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The Impacts of Incarceration on the Wellbeing of Family Members of African American Males
who Experience the U.S Prison System: A Phenomenological Study

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Counselor Education

by

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Abstract

African Americans encounter a high rate of imprisonment, and the social, economic, mental and other effects of imprisonment are extended to their families and communities (Roberts, 2004). In addition to separating individuals from their families and communities, incarceration maximizes the probability for fractured relationships, fragmented communities, and encumbers the public service systems (DeHart, Shapiro & Clone, 2018). Therefore, the purpose of this phenomenological inquiry was to explore the mental health effects of incarceration on the family members of African American males who experience the U.S prison system.

The theoretical framework utilized for this study was the critical race theory (CRT) immersed in the constructivism paradigm which were useful in creating meaning from the phenomenon studied. The study utilized transcendental phenomenology as the research design. Data was collected from nine individuals who had significant relationships with incarcerated African American males. The data was analyzed using phenomenological reduction and data visualization. The findings were then synthesized into themes which helped to produce textural and structural descriptions leading to thick, rich descriptions of the participants lived experience. The emergent themes were familial changes and adjustments, impacts on family members wellbeing, Support systems, stigma of incarceration, and sharing personal experience.

Key words:

African American, Incarceration, Mental Health, Wellbeing

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Thanks to my participants for trusting me with their stories. It was not easy, and you could have stopped at any moment, but you all persevered. I will endeavor to use your collective voices to bring continued awareness to the myriad of problems incarceration causes in the Black community and do my part with agitating for policy changes.

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Dedication

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

According to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP, 2018), the United States of America is responsible for almost five percent of the prison population in the world. With an incarceration rate of 655 per 100,000 individuals, the United States is five times ahead of most developed countries worldwide (Gramlich, 2018). Currently, there are approximately 2.2 million people in state and federal prisons which include county and local jails, juvenile correctional facilities and military prisons (Sawyer & Wagner, 2019). Kirby (2012) reported that people of color constitute 60% of those behind bars. Specifically, African Americans account for a significant portion of the prison system, even though they comprise just over 13% of the United States general population (Carson, 2015; Kirby, 2012). Additional research shows that one in 11 African American men are incarcerated compared to one in 36 Hispanic and one in 106 white men (Kirby, 2012; Pierson, et al., 2017). African Americans are more likely than other races to experience the use of excessive force from law enforcement and are more than two times likely to be arrested (Kirby, 2012).

Numerous quantitative researchers over the years have documented the overuse of incarceration in the United States, and the disparity that exists as it relates to the incarceration of people of color (Kirby, 2012; Walmsley, 2016). However, Wagner and Walsh (2016) noted that mass incarceration does not significantly or proportionally improve the public's safety but rather contributes to decreased health and wellbeing of those incarcerated and their loved ones. Justice (2014) added that even with the justice system's knowledge of the ill effects of mass incarceration it is still overused, and African Americans continue to make up the larger percentage of the penal system. This leaves numerous children, spouses and parents to adjust to life without this incarcerated loved one.

Need for the Study

The overrepresentation of African Americans in the prison system is a long-standing issue. Mauer (2011) and Carson (2014) found that one in three black males in the United States will be incarcerated at some point in their lives. More recent data shows, on an average day in the United States, 1 out of 10 Black males in their thirties will be in prison or jail (The Sentencing Project, 2019). Additionally, the NAACP (2017) predicted based on data collected over several years that over 50% of African American males will be detained before reaching their 23rd birthday. The imprisonment of a loved one, especially a wage earner in the family, can lead to consequential psychological anguish, loss of earnings and possessions, and housing instability for family members left behind (Maxwell & Solomon, 2018).

These experiences create the potential for even more critical long term physical and mental health effects for family members (DeHart, Shapiro, & Hardin, 2017). Family members pay overt and covert prices while their incarcerated loved ones serve their sentences. An intersection of women, families of low socio-economic status (SES), and citizenry of color have been most profoundly impacted by unwarranted criminal justice policies for several decades and have fashioned a heritage of collateral damage that has persisted for generations (deVuono-Powell, Schweidler, Walters, & Zohrabi, 2015). The Pew Center on the states (2009) added that the setback and penance associated with incarceration extends beyond the incarceration end date (if there is an end date), and surpass the person being punished, thus negatively impacting families and communities.

Adverse health impacts related to their own or to a family member's incarceration is experienced by one in every two previously incarcerated individuals and one in every two family members (deVuono-Powell et al., 2015). Challenges such as depression, anxiety, Post-

Traumatic Stress Disorder, nightmares and feelings of hopelessness has been commonly reported by families, including their incarcerated loved ones. Notwithstanding, there is very little organized support for assisting families with the process of becoming emotionally and financially stable during and after incarceration (Lee, McCormick, Hicken, & Wildeman, 2015). Lee, et al. (2015) added that the ramifications of incarceration affects women of color and their families more extensively than others, intensifying the inequalities and systematic divisions that have – in the first place - forced many into the criminal justice system. In support of this statement, deVuono-Powell et al. (2015) noted that approximately one out of every four women and two in five Black women are kin to a person who is incarcerated. Children are also significantly impacted by incarceration, as Glaze and Maruschak, (2010), and Martin (2017) disclosed that there was a 7.5 times likelihood of African American children than white children to have an incarcerated parent. The pew Charitable Trust (2010) also, noted that African American fathers constituted 40 percent of all parents behind bars. It is important to note that despite more attention being given to the adverse impacts of incarceration for family members in the African American community, this might not be the conceptualization of every individual who experiences this phenomenon.

Significance of the Study

African American communities continue to encounter discrimination, despite the discrimination laws that are theoretically in place to prohibit the practices of racial, ethnic, or gender prejudice to achieve social justice. U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, (2018) attested that with the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, not much has changed as it relates to the treatment, discrimination, and racial profiling of African Americans. They noted that due to the violation of the Civil

Rights Act, even higher levels of incarceration have occurred among African Americans citizens, especially males.

Mauer and King (2007) concurred that the growth in high incarceration rates among African Americans is brought about by more disproportionate racial tensions against this ethnic group. Such findings assured Durrah (2013) to conclude that communities with large numbers of Black or African American people have a higher risk of incarceration for males. It is even more alarming to note that 18% of the nation's young black males, even with high school diplomas, will experience imprisonment prior to their 30th birthday (Pettit & Western, 2004).

Disproportionate allocation of funds in government spending between the penal and education systems is also problematic. The United States government spends over \$81 billion to fuel mass incarceration (Equal Justice Initiative, 2017; NAACP, 2018) compared to just \$59 billion for the total Department of Education 2018 budget (White House, Office of Management and Budget, 2019). Wagner and Walsh (2018) indicated that the actual cost of mass incarceration for federal and state government is \$182 billion; however, it is not an effective public safety approach.

The current research was instrumental in shedding light on the significant concern of incarceration due to the social disparity arising from growing numbers of healthy men who are not able to contribute to society or their families (Pew Center on the states, 2009; Western & Pettit, 2010). Lee, et al. (2015) added that poverty prolongs the cycle of incarceration and in the same breath; incarceration essentially leads to exponential poverty, especially in communities of color. Incarceration is a major barrier to employment and financial progression after individuals serve their sentences. This, therefore, further consolidates the connection between incarceration and poverty (Eisen, 2014).

There have been talks and attempts made to reform the criminal justice system over the years. However, Lee, et al. (2015) and deVuono-Powell et al. (2015) noted that this cannot be effectively done without taking into account the function and impact on families and wider communities. For any lasting change to be made, it is crucial that decision making institutions recognize the disparate effect the current system has on women, low income neighborhoods and communities of color, specifically African American families, and tackle and rectify the policies that started the problem. With over two million people presently domiciled in American correctional facilities, and their family members left behind, the glaring negative impacts of poor systemic policies on mass incarceration can no longer be disregarded (Sawyer & Wagner, 2019).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological inquiry was to explore impacts of incarceration on the wellbeing of family members of African American males who experience the U.S prison system. As the researcher read through studies on incarceration, it became apparent that researchers' focus over the years have primarily been on the wellbeing of those incarcerated, and very little attention has been given to the wellbeing and overall experiences of their family members. McFadden (2017) concurred that when reference is made to the criminal justice system in America, consideration is oftentimes not given to the family members of those incarcerated.

The objective for this study was driven by the awareness of the paucity that exists with regards to qualitatively researching the impact incarceration has on the wellbeing of the family members of African American males. The findings of this study will therefore add to the limited existing body of knowledge available and provide a platform for underserved family members who grapple with the family dynamic of incarceration to share their stories.

Research Questions

The following questions guided the study and assisted the researcher with providing a more comprehensive description of the phenomena (Polit & Beck, 2014).

1. What are the lived experiences of family members of incarcerated African American males?
 - a. How does incarceration of a parent impact the wellbeing of children?
 - b. How does incarceration of a child impact the wellbeing of parents?
 - c. How does incarceration of a spouse/partner impact the wellbeing of women?
 - d. How does incarceration of siblings impact the wellbeing of non-incarcerated siblings?

Definition of Terms

African American/Black - The term African American or Black refers to an indigenous group of people descended from enslaved Africans who are residents of the United States (Locke & Bailey, 2013; Martin, Fabes, & Fabes, 2011). For the purpose of this research the terms ‘Black’ and ‘African American’ will be used interchangeably.

Critical Race Theory – CRT is theoretically focused on race and racism, and the way that these constructs are profoundly and systemically entrenched within the structure of American society (Crenshaw, 2010 & Creswell, 2007).

Family Members – The researcher believes that the definition of a family is how the unit defines themselves. In the African American context, family structures are oftentimes intergenerational or multigenerational (Davis, 2007). This takes on a non-traditional approach to viewing families and sometimes includes members such as grandparents, great grandparents, aunts, uncles’ cousins, etc. living in the home. A family member in any of the roles above might also be

required to play a significant role for varying reasons. For the purpose of this study, if an extended family member plays a substantial role in the incarcerated family member's life, or if the incarcerated family member has a substantive relationship with the participant, then they will be considered for the study.

Incarceration – individuals quarantined in jails or prisons (Murray, Farrington, & Sekol, 2012).

Mental health – is the state of well-being or comfort in which each human being recognizes his or her capabilities to effectively and productively, manages the regular pressures of life, and most importantly, contributes meaningfully to society (World Health Organization, 2014).

Mental illness – refers collectively to all diagnosable mental disorders that include health situations such as substantial variations in emotion, thinking, and or behavior (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

Well-being - describes an individual's experience of health, happiness, and comfort. It incorporates having good quality mental health, high life contentment, a perception of purpose, and the capability to cope with stress (Davis, 2019).

Researcher Position in the Study

The researcher is a Black woman who is knowledgeable of the overuse of incarceration in the Black community, especially among Black males. The researcher has been affected by the incarceration of a loved one in the past and through this experience, has a one-dimensional view of how her and other close family members had to mentally refocus and readjust our lives during that period. In retrospect, the researcher has the awareness that based on our different positions and roles in the family, we were affected by the incarceration of this loved one in different ways. My personal experience, in addition to the shared experiences of a few close friends has influenced this proposed study.

The researcher is however aware that other families who have encountered incarceration of a loved one, may have very diverse experiences. The researcher is therefore cognizant of the need to remain unbiased and objective as she listens to each participant's unique narrative. In the data collection process, the researcher employed the use of bracketing, field notes, member checking, peer debriefing, and external auditing in order to mitigate potential personal opinions, judgement, or any other adverse effects that might blemish the research process.

Assumptions

There are several assumptions that the researcher has made with regards to the progress of this study. First, the researcher assumed that based on acknowledging her position in the study as a doctoral candidate with background knowledge of mental health issues and the workings of the criminal justice system, the data collected will reduce researcher bias and precisely disclose the participants' experiences. Second, the researcher assumed that the participants would participate in the scheduled interviews and approach the process with open minds and some anxiety. Third, the researcher assumed that the participants in the study would provide honest and credible information with regards to their experience with their incarcerated loved ones. Finally, the researcher assumed that the instrument or interview protocol would efficiently collect the relevant data to answer the research questions.

Organization of the Study

This study is organized in five distinctive chapters which include an introduction, a literature review, methodology, findings and discussion. Chapter 1 presents the introduction and includes the need for the study, purpose of the study, significance of the study, the research questions, definition of terms, assumptions, and organization of the study. Chapter 2 presents a detailed analysis of the literature related to the incarceration of African American males, family

members' experiences with incarceration, and different ways that incarceration can impact their wellbeing. Chapter 3 provides a thorough description of the phenomenological research methodology which include the research design, the population, sample and sampling techniques, the instrument, process of data collection, and the method of analysis for the research questions. Chapter 4 presents the findings and Chapter 5 present the discussion, limitations and delimitations, implications, recommendations, and conclusion of the study.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Policies, bureaucratic practices, cultural misrepresentations, and other customs that function in intensifying ways to sustain and proliferate racial inequality is described as structural racism (The Aspen Institute, 2016). Maxwell & Solomon (2018) asserted that the criminal justice system is conceivably the most evident illustration of structural racism in the United States. Maintaining an unchallenged lead with the highest incarceration rates in the world, the devastating encumbrance of exposure to the penal system in the United States falls on communities of color, especially African Americans (Kaeble & Cowhig, 2018; Wagner & Sawyer, 2018). The involvement of young African American men in the preposterous prison expansion is egregiously disparate in numbers (Roberts, 2004).

African Americans encounter an exceptionally exorbitant rate of imprisonment, and the social, economic, mental and other effects of imprisonment are extended to their families and communities (Roberts, 2004). In addition to separating individuals from their families and communities, incarceration maximizes the probability for fractured relationships, fragmented communities, and encumbers the public service systems (DeHart, Shapiro & Clone, 2018). DeHart et al. (2018) further stated that the United States have been making advancements in confronting the repercussions of mass incarceration, however, the impacts on prisoners and their family members are still prevalent. Sykes and Pettit (2014) contended that even with a growing number of studies on the subject, pinpointing the casual effects of incarceration on children and families continues to be challenging, as there is an elevated association between incarceration and other indicators of hardships. Incarceration, nonetheless, increase risks of disadvantages among already vulnerable populations in the United States (Arditti, 2012).

Overview of the U.S Prison System

The world prison population currently stands at 10.7 million inmates, and the United States of America is in the lead with over 2.2 million prisoners (Wagner & Rauby, 2017 & World Prison Brief, 2019). The U.S. has the largest rate of incarceration at 716 per 100,000, more than 5 times higher than most industrialized countries in the world (Wagner & Walsh, 2018). Other countries with significant numbers include: China with 1.65 million, Russia, with 640,000, Brazil, with 607,000, India, with 418,000, Thailand, with 311,000, and Mexico and Iran with 255,000 (Walmsley, 2016). The United States prison population grew in excess of 500% within the past 40 years; a rate that is outpacing crime and population rates (The Sentencing Project, 2017). While there have not been outstanding changes in crime rates, significant changes in sentencing laws and policies, explain most of this upsurge. These trends have resulted in overcrowded prison spaces, and economic encumbrances on states to accommodate a rapidly burgeoning penal system, despite growing evidence that large-scale incarceration is not an effective means of attaining public safety (The Sentencing Project, 2017).

There are unquestionably significant dissimilarities with the United States treatment of incarceration, even within individual states. Placing each state in a global context, however, reveals that incarceration policy in every region of this country is in discord with the rest of the world. Wagner and Walsh (2016) concurred that this may be because, governments around the world, counter unlawful activities and social conflicts in disparate ways. They further noted that in the 1970s, United States policymakers made the resolution to establish the incarceration of Americans at worldwide unparalleled rates. Subsequent decades have disclosed that the expansion in the U.S. prison populace can be more comparably ascribed to impractical policy choices than legitimate crime rates.

Individuals of color, especially Blacks or African Americans experience a disparate number of encounters with law enforcement, indicating that racial profiling continues to be a problem in the United States (Kirby, 2012 & Mapping Police Violence, 2018). The Department of Justice reported that Blacks and Hispanics are approximately three times more likely to be searched during a traffic stop than white motorists (Mapping Police Violence, 2018). NAACP (2018) added that African Americans are two times more likely to be arrested and almost four times more likely to experience the use of force during encounters with law enforcement.

Over the years, disparities in sentencing have been partially caused by more unrelenting laws, the war on drugs, in addition to systemic racial differences in the processing of cases (Travis, Western, & Redburn, 2014). Blacks, for example, were more likely to be imprisoned before trial so they could end up worse in plea deals that otherwise would have kept them out of prison, to be recipients of the death penalty, and to be detained and indicted with drug crimes, which include mandatory sentences (Collier, 2014 & Travis, Western, Redburn, 2014).

The 2010 census indicated that African Americans or Blacks, account for just over 13% of the United States population but make up over 40% of the prison population. Whites account for 64% of the U.S population, and 39% of the prison population. Latinos or Hispanics make up over 16% of the US population and 19% of the prison population. The Census also reported that the US population consists of 49% males, but men comprise 91% of the incarcerated population, while females make up 51% of the US population but constitutes only 9% of those incarcerated (Carson, 2015).

Despite considerable regression in crime rates, the United States has made only meagre advancement in ending mass incarceration (Ghandnoosh, 2019). Individual states have reported varying, but an overall moderate pace at which decarceration has been happening. Although

reported criminalities have significantly decreased since the 1990s, the United States have maintained a high rate of incarceration, unlike several other countries that have chosen not to proliferate the levels at which they utilize imprisonment (Ghandnoosh, 2019; Gramlich, 2019). Treatment Alternatives for Safe Communities (TASC) (2019) added that if this gradual pace of decarceration is sustained by the state and federal government, it will take another 72 years - until the year 2091 - to see a 50% reduction in the U.S. prison population. Ghandnoosh (2019) noted that it is undoubtedly intolerable for a country with world power status to passively wait for 70 years to significantly amend a system that is out of harmony with the rest of the world and is also racially prejudiced toward a notable quota of its own population.

Cox and Wallace (2016) highlighted the harmful effects of incarceration on the wellbeing of family members exposed to their loved one's incarceration. They further noted that particularly susceptible, is the wellbeing of children exposed to parental imprisonment. The health and wellness of prison populations prompts multi-layered, ethical, and economic unease and impacts not only those incarcerated, but a multiplicity of communities, including the neighborhoods in which family members reside, and where inmates will be essentially be released (Borysova, Mitchell, Sultan, & Williams, 2012). Incarceration therefore has negative social emotional and even economical outcomes at the individual, familial, and societal levels and these consequences are excessively shouldered by communities of color (Cox, 2018; Wildeman, 2014).

The Mental Health Effects of Incarceration

With the overuse of incarceration, mental health issues among other effects on overall wellness have become very prevalent among inmates, with 64% of jail inmates, 54% of state prisoners and 45% of federal prisoners reporting mental health concerns (Collier, 2014). Collier

further noted that a huge number of people find themselves trapped in the criminal justice system as opposed to receiving help from the mental health system. She further stated that these individuals struggle with very treatable illnesses but oftentimes do not receive treatment while incarcerated. As the researcher perused the literature to find information on the mental effects of incarceration on family members of African American males, there was an obvious gap in the literature, as a few quantitative studies provided general information, but none so far have qualitatively explored the phenomenon.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2014), mental health is the state of well-being or comfort in which each human being recognizes his or her capabilities to effectively and productively, manage the regular pressures of life, and most importantly, contribute meaningfully to society. A person's mental health and many common mental disorders are shaped by various social, economic, and physical environments operating at different stages of life (World Health Organization and Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 2014). The Office of the Surgeon General (US); Center for Mental Health Services (US); National Institute of Mental Health (US) (2001a) indicated that the influence of culture and society on mental health is alarming.

Durrah (2013) estimated that approximately 50% of individuals who are incarcerated have reported varied symptoms of mental illness. Research shows that mental health problems among incarcerated African American population are 16% higher than their White counterparts (Thomas, 2017). Carson (2015) explicated that for every 100,000 individuals in the United States Population that enters the penal system, there are 38% African Americans. This considerable occurrence of incarceration has resulted in a higher incidence of mental health issues in the Black community (Justice, 2014). Mental health problems do not plague only the incarcerated

individuals, but also the family members left behind. Glaze & Maruschak, (2010) noted that there is a 79% increase in mental health problems among children whose parents are incarcerated. The incarceration of parents also creates an increased risk for children to both internalizing and externalizing behavior problems, cognitive delays, difficulties in school (Martin, 2017), and other issues later in life.

Sociocultural factors related to Incarceration of African American Males

Overt as well as covert racism and classism underpins and fuels the sustained inequality faced by minorities, especially African Americans. Ming Liu, Pickett and Ivey (2007), concurred that “America’s blind spot is social class” (p.194). With 1 in 11 adult Black males imprisoned in the United States (Durrah, 2013; U.S. Department of Justice, 2010), incarceration is a significant concern due to the social inequalities arising from increasing numbers of able bodied men, not able to contribute to their families or society (Pew Center on the States, 2009; Western & Pettit, 2010).

These concerns among other factors help to shed light on the disproportionate way in which African American families are affected by incarceration. African Americans suffer from the implicit racial prejudices of judges, and other structural and systemic disadvantages set up as obstructions, even before they enter the criminal-justice system (Simon, 2016). The NAACP (2017) reported that over 50% of African American males are arrested by the time they are 23 years old, which is a significant detriment to finding work, going to school and contributing fully in their communities. Additionally, removal from families as a result of incarceration negatively impacts social and familial roles, such as being a father, brother, husband and industrious community member. It is often times arduous to re-learn these skills, especially for those who had a long-term sentence (Durrah, 2013).

The effects of incarceration also create a sociocultural barrier, which is a factor for employment of African American males. Finding stable employment is often very crucial in ensuring that an ex-convict does not re-offend. Having a criminal record, however, is a major setback for African American males, as it reduces the likelihood of a job callback or offer by as much as 50% (Kirby-McLemore, 2013). A White male with a criminal record is more likely to get selected for a job interview, than a Black male without a criminal record (NAACP, 2017).

There is a great deal of separation from family and community due to incarceration, both short term and long term, which indicates a sociocultural factor related to the incarceration of African American males. According to Murphey & Cooper (2015) and Arditti (2016), an estimated 7% of, or 5 million, youth in the United States have one or both parents in the penal system before their 18th birthday. Regardless of this high incarceration rate, not much research has been done to investigate its impact on family (Shlafer, 2013). Incarceration changes the length of time parents [who are primary caregivers] spend with their children (Besemer & Murray, 2015). Arditti (2016) highlighted that there is also great concern about the stigma children face in the community, with having an incarcerated parent.

The Effect of Parental Incarceration on Children and Families

Approximately 52% of state inmates and 63% of federal inmates are parents to an estimated 1.7 million minor children, which according to Glaze and Maruschak (2010) accounts for 2.3% of the U.S. population under the age of 18. More recent estimates indicate that 5 million youth, or 7% of all U.S. children, experience parental incarceration at some point in their lives before reaching the age of 18 (Murphey & Cooper, 2015). Incarceration used to be reserved for the most serious violent offenders. Conversely, today's inmate is likely to be a person of color, involved in a minor or non-violent offense, and a parent (Wakefield & Wildeman, 2014).

Considerable numbers of incarcerated individuals have children, and after decades of unprecedented prison growth, researchers are now focusing their attention to the query of how parental incarceration affects families (Ardetti, 2016).

