, workforce development, employment assistance, training and education, housing, and additional supportive services. Additional life skills and personal development classes are offered depending on clients' needs. Classes are facilitated in 6-week intervals and focus on financial literacy, trauma, relapse prevention, anger management, parenting/fatherhood, computer literacy, and goal setting. HOPE for Prisoners

utilizes a holistic and person-centered approach when working with clients whereby every aspect of a person's life is assessed, and support is made available. Participation in these classes is based on clients' needs and institutional requirements.

Since its inception, HOPE for Prisoners has provided reentry services to over 6,000 individuals returning to Clark County. Approximately 500 individuals are served yearly, with the majority (85%) being males (HOPE for Prisoners website, n.d.). Reentry services are available through an unprecedented partnership with local law enforcement, judiciary, corrections, community supervision (parole and probation), training providers, employers, and other local reentry stakeholders within the community. The partnership between HOPE for Prisoners and the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department (LVMPD) is garnering attention as it extends an opportunity for law enforcement officers to serve as mentors to the formerly incarcerated individuals participating in HOPE for Prisoners program.

Research Site: Program Components

HOPE for Prisoners program component delivery spans the entire 18 months, where administering support and establishing program requirements are based on client needs. Clients enrolled in the program receive reentry support for the entire duration of their participation; thereafter, signaling program completion. The components of the program are developed to promote instances of successful reintegration while directly focusing on the client. Programs created within the model mirror paradigms associated with recidivism and address both static and dynamic risk factors. By utilizing this approach, HOPE delivers targeted case management services to address both short, intermediate, and long-term needs.

Community programs, like HOPE for Prisoners, have been seen as change agents in providing reentry support. This support mechanism includes addressing skill gaps in employment, case management, mentoring, and supportive services to address housing insecurity and transportation. In alleviating these barriers by providing support, justice-impacted individuals can accomplish housing, relationship, and employment goals.

Figure 5 identifies program components including a 40-hour Leadership Workshop, case management services (case planning, family reunification, substance use counseling; mentoring) one on one coaching between mentors and mentees; and workforce development – employment resources, and career counseling. Participants in the HOPE for Prisoners program are either referred to the program by correctional staff, parole or probation officer, social service agencies, or self-elect to participate.

The first step as it relates to program participation is enrolling in the HOPE for Prisoners' reentry program. Participants complete an intake form, which collects information related to demographic characteristics, housing, household composition, convictions, education, employment history, substance use, mental health history, interests, and goals, as well as a checklist with transitional challenges. After completing intake, applicants are required to attend an orientation (that describes the program) before attending the 40-hour leadership workshop. Attending and completing the leadership workshop marks the beginning of program participation, separated into phases.

Figure 5

HOPE for Prisoners Program Components



HOPE for Prisoners' 18-month program is divided into four specific phases. The initial phases (phases 1 and 2) are considered to be contact heavy, where clients, program staff, and mentors meet regularly to discuss, plan, and address transitional issues. During this time, it is imperative that staffs begin addressing clients' needs, which enables participants to secure employment to alleviate some financial barriers. As participants move to the next two phases (3 and 4), the focal point is to assist the client in maintaining employment, continued goal setting, and eventually training to become mentors, and volunteering within the community. Throughout

the entire program, clients are required to attend the huddle, life skills/personal development classes, and vocation training specific to their career goals. Program engagement and compliance are measured through direct contact with a case manager and mentor, participation in classes (if required), and huddle attendance.

Huddles serve as an opportunity for participants to be involved with the group-mentoring component of the program. These two-hour group sessions are held weekly and clients are given an opportunity to speak on the successes and challenges they encountered during the past week. Sharing within these groups is done voluntarily. Also, this group functions as a safe space where participants can be candid and real about their reentry journey. There are weekly guest speakers who often facilitate personal development sessions based on a wide range of topics.

Prior Research: HOPE for Prisoners

In line with a what works approach, HOPE for Prisoners provides a second chance to clients. while advocating for policy change in the reentry arena. Research projects and data collection are done periodically to assess the effectiveness of the program as well as evaluate program outcomes to measure success. These measures of success include:

1. Reduction in recidivism: evaluating program and client participation to report any reduction in recidivism, which may result in lower rates of re-offending, victimization, and incarceration.
2. Access to employment: addressing the individual's skill gap, building relationships within the community, and collaborating with employers is beneficial to clients in that it increases the probability of obtaining and maintaining employment.

3. Sustained employment fosters self-sustainability, increases the capacity to secure housing, and leads to financial stability. Employment is also a major contributor to family reunification and addressing child support issues.
4. Program participation and addressing individual barriers: participating in, and completing program requirements, prepares clients to overcome barriers associated with housing insecurity, substance use, financial instability, etc.

Being able to address client challenges and measure outcomes that demonstrate success reinforces the idea that successful reintegration may contribute to reductions in institutional capacity and address issues related to the overburdened criminal justice system.

In assisting clients, HOPE receives funding from federal, state, and local agencies, as well as individual and philanthropic donations. Over the years, funding has been secured through the Department of Justice, the Department of Labor, partnering organizations, county grants, and the local Workforce Board. These funding opportunities have supported the organization to implement programs and execute its mission, whereby clients have access to crucial reentry support like training, housing, counseling, workforce development, and so forth. Apart from providing direct services, several of these awards are outcome-based and require the organization to conduct evaluations throughout and after the completion of the funding cycle. Over the past decade, several evaluations and research projects have been completed as a part of the funding and organizational requirements.

Grant funding covers the cost of program participation for all clients. Cost approximations for individuals participating in the HOPE for Prisoners program amount to \$5,300 yearly (self-calculated). This cost accounts for clients accessing comprehensive case management and workforce development services, family reunification as well as addressing

substance use and mental health challenges. There is also an additional cost for clients interested in vocational training or attending an academic institution. These costs may be covered by financial aid (zero cost to the organization or subsidized by the organization, ranging from \$400.00 to \$8000.00 depending on the training selected).

Cost comparisons to incarceration for HOPE for Prisoners program range from a mere 17% to 42 % yearly for an individual to receive both comprehensive case management services and vocational or educational resources. This number is based on an average yearly incarceration cost of \$39,000 (Annual Determination, 2021). Overall, participation in HOPE for Prisoners program cost is lower (less than 45%), even with the most comprehensive services available, as compared to the cost of incarceration in state and federal institutions. More significantly, the availability of reintegration services demonstrates significant cost savings that benefit not only the taxpayer but the community as well.

Role of Researcher

The researcher for this project has served in various roles within the organization. During the preliminary research conducted from 2014 through 2015, the researcher served as a research assistant with the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Currently, the researcher is employed by HOPE for Prisoners and has held the following positions during her tenure: case manager, reentry supervisor, and program manager – spanning five years from 2018 to date.

As a case manager, the researcher worked directly with clients providing case management services and reentry support/services. She also facilitated various life skills classes and conducted risk assessments to identify needs and barriers. In the capacity of a program manager, the researcher supervises staff, plans, implements, and assesses programmatic components, oversees grant management components, and monitors outcomes. As a manager,

she assists with strategic planning, collaborates with stakeholders within the community, works with independent evaluators to assess program outcomes as well as creates and implements best practices as it relates to reentry.

The researcher continues to work on several mixed-methods research projects alongside an independent evaluator. These projects include studying several aspects of the reintegration process to develop programs and identify resources to address the needs of individuals returning to the community from incarceration. In addition, the researcher has embarked on several unique research projects using clients' narratives to highlight instances of successful reentry; challenges individuals encounter as they are navigating reentry and returning home amid a pandemic; and using individualized and lived experiences as a part of the reentry process. These projects are forthcoming works as journal articles and book chapters.

