A Qualitative Analysis of the Lived Experiences of African American Fathers’ Struggle with Reentry, Recidivism, and Reunification

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60 Reasons Why Relatives that Experienced Incarceration

- 1 Father
- 7 Brothers
- 9 Uncles
- 3 Aunts
- 3 Nephews
- 1 Niece
- 36 Cousins

60
Problem Statement

African American fathers who participate in prison reentry programs continue to struggle with the 3 R’s more than any other group of fathers.
Significance of Study

- United States has approximately 2.3 million individuals in correctional facilities (Prison Policy Initiative, 2017).
- 1.1 million are fathers (NRC Children and Families of the Incarcerated, 2014).

More than the prison population of:

- Finland
- India
- Argentina
- Canada
- Lebanon
- Japan
- Germany
- Israel
- England
- ...COMBINED
SUMMARY

• The Negro Family: The Case for National Action (Coates, 2015).

• African American fathers participate in prison reentry programs more than any other ethnic group (Sanders, 2016; Fathers.org, 2016).

• 2.7 million children have a parent in jail or prison (Reilly, 2013).

• 767,400 are African American and 91 percent of them have incarcerated fathers (The Urban Institute, 2015; Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2010; Christian, 2009).

GAPS

Failed to identify:

• Reasons for increased recidivism and reentry rates despite participating in reentry programs

• Underlying factors that serve as barriers for African American fathers and their families post-release.
Historical Plight of African Americans and Confinement

- 1619: Slavery
- 1865: Black Codes
- 1877: Jim Crow
- 1980’s: War on Drugs
- 1990’s: Mandatory Minimums
- 1990’s: 3 Strikes
Theoretical Framework

AFRICAN AMERICAN OFFENDING

- African American offending is related to the injustices that have occurred as a result of racial oppression and subordination (Unnever & Gabbidon, 2011).

FAMILY SYSTEMS

- Individuals cannot be understood in isolation from one another, but rather as a part of their family, as the family is an emotional unit (Bowen Center for the Study of Family, 2000).
Research Questions

• RQ#1: Why do African American fathers continue to struggle with reentry, recidivism, and reunification after participating in prison reentry programs?

• RQ#2: What is the lived experience of African American fathers who are reintegrating back into society and their families post-release?
Research Sample

N = 10

Convictions

Participant 10
Participant 9
Participant 8
Participant 7
Participant 6
Participant 5
Participant 4
Participant 3
Participant 2
Participant 1

Number of Convictions
# Research Methodology

## Phenomenological Approach

- Understanding the universal experience through the interview of subjects (Kumar, 2012).
- In-depth descriptions (Kumar, 2012).
- Subjectivity (Manen, 1990).

## Data Collection

- Non-random sampling-purposive.
- 13 question demographic questionnaire.
- 16 semi-structured interview questions.
- Interviews were conducted and manually transcribed by researcher.
Data Analysis

• Data was analyzed for emerging patterns and themes.

• Codes were created and organized in three categories:
  • Thematic
  • Descriptive
  • Analytic

• Data was interpreted by identifying similarities, differences, themes, and relationships.
## Findings

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Findings

1.) Trauma

- P#10: I went to alcohol and drugs because I was trying to get over a lot of things, like finding my brother dead in the house when I was 10. My mother and father left us in the house to die. First, my father left then my mother left. My mother was always a church-going woman. When she would come home, my daddy used to beat her up. My daddy will hold her down and pour liquor in her mouth- make her drink. Over the years, she just gave in and drank more than him.
Findings

2.) Self-Identification

- P#3: I saw a couple of friends from around the neighborhood. I was pretty much in a safe haven. With me it was kind of like, I’m right at home.

- P#10: I never been a thief, but when you want that drug to satisfy yourself you will do anything. I never have been a real criminal, but during that time I was more gangsta and thought that I could get away with it. I wound up not getting away with it.
Findings

3.) Reentry

- P#5: So it’s like every time I go through South Florida and I want to take a trade they send you to a prison where the trade is but it ain’t no trade there, it was there.

- P#6: I’m going to look for an apartment with my daughter, which I never did in my life. I don’t understand how to get an apartment because I been living with my mom.
Findings

4.) Reunification

P#5: I have to become their friend again before I can do the father work. They seen me a couple of times incarcerated but that’s only when they started to do something wrong.

P#2: Awe man, we strangers. Mothers took them the other way. My daughters believe everything their mother’s say. Before I came down here, I got to deal with them a lil bit but after then I had one that used to call me every week but she stopped calling me. It hadn’t bothered me real bad because I done learned to be by myself.
5.) Recidivism

- P#9: You can have the best intentions in the world but when you are accustomed to a certain lifestyle and you not getting the money it’s hard, it’s real hard. The drug game is addictive-the money get to be addictive.

- P#3: You have like loyal guys you grew up with they gonna come and show you love - we call it breaking bread. They gonna come and give you $3-400, some drugs.
Implications for Social Work

Policy:

• **More social workers should be an integral part of legislative action.** Social worker’s involvement in the process of public policy development can help the justice system provide more effective services to the offender and their families.

Practice:

• Practitioners should **implement a specialized therapeutic approach** that focuses on coping, trauma, and parenting so that treatment becomes an instrument in preventing future criminal behavior.
Implications for Social Work

Research:
• **More qualitative studies** so that the fathers can have the opportunity to express their concerns and fears about reentry, recidivism, and reunification.

Education:
• **Family and child welfare courses should be revised** to include trauma associated with incarceration, intervention, prevention, and rehabilitation for individuals and families affected by incarceration.
Discussion

• Endured chronic unaddressed trauma, which gave tremendous insight into why they struggle with the 3R’s.

• Prison reentry programs heightened their expectations for post-release.

• Programs did not prepare them for the difficult reality of reintegrating back into their families and society.

Observations

• Voluntarily showed pictures of their children.

• Expressed that their participation would help break generational incarceration in their families.
Limitations of Study

Sample size

Instrument

Personal biases
Conclusion

The 10 participants spent a combined 79 years in prison.

- This study provides evidence that African American fathers continue to struggle with the 3R’s after participating in prison reentry programs because of:
  - Unaddressed chronic trauma
  - Distorted worldview
  - Systematic racialized legislation
- It is the recommendation of this researcher that social workers, persons affected by incarceration, politicians, and criminologists create more evidence-based programs that address trauma, self-identification issues, and legislation.
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THANK YOU