A growing number of children are affected by the incarceration of their parents in both state and federal penal systems. Mumola (2000) who has acclaim for one of the most extensively cited research on parental incarceration, noted that approximately 336,300 households in the United States with dependent children, are afflicted by the detention of a parent who resides in the home. Mumola (2000) added that in 1999, State and Federal prisons held an estimated 721,500 parents of minor children. Fifteen years later, the National Resource Center on Children and Families of the Incarcerated (NRCCFI) (2014) reported that the number of children in the United States with an incarcerated parent has sky-rocketed to more than 2.7 million, with one in 28 children having an incarcerated parent. Porter (2018) added that in a short four-year span, the data reflected that one in 50 children had a parent in the penal system. Children of incarcerated parents encounter multiple risks and poor developmental outcomes (Arditti, 2016).

There is even a greater disparity in the African American community as it relates to parental incarceration. One out of 9 African American children, one out of 28 Hispanic children, and one out of 57 white children in the United States have an incarcerated parent (Morsy and Rothstein, 2016; NRCCFI, 2014; The Pew Charitable Trusts, 2010). Brown, Bell, and Patterson (2016) and Wildeman (2009) reported that in African American communities, one in 4 Black children have at least one incarcerated parent, compared to one in 25 White children. Western and Pettit (2010) found that 10% of African American children have experienced the incarceration of one or both parents. Additionally, Wildeman and Western (2010) asserted that

by 14 years old, 25% of African American families experience parental incarceration compared to 4% in white families.

Parental interruption or termination before age 18 can significantly impact the development of pro-social behaviors in children (Bishop, Granata, & Eynon, 2014; Douglas, 2016), particularly if the parent is a re-offender, or has been given a long sentence. Family roles in African American communities, however, tend to exhibit greater flexibility. This is due to greater exposure to adverse circumstances such as incarceration, death from crimes in the community, and killing of unarmed Black men at the hands of the police (Arditti, 2016). As a result, many African American families are single parent families headed by females. In the advent of adversities, African American families seem to possess the skills needed to readjust themselves well enough, to meet the challenges of existing in a Eurocentric society (LoFrisco, 2011).

Wing-Sue and Sue (2008) and LoFrisco (2011), noted that African American females manage to cope well, as they believe it is crucial to be strong, in order to trounce obstacles. Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2009) and Nelson, Cardemil, and Adeoye (2016) added that the distinguishing characteristic and pivotal part of the identity of Black womanhood is strength, which creates an allusion to the strong Black woman (SBW) or superwoman role. Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2009) further affirmed that the claim of strength promotes a compelling story of perseverance which can oftentimes be a problematic notion, as the indication of “strength appears to honestly reflect Black women’s extensive work and family demands as well as their accomplishments under far from favorable social conditions” (p. 2). On the other hand, research shows that 50.5% of African American children whose fathers failed to graduate high school can

expect that paternal figure to be imprisoned at some point before their 14th birthday (Brown et al., 2016; Lee & Wildeman, 2013).

Incarceration creates a snowball effect for children with one or both parents incarcerated. From a national perspective, the NAACP (2017) found that there was a higher risk for these children to experience the criminal justice system. Green, Ensminger, Robertson, & Juon (2006) and Travis and Waul (2003), concurred that there are diverse emotional responses that can result from incarceration in families such as anxiety, grief, loss, hope and sometimes relief, as they adjust to life without the detained individual. Previous research demonstrates that lack of emotional support from family members, psychological discomfort on family members of those incarcerated, and minimal or no interactions between family members and those incarcerated, all contribute to the separation of family and community (Brown et al., 2016).

The imprisonment of parents continues to predict youth externalizing and internalizing problems such as depression (Dallaire, Zeman, & Thrash, 2015; Johnson, 2009; Murray & Farrington, 2008), child trauma symptomology (Arditti & Savla, 2015), antisocial behavior (Will, Whalen, & Loper, 2014), developmental and learning disabilities (Turney, 2014), and overall poor health (Lee, Fang, & Luo, 2013). Wakefield and Wildeman's (2014) stringent analyses of several secondary data sets provided some of the most compelling evidence that parental incarceration (particularly paternal incarceration) uniquely contributes to substantial increases in children's expressing and suppressing, physical aggression, and total behavioral problems.

By the same token, it is notable that numerous studies have described risk factors attributed to incarceration for adults, but minimal attention has been given to developmental factors such as adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), which may confer risk for incarceration,

beyond other established risk factors (Leeb, Paulozza, Melanson, Simon, & Arias, 2008). ACEs include childhood exposure to both child maltreatment and caregiver maladjustment (Roos et al., 2016). Leeb et al (2008), reported that the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), explained maltreatment as including sexual, physical, and emotional abuse, physical neglect, and exposure to intimate partner violence. They further expounded that caregiver maladjustment comprises characteristics that interpose the home environment. Examples of these interruptions are caregiver mental illness, suicide attempts, incarceration, and substance abuse (Roos et al., 2016). Children with an incarcerated parent are significantly more likely to experience homelessness, housing instability, food insecurity, and lower rates of educational achievement. The effects are higher among African American youth, based on the higher levels of parental incarceration in that group (Arditti, 2016; Cox & Wallace, 2013; Foster & Hagan, 2009; Haskins, 2014; Johnson, 2009; Wakefield & Wildeman, 2014). With higher rates of incarceration in the Black communities, policy makers have expressed concerns regarding the number of states that have legislated laws to address the racial disproportions in the criminal justice system in the U.S. (Porter, 2018).

African Americans and the Justice System

African Americans continue to make up the largest portion of the nation's prison population (Nellis, 2016). As noted by Mauer (2011) and the United States Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics (2013), one in three black males will be incarcerated in their lifetime. Durrah (2013) and Pettit and Western (2004) also agreed that African American males have a 20% risk for incarceration, compared to a meager three percent for White males. In the federal system, Black offenders receive sentences that are 20 %

longer than White offenders for the same crimes (American Civil Liberties Union, 2014; U.S. Sentencing Commission, 2012).

Research shows that in this country of equality and justice for all, African Americans [especially males], has been and continues to be disproportionately incarcerated, or worse yet killed by law enforcement (Mapping Police Violence, 2018). “Black males and police forces have been warring combatants since the nation’s founding, when wealthy planters hired slave patrols to capture escaped slaves and keep the white community safe from dangerous brown bodies” (Shipp & Chiles, 2014, p.10). Even though policing tactics have somewhat been restructured over the decades, the effects are nonetheless distressing to African American communities.

Additionally, the role of perceptions concerning persons of diverse races or ethnicities is influential in criminal justice outcomes. Copious amounts of research have found that views about dangerousness and threats to public safety intersect with individual opinions about people of color. Evidence is available that racial bias deploys an enormous adverse effect on punishment preferences among whites but much less so for blacks (Bobo & Johnson, 2004; Unnever & Cullen, 2010). Further inquiries found that suppositions by fundamental decision makers in the justice system sway outcomes subjectively. As an example, researchers have found in studies on pre-sentence reports that people of color are frequently given harsher sanctions because they are viewed as foisting an inordinate threat to public safety, and therefore deserve greater social control and punishment (Bridges & Steen, 1998; Nellis, 2016).

African American communities continue to encounter discrimination, despite the discrimination laws that are theoretically in place to prohibit the practices of racial, ethnic, or gender prejudice to achieve social justice. With the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964

(History, 2019) and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (2019), not much has changed as it relates to the treatment, discrimination, and racial profiling of African Americans. The violation of the Civil Rights Act has resulted in high levels of incarceration among African Americans citizens, especially males (U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, 2018). Mauer and King (2007) concurred that the growth in high incarceration rates among African Americans is brought about by more disproportionate racial tensions against this ethnic group. Such findings convinced Durrah (2013) to conclude that communities with large numbers of Black or African Americans have a higher risk of incarceration for males. It is even more alarming to note that 18% of the nation's young black males, even with high school diplomas, will experience imprisonment prior to their 30th birthday (Pettit & Western, 2004).

Studies show that African Americans are imprisoned at a ratio of 5:1 compared to their White counterparts (Simon, 2016; United States Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2015). In five states (Iowa, Minnesota, New Jersey, Vermont, and Wisconsin), the disparity is escalated to more than 10:1. Additionally, in twelve states, more than fifty percent of the prison population is Black. These states include Alabama, Delaware, Georgia, Illinois, Louisiana, Michigan, Mississippi, New Jersey, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, and Maryland, topping the nation with a colossal 72% prison population of African Americans (Nellis, 2016).

King (1993) noted spending numerous years working in the prison system and reported that "thousands of these young African males were spending their late adolescent and early adult years confined to state correctional institutions that breed crime, despair, anger, and frustration" (p. 9). The government has a responsibility to therefore, put into practice improvements that can

decrease the number of incarcerated individuals especially as it relates to ethnic and racial disparities in the criminal justice system (Wagner, & Walsh, 2018).

U.S. Policy-making and Racial Disparities

The upsurge in confinement that was later known as mass imprisonment commenced in 1973 and can be ascribed to three major eras of policymaking. Policies during this time period had a discordant effect on people of color, principally African Americans. Since 1986, a series of policies were sanctioned to increase the use of imprisonment for a multiplicity of offences (Nellis, 2016). The policy focus after this point progressed to greater levels of imprisonment for drug and sexual offenses. A predominantly rapid increase in state imprisonment for drug offenses occurred between the years 1987 and 1991. The final stage began around 1995, with prominence on policies that increased both prison likelihood and significantly lengthened prison sentences (Nellis, 2016; Zimring, 2010).

In recent years, there has been great concern about the treatment of African Americans in the United States (Pew Research Center, 2016). These negative experiences have intensified, as the country has been embroiled in several controversies about racial discrimination and deaths of numerous unarmed African American men and women by police officers (Simon, 2016). Nellis, (2016) noted that there is also an increase in regular incidents of brutality against Black people, [specifically but not exclusively males] by law enforcement. In most cases a great number of these incidents have resulted in deaths of these men and women even though there has been no substantiated evidence of aggravation or provocation.

In 2015, a disturbing 37% of unarmed individuals killed by police were black (Craven, 2016). To date, 99% of those cases have not resulted in any criminal charges brought against the involved officers, and the trend of killing unarmed black men has unfortunately continued

consistently with rising numbers (Mapping Police Violence, 2018). The specific propeller of disparity may be related to implicit bias, ineffective policies, offending, or any combination of disparities (Craven, 2016). The existence of these disparities is concerning, considering the repercussions for individuals and communities. While chronic racial and ethnic disparities in imprisonment has been a visible feature of the prison system for many decades, the effort toward change requires greater action.

The literature shows that racial disparities in incarceration arise from a variety of situations that might comprise of a high rate of black incarceration, a low rate of white incarceration, or varying combinations. Nellis (2016) explicated that

States with the highest ratio of disparity in imprisonment are generally those in the northeast or upper Midwest, while Southern states tend to have lower ratios. The low Southern ratios are generally produced as a result of high rates of incarceration for all racial groups. For example, Arkansas and Florida both have a black/white ratio of imprisonment considerably below the national average of 5.1:1 (3.8:1 and 3.6:1, respectively). Yet both states incarcerate African Americans at higher than average rates, 18% higher in Arkansas and 15% higher in Florida (p. 6).

The National Research Council (2014) added that the disparity in the rates of incarceration are slightly counterbalanced by the predominantly high White rates, 61% above the national average in Arkansas and 63% above Florida's average. Blumstein (1993) and Mauer (1997) noted that contrarywise, in the states with the greatest degree of disparity, this is frequently generated by a larger than average Black rate, but a comparatively small White rate. For example, African Americans are imprisoned in the state of New Jersey at a rate that is 12 times higher than Whites, notwithstanding that the Black incarceration rate is 24% beneath the nationwide average (Nellis, 2016). The conventional and unofficial policies and procedures on which the criminal justice system is constituted, influences the degree to which individuals experience the system. At different facets of the penal system, the role of race becomes apparent

Kutateladze, Andirilo, Johnson, & Spohn, 2014; Nellis, 2016). As individuals proceed through the system, inequalities escalate and create even more barriers that extend beyond the incarcerated individuals (Kutateladze et al., 2014).

Barriers to mental Health care in the African American Community

The National Alliance on Mental Illness (2018b) and The Office of the Surgeon General (US), Center for Mental Health Services (US), & National Institute of Mental Health (2001b), indicated that African Americans are 20% more likely to experience serious mental health problems than the general population. These problems stem from unmet needs, and social barriers such as homelessness and violence. Previous research shows that 73% of females and 54 % of males experienced some forms of mental health issues (Human Rights Watch, 2011). Misunderstanding and stigma surrounding mental illnesses are widespread (WHO, 2014).

Numerous African Americans, regrettably, continue to embrace stigmatizing views about mental illness. Kessler et al., (1994) and Sue & Sue, (1990) agreed that African Americans have been identified as a group that uses mental health services inconsistently. Research has documented the overuse of inpatient services and the over- and underuse of outpatient services depending on the setting and problem (Atkinson, Morten, & Sue, 1998; Thompson, Bazile & Akbar, 2004). Alvidrez, Snowden, and Kaiser (2008) established that over a third of Blacks who were receiving mental health care, still had the conception that mental health issues such as mild depression or anxiety would be considered "crazy" in their social circles. There is also the view that discussing problems with a stranger [counselor] can be regarded as airing one's "dirty laundry." Even more significant is the fact that over a quarter of this population, felt that conversations about mental illness was inappropriate, even with family members (Williams, 2011).

Older adults in the African American population suffer more psychological distress than their White counterparts due to lifelong exposure to and experiences with racism, discrimination, prejudice, poverty, and violence (Office of the Surgeon General (US), Center for Mental Health Services (US), & National Institute of Mental Health (US), 2001b). These older African American adults tend to also have fewer psychological, social, and financial resources for coping with stress than their White counterparts (Choi & Gonzales, 2005; Conner et al., 2010).

Approximately 25% of the African American population seeks mental health care, compared to over 50% of the White population (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1999). Unfortunately, these disparities linger, even after preliminary obstacles have been overcome (Brown & Palenchar, 2004). African Americans attend fewer sessions when they do seek specialty mental health treatment and are more likely than their White counterparts to terminate treatment prematurely (Brown & Palenchar, 2004; Miranda & Cooper, 2004). Older adults, particularly older African Americans, are less likely to seek mental health services in specialty mental health settings but are more likely to seek treatment in a primary care setting. They however continue to be less probable than their younger counterparts to have depression identified and treated in a primary care setting (Conner, et al., 2010; Coyne & Katz, 2001; Gum, Iser, & Petkus, 2010; Pingitore, Snowden, Sansone & Klinkman, 2001).

Lack of Education and Mental Health Awareness. A growing body of research has suggested that comprehending diverse cultural backgrounds, and what they bring to the mental health setting, is vital for counseling effectiveness (LoFrisco, 2011). African Americans share similar mental health issues with the rest of the population, arguably, even with greater stressors due to racism, prejudice, and economic disparities (Williams, 2011). Wing-Sue and Sue (2008) recounted that 91% of African Americans reported experiencing discrimination. Educating

African Americans about mental disorders and available treatments is fundamental in the process of reducing and eventually eliminating these barriers.

Williams (2011) suggested that concepts for overcoming this barrier include public education campaigns [utilizing mass media and social media], educational presentations at community locations, for example in Black churches, and open information sessions held at local health clinics. In recent times, many Black churches have been taking the treatment to people where they are and have also been hiring licensed therapists to work with congregants.

Corrigan (2015) and Rivera (2014) stated that lack of available services and cultural competence limits health care for people of color. There is less access to and consumption of mental health care by Black people than the rest of the population despite its proven importance in treating life stressors and mental health challenges (Griffith, Jones, & Stewart, 2019). Disproportionately high poverty rates cause mental and primary care services to be less accessible to African Americans. Therefore, individuals without the luxury of health coverage are usually dependent on public aid, with whatever associated mental health services, if any (Corrigan, 2015; Griffith et al., 2019). Health care systems which are Eurocentric in nature, often fail to connect with Black patients in ways that are culturally familiar, and a deficiency of culturally coordinated providers may intensify issues such as trust, the stigma of culturally unambiguous mental illness, diverse conceptions of mental illness and mental health care professionals missing symptom expressions that are culturally specific (Abdullah & Brown, 2011; Corrigan, 2015; Martin, 2009). Griffith et al. (2019) further noted that Black individuals often go to therapy because they receive referrals or recommendations from trusted individuals such as clergy members, or they might be mandated by court systems based on issues related to

domestic abuse or custodial battles. Alexander (2012) added that Black males who engage in therapy are oftentimes required by the justice system.

Customarily, the counseling profession has lacked diversity and for a long time did not embrace a push for multiculturalism. For numerous years, the face of the profession was represented by White men who essentially determined and shaped the focus and pathway of the organization. Black leadership in the organization did not occur until the mid-1970s, and then over two decades later again in the 1990s (Myers, 2017). Due to the underrepresentation of African Americans in the helping profession, racial disparity between the counselor and client can potentially be an issue. Where racial disparity exists, it is incumbent on the mental health professional to initiate a discussion with the client on this topic. The African American client's stage of racial identity development plays a crucial role in feelings displayed towards the counselor. Therefore, it would also be beneficial to the therapeutic process to assess the client's racial identity stage (LoFrisco, 2011).

The first clinical encounter with African Americans presents a significant occasion to address any present uncertainty concerning the helpfulness of treatment. It is the therapist's duty to interpret or simplify the process and clarify the benefits of staying the course of treatment. Without this awareness, the potential client's success will still be encumbered the unspoken assumptions. To give the potential client a sense of control in the therapeutic relationship, it is also important to be proactive with discussing anticipated outcomes, number of sessions, and prospective goals clearly and in advance. The counselor/client bond can be strengthened with this additional attempt at transparency (LoFrisco, 2011).

Davis and Proctor (1989) clarified that while evidence proposed that race/ethnicity impacted the therapeutic process, there was no evidence that racial dissimilarity inhibited

treatment outcome. Sue, Fujino, Hu, Takeuchi, and Zane (1991) agreed, that although African Americans had lower rates of premature termination when there was an ethnic counselor/client match, ethnic matching did not affect treatment outcome.

Furthermore, Neighbors (1990) noted gender and type of problem, as concerns impacting African Americans' use of mental health services. He clarified that African American men were more likely to seek services, following events such as the death of a spouse or a loved one. Likewise, women and individuals with financial challenges, were more likely to seek the assistance of a pastor or religious leader (Neighbors, Musick, & Williams, 1998). If a pastor was contacted first, individuals were less likely to seek assistance from other professionals (Thompson et al., 2004).

Considering this conception, cost is a noted health care concern in the African American community and is a significant barrier to seeking mental health treatment. African Americans frequently lack adequate insurance to cover mental health services. Therefore, when faced with having to choose between exorbitant hourly fees for mental health care, or other demanding pecuniary needs, counseling is viewed as an unaffordable luxury item (Thompson et al., 2004).

Despite the sense that therapy is required to address certain issues, even educated members of the African American community reported that they lacked sufficient knowledge of the signs and symptoms of mental illness (i.e., depression, anxiety, etc.). The lack of experience with mental health conversations or literature, creates a general difficulty among Blacks to discern when a situation or condition has reached a stage requiring professional services (McGoldrick, Giordano & Garcia Preto, 2005). This lack of information oftentimes causes individuals to consult local church leadership for resources and referrals. Similarly, the data revealed that Black people viewed emergency rooms as accurate sources of information and

referral, and also as a place that allowed people to avoid the stigma of seeking services and issues related to payment (Williams & Williams-Morris, 2000).

The issue of trust generates a significant debate in African American families and communities, with regards to the subject of mental health issues and seeking therapy. The consensus is that although counseling might be beneficial, therapists being predominantly white, lack adequate knowledge of African American life and struggles, to accept or understand them (Williams & Williams-Morris, 2000). Additionally, African Americans also fear that the stereotypes of the racial group that exists in the wider society could possibly challenge the ability of mental health professionals to remain unbiased (Nickerson, Helms & Terrell, 1994).

Theoretical Framework

The study will utilize the critical race theory (CRT) to form the theoretical context that guides this research. Based on the literature on the incarceration of African American males, and the mental health effects of incarceration on family members, this theory provides an objective lens to evaluate the experiences of African Americans. CRT serves as a reminder of the depth of racial ideology and power in the United States, how racism is profoundly entrenched within the structure of American culture, and the ways in which these continue to impact life in this country (Crenshaw, 2010 & Creswell, 2007). Critical race theorists persuasively demand color conscious efforts to revolutionize the status quo as it relates to the African American experience (Delgado, Stefancic & Harris, 2017).

Barlow (2016) stated that CRT also envisages routine race-conscious decision making and non-deviant modes, as a preferred permanent standard to be utilized in allocating positions of wealth, stature, and influence. The theory also has the main focus of rejecting colorblind meritocracy. CRT deals with the awareness of meritocracy in this framework, that the law can

and should treat all people equally regardless of skin color as a vehicle for egotism, supremacy, and privilege (Barlow, 2016). The concept of ahistoricism is challenged in CRT, by underscoring the prerequisite to recognize racism within its social, historical and financial contexts (Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, & Williams Crenshaw, 1993).

Creswell (2007) outlined three core objectives of CRT as illustrated in Figure 1.

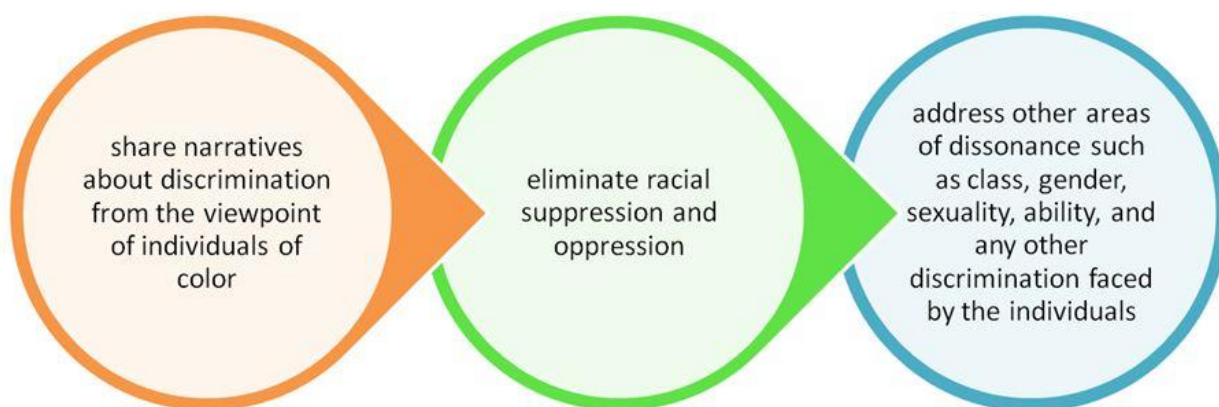


Figure 1: Core Objectives of CRT

The first objective is to share narratives about discrimination from the viewpoint of individuals of color. Secondly, CRT stands for eliminating racial suppression and oppression and thirdly, CRT seeks to address other areas of dissent such as class, gender, sexuality, ability, and any other discrimination faced by the individuals. Critical race theory works well with my study since incarceration is built on systematic racism and disproportionately impacts African Americans. Additionally, the effects of incarceration trickle down to negatively impact African American families and communities. Macpherson (1999) indicated that;

Institutional racism consists of the collective failure of an organization to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their color, culture, or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes, and behavior which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people (p. 321).

The focus of CRT, in sum, is to make decisions that are focused on race consciousness and to continually contest the systems that are purposefully put in place to create marginalized and oppressive conditions for African Americans.