Participant Data

Although the researcher is currently employed at the research site, the researcher has created a plan for maintaining the confidentiality and anonymity of participants and their information throughout the research project and analysis. Data were retrieved from the management information system with both names and record identification numbers. Identifying information regarding name, age, and date of birth was removed from the original data set with client characteristics like criminal history, employment history, etc. In doing so, the process created two different data sets. To provide clarity for this project, each data set will be numbered and described based on content:

- A. Data Set 1 (Preliminary Research) – with record ID, name, age, date of birth, criminal history, employment history, family size, etc.
- B. Data Set 2 (Current Project) – with record ID, name, age, and date of birth.

C. Data Set 3 (Current Project) – record ID, age, date of birth, criminal history, employment history, family size, etc., and reincarceration information (all names removed).

Data Set 1 and 2 both reflect information from the participants in the 2014 – 2015 project (N = 522). Data set 2 with name, age, and date of birth was evaluated to establish whether individuals were reincarcerated in any Nevada Department of Corrections five years after program participation. Once the data was collected, Data Set 1 was merged with Data Set #2, and all identifying information (i.e., names) was removed preceding data analysis creating Data Set # 3. By ensuring that no identifying information was in the data set and in creating a two-step process, the researcher was able to adhere to and maintain confidentiality and anonymity standards.

Description of Data Sources

This first-of-its-kind research focusing on the success of community-based prisoner reentry programs initially started in 2016. The data collection covered participants enrolled from a two-year period between 2014 to 2016 (Troshynski, et al., 2016). The author of this dissertation was part of the original data collection team. The original data collected was reported in a descriptive way by the University of Las Vegas, Nevada's (UNLV) Center for Crime and Justice Policy and published in the Research Brief Series. HOPE for Prisoners was chosen as the research site for this research project, as it was the only program in Nevada providing reentry services (Troshynski, et al., 2016).

Data were collected and evaluated to measure employment outcomes, engagement in a community program, and recidivism. The evaluation approach centered on the analysis of a few

points of quantitative data – demographic information, employment, and recidivism outcomes, as well as qualitative interviews with clients, mentors, and programming staff. Participants from the original research project were ex-offenders released from correctional facilities that returned to Clark. There was a total of 1,186 intakes conducted by HOPE during the 2014-2016 data collection period; however, the final sample consisted of 522¹ individuals who completed the 40-hour job readiness workshop and were assigned to a case manager.

Program Participants

The sample size for this dissertation project (N = 522) reflects the number of participants enrolled in the HOPE for Prisoners program during the preliminary research stage. For this dissertation, I matched the incarceration records for all 522 original participants when there were at least five years past their original program participation. The sample size for both projects is identical, consisting of the same individuals. Data on demographic information, criminal history, program participation, recidivism, and employment outcomes were collected and analyzed from the HOPE for Prisoners case management database. Nevada Department of Correction furnished secondhand data on whether individuals were re-incarcerated after participating in HOPE for Prisoners.

The average age of participants was 36.8 years with 77.7% of participants being men. A large majority (84%) of participants identified as single. For criminal history, as it relates to the most recent offense, participants self-reported the following categories of offenses: violent crime (43%), property crime (28%), drug offenses (20%), and sex crimes (9%).

¹ Total sample size for this project was N = 522. Throughout the data analysis, missing data have been excluded and sample sizes for each individual analysis are reflected accordingly.

Program outcomes based on class completion showed that 25% secured employment within 17 days, 50% of clients secured employment within 32 days, and 75% secured employment within 71 days. The average time it took to secure employment was 59 days. The majority of the employment secured was categorized as full-time employment, the largest category being administrative/sales. Employment rates were similar for men (65%) and women (60.3%).

In the 2016 research brief, the team found that only 6.3% of participants reoffended. The time between class participation and the time to reoffend ranged between 6 and 18 months. Notably, most participants (n = 21) who reoffended did not secure employment (Troshynski et al., 2016). The preliminary research also demonstrated that mentor participation was correlated to program goals. Individuals with mentors were more likely to secure employment and less likely to re-offend – this being one of the primary findings of this research.

Extended Recidivism Analysis

For this dissertation, a five-year follow-up evaluation was conducted to determine whether individuals were re-incarcerated after participating in HOPE for Prisoners work readiness program during 2014 and 2015. Data were collected from the Nevada Department of Corrections (NDOC) between July 2020 and May 2021.

At certain points in time, this research encapsulates recidivism windows between five and seven years – based on participation dates for the last cohort and the first, respectively. Findings from this current research will create a compelling comparison to the state and national data, as well as postulate a measurement of the program's effectiveness in addressing recidivism, thus, shaping policy change. Of note, national recidivism data show more than 67% of former

offenders were rearrested and/or reincarcerated three to five years after release from prison (2018 Update on Prisoner Recidivism, n.d.; Durose, Cooper & Snyder, 2014).

Research Questions

Using data collected from HOPE for Prisoners and the Nevada Department of Corrections, this research assessed the effectiveness of community programs in securing employment for individuals with a criminal background. Likewise, it measured the effectiveness of program participation, mentoring, and employment resources in addressing recidivism outcomes. The purpose of this study was to explore whether participation in a community-based reentry program decreased reincarceration. One important goal of the community program used in these analyses was to increase employment and decrease recidivism and reincarceration. This current study examined whether employment and participation in a reentry program affected reincarceration. Each cohort within this study participated in a one-week 40-hour Leadership and Job Readiness workshop prior to a period of direct case management and mentoring services lasting up to 18 months.

Research Question #1. Do participants in a community-based reentry program have lower reincarceration rates than the state average?

Hypothesis 1. The 522 program participants will have an incarceration rate lower than the state average.

Research Question #2. Does employment reduce reincarceration?

Hypothesis 2. Among the participants, those finding employment following the completion of the 40-hour class will have a lower reincarceration rate than those who did not.

Research Question #3. Does engagement in a community-based program improve outcomes such as gaining employment and avoiding re-incarceration?

Hypothesis 3. Certain program participants are more likely to be employed than others based on their demographics, personal histories, and program engagement.

Hypothesis 4. Certain program participants are more likely to be reincarcerated than others based on their demographics, personal histories, program engagement, and employment.

Hypothesis 5. Any engagement with the program will increase employment and decrease reincarceration, either by working with an individual mentor or attending group events like the Huddles.

Methods

In evaluating the above-mentioned program, data were analyzed to measure actual program outcomes and determine what constitutes successful reentry (i.e., measures of employment, and lower recidivism rates). For the preliminary data, qualitative and quantitative data including transitional challenges centering on employment, length of incarceration, criminal history, mentor participation, access to community resources, demographics (age, race, gender), mental health, and substance abuse issues were analyzed to examine the correlation between recidivism and employment outcomes. This current project utilizes the data as a part of a longitudinal case study design, to evaluate program participation and its effects on rates of re-incarceration. Incarceration data will be collected using the original data set. Extended analysis of data permitted the researcher to categorize program outcomes based on program participation (having a mentor) and obtaining employment. In this case, I theorized that the increased engagement with program participation created positive employment outcomes and decreased the likelihood of re-incarceration.