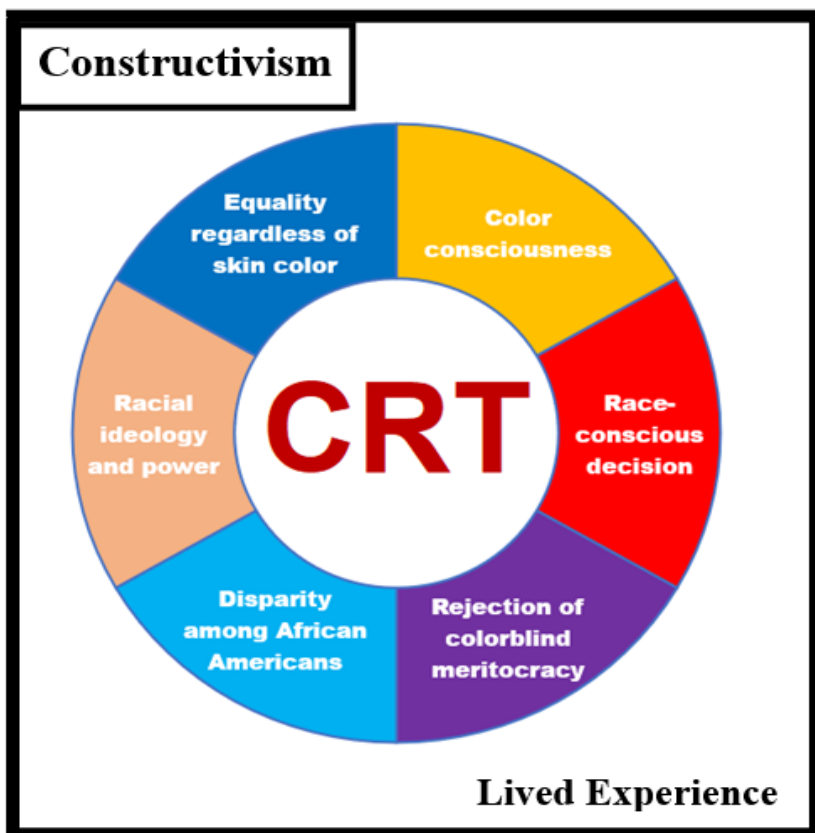


Figure 2: Critical Race Theory.

The diagram above is a graphical representation of the main components of CRT. As it relates to the current study, the main components of the theory include color consciousness, race-conscious decision, rejection of colorblind meritocracy, racial ideology and power, equality regardless of skin color, and the disparity with which African Americans are impacted. These are a few of the different tenets of CRT. The diagram shows the CRT immersed in the constructivism paradigm, which will be used to explain the participants lived experience with the researched phenomena.

Additionally, after critically assessing the theoretical paradigms, my study also fits the constructivist paradigm. The concept of constructivism forms the chief underpinning and support

for qualitative studies (Ponterotto, 2005). Adherents of the constructivist theory underscore the objective of comprehending the lived experiences, from the standpoint of individuals who live those experiences daily (Ponterotto, 2005). Based on the constructivism model, thoughtfulness can be encouraged by the dialogue between researcher and participant(s). Ponterotto (2005) further added that in order to completely comprehend the human lived experiences or phenomena, it is vital to establish discourse with the participant(s).

Summary

Incarceration is a significant family disruption (Arditti, Lambert-Shute, & Joest, 2003; Hairston, 2001). Travis and Waul (2003) propose that incarceration may elicit mixed emotion in families. Underlying and sometimes undetected mental health issues often plague African American family members, as a result of the ensuing grief and anxiety associated with forced separation and the loss of emotional and monetary support in their households when loved ones are incarcerated. Kelly (2016) noted that the United States spends over \$80 billion per year on corrections and the NAACP (2017) added that spending on prisons and jails has increased at triple the rate of spending on Pre-K-12 public education over the last thirty years. Incarceration is more common for African American men than obtaining a college degree or serving in the military (Pettit & Western, 2004). Despite these troubling statistics, little is known about the diverse lived experiences the family members of those confined by the criminal justice system (Green et al., 2006). This study will help to explore the issues and even incrementally decrease the paucity in this body of knowledge.

This chapter explored the following topics: An introduction to the literature, overview of the U.S. prison system, the mental health effects of incarceration, sociocultural factors related to the incarceration of African American males, effects of parental incarceration on children and

families, African Americans and the justice system, U.S. policy making and racial disparities, barriers to mental health care in the African American community, lack of education and mental health awareness, theoretical framework, and the chapter summary. The subsequent chapter will address and explore the qualitative methodology (phenomenology), which was used to conduct the study.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this phenomenological inquiry was to understand the impacts of incarceration on the wellbeing of family members of incarcerated African American males who experience the U.S prison system. Farghaly (2018) indicated that qualitative research becomes expedient when there is limited knowledge about a phenomenon, thus leading the researcher to seek an in-depth understanding of these experiences. In support of this claim, Rutberg and Bouikidis (2018) concurred that “qualitative research methodology is often employed when the problem is not well understood and there is an existing desire to explore the problem thoroughly” (p. 211). Consequently, after a meticulous study of qualitative research methods and designs, phenomenology best fits the objectives of this study, as it strives to ascertain the essence of the lived experiences of individual(s) experiencing the phenomena of familial incarceration (Creswell, 2012a; Creswell & Poth, 2017).

Research Questions

The following questions were utilized to guide this study and assisted with providing a more comprehensive description of the phenomena.

1. What are the lived experiences of family members of incarcerated African American males?
 - a. How does incarceration of a parent impact the wellbeing of children?
 - b. How does incarceration of a child impact the wellbeing of parents?
 - c. How does incarceration of a spouse/partner impact the wellbeing of women?
 - d. How does incarceration of siblings impact the wellbeing of non-incarcerated siblings?

Research Design

Figure three displays the research design that will be utilized in this study.

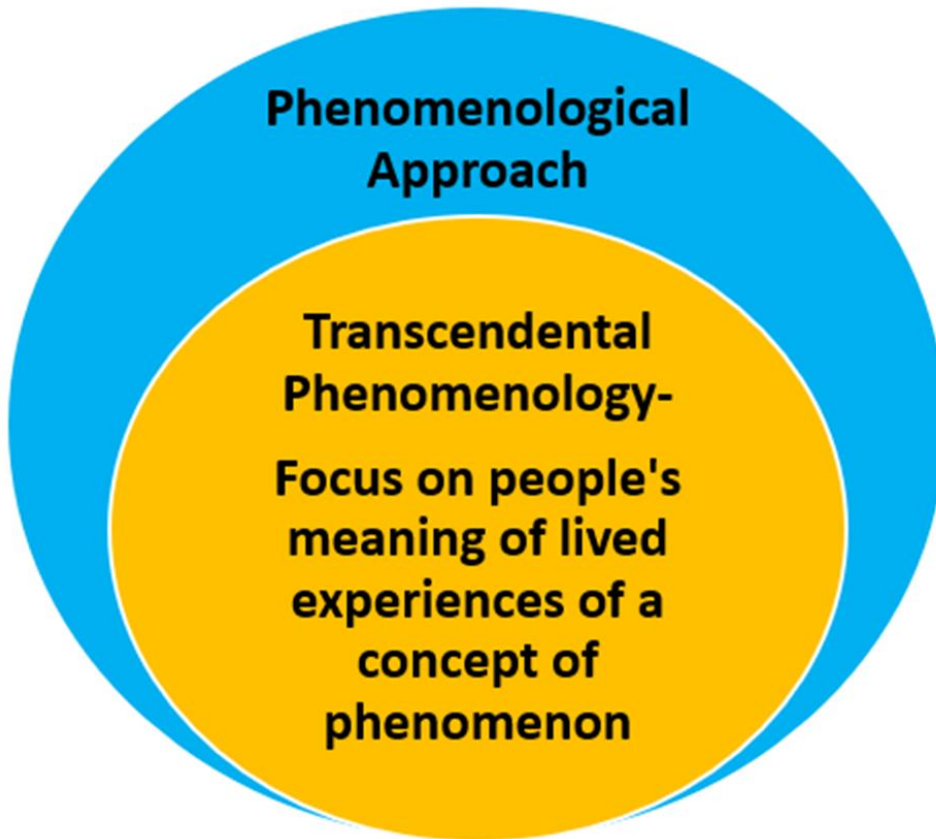


Figure 3: Illustration of Research Design

Phenomenology. This chapter utilizes phenomenology as the qualitative method that underpins the study. The fundamental objective of phenomenology is to condense the experiences of individuals with a phenomenon to a depiction of the common essence (Creswell, Hanson, Clark Plano, & Morales, 2007). Padilla-Díaz (2015), established that Husserl (1931), the father of phenomenology first specified the concept, as a study that demonstrated the way humans decrypt their experiences, and transform these experiences into awareness or insights called phenomenology. Leedy and Ormrod (2016) asserted phenomenological research seeks an understanding of what individuals think about their unique situation. Phenomenological research

aims to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the meaning of ordinary experiences (Patton, 2002; 2015).

Additionally, to distinguish research that focuses on the essence of human experiences, Moustakas (1994) differentiated phenomenological design from other qualitative methods. Gentles, Charles, Ploeg, and McKibbin (2015) corroborated that phenomenology is a qualitative approach in which investigators seek to establish novel comprehension of human lived experiences, depending on first-person description, commonly acquired by interviewing participants. Phenomenological investigation communicates individuals' experience and not necessarily an experiential expression (Darby, 2014; Giorgi, 2006). Patton (2002) further explicated that,

Phenomenology aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences. Anything that presents itself to consciousness is of potential interest to phenomenology, whether the object is real or imagined, empirically measurable or subjectively felt. Consciousness is the only access human beings have to the world. Alternatively, preferably, it is by virtue of being conscious that we are already related to the world. Thus, all we can ever know must present itself to consciousness. Whatever falls outside of consciousness, therefore, falls outside the bounds of our possible lived experience (p. 104).

Using phenomenology, unlike other qualitative methods, therefore gives the researcher the opportunity to understand the thought process of the individuals under investigation as it relates to their specific situation (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016). In short, the objective of this phenomenological study was to understand the impacts of incarceration on the wellbeing of family members of incarcerated African American males who experience the U.S prison system. Numerous quantitative studies have highlighted the growing issue of mental illness in addition to other areas of wellness among incarcerated individuals, and this seems to be more pervasive among African Americans than other racial groups (Thomas, 2017). There is also a number of studies that underscore the disparity in the incarceration of minority groups, especially African

Americans. Kirby (2012) and Pierson, et al. (2017) noted that one in every 15 African American men and one in every 36 Hispanic men are incarcerated, compared to one in every 106 white men. Conversely, there is a significant gap in the research as it relates to qualitatively investigating the wellbeing of incarcerated family members of African American males.

There are several types of phenomenological studies. Among them are transcendental, hermeneutical, existential, naturalistic, genetic, constructive, generative and realistic (Moustakas, 1994; Strang, 2018). This research will specifically utilize transcendental phenomenology inquiry, since it focuses on the meaning of people's lived experiences of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2018).

Transcendental phenomenology. Transcendental phenomenology is a philosophical approach that seeks to understand human experience (Moustakas, 1994; Strang, 2018). Unlike hermeneutical phenomenology, which seeks to interpret the experience of the phenomenon (Strang, 2018), transcendental phenomenology seeks to describe the participant's experience of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). An important aspect of transcendental phenomenology is the description of the epoché, in which the researcher takes a novel viewpoint of the phenomena and put away his/her experiences to take a fresh outlook of the phenomenon being investigated through the constructed meaning experienced by the study participant (Creswell et al., 2007). Transcendental can therefore be summed as a method "in which everything is perceived freshly, as if for the first time" (Creswell et al., 2007, p. 254). Moustakas (1994) further cautions researchers to be aware of preconceived thoughts when conducting transcendental phenomenological studies. As difficult as it is to for a researcher to isolate his/her personal feelings and experiences, some success can be achieved if the researcher commences

the process by identifying and documenting personal connections to the phenomenon and bracketing these individual views before interacting with the occurrences of the participants.

Since this researcher was primarily interested in the description of the impacts of incarceration on the wellbeing of the family members of incarcerated African American males, the transcendental phenomenological approach seemed to be the most suitable. As depicted by Sheehan (2014) and Creswell (2007), this type of phenomenological inquiry conveys additional scope when studying human experiences, and will eventually produce a thick, rich, structural account of the phenomenon.

Participants

The participants for this study included family members of incarcerated African American males in South central Arkansas. A phenomenological study can be conducted with 5 to 25 individuals who have all experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, 2014; Polkinghorne, 1989). The aim of the study was to include parents, children (not younger than 10 years old), siblings, and spouses/partners of incarcerated African American males. The minimum age 10 years of age is chosen for the child participant because it is important for the child to be able to understand what is required by the study, and to be able to participate as required in the interview process. Typically, a 10-year old's language and comprehension skills are developed enough to accomplish this expectation. The researcher is however, by no means indicating that all 10-year olds' experience the same levels of intellectual maturation.

Selection – sampling technique. A purposive sampling technique was used to conduct this study. Purposive sampling is a non-probability technique of purposely choosing participants (Bullard, 2016). Mills and Gay (2015) substantiated that purposive sampling technique can also be described as a system of choosing the sample or participants that are believed to have specific

characteristics about the population. The characteristic or criteria for selection in this research was that each participant must have at least one African American male family member incarcerated and must be either a parent, child, sibling, or spouse/partner. Bernard (2002) typified that there is not a set number of individuals required for a purposive sample. However, the researcher opted to select 10 individuals to participate in this study, as this number falls within the given range of 5 to 25 denoted by Creswell (2014), as adequate to experience the phenomenon. Only nine individuals volunteered to participate.

While there are several ways that purposive sampling can be conducted (Patton, 2002), the researcher employed the maximum variation sampling, also known as heterogeneous sampling technique. The concept of this type is holistic and provides an understanding of the phenomenon by looking at several dimensions of the participants (Suri, 2011). Creswell (2012b) clarified that

Maximum variation sampling is a purposive sampling strategy in which the researcher samples cases or individual that differs on some characteristics or traits (e.g. different age groups). This procedure require that you identify the characteristic and then find sites or individuals that display different dimensions of that characteristic (pp. 207-208).

Nastasi (2015) also clarified that maximum variation sampling leads to uncovering fundamental themes and central elements in the collective experiences of the participants, and at the same time, discover diverse variations within the phenomenon. The researcher utilized this method to uncover the variations of the participants experiences with the phenomenon. This strategy worked best for selecting rich and comprehensive data from the participants (Patton, 2015), thus, augmenting the meaning of the lived experiences of the family members of incarcerated African American males.

Demographics and eligibility. The sample chosen was family members of incarcerated African American males. However, there was no stipulation that the family members had to be

African Americans but could be representatives of diverse races and ethnicities. The age, gender, and level of education was also diverse, as it took into account children (not younger than 10 years old), spouses/partners and parents of the incarcerated males. The participants' ages ranged from 12-55 years old. Extended relatives such as grandparents, cousins, aunts and uncles were not generally considered for the purpose of this study. The caveat however was that if the family is intergenerational or multigenerational and one of these relatives previously played or was playing a significant or primary role in the life of an incarcerated African American male, they could receive consideration for the study. Through this stipulation, a cousin and a niece of incarcerated individuals participated in the study, and contributed significantly to the thick, rich data gathered. The other participants included four children, two partners, and one sibling of incarcerated African American males. No parents of incarcerated children volunteered to participate. The subsequent chapter has more details.

Recruitment of participants. For the purpose of phenomenological studies researchers have the option of recruiting participants in a single site (Creswell, 2007; Creswell & Poth, 2017). This study however recruited participants from the South-Central Arkansas region. The researcher utilized connections with a few key informants. One was a social worker who works closely with inmates and family members, and the other informant was a school counselor. The third informant was closely affiliated with Black student organizations on a college campus in the region. These informants were extremely instrumental in establishing connections with potential participants and providing contact information such as addresses and telephone numbers to facilitate text messaging or phone calls. This of course was done with prior consent from these individuals.

In addition, the researcher also utilized other recruitment strategies such as using flyers to advertise the study through email and social media platforms. Flyers were also sent to leaders of select diverse churches and community centers in the region, and also barber shops and hair salons that serve African American families. The researcher was able to build trust with the participants primarily as a member of the same racial group, by being able to identify with experiencing the phenomena, and also by creating a warm and safe space to share their experiences. Participants were informed from the onset or during the introduction that their participation is entirely voluntary, and if they chose to participate, they could terminate their participation at any time without consequence.

Instrumentation

Qualitative studies generally require structured, semi-structured, or unstructured interviews (Bernard, 1988; Fontana & Frey, 2005). However, interviewing for phenomenological study requires depth and specificity (Creswell, 2007). For this qualitative transcendental phenomenological study, the researcher developed and utilized a semi-structured interview protocol with open-ended questions. The items on the questionnaire was broad enough for the participants to provide adequate answers to each research question, and also to facilitate possible follow-up questions.

The interview was semi-structured in nature, to facilitate the ease of response from the participants,' and allowed them to provide as much detail about their experience as possible, leading to thick, rich descriptions of the phenomenon. For the development of the interview protocol, the researcher applied information from the research questions, the theoretical framework and also the literature review. The researcher used two interview protocols to facilitate the needs of the child participants and the adult participants. Both child and adult

protocols incorporated two sections. The first segment captured the demographic data of the participants and the second part consisted of the semi-structured interview questions, designed to gain the essence of the participants' experiences and the meaning they ascribe to them (see appendices G, H and I). Each interview lasted between 60 to 90 minutes.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection. Before beginning the data collection process, the researcher sought permission from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct the study. The IRB consent letter outlined in detail, the moral and ethical implications of the study as well as the rights and responsibilities of the participants and researcher. The collection of data for this transcendental phenomenological study utilized in-depth, open-ended interview questions (Creswell, 2014; Seidman, 1998; 2015), in addition to participant journals, observations and field notes and participant member checks. Creswell (2007) underscored that primarily utilizing interviews with participants is ideal, but documentation, observations, and even artwork can be considered. For phenomenological studies, data must be collected from several individuals who have experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007, 2012a). In the case of this study, the researcher collected data from nine individuals who meet the criteria of being significant family members of incarcerated African American males.

Furthermore, the researcher exercised caution and thoughtfulness when conducting interviews, since phenomenology deals with the lived experiences of the individuals. The same was even more critical when interviewing children as part of the population because of the sensitive nature of the research. The researcher modified the interview process to gain the perspectives of the child participant, which was crucial in providing pertinent information and insight about his world (Creswell, 2007; 2012a; Creswell & Poth, 2017).

As part of the modification, the researcher had the to probe with follow-up questions in order to acquire additional elements about their experiences (Robinson, 2013). To maintain the integrity of the data, the researcher sought permission from the participants to digitally record the interviews with an audiotape recorder. The researcher then transcribed the audiotape interview, observation notes and field notes. These diverse perspectives provided rich descriptions, and also triangulated the data, offering distinctive scopes of the same phenomenon. Triangulation describes the use of several methods or data sources in qualitative studies to create a thorough awareness of phenomena while strengthening the credibility of the study (Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, & Neville, 2014; Creswell, 2007). Next, the researcher conducted a member check, where the participants had a chance to check for accuracy in the transcription and ensure that their experience was not misrepresented. Reliability of the research was achieved from triangulating the study with substantiating data sources. These Sources comprised findings from various derivations of information including existing literature such as cited in the literature review. Triangulation will also be achieved through the utilization of several methods of data collection such as interviews, member checks, and utilizing artifacts that include participant journals /artwork, field notes, and observations. Figure four below provides a summarization of the areas that were triangulated in this study.

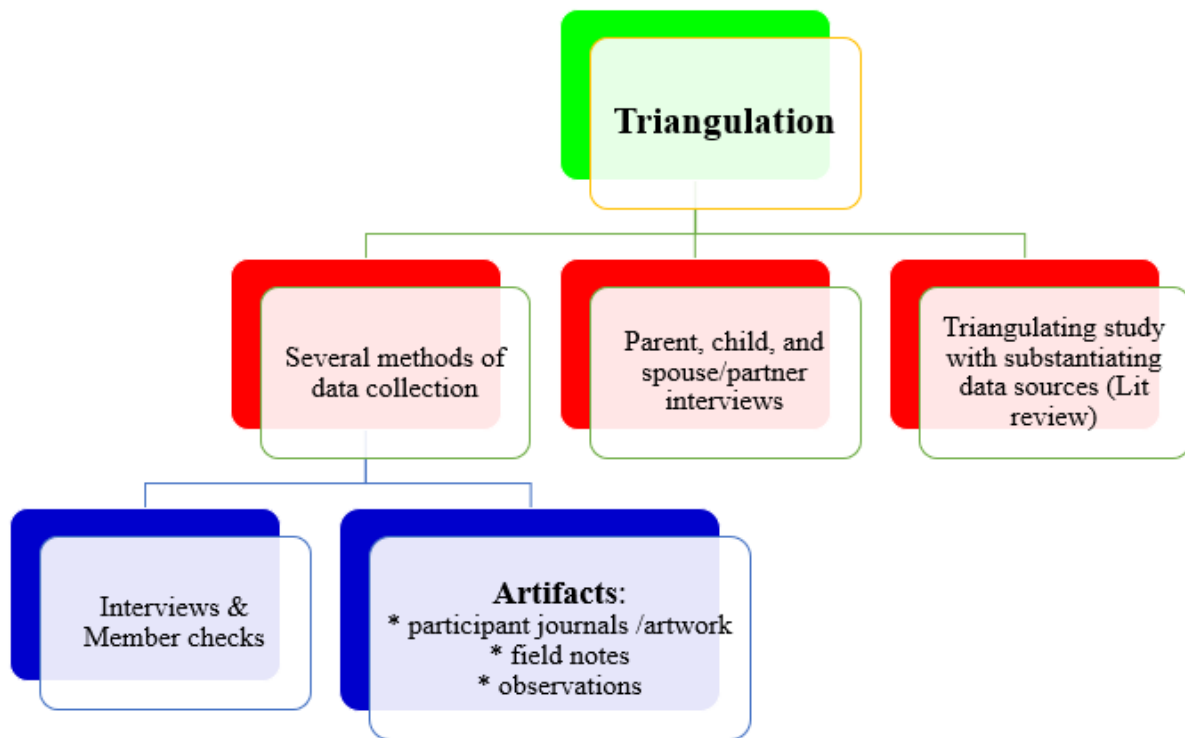


Figure 4: Summarization of Triangulation

Informed consent. The study included multiple individuals who are family members of incarcerated African American males, which also included a minor participant. Thus, for this research, the informed consent consisted of both assent and consent forms. The assent form is for minor children, and the consent form is for the adults. The Parent granting permission to the minor participant in this study, was not able to assume automatic participation for the child. The child had the opportunity to express willingness and the desire to participate voluntarily. Participants were also provided with the name and contact information of my dissertation chair and the university's Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in case they had any concerns or questions regarding this study.

The information on these forms explained in great details the purpose of the study, seeking the individuals' participation in the study, the possible implications of the study, and

ethical issues as well as the university personnel to be contacted, if the researcher breached their rights or violated any ethical principles. Creswell (2007; 2012a) cited the following as important information that must be added to a consent form: the purpose of the study, the steps for the collection of the data, the participants' right to withdraw voluntarily at any time from the study, information about safeguarding the privacy of the participants, information about the possible risks and benefits concerning participation in the research, and ultimately, the signature of participants and myself. Additionally, a key part of the informed consent and ethical principles in qualitative research are data protection and participant safety.

Data protection. Ethical considerations are of utmost importance in qualitative research. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (1988) and U.S. Food and Drug Administration (1988) have instituted regulations to protect human subjects that are involved in research. Other organizations like the American Anthropological Association, the American Educational Research Association (AERA), the American Psychological Association (APA), and the American Medical Association (AMA) have documented ethical standards that should govern human subjects in research (Creswell, 2007; Robinson, 2013; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). Moreover, the researcher followed the proper research protocols approved by the University of Arkansas' IRB to ensure that the confidentiality and privacy of the participants was always protected.

In addition, the researcher protected the confidentiality and privacy by assigning pseudonyms to all participants, which was used throughout the process (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2015; Robinson 2013; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). The researcher kept the collected data protected. It was transcribed and stored on encrypted computer files and stored on my password enabled computer. The raw data and the interview transcripts were also securely stored in a file

cabinet that was adequately locked with keys, and only the researcher had access to those records. All transcripts and audiotapes will be kept for up to three years after the completion of the study.

Prior to the beginning of each interview, the researcher conducted a reflexive interview, bracketing out any previous or personal experiences with the phenomenon and try to fully see it from the participant's perspective. The researcher then explained the interview format and had the participant read and sign the consent form. The interview protocol has 10 questions, was slated to last 60-90 minutes. It was also audio recorded. Only one interview was scheduled with each participant, and a member checks after the interviews were transcribed. The member checks were completed via phone and email consultations.

Participant safety. Although there was no physical risk associated with this research, based on the nature of the study, which was to explore the impacts of incarceration on the wellbeing of family members of African American males, there were potential psychological or emotional risk to participants. The researcher had this information documented in the consent forms, and also took care to explain to participants to ensure clarity. The researcher exercised much care and thoughtfulness throughout the interview process, as processing such sensitive information could be emotionally exhausting and overwhelming (National Alliance on Mental Illness, 2018a). The researcher explained in detail the possible risk that the participants might encounter and utilize empathic skills to ensure the participants comfort and safety, before, during and even after the interview. The participants were reminded that the interview was entirely voluntary, and that they had the right to stop or take a break at any point during the interview process without penalty. The researcher also provided community resources for the participants to further process issues related to the phenomenon if they needed to. The researcher informed

the participants that the data gathered from the interview would be handled with extreme confidentiality and that their names would not be attached to any information collected.

Recruitment and interview process. As mentioned earlier, initial introduction to potential participants was facilitated by key informants as well as advertisement through different community businesses and organizations. The informants were helpful in the process of reaching participants throughout the South-Central Arkansas region, especially the informant with access to the Black college student groups. Advertising through media also yielded some results. The informants assisted in establishing initial connection with potential participants and sourced contact information such as telephone numbers and email addresses to facilitate communication.

The researcher then made initial contact through the best contact source provided by each participant. Market Research Society (MRS, 2014) Code of Conduct noted that methods of contact such as private homes or office visits, text messages, or landline or mobile telephone numbers, are all acceptable means of contacting research participants. Additionally, the researcher took into consideration the MRS (2014) Code of Conduct, which stipulates the importance of not contacting potential participants during anti-social hours. After ascertaining willingness to participate, the researcher made further detailed arrangements concerning the meeting time and space.

Data Analysis

Qualitative analysis largely depends on the theoretical perspective of the researchers (Sutton & Austin, 2015). Creswell, (2007) attested that it commences with preparing and organizing the raw data by coding it into themes and presenting the findings in numbers or discussion format. Studies point to phenomenological inquiry as following a universal analytic

approach (Creswell, 2007; Riemen, 1986). The researcher therefore used Creswell (2007) and Moustakas (1994) phenomenological data analysis and representation as a guide to conduct the analysis for this qualitative study. The data analysis process started with the use of Moustakas (1994) phenomenological reduction. In this stage, the researcher bracketed once more to ensure that preconceived notions, personal beliefs and experiences did not interfere with the findings. This is also referred to as the epoché. Next, the researcher utilized horizontalization in which preliminary statements were grouped or listed.

Phenomenological reduction also includes finding the invariant constituents, and finding significant statements themes, meaning, textural and structural description and description of the essence of the phenomena being studied (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher then presented a detailed assessment of the lived experience of the participants (Lichtman, 2012; Robinson, 2013). Imaginative variation and synthesis were also important facets of the data analysis process. Imaginative variation provides the context of the experience, in addition to the composite structural descriptions. It was also crucial in shaping the facets of the experience that caused the phenomenon to occur (Moustakas, 1994). Synthesis on the other hand, includes the invariant essence, or incorporation of the textural-structural themes (Moustakas, 1994). These provided a comprehensive description of the phenomenon, otherwise denoted as the 'essence' of the phenomenon. The essence attends to universal findings that are possibly transferable to comparable situations (Moustakas, 1994).

Creswell (2007) and Moustakas (1994) outlined six important steps that should be used as guidelines when conducting phenomenological data analysis. The authors noted that the first step should be the management of the data. In this stage, it is important that the transcription matches the audio file. This is to ensure that the words of the participant(s) are not changed or

tampered with. To accomplish this, the researcher created a table in Microsoft Excel with four columns. The first column contained the pseudo names of the participants as the researcher continued to protect the identity of the participants throughout the study. The second column had the raw data or the precise words of the participant, and the third column included the codes based on preliminary or initial readings. The fourth and final column contained themes arising from the preliminary codes. It is noteworthy that even though the transcript in parts might seem unintelligible after reading it, it is advisable that all audio and written transcripts from the participants should be recorded precisely the way it was stated by the participant(s) (Sutton & Austin, 2015). The researcher did her own transcription, and as good practice, kept several copies of the data to prevent loss (Creswell, 2007; Robinson, 2013).

The second step delineated by Creswell (2007) and Moustakas (1994) is reading and making documentation. In this phase the researcher meticulously read each transcript several times, made notes, and started the process of forming first codes. Codes in qualitative studies are short phrases or symbolic words allocated to a salient component that epitomizes a segment of language-based or graphic data (Robinson, 2013; Saldana, 2009; 2015; 2016). The researcher also listened to the audio recordings in conjunction with the transcripts, to ensure the precision of the participants' account of their experience. Accuracy was paramount as it helped the researcher form codes and ultimately themes that came from each participant.

The third step is description of the data. During this phase of the analysis, the researcher commenced describing the personal experiences of the phenomenon shared by each participant. According to the literature, it is vital that researchers describe in detail the essence of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). After all, this is the core of the phenomenological method as it seeks comprehension of the participants communicated

experience (Sutton & Austin, 2015). At this stage of the analysis, the researcher started with a complete account of the impact of incarceration on the wellbeing of family members of incarcerated African American males who experienced the U.S prison system. Presenting the complete account of their experiences helped to even further remove the researcher's personal experiences and opinions thus, keeping the focus on the participants.

The fourth step in the data analysis process is classification of the data. According to Creswell (2007), the classification of the data will commence by developing imperative statements and organizing them into meaningful components. Moustakas (1994) termed these meanings units or themes. These meanings or themes assisted the researcher in categorizing the data. Auerbach and Silverstein (2003) and Robinson (2013) concurred that common themes will continue to emerge, as the researcher works on classifying the data from each participant.

The fifth step is interpretation of the data. In this stage, the researcher attempted to understand the impacts of incarceration on the wellbeing of family members of incarcerated African American males who experience the U.S prison system. The researcher focused on the textural description (Creswell 2007) as well as the structural description of the phenomenon Moustakas (1994). Additionally, the researcher utilized some of the precise words from the participants in the interpretation, so as not to infuse personal thoughts in the interpretation of the data.

The sixth and final step in Creswell (2007) and Moustakas (1994) analysis process, involves representing and visualizing of the data. Creswell (2007) revealed that representing and visualizing qualitative data can be done in different forms, inclusive of tables, discussion, or figures. The researcher formed a well-structured and detailed narrative of the phenomena being investigated, using tables to augment the narrative. Having visual representation of the essence

of the participants' experience, the researcher was able to highlight common themes and therefore, document and present a composite description (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994) of their lived experiences.

According to Creswell (2007), "The final written report or presentation includes the voices of participants, the researcher's reflexivity, and a complex description and interpretation of the problem" (p. 37). The researcher used a table to display a summary of the demographic information for each participant, in addition to tables illustrating participant quotes that support each theme. The researcher also created word clouds with various themes that display a graphical presentation of the data from the participants. All this information will assist the researcher with illustrating a parallel with the findings from this study and broadening the existing literature. Word cloud is another method of analysis using words from the participants' responses. Word cloud is a way of visualizing data using hard color text which represents the frequency words appeared (Tafazoli, 2013). Like data visualization in quantitative research, which presents data in the form of graphs, charts, or tables, word cloud is the presentation of textual data in cloud format highlighting the most frequent points. Thus, using word cloud gave the researcher a visual and graphical view of the most common words or phrases used by the participants.

Research Procedure

The information in Figure 1 represents the procedure that the researcher employed to execute the study. The researcher prepared the proposal and requested necessary approval from the dissertation committee. The researcher then sought approval of the University of Arkansas Institution Research Board (IRB). After this approval, the researcher acquired necessary permission from the participants before conducting interviews for data collection. All data collected along with the transcriptions were stored in a safe, securely locked away and accessible

by only the researcher. The penultimate stage of the research process was transcribing and coding the data before conducting the analysis and interpretation of the data. The final phase is reporting and presenting the findings in the form of the dissertation.

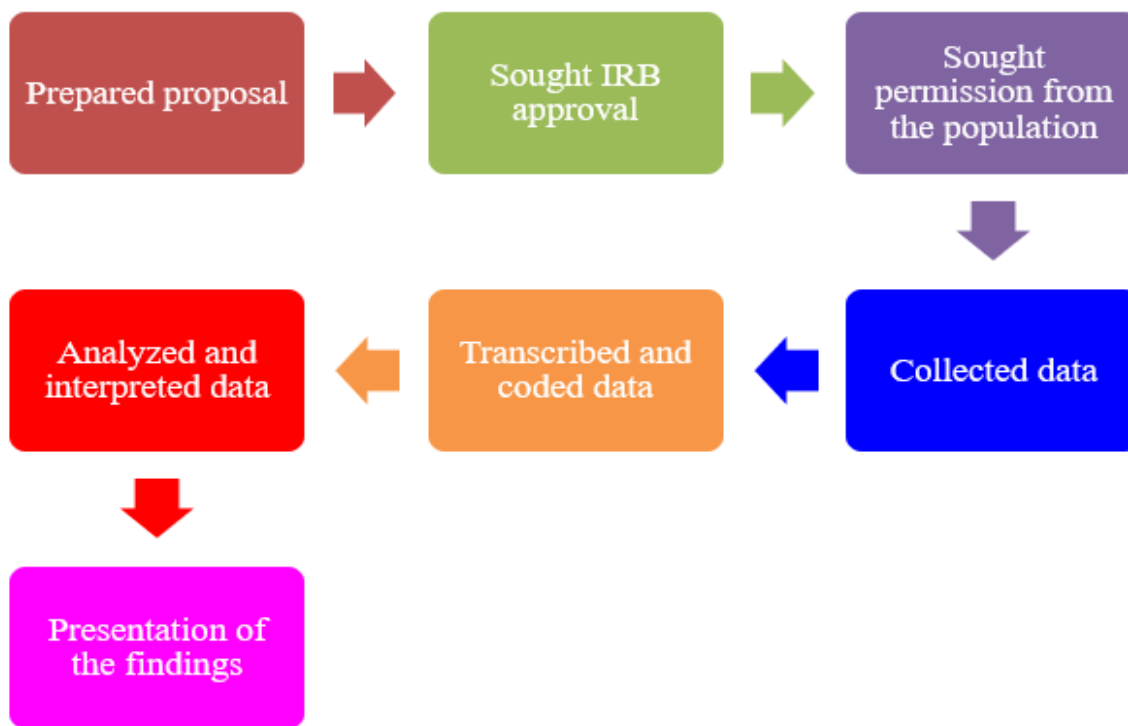


Figure 5: Research Procedure. The information in the Figure 5 represents the research procedure. The research procedure includes preparation of the proposal, seek IRB approval, seek permission from the participants, conduct data collection, transcribe and code data, analyze and interpret data, and presentation of the findings.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity, as illustrated by Mills, Durepos, and Wiebe (2010) is an investigator's continuing critique and self-reflection of his/her own personal biases and assumptions.

Reflexivity is carried out prior to and during the process of data analysis, to keep the investigator aware of the impact personal biases or opinions can have on the outcome of a study. Throughout the course of this study, the researcher remained cognizant of the need to be authentic and self-aware, having a clear understanding of her position within the research.

As a doctoral candidate with training in the counseling field, the researcher ensured that she used her position of power to assist the participants as they live through this difficult phenomenon, without being insensitive and hurtful. The researcher was also constantly conscious of her personal experiences with the phenomenon, and also the way her upbringing, experiences, culture, gender, biases and received definition of family, all had the capacity to shape different facets of the research (Patton, 2002).

The researcher conducted a bracketing interview, setting aside personal experiences, biases, and preconceived notions, to focus on the lived experiences of the participants. The researcher also worked on maintaining self-understanding and disclosure about the biases, values, and experiences brought to the study (Patton, 2002). The researcher maintained a reflexive journal that was very helpful with bracketing personal biases and keeping the researcher self-aware. Additionally, the researcher utilized an external auditor who is an investigator that is not involved in the research process. This individual has a PhD degree, and is a competent statistician. He assisted with exploring the proceedings and results of the study, mainly for the intent of appraising the accuracy and validity and gauging whether the findings, clarifications and deductions were supported by the data (Creswell, 2012a; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

A peer debriefer was also utilized to bring a fresh perspective in examining the data and interpretations and improve trustworthiness of the study. The peer debriefer was a doctoral candidate and trusted colleague who is proficient with qualitative research and understood the nuances of the study. This individual was also thorough in assisting the researcher while dissecting the researcher's thought process concerning parts of the study (Given, 2008; Privitera & Ahlgrim-Delzell, 2018). In sum, the researcher remained aware throughout the study that past

experiences can influence the interpretation of the phenomenon, even though this reality is often overlooked, and that this had the potential to be overly challenging in the data collection and analysis process.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness, as clarified by Shenton (2004), is the framework for creating rigor in qualitative research. Connelly (2016) further expounded that a study's trustworthiness denotes the gradation of confidence in data, clarification, and procedures used to safeguard the excellence of a study. Expert qualitative researchers Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Guba and Lincoln (1994) posited several criteria that denote trustworthiness. These are: credibility, dependability, transferability, confirmability, and later authenticity was added. In this study, the researcher guaranteed rigor through the use and illustration of credibility, dependability, and transferability. All these areas were of equal significance in bolstering the validity of this study's outcomes.

Credibility. Connelly (2016) typified that the integrity of the research, or the assurance in the truth of the study and eventual findings, is the utmost significant measure. To establish credibility, the researcher was intentional about first being transparent with participants. The researcher also utilized competence gained from her training (awareness, empathy, presence, warmth) to ensure that the participants' emotional needs were catered to during the interview process. The researcher ensured that ethical decisions were made on behalf of the participants. The researcher further established credibility through prolonged and persistent engagement, which also assisted in building rapport and trust, add depth to the participant/interviewer relationship, and essentially lead to thick rich descriptions (Creswell, 2014).

The researcher started the prolonged and persistent engagement from the recruitment phase, through the interview stage, and followed by member checking. This occurred over a period of 12 weeks. The researcher created space for participants in case they wanted to share more of their experiences beyond the scheduled 60-90-minute interview time. The researcher also encouraged the participants to journal after the interview process, documenting any afterthoughts or feelings that may have come from the interview process. They also had the freedom to do this the way they chose whether by writing or in expressive art form. Participants submitted their reflective journals via email. The researcher additionally created availability for processing these with the participants, if they expressed that desire. The researcher provided email access to participants, in case they had additional questions or needed further information regarding accessing services.

Dependability. Connelly (2016) and Polit and Beck (2014) expounded that dependability refers to how stable the data remains during the research period, and throughout the varying states of the study. Connelly (2016) added that it is imperative to maintain an audit trail and also peer-debriefings with a colleague, to ensure some stability in the event any aspect of the study should change. As mentioned earlier, the researcher employed the use of a peer debriefer with whom the researcher met weekly for an hour, during the data collection and data analysis period. The researcher also maintained a thorough audit trail throughout the study that included keeping an exhaustive journal, and documenting observation/field notes.

Dependability is also achieved through exhaustive dialogue concerning the collection of data and analysis, a vibrant description of triangulation, an unambiguous framework for coding, and the use of external auditing to confirm precise conclusions (Patton, 2002). Dependability ensures uniformity between described or narrated experiences and emergent themes from

recorded data. Throughout the study, the researcher remained mindful of personal reactions, knowing that these could compound data through clarification based on personal experience, instead of participant meaning. In sum, the researcher ensured that a methodical process of rigor was followed (Patton, 2002), so that the study can be replicated as desired.

Transferability. Polit and Beck (2014) and Patton (2002) indicated that transferability is the ability to reproduce the research study in other contexts, for example populations, times and places. The researcher's goal was to strengthen the opportunity for consumers of the study to be able to determine the applicability of this study's findings to situations more personal to their experiences (Connelly, 2016). The researcher also attended to the transferability of this study using rich, thick descriptions and quotes, which provided context for precise clarification and comparison to supplementary experiences (Patton, 2002). Additionally, the researcher utilized transparency and comprehensive accounts of participant admissibility, data collection procedures and length of time taken, number and length of interviews and other data collection methods (Patton, 2002) to also concretize the rigor of transferability.

Summary

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological inquiry was to understand impacts of incarceration on the wellbeing of family members of incarcerated African American males who experience the U.S prison system. This chapter presented the justification for the investigation design and methodology. This chapter also provided thorough details for the measures that were used to conduct this study, commencing with seeking IRB approval. Sampling and recruitment measures, interview settings and justification, sample size, data collection methods, data analysis, and reflexivity. Steps to guarantee trustworthiness were also substantiated in this chapter.

CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to explore the impacts of incarceration on the wellbeing of family members of African American males who experience the U.S prison system. It was the researcher's belief that obtaining a clearer understanding of this phenomenon would provide clarity regarding the way(s) in which family members of incarcerated African American males are affected when their loved ones enter the penal system, and how they conceptualize and perceive these experiences through their personal lens.

The findings of the study are presented in this chapter. They were obtained by means of one semi-structured 60 – 90 minute interview with each of the nine participants, participant journals, researcher observation/field notes, and participant member checks. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed by the researcher. The researcher analyzed documents for rich data, and extricated significant statements concerning the experience of being the family member impacted by the incarceration of an African American male. The confidentiality of each participant was prioritized and maintained throughout the period of data collection and data analysis. The primary research question and four sub-questions are examined below. In order to address the research questions, the findings of the study are presented from each participant's viewpoint through expression of individual experiences and quotes from participants' validating these expressions. Included, is also participant demographic information.

Research Questions

The following research question and sub-questions were addressed:

1. What are the lived experiences of family members of incarcerated African American males?
 - a. How does incarceration of a parent impact the wellbeing of children?

- b. How does incarceration of a child impact the wellbeing of parents?
- c. How does incarceration of a spouse/partner impact the wellbeing of women?
- d. How does incarceration of siblings impact the wellbeing of non-incarcerated siblings?

Participant Data

All participants were family members of incarcerated African American males, living in the South-Central Arkansas region. Eight of the participants identified as Black/African Americans and one as white. Two of the nine participants identified as males, while the remaining seven identified as females. The participants ranged in age from 12 – 55 years old. The participants education backgrounds also ranged from Middle school to a PhD degree. The participants' relationship to the incarcerated individual included: two partners, four children, one sibling, one niece, and a cousin. Participants employment category ranged from student status to being employed, with a salary range of no income to over \$65,000 per year. Table 1 summarizes demographic data of the participants based on the demographic questionnaire given to participants at the beginning of the semi-structured interview. Participants codes and researcher assigned pseudonyms are noted in the demographic summary table, but henceforth, participants are referred to only by their researcher assigned pseudonyms.

Table 1

Participants Demographic Data

Participant code	Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Education Level	Employment status	Income level (\$)	Relationship to Incarcerated Individual
001	Clara	33	Female	African American	PhD	Employed	65,000+	Child
002	Karen	44	Female	White	Masters	Employed	36,000 – 45,000	Partner
003	Olivia	21	Female	African American	Some College	Student	0 – 25,000	Sibling
004	Elaine	21	Female	African American	Some College	Student	0 – 25,000	Cousin
005	Kyle	23	Male	African American	Bachelors	Student	0 – 25,000	Child
006	Natalie	21	Female	African American	Some College	Student	0 – 25,000	Niece
007	Cora	55	Female	African American	Some College	Employed	26,000 – 35,000	Partner
008	Lauryn	30	Female	African American	Some College	Employed	26,000 – 35,000	Child
009	Darren	12	Male	African American	Middle School	Student	0 – 25,000	Child

Participant 1. Clara is a 33-year-old African American female with a PhD degree. She stated that she is gainfully employed, earning over \$65,000 annually. She shared her experience of her dad being incarcerated for a significant portion of her childhood to adolescent years and the impacts that had on her as an individual and also her family. The textural descriptions for participant 1, how she experienced having her dad locked away for a substantial and critical time period of her life, are explained in further detail. Examples of related data for Clara are available in Table 3.

Participant 2. Karen is a 44-year-old White female who has attained a master's degree. She noted that her annual income is in the range of 36,000 – 45,000 annually, doing a job that she loves immensely. Karen shared her experience of having her partner and the father of her then young children incarcerated and the enormous and lasting hardships that ensued as a result. The textural descriptions for Karen, how she experienced having her partner locked away without any immediate chance for parole and having children who grew up without knowing their dad, are explained in further detail. Examples of related data for Karen are available in Table 4.

Participant 3. Olivia is a 21-year-old African American female who was pursuing her undergraduate degree. She stated that she has part-time employment and earns less than \$25,000 annually. Olivia talked about what it has been like having her brother currently incarcerated while waiting for a trial that might lead to long term incarceration. The textural descriptions for Olivia, how she has been experiencing her own stresses in addition to the stress caused from the uncertainty of her brother's future, are explicated in further detail. Examples of related data for Olivia are available in Table 5.

Participant 4. Elaine is a 21-year-old African American female who was pursuing her undergraduate degree. She mentioned that she has part-time employment and earns under \$25,000 annually. Elaine revealed that her close cousin who is more like a brother to her has recently been incarcerated and will be in the penal system for another 10 years. The textural descriptions for Elaine, how she and her extended family have been coping, are expounded in further detail. Examples of related data for Elaine are available in Table 6.

Participant 5. Kyle is a 23-year-old African American male who currently has an earned bachelor's degree and was pursuing graduate studies. He shared that he has part-time employment and earns a little below \$25000 per year. He talked about his dad's absence from his life for a significant portion of his early to mid-childhood years and how that impacted him and his family. The textural descriptions for Kyle, how he has tried to forge a relationship with his dad post incarceration and the difficulties involved, are explained in further detail. Examples of related data for Kyle are available in Table 7.