Measures

Dependent Variables

For this study, the dependent variables reincarceration and employment attainment were both considered to be measures of program outcomes. Both dependent variables will operationalize as noted below:

1. Reincarceration is defined as any incarceration in the Nevada Department of Corrections occurring after the date of participation in the HOPE for Prisoners program within the recidivism window established between 2015 and 2020. Since there is no consensus as to a definition for recidivism, for this research recidivism is defined as a new commitment to prison resulting from a subsequent conviction after being released from prison, discharged from parole or probation, or participating in a program. This construct excludes re-incarceration resulting from technical violations. It is a dichotomous variable with 1 = Yes for reincarceration and 0 = No reincarceration.
2. Employment attainment is defined as securing employment while participating in the HOPE for Prisoners program and will be measured as a dichotomous variable on a nominal scale: 1 = Yes, for employment, 0 = No employment attained during program participation.

Independent Variables

The independent variables include criminal history, mentor participation, and demographics (age, race, gender). *Criminal History* was coded as violent crime (1 = Yes, 0 = No); sex crime conviction (1 = Yes, 0 = No); drug conviction (1 = Yes, 0 = No); or murder

conviction (1 = Yes, 0 = No). *Race* was coded as a dummy variable Caucasian/White = Yes/No, African American = Yes/No, and Hispanic = Yes/No. *Gender* was coded as Female = 0, and Male = 1 (dichotomous measures). *Age* was a continuous variable with a range from 17 to 65 years old. *Participation with a program mentor* is measured as a dichotomous variable 1 = Yes, participated with a mentor, 0 = No participation with a mentor. For the final hypothesis, engagement with the program was coded to capture those participants that declined working with a mentor but showed up for group activities like weekly huddles. The coding for this variable was categorical, no participation following the work readiness training = 0, group huddle participation only = 1 and working with an individual mentor = 2.

Analyses

A multivariate analysis was conducted to test whether re-incarceration rates and employment attainment are supported by program participation or affected by independent variables – criminal history, age, race, and gender. These predictors were examined to see if they explained variance in program outcomes. Data from the Nevada Department of Corrections were analyzed to ascertain whether clients from the 2014/2015 cohort were re-incarcerated. These data were collected through public access inmate search and prior documented case notes in HOPE for Prisoners case management database. A description of the statistical analysis used in each research question and the hypothesis is provided below.

Research Question 1. For the question about reincarceration, the hypothesis was tested using a frequency distribution to determine the number of participants that were incarcerated after participating in HOPE for Prisoners program. A two-sample Z test of proportions was computed to compare the rates of reincarceration of program participants to the known rate for the state. Program participants' rates of reincarceration were based on a 5-year follow-up period

averaged across all individuals. The 5-year period started the month after they completed the 40-hour workshop. Reincarceration data collected were between 2014 and 2020, depending on the workshop completion date. The average reincarceration rates for the state (individuals who returned) collected between 2015 through 2018.

Research Question 2. Analysis for this question on the role of employment was tested using Pearson's chi-square test to assess the relationship between employment and incarceration. Rates of reincarceration were compared between those who were employed within 6 months and those who were not. Program participants' rate of reincarceration in each group was based on a 5-year follow-up period averaged across all individuals.

Research Question 3. The hypothesis looking at engagement was tested through logistic regression with variables entered in sequence. The dependent variable, employment within 6 months of 40-hour class completion, was coded as yes/no. The independent variables are based on demographics, personal histories, and program engagement.

- *Step 1* included demographic variables that are dichotomous race (dummy coded) and gender or continuous – age.
- *Step 2* included the type of criminal history: violent crime, murder, sex crime, and drug crime.
- *Step 3* included program engagement, specifically participation with a program mentor.

Additional analyses included correlations to further examine program engagement and employment and incarceration rates.

Statistical analyses for all data sets were completed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software tool.

Chapter 5: Findings

Descriptive Statistics

The collection of data for this project was done at two different intervals. The first data set for time 1 was collected from 2014 through 2015, while data set for time 2 was collected in 2020. In presenting data for this project, general demographic characteristics – age, gender, and race – were highlighted in chapter four.

Race

To allow for proper analyses, only the three largest racial groups were included in the regression analyses. Race and ethnicity for the entire population were presented in Chapter 4. In the regression analyses, the sample drops in size from 522 to 457 when only the three large groups were included: Caucasian, African American (AA), and Hispanic. The data for race was coded as a dummy variable for the analyses. All other races were coded as missing and excluded from the regression analyses. Table 3 presents the frequencies of the three primary races discussed in this research. African Americans represented 50.3% of the population as compared to Caucasian (34.4%) and Hispanic (15.3%).

Table 3*Frequencies of Race*

Race	Frequency	Percent
Caucasian	157	34.4%
African American (AA)	230	50.3%
Hispanic	70	15.3%
Sample size	N = 457	

Mentoring

Individuals enrolled in the HOPE for Prisoners participated in the program by completing a 40-hour Leadership/Work Readiness workshop and mentoring. From the total sample (N = 520), 45.8% of hopefuls (participants) were paired with an individual mentor (n = 238), and 27.1% of hopefuls participated in group mentoring (n = 141) or did not have a mentor (n = 141). From the sample, two cases were coded as missing. The percentages and sample sizes for the latter two groups were the same. Based on the frequencies, a large majority (72.98%) of participants were either paired with an individual mentor or participated in-group mentoring – Huddles (n = 379).

Reincarceration Rates

For research question 1: Do participants in a community-based reentry program have lower reincarceration rates than the state average?

Hypothesis 1: The 522 participants will have an incarceration rate lower than the state average.

Table 4 shows reincarceration rates for individuals enrolled in HOPE for Prisoners Program. Based on program participation, 11.9% of program participants (n = 62) were reincarcerated within five years after participating in HOPE for Prisoners' 40-hour Leadership/Work Readiness workshop. As noted, the reincarceration rates for HOPE for Prisoners participants were found to be lower than the state of Nevada's average reincarceration rates of 28.63% and 25.07%. These averages are based on a recidivism window of three and five years, respectively. Within a recidivism window of 5 years, a large majority (88.1%) of participants were not reincarcerated after participating in HOPE for Prisoners program.

Table 4

Reincarceration after Program Participation (HOPE)

Reincarceration after Program	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
No	457	88.1%	88.1%
Yes	62	11.9%	100%
Sample size	N = 522	N = 522	

Table 5 displays data utilized to compute the Z test scores. Based on the Z test of proportions, the rates of reincarceration for HOPE for Prisoners program participants (11.9%) was compared to readmissions for the entire state of Nevada. To calculate a comparison group

for the state of Nevada’s readmissions, the total number of people released from Nevada Department of Corrections (NDOC) custody between 2015 to 2018 was used to establish the reincarceration rates for NDOC (Livingston, 2022). The total number of releases in that period amounted to 20,190 individuals. The number reincarcerated on a new charge during those 4 years was 5,545 individuals, reflecting a reincarceration rate of 27.5%. To test if the proportions of those returning from HOPE were different from the state average, a test of proportions was used. This proportion difference was statistically significant ($z > 1.96$, $p < .05$, two-tailed test), using z -scores to reject the null hypothesis that the proportions were equivalent. The average reincarceration rate for the state of Nevada (27.5%) was higher as compared to reincarceration rate for HOPE for Prisoners (11.9%). This reflects a difference of 15.6%.

Table 5

Admissions and Reincarcerations for Nevada Department of Corrections 2015 through 2018

Year	Prison Admissions	Reincarcerated	Percent Reincarcerated
	N	n	%
2015	3,621	1,375	27.50%
2016	2,041	1,241	24.60%
2017	5,890	2,426	24.26%
2018	5,638	1,494	26.50%
Sample Size	20,190	5,545	27.46%

Research Question 2: Does employment reduce reincarceration?

Hypothesis 2. Among the participants completing the 40-hour work readiness workshop, those finding employment will have a lower reincarceration rate than those who did not.

A Pearson chi-square test was performed to assess the relationship between employment and reincarceration. The total sample size for this analysis was $N = 519$. Based on the analysis, 88.1% of participants were not reincarcerated ($n = 457$). The Chi-Square Test conducted for this analysis showed that a large majority (64.2%) of participants in the total sample were employed and not reincarcerated ($n = 333$) and 35.8% did not find employment ($n = 186$). Of those employed, a large majority of participants (91.8%) were not reincarcerated (see Table 6). There was a statistically significant relationship between the two variables tested (employment and reincarceration rates). Participants who found employment were less likely to be reincarcerated, as compared to participants who were not employed [$X^2 = 3.011$, $df=1$, $p < .001$]. Therefore, those participants who found employment had a lower reincarceration rate than those who did not.

Table 6*Employment and Reincarceration Rates*

	Employed			
	No		Yes	
	n	%	n	%
Reincarcerated (No)	151	29.1%	306	59.0%
Reincarcerated (Yes)	35	6.7%	27	5.2%
Sample (n)	186	35.8%	333	64.2%

Note: $X^2 (1) = 13.01, p < .001$

Research Question 3: Does engagement in a community-based program improve outcomes such as gaining employment and avoiding re-incarceration?

Hypothesis 3. Certain program participants are more likely to be employed than others based on their demographics, personal histories, and program engagement (mentor).

For this research question #3, a binary logistic regression was conducted, where the independent variables were entered in three steps to test the hypothesis. As noted in Table 7, demographic information (with race coded as a dummy variable) was added in the first step, criminal history was added in the second step, and mentoring was added in the third step. The logistic regression model was performed to see whether demographics (Step 1); demographics and criminal history (Step 2); and demographics, criminal history, and mentoring (Step 3), predicted the odds of an individual obtaining employment or being reincarcerated after

participating in the HOPE for Prisoners program. Entering the data in three steps provided outcomes for Hypotheses #3 and #4.

Table 7 displays the results for Hypothesis 3, as to whether individual demographic characteristics, personal histories, and mentoring affected employment outcomes. The model was found to be statistically significant at $p < .05$ for Steps 1 and 2, and $p < .001$ for Step 3. As indicated in Table 7, being African American was negatively associated with employment outcomes. African Americans were less like to obtain employment. Race was found to be significant for all three steps at $p < .001$ levels. There was a positive relationship between having a mentor and obtaining employment. Individuals with a mentor were more likely to obtain employment as compared to those who do not have a mentor. This relationship was statistically significant at $p < .001$. For this analysis, there was a negative association between gender and employment. Although not statistically significant, women were less likely to secure employment as compared to men.

Table 7*Independent Variables Influence on Employment Outcomes*

	β	S.E. (B)	Exp	95% Confidence Interval		Sig.	R ²
				Lower	Upper		
Step 1							.078
AA	-1.018	.313	.361	.195	.667	.001**	
Hispanic	.141	.454	1.151	.473	2.800	.757	
Gender	-.146	.326	.864	.456	1.636	.653	
Age	.001	.013	1.001	.976	1.027	.918	
Step 2							.093
AA	-1.013	.316	.363	.196	.674	.001**	
Hispanic	.159	.456	1.172	.480	2.866	.727	
Gender	-.118	.334	.889	.462	1.709	.724	
Age	-.001	.014	.999	.973	1.026	.932	
Drug Conviction	-.003	.360	.997	.492	2.019	.993	
Sex Crime	.460	.503	1.584	.591	4.247	.361	
Violent Offense	-.146	.360	.864	.427	1.749	.685	
Murder	.752	.674	2.122	.566	7.953	.264	

Step 3							.235
AA	-.978	.335	.376	.195	.724	.003*	
Hispanic	.176	.479	1.192	.467	3.046	.713	
Gender	-.202	.354	.817	.408	1.637	.570	
Age	-.010	.015	.990	.962	1.019	.488	
Drug Conviction	-.112	.383	.894	.422	1.894	.770	
Sex Crime	.460	.531	1.583	.559	4.483	.387	
Violent Offense	-.108	.381	.897	.425	1.893	.766	
Murder	.743	.673	2.102	.562	7.869	.270	
Mentoring	1.647	.309	5.193	2.835	9.513	< .001**	

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$

Notes: AA = African American; the reference category for race is Caucasian. S.E. = standard error, Employment: 1 = employed, 0 = not employed. Sig. = statistical significance.

Hypothesis 4. Certain program participants are more likely to be reincarcerated than others based on their demographics, personal histories, program engagement, and employment.

The data for Hypothesis 4 were added in steps as noted above. For this analysis, a fourth step was added to include employment (see Table 8). The overall model was found to be statistically significant for race in steps in Steps 2 (.030) and 3 (.038). Being African American was statistically significant in predicting the odds of being reincarcerated. This logistic regression demonstrates there is a positive correlation and an increased likelihood of being reincarcerated if the individual is African American ($X^2 = 1.206, p < .05$).

For both Steps 2 and 3 where criminal history was added, having a drug conviction was found to be nearing statistical significance at 0.58 and 0.63, respectively. Although not statistically significant in meeting the $p < .05$ criteria, the closeness in proximity to the criteria merits a discussion. Being convicted of a drug crime is negatively correlated to reincarceration rates. This analysis found that individuals convicted of a drug crime were less likely to be reincarcerated.

Table 8*Independent Variables Influence on Reincarceration*

	β	S.E.	Exp (B)	95% Confidence Interval		Sig.	R ²
				Lower	Upper		
Step 1							.057
AA	.689	.357	1.991	.990	4.004	.053	
Hispanic	-.188	.559	.828	.277	2.477	.736	
Gender	.411	.411	1.509	.675	3.374	.316	
Age	-.029	.016	.971	.942	1.002	.063	
Step 2							.128
AA	1.258	.579	3.519	1.130	10.956	.030*	
Hispanic	-.094	.898	.910	.157	5.292	.917	
Gender	.375	.593	1.454	.455	4.651	.528	
Age	.008	.021	1.008	.967	1.052	.693	
Drug Conviction	-2.00	1.055	.135	.017	1.071	.058	
Sex Crime	-.590	.752	.554	.127	2.419	.432	
Violent Offense	-.041	.527	.959	.341	2.697	.937	
Murder	.420	.565	1.521	.502	4.606	.458	

Step 3							.049
AA	1.206	.581	3.341	1.070	10.437	.038*	
Hispanic	-.112	.900	.984	.153	5.215	.901	
Gender	.347	.595	1.415	.441	4.545	.560	
Age	.011	.021	1.011	.969	1.054	.608	
Drug Conviction	-1.967	1.056	.140	.018	1.108	.063	
Sex Crime	-.610	.751	.543	.125	2.368	.417	
Violent Offense	-.057	.529	.945	.335	2.667	.915	
Murder	.434	.563	1.543	.511	4.657	.441	
Mentoring	-.429	.449	.651	.270	1.569	.339	

Notes: * $p < .05$, AA = African American; the reference category for race is Caucasian. Reincarceration: Yes = 1, No = 0.

To test hypothesis 5 of whether employment and mentoring influenced reincarceration, an analysis was conducted using a Pearson Correlation. Table 9 illustrates results for a correlation between reincarceration, employment, and mentoring (individual and group).

Table 9

Correlations for Study Variables Employment, Mentor, and Reincarceration Rates

	1	2	3	4
1. Employment	1			
2. Reincarcerated after Program	-.164**	1		
3. Individual Mentoring	.327**	-.076	1	
4. Huddle Mentoring only (group)	.342**	-.055	.900**	1

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

As noted in Table 9, obtaining employment was found to be statistically significant ($p < .001$) across all three study variables (reincarceration, individual mentoring, Huddle). The correlation also shows that there was a negative relationship between employment and reincarceration, where any increase in employment produces a decrease in reincarceration. This model demonstrates that obtaining employment reduces reincarceration. Individuals who were employed were less likely to be reincarcerated.