Participant 6. Natalie is a 21-year-old African American female enrolled in undergraduate studies. She stated that she had part time employment which she balanced with her full-time studies and earned below \$25,000. Natalie talked about growing up in a close-knit family and the impact incarceration of her very close uncle has had on her and the family. The textural descriptions for Natalie, how she and family have been coping with the incarceration of this loved one, are explained in further detail. Examples of related data for Natalie are available in Table 8.

Participant 7. Cora is a 55-year-old African American female who stated that she has some college education but did not earn a degree. She however noted that she was proud to be employed at the same job for over two decades with an annual salary within the range of \$26,000

- \$35,000. Cora shared that she had a few experiences with loved ones being incarcerated, but stated that the one that stood out most, was the incarceration of her partner. The textural descriptions for Cora, how she dealt with the incarceration of this loved one, are explained in further detail. Examples of related data for Cora are available in Table 9.

Participant 8. Lauryn is a 30-year-old African American female who shared that she has some college education but did not complete a college degree. She stated that she was employed and earned in the \$26,000 - \$35,000 salary range per year. Lauryn shared what it was like for her to experience the incarceration of her dad for most of her childhood to adolescence years. The textural descriptions for Lauryn, how she experienced the incarceration of her father, are explained in further detail. Examples of related data for Lauryn are available in Table 10.

Participant 9. Darren is a 12-year-old African American male who was a middle schooler. Darren shared his experience of having his dad incarcerated for two of the formative years of his life. The textural descriptions for Darren, how he experienced the incarceration of his father and the impact it has had on his life, are explained in further detail. Examples of related data for Darren are available in Table 11.

Thematic labels

The researcher gained familiarity with the data through frequent listening of the audio recording and reviewing of each transcript until thorough comprehension of the data was attained. As the researcher went through the process of phenomenological reduction, she was very mindful of bracketing out her own biases about the phenomenon. This assisted the researcher with developing a laser focus on the participants' data, instead of her own ideas. Personal journaling and peer-debriefing were useful in this process. The researcher then engaged horizontalization, ensuring that all of the participants' statements were viewed and valued

equally. During this stage, all repetitive statements and those not enhancing the research questions were removed. Within the process of horizontalization, significant statements were identified by the researcher concerning the participants' experience of the phenomenon studied. Meanings were formulated from these statements which were further arranged into clusters, and the clusters into themes.

Five thematic labels emerged, under which the participants' invariant constituents were organized. Two of these primary themes also had sub-themes, which assisted the researcher even further with organizing the data. The theme labeling process was directed by the research questions and the critical race theory (CRT) theoretical framework reviewed in Chapter II. CRT, immersed in the constructivism paradigm, was used to explain the participants lived experience with the researched phenomena. Another important component of CRT was the shared narratives concerning the discriminatory experience of incarceration from the viewpoint of individuals of color. It also addressed the negative trickle-down effects of incarceration which is built on systemic racism, and the disproportionate ways in which African American families and communities are impacted. A list of these themes and sub-themes are exemplified in Table 2, and were collectively extricated from participants' interviews, process journals and researcher observation/field notes. The themes serve as a representation of the participants' shared experience with having a loved one incarcerated. Also, adding to the thick rich descriptions are textural data in cloud format described as word clouds. The researcher utilized word clouds which provides a visual and graphical view of the most common words used by the participants. The word clouds are represented under each theme depicted below.

Table 2

Thematic Labels

Primary Theme	Sub-theme
1. Familial changes and adjustments	
2. Impact on individual and family wellbeing	a. Emotional
	b. Social
	c. Financial
3. Support systems	a. Faith
	b. Intergenerational influence
	c. Professional mental health care
	d. Self-reliance/independence
4. Stigma of Incarceration	
5. Sharing personal experience	

Familial changes and adjustments. The data disclosed that individuals and families facing the incarceration of a loved one, experience major changes and adjustments as they adapt. The change and adjustment diversified, based on the role that family member played and the duration of the incarceration. The data gathered indicated that when dads were incarcerated, it left a void and burden on the family which oftentimes had to be filled and carried by mothers, assisted by extended family members. The incarceration of a sibling also created an emptiness that was difficult to navigate. This was due to not having the ability or space created to talk about the loss of this sibling in the home setting. Parents took care of the needs of the incarcerated sibling in a business-like manner, but no space was created to grieve or express any connected

Impact on individual and family wellbeing. Incarceration not only impact the incarcerated, but also takes a toll on the wellbeing of family members. The data demonstrates that this impact can occur in different ways which include but is not limited to emotionally, socially and financially. This finding supports existing research. When a loved one is incarcerated, in some cases, it creates an emotional burden on the family. In African American households, this emotional strain is oftentimes not addressed or discussed among family members leaving individual members to suffer silently. In the cases that it is addressed, older family members will talk about it and pray about it amongst themselves or take it to a spiritual leader to receive spiritual intervention and prayer. Younger children are often excluded from this conversation as it is “*grown folks’ business*” (Kyle). Unattended emotional needs can overtime materialize into more serious mental issues as expressed by Lauryn.

Incarceration also impacts family members social wellbeing in different ways such as children being teased at school and in the community and children also being treated with insensitivity by teachers at school [African American boys especially having the self-fulfilling prophecy placed on them of entering the school to prison pipe-line] (Clara, Kyle, and Darren). Financial wellbeing is also impacted as the data shows that the financial needs of the family is left with a void when a family member - especially a breadwinner - is incarcerated. In addition to finding ways to meet the family’s needs without that extra income, family members now have to amass the needed finances to pay for attorney’s fees, long distance phone calls, and other incidental needs that this incarcerated family may incur while behind bars. This financial stress oftentimes plunges the families into dependence on the welfare system as a means of survival.

provided some consolation and in ways helped to ease the burden of coping with their loved one's incarceration, even momentarily.

Intergenerational influence was also another important source of support for participants. Most participants noted that after having their loved ones incarcerated, extended family members such as grandparents, aunts, uncles, etc., stepped up and offered needed assistance to keep the family stable. Participants noted that the influence of these extended family members were influential in many ways such as providing shelter, food, financial assistance, and also emotional support. Overall, participants stated that especially with their fathers incarcerated, it was meaningful for them to have uncles, grandfathers, and even older male cousins who would provide mentorship and modeled what it meant to be a role model.

Professional mental health care was across the board under-utilized by the participants. A few participants shared experiencing externalizing behaviors that became disruptive at home and mostly at school, and eventually were recommended for services at school. Externalizing behaviors shared by participants included running away from home, getting into fights at school, talking back to teachers, caring less about school assignments, and receiving in and out of school suspensions. A couple participants found it helpful to be able to talk with their school counselors about their feelings concerning missing their loved ones. Lauryn noted specifically that she was very angry and chose not to speak during her counseling sessions, as that was the only control, she felt like she had at that time. Other participants noted that mental health care in that formal sense was never a part of their experience as they had spiritual grounding and familial support, so talking to a stranger about personal issues was never given consideration.

Self-reliance and independence were also important as a few participants noted that they felt like they should be in charge of their own destiny and figure out their own problems. One

with the discomfort. Karen noted that because her family did not consent to her dating outside of her race, it became a double jeopardy for her to mention to them that her partner was incarcerated, the circumstances surrounding his incarceration, and the hardships she was having as a single mother to their children. There is minimal research conducted on the phenomenon of stigmatization, even though it is often cited as one of the adverse outcomes of parental incarceration (Phillips & Gates, 2011).

Participants with incarcerated dads noted that there was a certain level of shame that was associated with having their dads in prison. Overall, they shared feelings of not being safe talking about it at school, as there was the chance of being teased by peers and treated differently by teachers. Clara shared how painful it was when children from her school found out who her dad was and how they enjoyed making fun of her and her sibling due to his reckless lifestyle. She noted that the teasing and bullying caused her to feel isolated. Kyle noted that because of the associated shame he felt, he avoided the subject for as long as he could and only engaged it when other peers talked openly about their experience with their family member's incarceration. Kyle added that it was not until he was much older that he had the courage to talk about his dad and his experiences with his incarceration. He shared that at this point, he started to realize that other children had similar experiences and he was not as isolated as he thought he was. Darren shared an experience of a teacher who made an insensitive comment based on his father's incarceration and this happened at a meeting in the presence of his mom. Darren disclosed that his mom quickly addressed it and that made him feel better.

Natalie revealed that living in an area that she described as the "hood" made incarceration very visible and oftentimes problematic for the family members of those incarcerated. She noted that family members can sometimes become targets if the incarcerated loved one had unfinished

Sharing Personal Experiences. The final theme addressed was sharing personal experiences. The data gathered indicated that collectively, the participants rarely if ever talked about having a loved one incarcerated outside of their family setting. A few participants expressed feelings of apprehension in talking with the researcher, which the researcher validated and reassured them that if they wanted to opt out of the study, it was perfectly fine. The researcher also informed participants that if they started the interview and got to a place where it became too difficult to continue, the choice to stop would be respected. Other participants expressed feeling fine about engaging in the conversation as they wanted to see what would come up for them since they never spoke about that experience with a stranger.

It was an emotional experience for some participants to engage the conversation, at which points the researcher employed even more warmth and empathic skills. The researcher also again reminded participants of the option to discontinue if they wanted or needed to, but they opted to keep going, as they shared that the experience was meaningful. Overall, participants revealed that even though there were hard moments reminiscing and sharing about the incarceration of their loved ones, they felt safe, found the tone of the interview very calming and reassuring, and were able to reflect on their experience in a way that they had not done before.



Figure 10: Word cloud illustrating text from sharing personal experiences theme

Individual Textural and Structural Descriptions. According to Moustakas (1994), textural descriptions focus on the ‘what’ while structural descriptions focus on the ‘how’ of the experience in a transcendental phenomenological study. The textural and structural descriptions highlighted in this section, comprise quotations retrieved from the single semi-structured participant interviews and their reflective journals. Also included, are descriptions that explore the emotional, social, and cultural relationships among information shared by participants. These articulate the unique perceptions of the phenomenon explored. The descriptions were designed utilizing the reduction of participant experiences or invariant constituents, in addition to the thematic labels. These are organized in order by individual participant. A brief and general

discussion of the participants' experience with incarceration of their African American male family member precedes a complementary data summary table for individual participants.

Participant 1. Clara was very open and ready to talk about her experience with the incarceration of her dad throughout her childhood and adolescence. She noted that *“my father was incarcerated all throughout my life. He was incarcerated for 29-30 years or more in and out of jail and prison for various offenses.”* She shared that she was born in the latter part of his over a decade of marriage to her mom, so in her early childhood, she mostly heard stories about him, but did not see him very much. Clara stated that as she got older,

He would often send letters. He would write my sister and I, give us updates on where he was, what he was doing, what prison or jail he was in, he would also give his perspective on the case and why he was in prison. He would often plead his innocence and he would reassure us that he loved us and that he looked forward to seeing us.

Clara stated that he was released in the late 2000s and came to live with her family, giving her and her sibling a chance to spend some time with him. However, he was not changed or rehabilitated so he would hang out with the same individuals in the community and fall into his old patterns of behaviors that landed him in prison repeatedly. Clara noted that after he had a near death experience, she along with her sibling took the opportunity to talk to him about his lifestyle, how he was being self-destructive while at the same time hurting them. She noted that he was not very receptive to their concerns. Clara stated that he eventually died less than a year after being discharged from prison. Clara indicated that outside of familial interactions, she had never engaged in any formal conversations about that experience prior to our conversation. Table 3 below is arranged by thematic labels and provides supplementary data to support Clara's textural and structural descriptions.

Table 3

Participant 1 Data Summary

Thematic Labels	Quotes
1. Familial changes and adjustments	<i>"...I would say the family changed for the better when he left."</i>
2. Impact on individual and family wellbeing	<i>"When he left, it was actually a relief because he was very violent, very abusive and just put the family in some situations that were not safe. So, our safety increased when he left."</i>
a. Emotional	<i>"I was more so afraid of him, and so seeing him was actually out of the question. I really wanted to keep my distance at the time I was in middle school and elementary school."</i>
b. Social	
c. Financial	<i>"I have feelings of sadness for him because I realize that he was the way that he was based on the fact that he didn't have a father when he was growing up. The street raised him..."</i>
	<i>"I feel sorry for him. I'm not mad at him. I'm not angry. Yea, it sucks not growing up with your father, but he had an even worse childhood."</i>
	<i>"Not having a relationship with my father impacted my relationship in dating and with men."</i>
	<i>"I acted out in certain ways, you know, just dating guys that I should not have been dating just because they filled that man void. I even remember how I used to have a tendency to date older guys because they gave me that father figure feel. Yeah, but I never vocalized it in a way like oh my gosh, I'm really missing my dad and I wish I had a father figure. I never verbalized it that way. I don't think it ever hit me that way."</i>
	<i>"I think things improved as far as financially because he was in the military. I was able to benefit from a bill that essentially paid for my education. I was able to receive a check from the military based on his mental health status."</i>

Thematic Labels	Quotes
3. Support systems	<i>"I felt like I was at a huge loss, because I didn't experience that love of a father. But as I grew in my relationship with Christ, I was able to see how God was just filling those voids that I had."</i>
a. Faith	
b. Intergenerational influence	
c. Professional mental health care	<i>"I still sometimes will look at other girls and other women who grew up with their fathers and I think you know; how could things be different for me? You know, if I grew up with him, but honestly, it is my relationship with Christ, that has helped to heal the wounds and the hurt in those areas."</i>
d. Self-reliance/independence	<i>"I don't recall having those moments of missing dad when he was locked up, because my mom taught my sister and I, how important it was for us to have a relationship with Jesus Christ and how important it was for us to get an education and to be able to provide for ourselves and not depend on a man."</i>
	<i>"I'm thinking about those inter-generational family bonds that really stepped up and you know, just did different things because of the cultural influence."</i>
	<i>...As a child, I grew up seeing my mom, a single parent raise my sister and I with the help of our grandparents."</i>
	<i>"I had a mother and a grandmother who was just always pushing independence. Saying, hey, you don't need a man, but you know, you can do this. You can support yourself, get your education."</i>
	<i>"...With that female force and those uncles in my family, I'm not going to say I never thought about my dad. I did think about him. But they didn't leave much room for me to have to be sad about him."</i>
	<i>"No. I've never received counseling regarding the issue of being a fatherless child. Growing up, I've really just gotten word from the Bible and that helped, and I have been able to get through it. I never even considered going to counseling for something</i>

Thematic Labels	Quotes
	<p><i>like this. It was just something that you pushed through."</i></p> <p><i>"Overall, my wellbeing is good, mental health is good. I have my days just like anybody. But overall, I am able to function day to day."</i></p> <p><i>"So I think even though my culture and what I saw in my family taught me to be a strong independent Black woman and carry and handle all these things, in the long term it's not necessarily the best thing for my health."</i></p> <p><i>"...To be a 'strong black woman' probably also means that you are you're not so strong and you might be hurting yourself in some other areas. There might not be evidence of it in the moment, but they do come up later."</i></p> <p><i>"I would like to tell you in this moment that I practice self-care, but I don't. Because grinding and working hard and just staying busy is a lifestyle. It's what I do."</i></p>
4. Stigma of Incarceration	<p><i>"I grew up in a very small town. Everyone knows everyone. So when my dad was in and out of jail, he would often come back to that small town and he would often hang out with the drug dealers and the addicts and people who were into crime and things like that. When I was in middle school, I remember him hanging out with some guys who were in my class...we rode the same bus to school. I remember they were talking about him at one time and at the time, they didn't know that he was my father... eventually word got out that he was my father. And so just based on the fact that they knew I was affiliated with him, they then started making fun of me, started bullying me and things like that, just based on the things that he was doing with them. So it isolated me to a certain extent because I was really embarrassed based on the things that he was doing."</i></p>

Thematic Labels	Quotes
5. Sharing personal experience	<p><i>“I know my dad’s incarceration has impacted my life. I am not sure of all the ways, but I do know that it impacts my perspectives on things. It impacts the way I view life, the way I interact with people, it impacts the way I deal with men, whether me just having the mentality that I can do it all by myself; the reason why I have all these jobs...who knows? The hurt and pain I have felt from it, I have healed, I have forgiven him, and I really have just moved on. It was a good experience being able to reflect on this through the questions asked, in ways that I have not done before.”</i></p>

Participant 2. Karen noted that she was eager to participate in the study but was unsure as to how much she could contribute. She was also concerned about how her racially different (White) perspective would impact the study. Karen shared that her partner was in and out of jail, but that he has been convicted since the late 1990s and will not be eligible for parole for close to another two decades. Karen noted that she was very young when they met and at that time, she had no knowledge of his history with the criminal justice system. She stated that he was gainfully employed, and they established *“a very normal relationship.”* She shared that she became pregnant and after the birth of their first child they lived together. She noted that he was a supportive partner and dad.

Karen mentioned that after living together for a short time, he had a run in with the law and went back to prison. She noted that he was in and out after that for various offences and they stopped sharing a residence after their second child was born, even though they maintained a relationship. She stated that he would visit her and the children, but it was difficult, as they did not spend as much time together. She noted that when he received his final long-term conviction, it became especially hard as she had to take the kids to go visit him. She stated, *“loading*

everything up and you always took food, right?... So, it's like whenever you're going to visit, it was always a big day of cooking beforehand because you wanted to have everything ready."

She shared a particular moment of hardship she experienced in their relationship, when she found out that he was leading a double life and had another family that she was not aware of.

I remember just going and getting there [to the prison] and this was before I knew about the other person and I still didn't put two and two together you know, 'cause I was young and didn't really recognize... I couldn't visit him, because he already had a visitor. I just remember my son being so excited. You know, we were going to go and he was just screaming, crying, trying to run back, like I'm trying to put everything back in my car. And he's trying to like to break away and run back to the building. He can't go in. Anyway, a memory like that squander my brain. I'll never, ever forget it.

Karen noted that the incarceration of her partner was a very isolating experience that has had far reaching effects on not just her, but also her now adult children who were not able to get to know him or establish a relationship with him. Table 4 below is arranged by thematic labels and provides supplementary data to support Karen's textural and structural descriptions.

Table 4

Participant 2 Data Summary

Thematic Labels	Quotes
1. Familial changes and adjustments	<p><i>"So, I think a lot of it was like, like for my son. For instance, for all of his faults, like all of the things that he did, he was a really good dad when he was home. My son really loved being with his dad."</i></p> <p><i>"The hardest part was like when he couldn't come home, and we would have to visit. When we would go there. You know, the biggest part from a mom's perspective was just my son crying, he just cried. When we would leave, he would just cry and try to run back to dad."</i></p>

Thematic Labels

Quotes

"They [the kids] were really angry with me. And I don't know, if they were angry with me because they found out or because I never said anything to them."

"We Never had a conversation about their dad. I mean, we've never had a conversation about that."

"My two kids are the only two that weren't known by his family and his family don't know about them. So, it's like they don't exist for them."

"My son asked me this really strange question. He said, what kind of Black person am I? and I asked him what he meant by what kind of black person are you? And he was like, well, he wanted to know where he came from, you know? So, we spent a lot of time I went on the ancestry and we did his ancestry through his dad's side of the family. And, you know, that's how he's gotten a lot of that information."

"He got an understanding that he was a descendant of slaves. I think he still would like to know more. I think that there are some things that he recognizes that because he did not grow up with his dad, they're pieces of culture that he doesn't have, that he feels like he's missing. I don't think that he could verbalize that."

"I was really shocked that he just didn't know whether his father moved from Africa, or if he was from the Bahamas, he wanted to know that information. So, I mean, luckily, I was able to provide him with some of it."

"I Ask the kids sometimes, would you like to have you know, an address? Would you like to see a photo? Would you like to have a phone number? I don't think that they get upset with me or I don't honestly don't know that they care either way. I think they just feel like it's such a different part of their life. And it's not yet a door that they've been willing to open on their own."

"I don't know that they will ever be willing to meet their dad."

Thematic Labels	Quotes
<p>2. Impact on individual and family wellbeing</p> <p>a. Emotional</p> <p>b. Social</p> <p>c. Financial</p>	<p><i>"I was just so young and I've never had any experience like this before. I've never had any experience with incarceration, what I did have experience with, was the absence of my own father. And so, it started I think, for me this long journey of having really poor relationships probably with men."</i></p> <p><i>"It was kind of like an affirmation, I think an affirmation of the lack of worth that I had from my father leaving."</i></p> <p><i>"...The whole trying to be somebody's savior or feeling like you can change somebody or like your worth it for them to not do something and then they do something and then you know, try to make excuses for that."</i></p> <p><i>"I don't even think any men in my life cared about me just from the perspective of you're worthy and you're good, you're loved. So, I was looking for that from anybody. you're always looking for that. When you are young, and you find somebody for instance, like my partner, he's not a horrible person, but I very quickly knew that he could charm people."</i></p> <p><i>"I would choose the feeling words: lonely, sad, angry, worthless, shameful."</i></p> <p><i>"There was a lot of mourning and loss. Mourning around what could be and what was not. Not just for me but also for my kids."</i></p> <p><i>"When I think about shame, I think about it for me. I think about like my son and when he was a teenager and his friends were consistently asking where his dad was and then, you know, them kind of bringing those things up for him and him not having anything to say."</i></p> <p><i>"You get like frustration and you know, kind of disgusted with yourself. Those are the things that I have like now, but they have less to do with my partner and more to do with the fact that my children that are</i></p>

Thematic Labels	Quotes
	<i>also his children have a different trajectory in life because of him not being there."</i>
	<i>"I realized I couldn't have a conversation vocally and out loud when I was having all of these conflicting emotions personally."</i>
	<i>"...I could be hateful, or I could be mean, or I could you know, yell and scream or whatever. But then I can also be kind and empathetic."</i>
	<i>"...The biggest thing is like when I'm talking to my children, and trying to, you know, engage them in conversation. I don't want to project my whiteness into their thoughts. They have been raised in the White culture, but I want to make sure that I'm not projecting mine on them."</i>
	<i>"Financially, certainly was a big impact. Because, you know, I was in college, and I was basically a single mom."</i>
	<i>"...Mostly it was financial and emotional, just not having any control and being at the mercy of someone else or something else. Something else that wasn't always right or fair, just or true and you couldn't really do anything about it."</i>
3. Support systems	
a. Faith	<i>"My partner was really controlling. So, I didn't have a lot of friends. Because he wasn't there, right? He was gone so much. One of the ways that he was able to control his place in my life was to control who I had in my life. Right? So, I had a lot of severed relationships or friendships. My partner didn't want me to have those relationships or friendships because that could damage me being there for him."</i>
b. Intergenerational influence	
c. Professional mental health care	
d. Self-reliance/independence	<i>"...I did have family relationships and my family relationships were very strange because nobody in my family wanted me engaged with my partner at all."</i>
	<i>"When you have somebody incarcerated, regardless of what type of facility, a lot of times you will engage with</i>

Thematic Labels	Quotes
	<p><i>people who also have somebody in that facility. So, there were a couple of women who visited their boyfriends or husbands at these facilities, and you know, we would drive together to the facility, especially when it was further away... But those weren't real or true friendships. Those were friendships on the outside for us, that made it easier for them on the inside."</i></p>
	<p><i>"I'm not saying that it was all bad because it did give you the ability to have a conversation with somebody, especially somebody like me, who had never been in a situation like this before... It also gave me an outlet to talk about something to somebody that I could not talk about with anyone else."</i></p>
	<p><i>"While those relationships were not based on love and trust, there was a mutual understanding."</i></p>
	<p><i>"I couldn't have a conversation with my mom about how I had to, you know, drive an hour and a half to visit and somebody did something and so that place was on lockdown, or how I felt about the experience of him being locked up and me being a young single mom, you know, I couldn't have this conversation with anybody else. So, it's very lonely experience."</i></p>
	<p><i>"I feel like I've done a lot of work personally to try to work through all of those things, which is why I'm okay. I can talk about them and not revert. But the pieces with the kids I haven't really touched on that too much. So those are those are a little bit more difficult. You know, those are the things I still struggle with today."</i></p>
	<p><i>"When you talk about counseling, it wasn't counseling like one on one, therapists. It was more like counseling, like people that helped me to identify certain parts about myself that weren't necessarily related to this, then they became related to this as I started deconstructing them."</i></p>
	<p><i>"I'm actually just now in counseling. I've only had two sessions in like my entire life. I had an aversion to</i></p>

Thematic Labels	Quotes
4. Stigma of Incarceration	<p><i>counseling. I did a lot of repression. When I say I got help, I, what I did was I got help from, like I said, the online community, from a group of people who have been through similar situations, and where we actually talk and engage in common conversations without judgment.. so, I can have a conversation with somebody, and I can say, you know, be really upset."</i></p> <p><i>"I kind of did it on my own."</i></p> <p><i>"Another thing that was really hard was dealing with my family and the stigma that comes with incarceration. And so that, I think is more their issue than my issue."</i></p> <p><i>"I started looking at like systems differently. And I started looking at cultures differently. And I think when you put all those things together, they help me recognize and see how, something might still be broken, but not necessarily broken in this in the same way I thought that it was."</i></p> <p><i>"My partner made some poor decisions, but my eyes became open to the ways in which those decisions were impacted by other outside factors. And so, those things, I think, helped me work through some of my own issues. So before that a lot of my issues were very... and I'm not saying that I don't have a right to feel the way that I feel. I am saying that I think a lot of a lot of the ways that I felt was very much based in a very specific type of... I'm going to apologize for using these words, a very specific type of whiteness, or like white supremacist thinking."</i></p>
5. Sharing personal experience	<p><i>"I think it's really helpful to recognize some of the ways that I've grown just as just as a person in the way I see things. I can have this great conversation to share with my therapist next week. I can have this conversation and, you know, talk about all these hard things, but not have the same feelings of worthlessness and shame that I used to have. These feelings used to have a hold on me. And so, I appreciate that. I think that this also helps me."</i></p>

Thematic Labels	Quotes
	<i>“Also, it makes me think that I should probably have some of those conversations with my kids that I haven’t forced or pressed the issue on.”</i>
	<i>“...One thing that you can guarantee will come out of this is I’ll have a few more conversations with my children.”</i>
	<i>“ I could identify points where my Whiteness, my White thinking was making its way into the conversation and you know, sometimes I’m like stopping and I’m like, okay, I’m going to continue with this thread, I’m going to have to deconstruct it later because I can’t do it right now.. But at the same time, I can identify, you know, have some of that still come in, and how some of that implicit bias and stuff kind of sneaks its way into my thought process.”</i>

Participant 3. Olivia shared that she was very nervous about participation, as it was difficult for her to talk about her personal and family’s experience regarding her brother’s incarceration. She however stated that she wanted to give it a try. I reminded and reassured her that she could stop at any point if it became too difficult for her. She mentioned that he was currently incarcerated, but they were waiting for an upcoming court date to know what the length of his official sentence will be. She shared that she was often distraught about not being able to see him since he has been locked up but added that she was able to talk to him briefly by phone once every week or week and a half. She noted that they are each other’s only sibling and even though he is more than five years older, they have a very close relationship. *“You know, so because he’s much older You know, we’re not going to get into it about anything.”* Olivia added that even though her brother is older she has assumed the protective role in their sibling relationship. She further explained,

Our parents used to fight a lot and dad was abusive to my mother and brother. So even as young as a second grader, I remember thinking that I needed to figure things out for myself and brother in case our parents were not able to.

Olivia expressed that she misses her brother immensely, and looks forward to finishing school, starting her career, and securing her own home which she notes will be set up to accommodate her brother.

I only think about how things can benefit him and no one else. Like when I imagine after graduation getting a job and moving somewhere, I think about, how that could be a fresh start for him. He could live with me, I could have a room for him, you know, things like that. I think about how I can take care of my brother, and I worry about him more than myself. Like it's more important, you know.

She stated that she understands that her plan to continually support him might have unforeseen challenges, but she is willing to work through those and be a consistent and reliable presence in his life. Table 5 below is arranged by thematic labels and provides supplementary data to support Olivia's textural and structural descriptions.

Table 5

Participant 3 Data Summary

Thematic Labels	Quotes
1. Familial changes and adjustments	<i>"I think [his incarceration] has made it really tense and really stressful for everybody around because like, well, we are not seeing him and all we have is talking sometimes on the phone."</i>
2. Impact on individual and family wellbeing	<i>"It has been frustrating. And it makes me really sad."</i>
a. Emotional	
b. Social	<i>"The thought that I can't do anything to help, you know, it's so upsetting and overwhelming."</i>
c. Financial	

Thematic Labels	Quotes
	<p><i>"We can't do things like, you know... he can't visit, or we can't go out to eat or do simple things that other people take for granted."</i></p>
	<p><i>"He won't be able to attend my graduation, and that's important to me."</i></p>
	<p><i>"...There is financial pressure because of paying for care packages, phone expenses, paying for T-shirts that he needs and hiring attorneys..."</i></p>
3. Support systems	<p><i>"...I pray for him every day, for his release, most of all."</i></p>
a. Faith	<p><i>"I don't have my brother to be there for me, you know, so I have to find like a friend to go to if something is bothersome."</i></p>
b. Intergenerational influence	
c. Professional mental health care	<p><i>"So, with me there's no one, there's no other sibling, you know, who knows exactly what I'm feeling, like what I'm talking about [brother is my only sibling]. And then as it relates to friends, none of them have experienced incarceration or is currently experiencing it, so they don't understand. So, they listen, but they don't really understand. They can't give me appropriate feedback."</i></p>
d. Self-reliance/independence	<p><i>"Yes, I'm open to counseling. I think that would be helpful to talk to someone further about this."</i></p>
	<p><i>"I feel like I should use my freedom to protect him."</i></p>
	<p><i>"...He needs to get a decent lawyer...it's all too much...I feel like I care more than anyone else. So, if I stop, then he doesn't have strength and he needs that more than anything else."</i></p>

Thematic Labels	Quotes
	<p><i>"If I don't bring it up, it doesn't make me as stressed and then I don't have to worry about it."</i></p> <p><i>"Not having anyone to talk to, I guess it just remains unresolved. Because not having that outlet makes you have to keep it in your mind. You can't talk about it 'cause other people don't get it you know, so I just have those unresolved feelings."</i></p> <p><i>"I just can't, pursue my own path without thinking of him."</i></p>
4. Stigma of Incarceration	<p><i>"Talking about my brother is always difficult, so I never talk about him in regard to his incarceration. I feel as if I have to keep quiet about it... If I talk about how it makes me feel, my parents and other relatives might call me dramatic...but he's no one else's brother, he's mine."</i></p> <p><i>"When you are a young Black male, you just never know what can happen."</i></p>
5. Sharing personal experience	<p><i>"Talking about it with you doesn't make it harder. I think it's really helpful because I never do or have been able to talk about it. So, to be able to express it now with you asking me questions about it and being so calming, it's definitely helping."</i></p> <p><i>"I never thought about him being in prison as a loss, but that makes a lot of sense."</i></p>

Participant 4. Elaine expressed wanting to share her experience with the recent incarceration of her cousin, who she described as being more of a brother to her. She expressed that they are close in age, grew up together in an extended family setting, had a memorable childhood and have remained close as adults. Elaine explained, *"well, he is my favorite cousin.*

He would always come to visit me, and we talk about any and everything, so we were always real close. He is more like a brother to me.” Elaine noted that this was his first time being incarcerated, and he recently commenced his 10-year sentence. She shared that she was very heartbroken, as neither her or other family members foresaw him breaking the law or going to prison. She noted being blindsided especially because of how close they have always been. *“It breaks my heart. I didn’t even know about the charges until he was actually locked up... ‘cause he knew that it would have hurt my feelings, so he did not say anything about it.”* Elaine noted that her immediate and extended family are supportive of each other as they adjust to him being locked up and they also try to provide support for his two young children who will not have him in their lives for the next 10 years. Table 6 below is arranged by thematic labels and provides supplementary data to support Elaine’s textural and structural descriptions.

Table 6

Participant 4 Data Summary

Thematic Labels	Quotes
1. Familial changes and adjustments	<i>“It’s different not having him around as I’m used to talking to him almost every day and sometimes I just want to pick up the phone and call him but I can’t, as I have to wait on him to call home. And if I don’t get to talk to him I can ask his mom how he’s doing.”</i>
2. Impact on individual and family wellbeing	<i>“It’s sad that it happened, but at the end of the day we can’t just pause our lives for the careless mistakes that he made.”</i>
a. Emotional	
b. Social	<i>“I talked to his mom and grandma and they are really depressed and really torn up about it.”</i>
c. Financial	

Thematic Labels	Quotes
3. Support systems	<i>“When I think about him locked up it makes me feel heartbroken, disappointed, letdown, and at the same time, hopeful.”</i>
a. Faith	<i>“Even though he has been sentenced for 10 years, I have to remain hopeful that everything will work out well, and potentially he will not have to do the 10 years. So, I’m trying to stay hopeful for him.”</i>
b. Intergenerational influence	<i>“I feel like he could have talked to me about stuff when it happened, instead of taking it to the streets. That’s what makes it difficult for me.”</i>
c. Professional mental health care	<i>“...the mother of his kids has to be responsible for the financial needs of herself and the children at this point.”</i>
d. Self-reliance/independence	<i>“I am also hopeful for myself as well that I can stay positive and keep myself together for his immediate family like his mom, grandma and kids.”</i>
	<i>“I talk about it with my mom, my grandma, and his grandmother. His grandmother and my grandmother are sisters.”</i>
	<i>“I also have other family members who are open to discussing it.”</i>
	<i>“I mean, I have never thought about counseling, but I wouldn’t be against it. It’s just that my family is really close, so when we are going through something, our family just come together and talk about it. We have a strong family support. I usually know what’s going on in their experiences and they know what’s going on in mine.”</i>
4. Stigma of Incarceration	<i>“When the subject comes up, it makes me start feeling disappointed again. It’s like dang, I’m talking about it again. But I know</i>

Thematic Labels	Quotes
	<i>it's best to talk about stuff. I eventually feel better the more we talk about it."</i>
5. Sharing personal experience	<p><i>"This is the first time talking about it outside my family. It kinda' feels weird talking about it outside of my family."</i></p> <p><i>"No, it's not intrusive, just weird as I'm talking to someone who will only know what I have shared about him. Basically, I'm only talking about what he's done and not the other good things that has happened before in his life. So, I just thought, I guess weird."</i></p> <p><i>"It does makes me feel a little bit better talking about it though."</i></p>

Participant 5. Kyle indicated that incarceration has been a part of his life, even before he was fully aware of it. He mentioned that his dad has been incarcerated for most of his formative early childhood years and was released when he was about 11 years old. Kyle mentioned that *"as a kid, I just remember growing up knowing that he was in jail. I didn't know where he was. I didn't know what he did or how long he had."* He shared that as far as he knew, discussions about his father's incarceration were not had in his household, and if they were, they might have been adult conversations as *"kids had to stay out of grown folks business."* Kyle noted that there were hardships while growing up, but there was always the love and support of grandparents and other extended family members.

Kyle shared his memory of meeting his dad for the first time when he had a chance to be furloughed. He recalled it being a very strange but emotional meeting, as he attempted to bond for the first time with his father.

Whenever we met and then we had to leave, me and my sister were crying. Because we had to leave him and it was kind of like this was my first time ever, you know, seeing the guy. But, you know, it was like that bond, I knew he was my dad.

He stated that relationship building process with his dad have been challenging over the course of getting to know him and there has been some struggles along the way. Kyle was however proud to note that after developing an understanding about the legacy of incarceration, especially in Black families, he was determined to carve his own path to success to avoid becoming a statistic. Table 7 below is arranged by thematic labels and provides supplementary data to support Kyle's textural and structural descriptions.

Table 7

Participant 5 Data Summary

Thematic Labels	Quotes
1. Familial changes and adjustments	<p><i>"In my father's absence, it was kind of just like my mother. Looking back, my mother leaned on her parents a lot."</i></p> <p><i>"My mom, my sister and I, we were a unit. We were all close... We had a lot of pride in in our mom."</i></p> <p><i>"It was more coping than adjusting for me, because this is what I had always known. I didn't really know what it was like to have a dad at home."</i></p>
2. Impact on individual and family wellbeing	
a. Emotional	<i>"I remember asking mom if my dad was there when I was born. And he was not. And as a kid that made me feel really bad, you know, kind of a little angry at him for that."</i>
b. Social	
c. Financial	<i>"It was kind of like one of those things where if you didn't have a dad, you know, you just kind of developed, feelings of resentment."</i>

Thematic Labels

Quotes

“Meeting him was very emotional. It was kind of like, I don't really know this person, but I know that I have a bond or I just kind of feel that bond, connection or whatever.”

“I remember writing letters to him when I could read and write. We wrote what I just remember to be a few letters, and I would you know, like, tell him stuff about like my basketball games. And I really don't remember things that he would say, but I just remember writing letters.”

“At one point, I had a feeling of him being selfish, you know, kind of knowing that I was here, knowing that I was growing up and just to be sort of irresponsible enough to abandon that...”

“There was some sadness, because I didn't have a dad and I didn't get to do some of those things with him that could have created a bond.”

“At one point, we were close when he actually just got out, but it didn't, last very long. And so I remember you know, trying pretty hard to foster this relationship...but if I don't reach out to him, I don't hear from him.”

“I did have a lot of behavioral issues as a kid growing up in school.”

“As far as you know, relation with my peers, for some time it was something that I tried to not really bring up like when people talk about their parents, I really just didn't put my business out there like that.”

“His incarceration has impacted me in the sense that it gave me a model or example of what not to do.”

Thematic Labels	Quotes
3. Support systems	<p><i>"In addition to two jobs, mom also had a paper route. I would help with the evening job and before school, we would get up at like four in the morning and I would help her with the paper route and that's how she'd be able to make a little extra money."</i></p>
a. Faith	<p><i>"Getting up early in the morning and working with my mom was a tremendous amount of stress, especially for a kid and you know, an extra burden just to make some more money."</i></p>
b. Intergenerational influence	<p><i>"It's kind of a thing where we don't really talk about feelings. So, I mean, just kind of pray about it and keep going."</i></p>
c. Professional mental health care	<p><i>"I was blessed to have my papa - my mother's dad. He was essentially my father. And so, he took me under his wings. You know, he was older and so he tried to do some of the things that I wanted to do like play ball and stuff like that. So, I had a father figure."</i></p>
d. Self-reliance/independence	<p><i>"My grandparents cared for us."</i></p>
	<p><i>"I had a lot of Anger outbursts and I went to counseling as a little kid through the school."</i></p>
	<p><i>"I remember as a kid wanting to talk about it... Maybe I felt like that was out of my place."</i></p>
	<p><i>"They didn't really talk about it. Neither did I, really. So, I remember always being curious, but never feeling as though I could just go up there and ask anybody."</i></p>
	<p><i>I don't feel the need or the motivation to continue building this relationship right now. Until I see that he also wants to do that as well."</i></p>

Thematic Labels	Quotes
4. Stigma of Incarceration	<p><i>"...Maybe I was a bit embarrassed, maybe I was, you know, scared about what people say about you know, my dad being locked up, how they would react to it and how they would treat me, or what they would think about me."</i></p> <p><i>"As I got older, probably around high school, I was still just not talking about it, you know, but, if it got brought up, or someone asked me about it, I wouldn't shy away from it and I would just tell the truth because I started to understand it better."</i></p> <p><i>"As a kid I thought it was a me problem and this stuff didn't happen to other people."</i></p>
5. Sharing personal experience	<p><i>"You know, these are things that don't get talked about because no one really asks. Of course, I know that this is geared towards research, but you know, no one has ever asked me any question about it, you know, not even in general. My family doesn't ask questions about how it affects me and I'm sure they have their own opinions. My mom will probably even have more, you know, in depth opinions about how she saw me develop as a child."</i></p> <p><i>"Overall, I think it was a refreshing exercise, you know, I think that me being able to talk these things out, you know, make it make more sense in my mind and it gets me critically thinking about myself as a person and kind of putting my life in perspective, I guess, in the grand scheme of things. It didn't make me more sad or angry, but just kind of added a sense of, you know, rationale to it. I don't really get to vocally talk about these things. But, you know, these are kind of conversations that I have in my head with myself a lot, not that I obsessively dwell on it."</i></p>

Thematic Labels	Quotes
	<p><i>“The work that you're doing is very innovative and good..., I think that it does often get overlooked, the effect that incarceration does have on the family. The simple fact that I don't really remember talking about that as a kid, kind of evidences that. And so, you know, I think that it needs to be talked about, not in the sense of negative effects of people associated with the prison system but more so, how can we use this as a way to, to motivate and encourage or inspire? And then also, you know, getting that perspective of the family members is very important as not only are the loved ones in jail, but it's kind of like the family is also in jail.”</i></p> <p><i>“I have had some time to reflect on our conversation about my father's incarceration. While we were having the conversation, I will say that it provided me with some memories and allowed me to reflect on my past and place my current position in perspective. It affirmed my position of wanting to eventually give back to youth that grew up like I did and show them that they do not have to be condemned...not many people ask those tough questions about how an experience like that affects you. To be able to express those feelings, felt good and essentially added some peace to my mind.”</i></p>

Participant 6. Natalie shared that she overlooked the flyer advertising the study a couple times because the incarceration of her family member was not something she had ever talked about with a stranger. She stated that it was addressed within the context of her family and with close friends. She then sheepishly noted that when she saw the flyer for the third time, she felt the need to respond as she felt that this could open the door to new experiences for her and her

loved ones and others with regards to overcoming the stigma of incarceration. I validated her thoughts and feelings around the sensitivity of the subject matter and helped her feel safe and comfortable before we began the interview. Natalie shared that her incarcerated loved one was her uncle. She noted that he has had several stints in prison over the years, and when he is released, violation of his parole is almost certain to land him right back behind bars. She shared that his most recent violation and incarceration has been a few months ago, and they are awaiting trial to see how long his sentence will be this time. In her words, *“he’s back in there and I don’t know if they’re gonna let him out again, because he has violated about three to four times.”*

Natalie stated that every time an offence lands him in prison, it is related to his drug addiction. She noted that despite his addiction and incarceration struggles,

We have always been close. He’s my father’s older brother that I’ve known my whole life, like we’re really close. I’m also really close with his children and things like that. I mean, he’s always been a part of like, every part of my life, and he’s a really, he’s a genuine good person; just sometimes you do bad things. I mean, he’s always like, been a part of my life and everything. And he’s always been like, really nice.

She added that her entire extended family unit in general is close and they come together to support each other, especially his children as they make adjustments dealing with his frequent bouts of incarceration. Table 8 below is arranged by thematic labels and provides supplementary data to support Natalie’s textural and structural descriptions.

Table 8

Participant 6 Data Summary

Thematic Labels	Quotes
1. Familial changes and adjustments	<p><i>So, when he first went to prison, my grandparents started taking care of his wife and four children as the wife was not able to work due to severe illness. They bought them a house and they would only have to pay the utilities."</i></p> <p><i>"I had to step in and help with taking care of the home and then my sister she helps a lot like whether they need to go to school or like take them places. So, it's like all my family members that are there we all have jumped in to make sure everyone's okay while he's in prison."</i></p> <p><i>"My grandma takes his wife and the children to visit. They get to talk to him with like a glass between them, and they write letters to him all the time."</i></p>
2. Impact on individual and family wellbeing	<i>"The family has chipped in to provide support socially, emotionally, financially, and all of them."</i>
a. Emotional	
b. Social	<i>"I would say grace. And a little anger towards him. He knows better."</i>
c. Financial	<p><i>"I became fearful of him because he would do things and not remember doing them. So, I didn't want to be around him."</i></p> <p><i>"I miss the person that he was when we were little, and how he used to act because he was fun. The drugs, I mean, it changed him for real."</i></p> <p><i>"The connection between me and him died down significantly because like, you know, I</i></p>

Thematic Labels	Quotes
	<i>am not able to call or have visitations and things like that.”</i>
	<i>“Where we live can be described as the ‘hood.’ So when he does things in the hood, I will say it personally affects me and everyone else because the fact that like, we deal with the repercussions that he leaves in the hood, and you never know the enemy he might make essentially.”</i>
	<i>“So, when he went back to prison, my grandparents decided to pay for half the utilities because my uncle’s wife still wasn’t able to work. My grandparents ended up paying for all of the utilities until they decided that it was best that they moved into their family home.”</i>
	<i>“I help the girls more like financially like I will pay for natural haircare products and hygiene products...”</i>
	<i>“I do help with finances when I can just to make it easier on them. Because I know like ultimately that the children are affected the most.”</i>
	<i>‘I’ll help my grandma with putting money on his book so he can get extra stuff he needs like snacks or like, hygiene products, or whatever.’</i>
	<i>“We are all tired, but he is still a part of our family and we can’t give up on him.”</i>
3. Support systems	<i>“He has favor with God to be getting so much leeway and with the warnings and things...”</i>
a. Faith	<i>“We have family meetings regarding his actions, and everything. We always first pray and then we talk about how we feel and come up with options on how to help him.”</i>
b. Intergenerational influence	

Thematic Labels	Quotes
c. Professional mental health care	<i>"My grandfather stepped up and then my uncle, my dad, my other uncle, and my aunt has also stepped up. Like, pretty much everyone."</i>
d. Self-reliance/independence	<i>"My grandfather is definitely is the one that has stepped up as the father figure for everybody."</i>
	<i>"We are all trying to give them a different environment as much as possible."</i>
	<i>"We all support each other."</i>
	<i>"His experience has encouraged me to educate myself and hold myself more accountable."</i>
4. Stigma of Incarceration	<i>"So, like we talked about the same things, but everything we do it's not working because he keeps going back to prison."</i>
	<i>"My uncle does not hold himself accountable for a lot of stuff but blames other people."</i>
5. Sharing personal experience	<i>"I have talked about it with some of my friends before. It's really not hard. The reason I did this is because I am aware that it can help other people going through the same thing so they can know that they are not by themselves and also, it can help like the children, or the spouse, or other family members in general, so I don't have a problem. It already comforts me enough to think that me speaking about this is going to help families."</i>

Participant 7. Cora shared that she had experienced the incarceration of several close family members, but the one that she was most impacted by was the incarceration of her partner. Cora noted that prior to their established partnership, they were first really great friends, and that friendship would later become invaluable when she had to be his biggest supporter over the

period of his 5-year incarceration. In Cora's words, *"I was crazy about him. While he was in prison, I visited him wherever he went. He was transferred a few times and I visited him at all those different places."* Cora emphasized that he was not the sum total of the bad choices he made, that landed him in prison. She noted, *"he was really a good guy just doing the wrong thing at the wrong time. He was smart, intelligent, nice looking. He just got caught up..."*

Cora acknowledged that maintaining a relationship with someone behind bars had moments of hardships and discouragement, but she was encouraged and motivated by their friendship and the plans they had for their future, after he got out. She expressed that some of the ways she experienced hardships were financially, socially, and mostly emotionally. She however added that she trusted him and had trust in their relationship that they would eventually be together again. She stated, *"I was just fixed on the thought that he was the one for me."* Table 9 below is arranged by thematic labels and provides supplementary data to support Cora's textural and structural descriptions.