For this analysis, having participated in the HOPE program at any level was also found to be correlated with finding employment. With both individual mentoring and group mentoring (Huddle), there was a positive correlation between mentoring and employment. This relationship

was statistically significant ($p < .001$). These results also demonstrated that individuals participating in the mentoring program (group or individual) were more likely to be employed.

Huddle attendance (group mentoring) was correlated with interacting with an individual mentor. This correlation was found to be statistically significant when looking at employment outcomes ($p < .001$). There was a positive relationship between both variables whereby participating in the mentoring program demonstrated positive employment outcomes and decreased reincarceration rates. These were two distinct groups (individual mentoring and Huddle – group mentoring) but demonstrated similar outcomes relating to employment. Neither participation level was found to be statistically significant as it related to reincarceration.

Table 10 illustrates the frequencies and percentages of independent and independent variables focusing on race. This table demonstrated a comparison for all races; however, the discussion for this analysis will focus on the three races that were dummy coded for this research (African American, Caucasian, and Hispanic). These findings were highlighted as race was the primary variable found to be significant across analyses. African American men and women were found to have lower employment rates and higher incarceration rates as compared to any other races. Mentor participation (declined mentor, individual, and group mentoring) showed similar rates of engagement across all races. Participants were either engaging with or declining mentors at the same rates regardless of race.

Overall, women were more likely to decline a mentor when comparing all the following three races: African American, Caucasian, and Hispanic. Although women would have higher rates of declining a mentor, they were more likely to work individually with a mentor as compared to participating in the Huddle (group mentoring).

A large percentage of African American men (31.1%) participated in the Huddle (group mentoring only). While Caucasian men and women were more likely to work with an individual mentor (53.0% and 55.0%, respectively).

Table 10*Frequencies of Variables (Independent/Dependent) and Race*

	Caucasian	African American	Hispanic	American Indian	Asian	Mixed
Employed – Percentage (n)						
Men	76.1% (89)	56.0% (108)	72.5% (37)	100% (2)	62.5% (5)	65.2% (15)
Women	72.5% (29)	59.5% (22)	63.2% (12)	50.0% (1)	50.0% (2)	40.0% (4)
Reincarcerated – Percentage (n)						
Men	7.7% (9)	15.5% (30)	11.8% (6)	50.0% (1)	12.5% (1)	8.7% (2)
Women	7.5% (3)	13.5% (5)	-	-	25.0% (1)	20.0% (2)
Declined Mentor – Percentage (n)						
Men	22.2% (26)	25.9% (50)	33.3% (17)	50.0% (1)	25.0% (2)	34.8% (8)
Women	25.0% (10)	32.4% (34)	36.8% (7)	-	25.0% (1)	-
Huddle Participation only (group) – Percentage (n)						
Men	24.8% (29)	31.1% (60)	19.6% (10)	50.0% (1)	12.5% (1)	26.1% (6)
Women	20.0% (8)	21.6% (8)	21.1% (4)	100% (2)	-	80.0% (8)
Worked with a Mentor – Percentage (n)						
Men	53.0% (62)	42.5% (82)	45.1% (23)	-	62.5% (5)	39.1% (9)
Women	55.0% (22)	45.9% (17)	42.1% (8)	-	75.0% (3)	20.0% (2)

Chapter 6: Discussion

Based on this research project, providing reentry capital and support to individuals navigating the reentry arena is important. Having the necessary reentry capital reduces reincarceration. Notably, participant demographic characteristics, personal histories, and program participation (mentor) have an impact on securing employment and reincarceration rates. Analyses for this project highlighted that African Americans were more likely to be reincarcerated and less likely to secure employment.

Individual Baseline Challenges

Age

The average age for this sample was 36.8 years. Although there were no statistically significant interactions related to age, this variable demonstrated both a positive and a negative relationship between reincarceration and employment, respectively. As age increased, a decrease in reincarceration rates was observed. Observations regarding race demonstrate that older individuals were less likely to be reincarcerated. Moreover, as age increases, individuals were less likely to secure employment. For the dependent variable employment, age had a positive relationship when analyzing demographics only. However, there was a negative relationship when accounting for types of crimes and mentoring. As age increases, obtaining employment decreases. This decline is a result of several factors not explored in this research like the inability of older individuals to reenter the workforce due to physical restrictions or lack of employment skills.

When employment was added as an independent variable, the opposite was observed between age and reincarceration. Age had a negative relationship with reincarceration rates, but a positive relationship when accounting for types of crimes and mentoring. For example, the

relationship between age and criminal history highlighted there was a negative relationship between an individual's age and convictions for drug, sex crime, and violent offenses. As age increased, there was a decreased likelihood that individuals convicted of these types of crimes would be reincarcerated.

Race

The program participant sample showed that a disproportionate number of African Americans were entering the reentry arena. Current observations align with criminal justice literature, indicating that a disproportionately larger number of African Americans are incarcerated as compared to any other race (Austin & Irwin, 2012). Based on the premise that 95% of individuals return home after a period of incarceration, there is an expectation that a larger number of African Americans will be navigating the reentry arena once they return home. Findings and discourse pertaining to demographics indicate that race plays a key role within the criminal justice system at both the pre-and post-release stages.

Race was the most significant factor across all analyses conducted. It is also one of the most discussed and narrated topics in the United States, so much so that it dictates policies, program outcomes, and expectations. At all levels, African Americans are disproportionately subjected to increasing interactions with the carceral system (Austin & Irwin, 2012). This continues to perpetuate the cyclical situations created by mass incarceration and racial inequality. For example, if African Americans are disproportionately entering the criminal justice and penal systems, once released, they will reenter the same systems through reincarceration. Taking this premise into account, the fact is many of the challenges African American face pre-incarceration become some of the same challenges faced upon release. For instance, returning to impoverished neighborhoods, having low socioeconomic status, lacking education, and experiencing a higher

concentration of social bond disruption (Tripodi, 2010). These deficits create a persistent challenge for African Americans.

Gender

Within this current research, gender did not play a significant role in any of the analysis or findings. Although there were no significant findings, gender should be discussed through a unique lens as gender matters (Van Voorhis, et al., 2009). A woman's experiences are often based on ascribed roles and status within the community. Experiences with poverty, trauma, abuse, and stigma often play a vital role in creating barriers during the reintegration process. Women are often forced to make constrained choices based on their roles and societal expectations. These choices not only create but also augment economic and structural oppression (Gottlieb & Mahabir, 2022). These experiences have a great impact in program participation and program outcomes. For instance, Huddle participation (group mentoring) was showed lower participation rates for women as compared to men. Once potential reason for this lower rate of participation may be due to childcare issues and the time the Huddle was held (6 pm to 8 pm).

Gender had a negative relationship with employment. Although not statistically significant for this research, this demonstrated that women were less likely to secure employment. Gendered perspective discourse affirms that securing employment is one of the most challenging aspects of the reintegration process for women, as returning to the workforce is often restricted due to childcare issues and low levels of educational attainment (Salisbury & Van Voorhis, 2009).

Research Questions

The first research question considered the rates of reincarceration, comparing the community program sample to the state rates. The reincarceration rates for HOPE for Prisoners

were found to be lower than those of the state of Nevada. These rates excluded individuals returning to prison for community supervision revocations. Differing reincarceration rates support the premise that when community programs provide reentry support to justice-impacted individuals, their reintegration process will yield success. While pathways, lifestyles, and aspirations are different, one common requirement is that justice-impacted individuals can return home and find support. Returning to communities with support changes an ‘us’ versus ‘them’ perspective and fosters inclusion.