Table 9

Participant 7 Data Summary

Thematic Labels	Quotes
1. Familial changes and adjustments	<p><i>"My life changed in a sense, because I was trying to be a friend and partner to someone needing a person on the outside to correspond with."</i></p> <p><i>"While he was locked up, we would write letters and say what we were gonna do in life when we got together, what we were kind of striving for and what we were both wanting in life."</i></p>

Thematic Labels	Quotes
	<p><i>Those thoughts made it easy, but you know, the dream the possibility of a decent man having a relationship, going through life, being happy and in love and trying to make it work."</i></p>
	<p><i>He called all the time so nine times out of 10 he knew what I was doing, and I knew where he was and what he was doing."</i></p>
	<p><i>"The letters came two or three times a week and I was visiting two or three times a week, if not more."</i></p>
2. Impact on individual and family wellbeing	<p><i>"I went through different emotions. As I said I was so in love."</i></p>
a. Emotional	
b. Social	<p><i>"I relied on a lot of music and I would send him lyrics from songs... I would write the words and send them to him because they expressed how I felt with him not being here and I used a lot of music to kind of cope or to get me through when I had a crying session."</i></p>
c. Financial	<p><i>"After I got off the phone with him and at nights and weekends there was the loneliness."</i></p>
	<p><i>"I was discouraged..."</i></p>
	<p><i>"The phone calls were, of course the ultimate rejoicing you know, just to be able to talk to him for a moment."</i></p>
	<p><i>"I'm sure I had doubts... there was a little doubt every now and then, but we would constantly and openly express our feelings, anticipations or anxieties to each other, and we were both able to comfort each other."</i> <i>"But I wanted hm to be there physically..."</i></p>
	<p><i>There was no opportunity to connect on the outside like we were accustomed to."</i></p>

Thematic Labels	Quotes
<p>3. Support systems</p> <p>a. Faith</p> <p>b. Intergenerational influence</p> <p>c. Professional mental health care</p> <p>d. Self-reliance/independence</p>	<p><i>"It was also socially restricting because it was not the same going out with friends and having a good time. There were other men trying to talk to me, and I would have to always prioritize being loyal to him."</i></p> <p><i>"I had high phone bills taking all his collect calls, in addition to supporting two children and maintaining a home."</i></p> <p><i>When he first got out, I remember being at a church event with my father...that's when I told him [dad] about our relationship for the first time..."</i></p> <p><i>"I just wanted to be sure of any relationship before telling my parents about it."</i></p> <p><i>"As a parent you want your child to be happy. My father wanted to know if he loved me. And I said yes... And so, my father respected him."</i></p> <p><i>"You always got your girlfriends that you could talk to you as I could not necessarily talk to my parents about it."</i></p> <p><i>"Occasionally I could speak with his sister which was more related to visitation. I didn't necessarily talk to her about the emotional part."</i></p> <p><i>"I never thought that was something I needed counseling for, you know. Support from my close girlfriends and pushing through on my own worked just fine."</i></p>
4. Stigma of Incarceration	<p><i>This was a person that had been in jail before, prior to me knowing him, you know, and he told me all of these things. But he had had his own company before. So, he had a lot of promise. He wasn't a thug. He was just a guy out here just trying to get rich fast. Working a full-time job, own his own</i></p>

Thematic Labels	Quotes
5. Sharing personal experience	<p><i>company, but trying to get rich fast...I sometimes had concerns."</i></p> <p><i>"I don't think any of it was bad. The experience of talking about it was something different for me."</i></p> <p><i>"Me being older now would not do anything of the things that came up, again. It's sad looking back at it but it is part of my experience."</i></p>

Participant 8. Lauryn stated that she has memories of her dad being in her life when she was younger, but that he went to prison in the midst of her early childhood years. She noted that she was aware of his absence and remember frequently wanting him to be around. *"I remember, just always still being a daddy's girl, you know. If I got in trouble at home, I wanted my dad."* She stated that even though she was conscious that he was not at home, she had no idea where he was or why he was not home, as his absence was not addressed by her mom or extended family members. Lauryn stated that *"I was in the 6th grade when I actually found out he was incarcerated."* She noted that she did not have an overwhelming reaction to the information, as she still did not completely understand what that meant.

She recalled their primary communication being through letters, and him sending drawings of carton images that she loved. She also shared a memory of having one visit with him and being taken along with one of her siblings by her grandparents, who are his parents. Lauryn disclosed that

I remember always wanting my dad, wanting him more than my mom. I know there are a lot of pictures, there are a lot of pictures of us, like me always sleeping on his neck,

always next to him, always up under him. Yeah, I was always about my dad, like, I cannot recall exactly why.

Lauryn noted that one story she was told about her father's absence was that he left to go pick up one of her sisters. She noted that the story eventually evolved into him getting into trouble and being locked up. She added that there was not any more detail and she accepted the fact that *"we were a single parent household, you know, and life was fine. I mean, we had our grandparents."*

Table 10 below is arranged by thematic labels and provides supplementary data to support Lauryn's textural and structural descriptions.

Table 10

Participant 8 Data Summary

Thematic Labels	Quotes
1. Familial changes and adjustments	<p><i>"... he used to send me letters, he used to have people draw images for me, pretty pictures of characters and stuff that I like."</i></p> <p><i>"The household got rough as we got older you know, I wanted to do things, I am having to take care of a child, I didn't have a child, why am I the one having to do it, me and my mom didn't see eye to eye about stuff."</i></p> <p><i>"I was mad at my mom a lot. I never said my dad being gone was her fault or anything. I ran away from home often. Even when I ran away, I knew I couldn't go to my dad."</i></p> <p><i>"Now that I'm older and look back, I was rebellious. I'm not sure what it is that I wanted, or I was missing. I wanted to have a childhood and I feel like my childhood got rushed, because I was taking care of another child."</i></p>

Thematic Labels	Quotes
2. Impact on individual and family wellbeing	<i>"I think the times I started feeling like I needed him was as I started growing up, dating boys and they would hurt my feelings."</i>
a. Emotional	
b. Social	<i>"I don't think his incarceration really hit me until 10th or 11th grade in high school."</i>
c. Financial	<i>"We were starting to talk about boys in high school, and he was also getting close to be released and I was excited that he was going to at least be out when I graduate."</i>
	<i>"My daddy was out, and I was happy."</i>
	<i>"We got mad at each other and we didn't communicate for a while and I had to be the bigger person."</i>
	<i>"Currently, we aren't talking. My perception of him has changed, it's like, I don't know who you are. And I tell him, this time, I'm not apologizing. I'm not gonna be the bigger person this time, because all of these years, I have had to be the bigger person."</i>
	<i>"I'm not saying I hate him or anything. No, I still love him."</i>
	<i>"There are situations with friends who grew up with dads and I sometimes wonder if I had him growing up, if things could have been different."</i>
	<i>"My mom had to do what she had to do; she had to work two jobs. So, in the evenings after school I would have to babysit my brother. I didn't want to be in the house babysitting as just wanted to be outside with my friends."</i>
3. Support systems	<i>Granny, my dad's mom, I love her dearly. She's always been there for me."</i>

Thematic Labels	Quotes
a. Faith	<i>"I try to keep my family involved because you hardships and at the end of the day, all I have is my family, even if we don't see eye all the time and we don't get along all the time."</i>
b. Intergenerational influence	
c. Professional mental health care	
d. Self-reliance/independence	<p><i>"I did find a best friend that I called my cousin, and we are still friends to this day. I could talk to her about anything. I ended up getting a boyfriend and he was my dad's best friend's son. At that point I felt like I had some protection. So, I was able to open up to My boyfriend and best friend about a lot of things."</i></p> <p><i>"I got put in a youth home. I remember doing some counseling through the jail system. I also remember doing some other type of counseling, but I would never talk to the people. I literally just sat through all of my sessions."</i></p> <p><i>"I did therapy probably like four years ago. I touched it [dad's incarceration] but then I stopped going. It was getting a little difficult."</i></p> <p><i>"Even before I started going to counseling, I was one of those people who thought, I am not crazy, I am creative. I look at the people I come from and how they created their path, and I felt like I could do this on my own, I didn't need help."</i></p> <p><i>"I don't have to tell another person my business so they can help me figure it out. I don't need to tell my story for them to help me."</i></p> <p><i>"Family is supposed to be there for family and if you feel this way and I can't count on</i></p>

Thematic Labels	Quotes
	<i>you, then why even bother with you when I can do it on my own?"</i>
	<i>"I have learned how to deal with both of my parents. I have accepted that they are my parents, we are family, but the support I need from both of them, I don't have, but they are my parents."</i>
4. Stigma of Incarceration	<i>"To this day, you know, I'm proud of him because he got out and got his life back on track. He went to school, got his bachelor's got his masters, you know, things that they don't expect people to do... they don't get out of prison and turn their life around like that. And so, you know, I'm proud of him. But at the same time, he has five kids and he's hardly ever been there for us."</i>
5. Sharing personal experience	<i>"You are having me think. You are having me go back deep. I knew my dad was gone, but I never until now, ever looked back at the experience and how it affected my childhood. I was rebellious and I am now thinking that it could be related to missing him, wanting my own say so or wanting some type of power."</i>
	<i>"Talking about this experience, is like, saying what you think in your head out loud and you're like, man, you know, I can look at the situation with my dad like, I really have done so much for you, for you not to have been there my whole childhood."</i>

Participant 9. Darren shared that his dad was incarcerated three years ago, when he was only 9 years old and *"was locked up for two years."* He mentioned that it was very hard for him especially since he did not know at first that he was actually in prison. Darren shared that his parents are divorced, and dad was not living at home but they would have frequent visits,

nevertheless. He noted that when the visits stopped, *“I was told different stories about where my dad was.”* He shared that his mom eventually told him that dad was in prison which made him very sad. Darren noted that he would get phone calls from his dad, and dad would promise him that he would be out soon. He added that his dad would give him dates and times that would keep changing. In Darren’s words, *“I felt like he was always lying.”* He shared that his dad would tell him at first that his absence had something to do with his military job, and he believed him. He said that he was very upset when his mom explained to him what was happening. Darren stated that after his dad got out, he would visit, but dad was more focused on being respected with titles than building a relationship. Darren declared that he doesn’t have a relationship with his dad anymore, as he *“is over it.”* Table 11 below is arranged by thematic labels and provides supplementary data to support Darren’s textural and structural descriptions.

Table 11

Participant 9 Data Summary

Thematic Labels	Quotes
1. Familial changes and adjustments	<p><i>“Dad wasn’t living at home, so the family did not change too much.”</i></p> <p><i>“It changed me a little bit, but not my family.”</i></p> <p><i>“First, I did not know that he was going to prison. I just thought that he was going to come back quickly.”</i></p> <p><i>“I cried a lot and asked mom why wasn’t he talking to me anymore.”</i></p> <p><i>“He wrote me letters, but I didn’t write back.”</i></p>

Thematic Labels	Quotes
2. Impact on individual and family wellbeing	<p><i>"Mom had to threaten to stop accepting the phone calls if he did not start telling me the truth."</i></p> <p><i>"Playing basketball help me to adjust."</i></p>
a. Emotional	<p><i>"I lost the social and emotional support from dad when he went to prison."</i></p>
b. Social	<p><i>"I was sad at first and missed him a lot, but then I got over it."</i></p>
c. Financial	<p><i>"I was sad because I didn't want anything to happen to him while he was in jail."</i></p> <p><i>"I was mad because he kept lying when I would ask about where he was."</i></p> <p><i>"Dad would give me wrong information about when he would be getting out, which would get my hopes up and then I would be disappointed when that time comes, and he didn't get out."</i></p> <p><i>"When dad got out of prison, he did not consider how I felt. He tried to move on as if nothing happened. He got angry when I refused to talk to him or face time with him."</i></p> <p><i>"He said mean things about my mom which hurt my feelings."</i></p> <p><i>"I don't really talk to him anymore. He yells a lot and wants me to say yes sir and no sir."</i></p> <p><i>"Yeah, I had trouble focusing and I was acting up at school because I missed my dad."</i></p> <p><i>"I started talking back to teachers and getting into fights."</i></p>

Thematic Labels	Quotes
	<i>"Mom paid for everything for me while he was in jail."</i>
3. Support systems	
a. Faith	<i>"I could talk to my mom when I feel sad about my dad in prison or when he lied about getting out."</i>
b. Intergenerational influence	
c. Professional mental health care	<i>"I am also close to my dad's side of the family and they support me."</i>
d. Self-reliance/independence	<i>"I was placed in an anger management program at school."</i>
	<i>"I could talk to my counselor and coach at school and get help."</i>
	<i>"Getting services and counseling at school helped me with my behavior. I learned coping skills, I did not get into fights anymore, and I kinda' got better with my schoolwork."</i>
4. Stigma of Incarceration	<i>"My dad made some bad choices that made him go to prison and I want to make sure that I make better choices and not end up like him."</i>
5. Sharing personal experience	<i>"I mean, it doesn't really bother me too much to talk about it now because I am over it."</i>

Composite Structural Description

The composite structural description explores the cultural connections, social, and emotional experiences among all participants, depicting the shared components of their experiences (Moustakas, 1994; Statistics Solutions, 2020). The following composite textural description features participants' lived experiences as family members of African American males who experience the U.S prison system.

Participants overall had awareness that this was a very difficult and sensitive subject matter and they had varying levels of feelings including excitement, anxiety and apprehension, related to getting involved. Participants were concerned about the level of exposure talking about the incarceration of their family member would bring to themselves and family overall, and expressed relief when reminded that their identity and that of their family would remain confidential throughout the course of the study and beyond. Even though the participants ranged in ages and had diverse experiences with their incarcerated family member, it was apparent through their collectively expressed anger, frustrations, sadness, doubts and fears that they loved those family members and wanted the best outcome for them. Participants who had family members who were repeat offenders seemed to express more frustration and anger as they felt like those family members had the ability to do better, but just was not cognizant of all the different ways (socially, emotionally, financially, etc.) the family was being impacted while they wore the label of stigmatized unproductive members of society.

Sentences for family members shared by the participants ranged from a low of two years to a maximum of life in prison. The youngest participant in the study Darren, experienced losing his dad to incarceration for two of his formative childhood years. However, he described it as dad being gone for a long time and was not coming to visit as he usually does. This speaks to the mental developmental stage of that then nine-year old's brain, and his inability to conceptualize the concept and abstractness of time.

Karen was the participant with the loved one incarcerated for life, and the only participant in the study who identified as White. She shared that her partner was a part of their children's lives when they were very young, but that the children were too young to have any memory of their dad. She noted that as they grew up, they did not express a desire to meet or get

to know him, and she did not necessarily facilitate that process. She noted that the decision to keep the experiences of the children's dad and by extension his family a secret, resulted in the children growing up to only value their White familial influence. It has also caused them to be angry and confused, as they missed out on critical aspects of themselves growing. Karen expressed that as a young mother, she did not know how to have the conversation with her biracial children about their Black heritage, and things just remained the same as they got older.

All the participants expressed experiencing some change in their family structure with the event of having their family member incarcerated, even if the sentence was short. Four of the participants (Clara, Kyle, Lauryn, and Darren) experienced the incarceration of their fathers during childhood, and this has had profound impacts on how their family structure changed. Of this four, three (Kyle, Lauryn, and Darren) did not have dad living in the home prior to incarceration, but social, financial and emotional impacts were experienced, nonetheless. The fourth participant in this group, Clara, noted that her dad was in and out of prison in her developmental years, but she grew up knowing that it was a relief whenever he was locked up, as he was very abusive to her mom and the family in general. She shared that they experienced some social and emotional impacts, but did not struggle as much financially, due to dad's ex-military benefits.

Two of the nine participants (Karen and Cora) disclosed having their partners incarcerated. Karen noted that she had to quickly adjust to life as a single parent of two young children. Her partner, prior to incarceration supported the family financially. Karen noted that he also provided emotional and social support as they had a good friendship and relationship. She also mentioned that he was a great dad to their children. Once he went to prison, all of that support was gone and in addition to fending for herself and children, she had to be his support

system as well. She shared that she did not have the support of her mother and family in general, as they were opposed to her relationship with her partner. The second participant in this pairing, Cora, noted that the incarcerated partner was not the father of her children. Nevertheless, his incarceration caused her to make changes in her household as she had to be working extra to pay for not just the costs of her home, but the costs incurred through collect phone calls, and frequent visitations to see her partner. She also shared struggling emotionally, socially and financially.

One participant, Olivia, had the experience of having a sibling incarcerated, and divulged how difficult it was, especially since it was not a topic that was openly talked about in her home. She noted that her parents did what they had to do to take care of the business side of things which include attending court, paying for legal representation and paying for the basic items he needs while locked up. Olivia stated that there was a lot of tension in their home and it seemed easy for them to take out frustrations on her, rather than have a conversation. She shares having an overwhelming feeling of responsibility for her brother's wellbeing as she noted that she has had to make adjustments as an individual and as part of her family unit without him.

Another participant, Elaine, shared having to cope with the recent incarceration of a cousin who she described as being more like a brother to her. She divulged that she was still struggling to come to terms with his incarceration, due to the recency. She noted that his incarceration has, like other participants, changed their family and has created a social and emotional void not just for her but his two children, his partner and other family members. She added that there is also a financial strain as he can no longer provide for his children and the financial costs associated with his incarceration are now the family's responsibility.

Natalie shared the experience of having an uncle who have been in and out of the prison system with no sign of rehabilitation in sight. She noted that he has a serious addiction problem

which contributes greatly to his high rate of recidivism. She shared that his constant battle with drug use which cycles him in and out of prison has been a major pain for the family. She stated that the family, especially his children has been affected in a myriad of ways, including socially, emotionally and financially. She noted that the family has gone through and is still encountering adjustments due to his incarceration.

It is important to note that eight of the nine participants interviewed shared that their family member who has experienced or is currently incarcerated had some level of drug charges associated with their sentencing. All of the participants had some experience with coming from low socio-economic backgrounds but based on the demographic information some individuals have socially stratified themselves through education and employment into higher socio-economic groups, and some are in the stratification process by way of seeking higher education. It is noteworthy that their choice or opportunity to elevate themselves is not reflective of or synonymous with their incarcerated loved ones' choices or opportunities.

Of the nine participants, only one individual, Olivia, shared not having any physical support to cope with the challenges of having an incarcerated family member. This participant expressed that she prayed and relied on her faith, in addition to internalizing the experience and dealing with it by herself. She noted that conversations around her brother's incarceration was frowned upon and not welcomed at home. She also stated that if she tried to address it with her friends, they could not relate, and it left her feeling even more isolated. The researcher offered support to the participant and shared resources concerning the possibility of receiving help to cope with that isolation and have someone to talk to. Olivia was open to the idea of seeking help. The other eight participants expressed having support that ranged from relying on their faith, having intergenerational influences in their lives, having sought, or is currently seeking mental

health care, in addition to relying on themselves. Some participants experienced all the sources of support mentioned above, while others had different combinations of a few. Intergenerational familial support seemed to be important and accessible for most people, and this was supported by the existing research on the phenomenon studied.

Intergenerational settings are often present in African American homes, and grandparents especially are seen as a source of wisdom and comfort who also become a buffer when things get challenging. Six of the nine participants who had intergenerational influence as support spoke glowingly of the roles their grandparents played or are currently playing and how important that has been in helping cope and adjust. Other individuals spoke of uncles, aunts, older cousins, etc., who have stepped up and done an amazing job providing support in the absence of the incarcerated family member. Only a few individuals expressed receiving any type of formal mental health care as they went through the incarceration of their family member. A number of the participants overtly expressed that they were not opposed to the concept of counseling but did not deem having a family member in prison as a reason to seek counseling. That was seen as more of a family matter which should be dealt with in the family setting, while relying on faith to get through the hard times. Although friendship was not mentioned in the themes as part of the support system, three participants, Karen, Cora, and Lauryn noted that they had trusted friends they could turn to when experiencing the incarceration of their loved one. They shared that this was important for them as they did not have familial support at that time.

In sum, all participants shared having to face some type of stigma associated with having an incarcerated family member. These ranged from being teased as children, having self-fulfilling prophecy placed on them to taking responsibility of their destiny and consciously staying clear of the mistakes family members, especially dads have made. The participants also

collectively had some positive take away from the interview experience. Even though some were a little nervous at first, they all in some way stated that having a conversation about their incarcerated loved one was meaningful and enlightening.

Composite Structural-Textural Description

The composite structural-textural description is also denoted as a Synthesis and serves the purpose of combining both the textural and the structural into a thorough understanding about the phenomenon studied (Moustakas, 1994; Statistics Solutions, 2020). This is the core of the lived experience of the phenomenon and is deemed as Moustakas' (1994) conclusive step of his model of phenomenological research. This synthesis is directed by the theoretical framework addressed in chapter two. The theoretical framework used is the critical race theory embedded in the constructivist paradigm, which gives participants the unique opportunity to share their personal narratives with the phenomenon. The synthesis of the data therefore addresses the lived experiences of family members of African American males who experience the U.S prison system.

Essence of Participants Lived Experience

The essence of the phenomenon encompasses the shared experience of the participants in this study. As noted above, the discussion will be guided by the theoretical framework. This will assist in providing the framework for the findings that have emerged. Participating in a study that is geared to address the experiences of having an incarcerated family member had elements of anxiety for some participants, while others viewed it as attempting a new experience with the hope that it can provide needed attention and exposure to the fact that family members are heavily impacted in many ways, when they are faced with this challenge in their families.

Participants overall, noted that their lives changed, and adjustments had to be made to accommodate this experience.

Children with incarcerated parents noted being confused and unaware about what was happening with their fathers and why they had not come home or visited in a while. They noted that the issue of incarceration was not addressed in their homes, and they were often told stories about their dads' whereabouts. In essence, the discussion around incarceration in these African American homes was reserved as private adult conversation. These participants seemed to express different emotions when they finally understood what incarceration was and that their dad would not be home for a long time. Emotions ranged from sadness and anger to acceptance of the fact that that was the way things were, and there was nothing they could do to change the situation. The participant, Lauryn, who expressed this immediate acceptance shared that she was angry all the time, constantly ran away from home, and expressed externalizing behaviors at school that constantly got her in trouble. She conveyed that she was not aware of this connection to her father's absence in her life until participating in the study. All participants' who experienced incarceration of their fathers, expressed that they experienced anger and sadness and also had some degree of externalizing behaviors at school.

Partners who experienced the incarceration of their loved one, also noted the difficulties involved in adjusting to the changes, especially in the case where children were involved. This meant first resetting the structure in their lives and homes to ensure that the missing financial support would be quickly addressed, and the welfare of the children prioritized. This also meant seeking support that could assist in the social and emotional aspects of their wellbeing. Partners, in addition to taking care of themselves and family, had to also be support systems for the incarcerated loved ones by meeting financial needs, becoming emotional/social support by

frequent visits (despite how far they were incarcerated), accepting expensive phone calls, and ensuring that they had items needed to make their stay in prison as comfortable as it could be.