When community programs function ideally, it provides an opportunity for individuals to become successful. This success leads to lower reincarceration rates, not only because of what the program provides but also what the individual gains. For instance, HOPE for Prisoners provides comprehensive case management and mentoring as reentry capital. These instances of support offer opportunities for justice-impacted individuals to tap into change. Once this change is materialized, this research shows that only a small number of individuals reoffend or return to their old lifestyle of crime and deviance (Laub & Sampson, 2004). The process of desistance takes place when justice-impacted individuals see themselves differently and their narratives begin to change (Maruna, 2009). Community programs establish the foundation for this change to become real.

By looking at the reincarceration rates found in this research project, the outcomes of lower recidivism rates support the theoretical framework related to desistance, social capital, and restorative justice that was discussed in chapter four. Desistance (not reoffending) promotes the development of social bonds by fostering the rebuilding of relationships, networks, and human agency (social capital). As this occurs the community then plays a part by providing opportunities for redemption and inclusion (restorative justice). As community programs

continue to lower reincarceration rates, one of the principal challenges within the criminal justice and penal systems is addressed – that of prison overcrowding and the excessive cost of incarceration burdening taxpayers. Reincarceration rates for HOPE for Prisoners participants were over 50% lower than those of the state of Nevada. This decrease translates to huge cost savings within the state, as any reduction in reincarceration rates translates to a reduction in spending.

The second research area considered was the importance of securing employment. As previously noted, 64% of individuals within the sample secured employment at the time of data collection. This research shows that employment reduces recidivism. In fact, it is the number one factor in reducing recidivism. Individuals in this sample who secured employment were reincarcerated at a lower rate than those who did not secure employment. Therefore, it is important that justice-impacted individuals be provided with meaningful employment opportunities to alleviate the many challenges they encounter as they reenter the workforce and community. These findings support the theoretical framework on desistance, social capital, and restorative justice. Not only does employment provide an opportunity for justice-involved individuals to develop hooks for change; but it also provides an opportunity for self-sustainability (Flores, 2019; Liem & Richardson, 2014).

This research also looked at the interactions of personal demographics, employment, and reincarceration. It revealed that certain program participants were more likely to be employed than others based on their demographic characteristics, personal history, and program engagement. Demographic characteristics, particularly race, play a significant role in employment outcomes. The logistic regression demonstrated that race was statistically significant ($p < .001$ and $p < .05$) throughout all steps of this analysis. There was a negative

relationship between race and employment, which demonstrated that African Americans were 36 percent less likely to secure employment, as compared to Caucasians. Even when examining personal histories (crime types) and participating with an individual mentor (social capital), a negative relationship between race and employment was nonetheless observed. Having a mentor created a negligible change in employment outcomes. African Americans were still 37 percent less likely to secure employment when social capital is provided. These negative employment outcomes for African Americans are analogous to the challenges noted in the current literature on racial disparities African American face when interacting with the criminal justice system. African Americans disproportionately experience negative interactions with not only the carceral system but also within the communities they return to (Gross & Hicks, 2015).

These results highlight a pervasive challenge within the criminal justice system where race plays not just an important part but appears to be a defining factor. Deeply rooted in years of racial injustice, African Americans face systemic disadvantages before, during, and after incarceration (Alexander, 2010). Even though racial injustices and challenges are rooted in years of inequality and injustice, in this research we see race as being pivotal to accessing and acquiring social capital (employment).

Overall, there was a positive relationship between having a mentor and securing employment. This relationship was statistically significant ($p < .001$). Individuals with a mentor were more likely to secure employment even when accounting for race. This outcome supports existing literature where mentoring is shown to be a formidable means of building social capital (Kjellstrand, et al., 2023). Mentors act as a conduit to access opportunities for justice-impacted individuals to receive support, by building human capital and social networks (José & Antonio, 2022). Often considered to be immutable challenges within the carceral system, results from this

analysis illustrate that social capital can affect static factors like race. Between the first and third steps, there was a slight increase in Beta values from -1.018 to -.978 indicating that there were more positive outcomes for employment when mentoring was included for this step (see Table 6).

In assessing whether certain participants were more to be reincarcerated based on demographic characteristics, personal histories, program engagement, and employment, race was found to be a significant predictor of reincarceration rates for justice-impacted individuals. These results echo extant literature where African Americans were incarcerated at higher rates (Alexander, 2010). Other demographic variables were not significant in this model.

Criminal history related to drug conviction had a negative correlation with reincarceration rates (nearing significance). Individuals previously convicted of a drug crime were less likely to be reincarcerated. In coding for this category, many individuals categorized their drug convictions as possession, sales, and drug trafficking. Certain crime types are incentive-based, meaning some crimes are committed for economic reasons. An inference can be made that when justice-impacted individuals secure employment, the need to engage in economic crimes decreases. Employment addresses immediate financial needs; therefore, decreasing instances of reoffending. Also, occupying a different social space (the workplace) removes individuals from the routine places they previously occupied (old neighborhoods).

When justice-impacted individuals can vacate spaces tied to crime and deviance by replacing routine activities with the demands of the workplace, there is a shift in their cognitive landscape (Giordano, et. al., 2002). Employment replaces antisocial behaviors with prosocial behaviors and builds social capital (Berg & Huebner, 2011). As a replacement for selling drugs to meet basic needs, individuals can earn a living wage to meet their needs. Justice-impacted

individuals become self-sufficient, build human capital, and reestablish social bonds. Providing social capital to address incentive-based crimes will reduce recidivism.

When accounting for the role that employment and mentoring play in relation to reincarceration, this research shows that employment was associated with reduced recidivism. The role that employment plays in reducing recidivism has been discussed in this chapter. Participating in a mentoring program also positively affects employment outcomes. This research question supports the notion that reentry capital furnished by community programs functions to create successful reintegration. Though there is no succinct definition of successful reintegration, the decrease in reincarceration rates provides a starting point to measure expected outcomes. Here we see the interplay of the theoretical framework previously discussed. The availability of community programs and the provision of reentry capital provide opportunities for social capital needed to rebuild social bonds and human agency.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

Offender reintegration continues to be one of the most dynamic and engaging processes within the criminal justice system. From a systematic perspective, the overall reentry process is complicated and difficult to manage. However, the availability of reentry support and social capital has aided justice-impacted individuals tremendously throughout the reintegration process. The impact on reentry is often demonstrated through observed outcomes related to employment and recidivism. This research merges different perspectives when looking at reintegration to address the individual as a whole, the communities they are returning to, and the relational spaces they occupy. When individuals are provided with opportunities and reentry capital, they can have successful reentry experiences.

Policy Implications

Based on the discussion and findings within this body of research, the following policy implications should be considered. Community stakeholders (service providers and government agencies) should collaborate to provide comprehensive services to justice-impacted individuals. This will allow for barriers and challenges to be addressed from a holistic perspective. Such collaboration can lead to the creation of a uniform and shared system of information management, to track releases to the community, and subsequent reincarceration. Having information tracked, and readily available, will alleviate current challenges regarding the availability and accessibility of data for this population.

There should be an extensive collaboration between stakeholders in the community and policymakers to create a seamless transition once individuals are released from incarceration. Where correctional services end, reentry services begin. Establishing a clear understanding of

this delineation is necessary to provide less punitive approaches, as correctional practices should not be imposed in the space where reintegration practices operate.

Both correctional institutions and community programs should provide pre-and post-release programs and services that focus on personal development and building human agency. The theory of desistance focuses on changing identity, agency, and social interactions. Tackling these challenges at distinct phases of an individual's life allows for change to happen in an incremental, but sustainable way. Individual change can occur at any phase while structural changes should start during incarceration, to prepare an individual to access social capital once released in the community.

Community programs should develop research centers. Policy research should focus on using clients' and stakeholders' narratives to define successes. Those navigating reentry spaces are more adept at describing challenges and providing solutions. Also, to create uniform procedures, there needs to be a clear mapping of the reintegration process. Although the reintegration process is not cookie-cutter, not having a reference point or standard procedure engenders a haphazard process. This is often problematic when implementing programmatic elements and evaluating program outcomes. Reintegration is a collective process; hence, community programs and correctional institutions should focus on building social capital within the community individuals are returning to. By providing pre- and post-release service and mentoring programs, individuals within the community can transition from participant to volunteer. This aids with portions of the reintegration process during and after incarceration.

Reintegration should start on day one of a prison sentence; individual risk factors should be assessed and addressed while an individual is incarcerated. For example, many justice-impacted individuals report not having a high school diploma, which limits access to

employment opportunities. Before release, it is important that incarcerated individuals acquire a high school diploma or GED. Vocational training or access to higher education should be provided pre-release. This will address the skill deficiency justice-impacted individuals face when entering the workforce.

The focus of Restorative Justice policies requires that they be continuously centered on race and racial disparities. These policies need to be robust not only at the federal level, but also at the state and local levels. Apart from addressing challenges associated with race, agencies need to implement gender-responsive assessment, treatment, and support to assist women in rebuilding relationships, securing employment, and accessing childcare and stable housing. Although this is currently being provided, services need to be more robust. Reintegration efforts and policies should be examined and administered through a gendered lens, as women's experiences are different from those of men.

Investing in infrastructure, within correctional facilities and the community, to ensure that resources are readily available for individuals while they are incarcerated and once, they return home. These resources can be financial or non-financial; however, it is imperative that these resources are provided based on individual needs.

Limitations

Limitations within this current research include inconsistencies in measuring recidivism and utilizing reincarceration as the primary and sometimes only measure of recidivism. To alleviate these challenges, there should be a common definition of recidivism that encompasses all aspects of the reintegration process.

Besides not having a concise definition of recidivism there is no reference point as to what successful reintegration looks like. Using subjective measurements creates challenges. Oftentimes, agencies independently define and determine what success looks like and these definitions are not shared externally resulting in inconsistencies in reporting data at all levels. In conducting this research it was observed that data were reported differently year to year (what was reported and how it was reported) creating inconsistencies and difficulties in making comparisons. For this research, technical violations were not reported due to data collection constraints.

At the time the research was conducted, several volunteers functioned as HOPE for Prisoners case managers, while current case managers are trained staff. Case management services were based on personalized plans that addressed individual needs. The research did not include case managers' involvement with clients to measure program participation. Also, risk assessment tools were not being utilized at the time the data was collected.

There may be some selection bias as individuals who participate in HOPE for Prisoners were referred to the program by stakeholders in the community or they may be proactive in their reintegration process and are ready for change. Clients were not randomly assigned to this program and may have been more motivated to change. Current research does not account for motivation.

This research may not be generalizable as it was a case study that focused on one reentry program and the Department of Correction in the state of Nevada. In exploring reincarceration rates, this study does not account for reincarceration rates for other correctional institutions on the federal or local levels. It also does not account for individuals who may have been deported,

moved out of state, or may have been reincarcerated in another state. Also, this research did not directly compare program outcomes for any other reentry program within the state of Nevada.

Nevada's population is also unique in that it is transient as compared to other states. As a result, this study is not generalizable as policies, outcome measures, and legislation differ from state to state. The sample may not be reflective of the general population as individuals participating in HOPE for Prisoners program self-elect to participate or are referred to the organization by community stakeholders.

Future Research

Research on offender reintegration continues in its importance as practitioners advocate to find alternatives to incarceration. Future research should examine the frequency of contact between case managers and clients to measure program engagement. Future research can also explore educational attainment as it relates to employment, reincarceration and program participation. In looking at reincarceration data, future research should measure time to reincarceration focusing on the recidivism window for each participant.

Conclusion

Life after being 'touched by' the criminal justice system looks different and provides its own unique challenges. Justice-impacted individuals should be assessed to determine their needs and provided relevant support throughout the reintegration process and thereafter. There needs to be an understanding of the dynamic nature of reintegration – the cyclical and sometimes disruptive process. The assumption is that reintegration is a linear process; however, it often takes a zigzag form whereby individuals are placed on a vacillating path without support. The realization is that successful reintegration can only come about through interactions between

several distinct factors – individual characteristics, motivation, reentry capital, and support within the community. Being able to define success at any point in the reintegration process is important to measure successful outcomes.

Community programs, like HOPE for Prisoners, work when it comes to reducing recidivism. The availability of reentry capital has a significant impact on the reintegration process, both at the micro and macro levels. Justice-impacted individuals participating in the HOPE for Prisoners program fared off better when examining reintegration outcomes related to employment and reincarceration. These findings suggest that investing in these types of programs can be a cost-effective way to address reintegration, prison overcrowding, and the excessive cost of incarceration. Community programs are shown to address challenges considered to be drivers of incarceration like racial disparities and racial inequality; homelessness and housing insecurity; trauma, mental health, and substance abuse challenges; unemployment and workforce development deficiencies; social capital and the rebuilding of prosocial relationships; as well as child support and family reunification. These supports bolster individual motivation and self-efficacy.

Through the reintegration process, client narratives reflect a change in how they see themselves and provide an opportunity for advocacy. Justice-impacted individuals can navigate spaces where there is access and representation. Successful reintegration and community support foster opportunities where justice-impacted individuals can thrive. Rehabilitation alone does not reduce recidivism; therefore, continuous support is needed to effectuate change. Any benefits derived from social capital provide a chance for inclusion and homogeneity of shared norms, values, and goals; therefore, strengthening communities.

The current levels that the carceral system is operating under dictate that viable solutions be found as to what works in reducing recidivism. This research continues to add to the extensive body of literature by providing a realistic pathway to success that includes addressing two important barriers to successful reintegration – employment (social capital) and reincarceration. Conclusions can be made that when provided the resources, justice-impacted individuals are more likely to reacclimate and become productive members of their communities. Community programs bridge the gap and provide reentry capital not readily accessible from government agencies. The availability of these resources is not affected by bureaucratic requirements and restrictions. This permits the strategic execution of service delivery within the reentry arena. Therefore, reintegration outcomes can signal significant changes in restorative justice practices, policy, and legislation. As this transformation occurs public, attention is garnered, leading to community support and policy change whereby justice-impacted individuals become policy entrepreneurs charting the course for sustainable change within the reentry arena at the local, state, and federal levels.

Appendix A: Intake Information for this Project

Portion of Intake Assessment

Demographic Information:

Gender: Male ____ Female ____ Date of Birth: ____ / ____ / ____ Age: ____

Ethnicity (circle one): Caucasian/White, African American, Hispanic, American Indian, Asian, Unknown, Mixed

Marital Status (circle one): Married, Single, Separated, Divorced, Widowed, Cohabiting

Have you ever been placed in foster care? Yes/ No ____ If yes, did you age out? Yes/ No ____

Veteran Status: Are you a Veteran of the US Armed Forces? Y / N

Housing Information:

Household Members:

Gender: Male/Female; Relationship; Age ____

Children not living with you: ____

Family/Household Information:

(If Married) Date of Marriage: ____ / ____ / ____ Length of dating: ____

Any previous marriages: Y / N If yes, # of marriages ____ Length ____

How did previous marriages end? ____

(Spouse/Partner Info):

Date of Birth; Age; Occupation; Years employed: ____

Child Support: Do you have a child support case that you would like assistance with? Yes / No

(If YES) Is there a current child support order in place? Y / N

Education:

GED: Y / N

High School Diploma: Yes / No

College/University Diploma: Y / N

Graduate School Diploma: Y / N

Vocational/Other Schooling Diploma: Y / N

HISTORY:

Any history of alcohol abuse: Yes _____ No _____

(If Yes) Date of last use: _____ / _____ / _____ Amount:

Number of years of alcohol abuse: _____

Any history of drug abuse: Yes _____ No _____

(If Yes) Drug of choice: _____ Other drugs:

Date of last use: _____ Number of years used:

CHARGES/CONVICTIONS:

Please list your charges and convictions below, starting with the most recent conviction:

Charge 1: _____ Conviction date: _____ / _____ /

Charge 2: _____ Conviction date: _____ / _____ /

Charge 3: _____ Conviction date: _____ / _____ /

Length of incarceration: Charge 1: _____ Charge 2: _____ Charge 3:

Where did you serve your time?

Charge 1: _____ Charge 2: _____ Charge 3: _____

(Pick One) Are you currently on ☐ Parole or ☐ Probation or ☐ None

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[Efficacy_An_Analysis_of_the_Social_Context_of_Offender_Reintegration.](https://www.academia.edu/2770466/The_Systemic_Model_of_Crime_and_Institutional_Efficacy_An_Analysis_of_the_Social_Context_of_Offender_Reintegration)

Zehr, H. (2002). The little book of restorative justice. Good Books.

Curriculum Vitae

Carolyn Willis

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Education

PhD Public Affairs

School of Public Policy and Leadership

University of Nevada, Las Vegas

August 2014 – Present

Expected graduation 5/2023

Cumulative GPA: 3.67

Master of Arts (MA) Criminal Justice

University of Nevada, Las Vegas

August 2012 – May 2014

Cumulative GPA: 3.90

Bachelor of Arts Criminal Justice (cum laude)

University of Nevada, Las Vegas

January 2011 – May 2012

Cumulative GPA: 3.77

Employment Experience

Director of Programs, HOPE for Prisoners, Las Vegas, NV

2023 - present

Program Manager, HOPE for Prisoners, Las Vegas, NV

2019 – 2023

Case Manager, HOPE for Prisoners, Las Vegas, NV

2018 - 2019

Reentry Clerk, Career Resource Center, Dublin, CA

2016 - 2018

Instructor, Microsoft Excel and PowerPoint, Dublin, CA

2016 - 2018

Graduate Assistant, University of Nevada, Las Vegas

2012 - 2015

Caregiver, Hope PCA, Summerlin, NV

2014 - 2015

Research Associate, Building Hope Nevada

2014 - 2014

Caregiver, All Valley Home Care, Las Vegas, NV

2011 - 2013

Juvenile Service Assistant, Juvenile Probation, Clark County, NV

2012 - 2013

Family Services Specialist, Department of Health and Human Services, State of Nevada 2010 - 2010

Customs Examiner Grade 1, Customs and Excise Department, Belize 1995 – 2009

Skills

Bilingual – fluent in English and Spanish (read, write, speak)
Proficient in Microsoft Office (Excel, PowerPoint, Word, and Publisher)
Adept working with and building case management information systems
Strong administrative and organizational skills (planning, analytical, reporting, grant writing)
Excellent time management
Ability to coordinate project tasks and detail-oriented
Excellent verbal and written communication
Case management

Papers and Presentations

Lost in Translation: experiences of ESL/LEP civil protection order petitioners – Emily Troshynski, Ph.D., Alexa Bejinariu, M. A., and Carolyn Willis, M. A. 2020

Prisoner Reentry in Nevada: Final Report on the Hope for Prisoners – Emily Troshynski, Ph.D., M. Alexis Kennedy, Ph.D., William H. Sousa, Ph.D., Tamara D. Madensen, Ph.D. and Carolyn Willis, M.A. 2016

Attitudes and Perceptions Toward Sex Tourism In Las Vegas (Thesis) 2014

American Society of Criminology – Presenter: Attitudes and Perceptions Towards Sex Tourism in Las Vegas 2014

Forthcoming Papers

Returning Home to Homelessness: Stories of Navigating Homelessness, Expectations of Successful Reentry, and Impacts on Reintegration

Working Title TBD: “Knowing and working with someone who has made it means I’m going to make it too”: The Impact of Lived Experiences on Reentry

Embracing Hope: Stories of Successful Reentry Experiences

Child Removal and Dual-Involvement: Crossing Over and Crossing Out Nevada’s Youth

Moving Between Infinity Focus and Aperture: The Researcher's Lens and the Focus of Research.

Neighborhood Characteristics and Transiency: Predictors of Collective Efficacy, and Attitudes Toward Police in Nevada

Community-Based Reintegration: Offender Programs and Challenges in Nevada

Research Experience

Director of Programs, HOPE for Prisoners	2023 – present
Program Manager, HOPE for Prisoners	2019 – 2023
Research Associate, University of Nevada, Las Vegas	2014 – 2016
Prisoner Reentry in Nevada – Hope for Prisoners program	
Research Associate, University of Nevada, Las Vegas	2014
Access to Justice and Self-Help Legal Services for Domestic Violence	
Research Associate, University of Nevada, Las Vegas	2012 – 2014
Sex Tourism, Human Trafficking, and Prostitution	

Teaching Experience

Workshop Facilitator, 40-hour Leadership and Job Readiness Workshop, HOPE for Prisoners, Las Vegas	2018 – present
Teaching Assistant, Department of Criminal Justice, University of Nevada, Las Vegas	2012 – 2014
Guest Lecturer, Survey of Criminal Law (CRJ 130)	2013

Professional Development

Mental Health First Aid Certification	2021
Community Health Worker Certification	2021
Moral Reconciliation Therapy Facilitator Training	2021
Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) Workshop	2020
Aegis Leadership Impact Program	2018
Nevada Sex Trafficking Awareness Campaign Educator	2018

Non-Profit Management Training	2015
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Mentorship Training Workshop, Las Vegas, NV	2014
The Council for Boys and Young Men Facilitator Training	2012
Marine Corp Leadership Workshop	2014
Children and Family Services Programs, State of Nevada	2010
Maritime Patrol and Ports Security, US Customs	2006
Narcotics/Contraband, Smuggling and Border Reinforcement, Belize	2003
Affiliations/Memberships	
American Society of Criminology	2014
Graduate and Professional Student Association – UNLV	2012 – present
UNLV Alumni Association	2012 – present
Alpha Phi Sigma	2011 – present
Academic and Research Interests	
Offender reintegration	
Crime and criminal behavior	
Restorative justice	
Community based corrections	
Penal system – incarceration, rehabilitation, restorative justice	
Victimization (sex tourism, human trafficking, prostitution)	
Victim advocacy	
Public Policy	
Non-profit management	
Honors	
UNLV Dean’s Honor List May 2011 – May 2015	
UNLV Dean’s Honoree May 2012	
St. John’s College Academic scholarship 1992 - 1994	
Service and Volunteer Work	
True Beginnings	
HOPE for Prisoners, Las Vegas, NV	
Saint Therese HIV Outreach (Food Pantry), Las Vegas,	
Tree of Life, Church of God in Christ (Las Vegas), Community Outreach programs	
YMCA (Belize) Mentoring program	
Port Loyola Community Center (Belize) Mentoring program	