The sibling experience with incarceration was expressed as lonely and painful, and this was due in part to immensely missing her only sibling with whom she now has only limited phone contact, and also by virtue of her parents not entertaining the subject of his incarceration in the household. Talking about his incarceration and how the family is doing is taboo, and any display of emotion around the subject was seen as being dramatic. This fits into the narrative of other shared experience from participants that the emotional aspect of that discussion wasn't welcomed, as it was more productive to do what was possible the incarcerated loved one while staying strong. This feeds into the 'Strong Black woman' concept, that encourages and oftentimes forces women into caregiving roles without any care or thought for their own wellbeing. Whereas this seemingly works in African American families, especially those that are matriarchically driven, it does come with a cost that affects the overall wellbeing at points in these women's lives.

The critical race theory played a crucial role in understanding the dynamics of these African American experiences. One important point that stood out in the study, was that eight of the nine incarcerated individuals addressed in the study, had some connection to drug use in addition to other charges. The literature highlighted that disparities in sentencing have been partially caused by more unrelenting laws, the war on drugs, in addition to systemic racial differences in the processing of cases (Travis, Western, & Redburn, 2014). CRT deals with the awareness of meritocracy in this framework, and contends that the law has the ability to, and should treat all people equally regardless of skin color (Barlow, 2016). Some participants' shared that their loved ones had to remain behind bars, or is currently behind bars, while waiting for

sentencing. Collier, (2014) and Travis, Western & Redburn, (2014) maintained that Blacks, for example, were more likely to be imprisoned before trial so they could end up worse in plea deals that otherwise would have kept them out of prison, to be recipients of the death penalty, and to be detained and indicted with drug crimes, which include mandatory sentences. Institutional racism involves the combined failure of an organization to provide suitable and applicable specialized service to individuals based on their ethnic origin, color or culture. This is easily identified in practices, mindsets, and conduct which adds up to discrimination, ignorance, insensitivity and racist stereotyping which place minority people at a disadvantage (Macpherson, 1999). CRT stands for eliminating this racial suppression and oppression (Creswell, 2007).

The focus of incarceration is commonly data driven and generally speaks to the issues concerning those incarcerated. The focus of the study is to tell the untold stories of the family members who in their own right experience the hardships of incarceration along with their loved ones. As the family members of incarcerated African American males struggle through the challenges of racially motivated inequities, the focus of CRT is to use forums like this study to provide safe spaces for individuals of color - especially African Americans – to share their narratives from their exclusive viewpoint.

Summary

The findings of this phenomenological study were acquired from various data sources that included semi-structured participant interviews, participant reflective journals, observation notes, and participant member checks. Five major themes and sub-themes were established through the data analysis process which include: familial changes and adjustments, impacts on family members wellbeing (emotional, social, financial), Support systems (faith, intergenerational influence, professional mental health care, self-reliance/independence), stigma

of incarceration, and sharing personal experience. Textural and structural descriptions which addressed the ‘what’ and ‘how’ for each individual participant experience, were incorporated and supported by corresponding data from participant interviews and journals. Through the thorough collection of data, interpretation, and analysis, an extensive description capturing the participants shared lived experience as family members of African American males who experience the U.S prison system was developed for the objectives of this research study.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to explore the impacts of incarceration on the wellbeing of family members of African American males who Experience the U.S Prison System. Reduction of the cluster themes led to five vital emergent themes correlated with the phenomenon studied. The findings of the data analysis led to a thick, rich, and comprehensive narrative of the lived experience of the phenomenon as described in chapter four. The study utilized and explored one central research question and four sub-questions as follows:

Research Question

1. What are the lived experiences of family members of incarcerated African American males?
 - a. How does incarceration of a parent impact the wellbeing of children?
 - b. How does incarceration of a child impact the wellbeing of parents?
 - c. How does incarceration of a spouse/partner impact the wellbeing of women?
 - d. How does incarceration of siblings impact the wellbeing of non-incarcerated siblings?

The chapter includes a summary of the study, a discussion of the data through the lens of the research questions, the study's limitations, implications for counseling practitioners and criminal justice policy makers, recommendations for future research, and conclusion.

Discussion

The research questions were instrumental in determining the eventual formulation of emergent themes which led to the thick rich description of participants' experiences with the phenomenon studied. From the data gathered, the researcher was able to conclude that the family members of incarcerated African American males had diverse lived experiences, most of these disrupting their wellbeing and creating lasting impacts and changes on their lives. The

information in Figure 11 shows a graphical representation of the major themes and sub-themes referenced above.

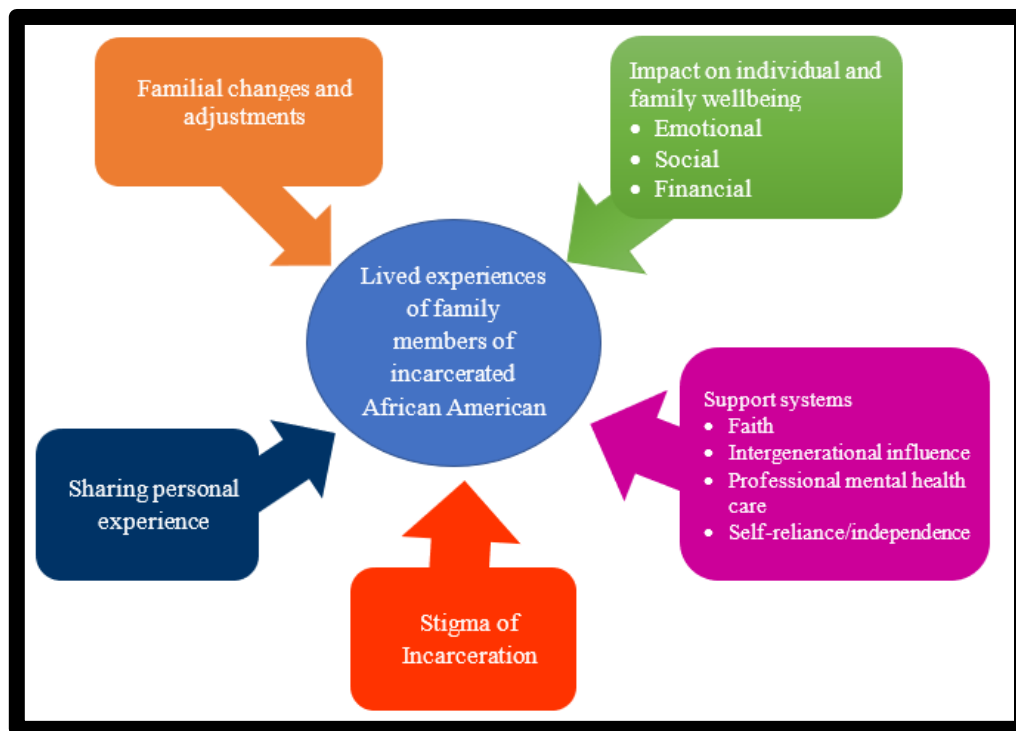


Figure 11: Major themes and sub-themes

Family members were not having to only make physical adjustments, but also adjustments that impacted them cognitively. The data gathered from the participants aligned with literature gathered to support this study. Research indicated that there is a blatant overuse of incarceration in the United States with a disparity that impacts people of color, especially Black people (Kirby, 2012; Walmsley, 2016). However, Wagner and Walsh (2016) noted that mass incarceration does not significantly or proportionally improve the public's safety but rather contributes to decreased health and wellbeing of those incarcerated and also their loved ones. The cited research spoke to the experiences shared by participants who had loved ones in the system serving maximum sentences for charges of drug possession or use, and these individuals were non-violent offenders.

The participants expressed frustration and anger as they shared that their loved ones could have been better helped through rehabilitation services geared to help them combat the actual problem which is drug use. Instead, they become part of a system that operates as a revolving door, and their specific need for treatment remains unmet indefinitely. Collier (2014) further supported this notion that a huge number of people find themselves trapped in the criminal justice system as opposed to receiving help from the mental health system. She added that these individuals struggle with very treatable illnesses but do not receive treatment while incarcerated. The social, economic, mental and other effects of these inequities of incarceration are thereby extended to their families and communities (Roberts, 2004).

Research supported data gathered from the study which stated that participants experienced adverse health impacts related to a family member's incarceration (deVuono-Powell et al., 2015). Participants expressed going through feelings such as anger, worry, prolonged sadness, hopelessness, hurt, intermittent crying etc., as it related to the incarceration of their loved one. A few participants expressed experiencing feelings of depression as it related to coping with the loss, but some participants did not seem to have the language to describe their feelings as they were not accustomed to putting feeling words to their emotions and also because they had overtime repressed the feelings around the experience in order to move forward with the rest of their lives.

Lee, McCormick, Hicken, and Wildeman (2015) found that there has been minimal organized support for assisting families with the process of improving their wellbeing by becoming emotionally and financially stable during and after incarceration. Five years later, not much has changed in this regard as there are no services in or around the area that this study was conducted, to offer those specific kinds of support to family members of incarcerated loved ones.

Lee, et al. (2015) added that incarceration affected women of color and their families more extensively than others. Approximately seventy percent of the participants in this study were African American women, who experienced the impacts of incarceration in some ways that were different from the White female participant, and the male participants.

African American females collectively expressed having to assume some form of care giving or supportive role, including even those that experienced incarceration as children. These roles could include but were not limited to responsibilities such as caring for a younger sibling while mom took on extra work to support the family, being the emotional and financial support for the incarcerated individual, caring for young children affected by the incarceration, rallying family members together to create a stronger support base for the incarcerated individual, and reorganizing the family structure to help the individual re-adjust to life outside of prison. It is therefore clear as indicated by Arditti (2012) that incarceration increase risks of disadvantages among already vulnerable populations in the United States.

The first research sub-question addressed was *How does incarceration of a parent impact the wellbeing of children?* Studies show that there is a greater disparity in the African American community related to parental incarceration. One out of nine African American children compared to one out of 28 Hispanic children, and one out of 57 White children in the United States have an incarcerated parent (Morsy and Rothstein, 2016; NRCCFI, 2014; The Pew Charitable Trusts, 2010). The research revealed that in addition to separating individuals from their families and communities, incarceration maximizes the probability for fractured relationships and fragmented communities (DeHart, Shapiro & Clone, 2018).

The data gathered from this study supported the research as all nine participants revealed varying levels fragmentation in their relationship with the incarcerated individual. This was

especially palpable for children experiencing the incarceration of their parents who missed key developmental relationship building milestones in their formative years. Perry and Bright (2012) conducted a study to explore the impact of prior incarceration on African American fathers' contributory and emotional engagement with their children, and the degree to which their children's behavior was influenced by their prior incarceration. Findings disclosed that after incarceration, these fathers did worse economically and were less involved emotionally in their children's lives. All four participants who experienced the incarceration of their fathers noted that they had some eagerness to foster relationships with their dad, but collectively expressed that their efforts were not reciprocated.

One male participant Kyle, expressed wanting to have a relationship with his dad so badly, that he would try to engage and develop an interest in whatever his dad was doing; whether changing oil in the car, putting exercise equipment together, working out with him, and even sometimes trying to engage his dad in his own personal interests such as basketball or other types of games. He noted that overtime his efforts became futile, as his dad displayed no interest in developing a bond with him. Kyle divulged that this experience has hurt him immensely and when he was younger, he thought for a while that the rejection from his dad was based on something he did or that he was not good enough as a son. He noted that even as he grew up, if he did not contact his dad, dad would not make contact with him. Kyle stated that he eventually gave up on the efforts and they do not have a relationship anymore. Kyle's dad missed out on the formative years of his childhood while incarcerated and seemed to struggle immensely with finding the ability to develop any emotional or social bonding with his son.

The second male participant in the study, Darren, expressed trying to form a similar bond with his dad after incarceration but seemingly ran into roadblocks as his dad did not reciprocate

the efforts for social/emotional bonding. His dad being an ex-military service member displayed more interest in wanting to discipline and teach him respect, rather than engage in activities that would bring him closer to his son. Even at eleven years old, Darren recalled trying to get dad to do 'kid stuff' with him, but to no avail. Darren also expressed feeling hurt and disappointment and not being wanted. He also gave up on trying to be close to dad and they no longer have a relationship.

Clara's dad was in and out of prison so much that there was not time to form a bond or relationship. She noted that he did not make the effort to form any social or emotional bonds with her or her sibling, but he would take every opportunity to brag to his friends about their successes, which he did not facilitate as a dad. She shared that by the time he got out for a long enough time, she would try to have conversations with him, but he was mostly indifferent and dismissive as he was battling health issues at this point. . She disclosed that he died within less than a year of being out so essentially, they never formed a relationship.

Lauryn also shared experiencing a failed attempt at establishing a relationship with her dad as he did not seem to know how to return the love, she was showing him. Lauryn shared that she was a teen when her dad was released from prison, so he basically missed a big part of her childhood. She noted going above and beyond to do things for him to ensure he was adjusting well and to make him comfortable. She noted that nothing she did made him want to spend time with her, or just show her love. Lauryn noted that after chasing his affection to no avail for a number of years, she gave up on it. She shared that once she grew up and had a child, she felt like it was giving him a second chance to love her through her child. She shared that he has not been able to show consistent affection to her child, and it's painful to seemingly experience a double rejection from him. She affirmed that she loved him dearly but was done with pursuing

him. Looking at the literature on fractured relationships caused by incarceration, one study examined existing literature and observed that when a positive relationship exists between parent and child, visits with the incarcerated parent promote attachment and foster a positive relationship after the parent is released (Martin, 2017). Conversely, it was shown that when the parent and child had little or no established relationship preceding incarceration, visits were not adequate in promoting a positive relationship (Folk, Nichols, Dallaire, & Loper, 2012). This holds true for the participants of this study, as three of the four, Lauryn, Kyle, and Clara had little to no established relationship prior to incarceration and recalled mostly receiving letters from their dads. Darren had an established relationship with dad even though he did not live in the family's home, but there were no visits throughout the course of his incarceration, and communication was limited to letters and brief phone calls.

The second sub-question *How does incarceration of a child impact the wellbeing of parents?* was not addressed, as there was no participant who fit that category. The sibling participant spoke to the experience of her parents shutting down, refusing to address the matter of their son's incarceration, and fostering a tense home environment. However, having direct information from a parent or parents who experienced the phenomenon would possibly yield a different result coming from their personal lens and unique point of view.

It is important to note that it was extremely difficult to locate any research on the experiences of parents who experience the incarceration of their children. Additionally, in the recruitment phase of this study, the researcher contacted with a few parents who had incarcerated African American sons ranging from juveniles to adult. They collectively expressed that they could not bring themselves to talk about the experience as it was overwhelmingly painful and

difficult to handle, and they were not ‘there yet’ in the process of dealing with the impact of their sons’ incarceration.

One of the moms who shared having twin juvenile sons in the penal system divulged that she would not be able to get a word out in the interview, as she was sure she would be crying the entire time. A dad also volunteered to participate, but withdrew right before the interview, citing that it was too difficult, and he was not ready. The researcher empathized with these individuals and showed utmost respect to their feelings and decision to refuse participation. Looking at the sibling account of her parents handling of her brother’s incarceration, the lack of research available on parental experience with their children’s incarceration, and the parents’ refusal to talk about their experiences, the researcher concludes that these are not isolated instances or a mere coincidence, and that the incarceration of children does negatively impact the wellbeing of their parents.

The third research sub-question explored was *How does incarceration of a spouse/partner impact the wellbeing of women?* The general depiction of the incarcerated male comprises the description of a loner, a social oddity, or a person completely disconnected from society. On the contrary, many of these individuals are young men who have formed relationships and families outside of their families of origin (Mille, Browning, & Spruance, 2001). Literature firmly confirms a feeling of being penalized, not just for the incarcerated males, but also for the significant others (Mille, et al. 2001). Wives and significant others considered their incarcerated spouses’ sentence as a direct imposition on the family and felt as if they were also doing time (Fishman, 1981).

Two of the nine participants in the study, Karen and Cora, identified as partners to incarcerated African American males. Both participants were also parents, but only one shared

children with the incarcerated partner. The narratives they disclosed were supported by the studies available on women's experiences with their incarcerated spouses. Karen shared that she had feelings of being punished along with her partner, as losing him took away the financial, paternal, emotional, and social support from her all at once. She shared having to quickly figure out how to provide for herself and two young children, as that was part of her partner's primary role. She noted having also to reorganize her life to accommodate visiting him, and prioritizing the relationship, even though there was no reciprocation of social or emotional connection for her on the outside. Fishman (1981) in support noted that spouses of incarcerated males often miss their physical presence and also miss them as companions, income providers, fathers, and handymen around the home. Fishman added that these challenges are experienced mutually by married and unmarried spouses.

Cora shared that she had young children at the time of her partner's incarceration but noted that the incarcerated partner was not the biological dad of her children. She added that it was nevertheless stressful to maintain her home and family, while facilitating the relationship with her partner in prison. She noted having to make frequent visits to see him in prison, assist him with paying for commissary, and paying for long distance/collect phone calls. Cora disclosed that she had to take on an extra job to pay for the extra expenses incurred by her imprisoned partner. deVuono-Powell et al. (2015) affirmed that the expenses associated with incarceration which include the costs of collect phone calls, commissary, visitation, health care costs, in addition to other expenditures are borne by persons with convictions and their family members.

Both women shared experiences of feeling lonely and isolated while dealing with their partners incarceration. They noted that the visits, phone calls and letters were temporary

communication opportunities, but it was difficult having to go through the absence of emotional and social connections outside of those brief and formal interactions. An intersection of women, families of low socio-economic status (SES), and citizenry of color have been most profoundly impacted by unfair criminal justice policies for several decades (deVuono-Powell et al., 2015). Spouses and families often times have to travel for hours to distant cities or out of state to visit their loved one, which puts an even greater strain on family adjustment. Both Karen and Cora shared the extra burden they faced having to travel for long distances for a visit, and sometimes having to immediately return home on arrival at the distant facility, as visitation was cancelled without notice that day.

The fourth research sub-question explored was *How does incarceration of siblings impact the wellbeing of non-incarcerated siblings?* Studies have shown that incarceration impacts the entire family system. Still, the impact on the sibling relationship is minimally investigated in the literature (Eman, Janelle & Ray, 2020). Hewko, (2018) concurred that very little research and resources are designed at investigating the impact of incarceration on non-incarcerated siblings or designing interventions to help non-incarcerated siblings manage their grief and loss.

Siblings may have rivalry from time to time. Notwithstanding, there is a rare connection between them, and when a child is incarcerated, it leaves a vacuum in the family that has profound consequences (MacDougall, 2017). Often, non-incarcerated siblings are left wondering about the future of their incarcerated sibling, as they watch their parents shoulder all the emotional and financial burdens, and family life as they knew it, slowly deteriorate. Olivia's experience with her brother's incarceration fits into the narrative of the research. Olivia shared that she has always had a close and special relationship with her older brother,

barring a few sibling squabbles. She shared that due to their age difference, he was always protective of her. She noted that when he started getting in trouble at home and would be punished by their parents, she started to adopt a more protective role towards him, even with her being younger. She expressed that her desire to protect him grew as they got older and he started getting in trouble that would land him in jail.

She noted that when he was not at home, she would worry constantly about his safety and wellbeing. Olivia shared that his most recent incarceration has left her sad, lonely worried, and sometimes feeling depressed, as he is currently awaiting trial for an official sentence. She noted that her home environment is not conducive to processing her feelings, or even mentioning her brother's incarceration as her parents do not welcome any such conversations. They handle the legal and financial aspects together but internalize the emotional parts of his incarceration. This internalization according to Olivia, leads to tension in the home and constant anxious feelings. These feelings are exacerbated by the frequent escalated verbal fights between her parents. Her experience corroborates the study which found that non-offending siblings face elevated amounts of emotive stress (Heaton, 2014; MacDougall, 2017).

Olivia expressed that it has been very difficult and lonely going through her sibling's incarceration on her own. She noted that not having any family member to talk to about it has caused her to shut down and not talk about it with anyone else. She stated that even when she considered talking about it with friends, they did not have any experience with incarceration, and thereby did not know how to engage the conversation or offer feedback. Non-incarcerated siblings need support while living with the incarceration of their sibling.

The family is uniquely situated to provide this assistance. However, they are not always emotionally capable or available to play this supportive role (MacDougall, 2017).

Even though the focus of the study was on close family members such as spouses/partners, siblings, children, and parents, there was the caveat of including other family members who had had significant relationships with an incarcerated African American male. As a result, Elaine and Natalie, a cousin and a niece to incarcerated individuals were included in the study. Their participation demonstrated that they were as significantly impacted by the incarceration of their family member as the other participants were. These individuals were raised in intergenerational family settings and had close bonds with the family members incarcerated. Davis, (2007) asserted that in the African American context, family structures are oftentimes intergenerational or multigenerational.

While neither Elaine or Natalie were solely responsible for the individuals incarcerated, Elaine's uncle was like a father figure as she grew up, and Natalie and her incarcerated cousin had a brother/sister bond growing up in the same extended family structure. Both of these ladies have also had involvement in assisting with different processes that contributed the welfare of their incarcerated family members, providing different levels of support. They had similar descriptions of their larger family units coming together and making necessary adjustments to facilitate the needs of the incarcerated individuals, while also supporting each other.

Delimitations

According to Simon (2011), delimitations are characteristics that limit the possibilities and define the margins of one's research. Delimitations are within the scope of the researcher's control. One delimitation of this study was the use of the critical race theory as the theoretical framework. Even though it worked very well with the context of the study, there were other

theoretical frameworks that could have worked as well, in concert, or even better. Another delimitation to the study is the population (family members of incarcerated African American males) that the researcher chose to study. This is a special and secluded population that were not accustomed to talking about their struggles with the phenomenon studied and some individuals were potentially dubious of the researcher's intentions, and how she would represent their stories.

Limitations

Limitations are probable weaknesses in one's research, and these are usually out of the control of the researcher (Simon, 2011). The existing study had several limitations, which could have impacted the outcome of the findings. These include participant demographic, sample size, and sampling procedure, Power differential or dynamic, and unaddressed research question.

The first limitation is the participant demographic, and sampling procedure used in the study. The demographics of the population was limited to a small geographic location in the South-Central region of Arkansas. This excluded the diverse experiences from other individuals across the United states who experienced the phenomenon studied. The demographic of my sample was seven females and two males. The sample narrowed the perspectives that could have been even thicker and richer with more diverse gender identities. While the data collected reached saturation, it nevertheless represented the lived experiences of only nine people. The researcher used the purposive sampling technique because it was helpful in choosing the participants that had specific characteristics needed for the study (Mills and Gay, 2015). It was also chosen based on convenience, especially since the researcher had a small population to work with.

Power differential or dynamic could be another limitation. The researcher is a doctoral candidate with training and research knowledge around the phenomenon studied. The participants for the most part had just the basic knowledge of how they experienced the phenomenon but had to be dependent on the researcher to facilitate them sharing their experiences. Even though they read the consent forms and were otherwise briefed about the study, there was some apprehension about how the information about their loved ones would be represented. Participants wanted the researcher to know that even though their loved one might have experienced incarceration, they had other great qualities about them. This mindset could have impacted what participants chose to share and how they framed their experiences, which in essence could be a limitation of the study.

One research question focused on how the incarceration of a child impacted the wellbeing of a parent. The researcher was not able to secure any participants to meet this criterion. As the researcher recruited participants, she encountered a few parents who expressed that it was just too painful to engage that conversation. One parent even got to the point of committing to participate, and then withdrawing shortly before the interview. Having that piece of the data missing from the study can also be considered a limitation.

Implications

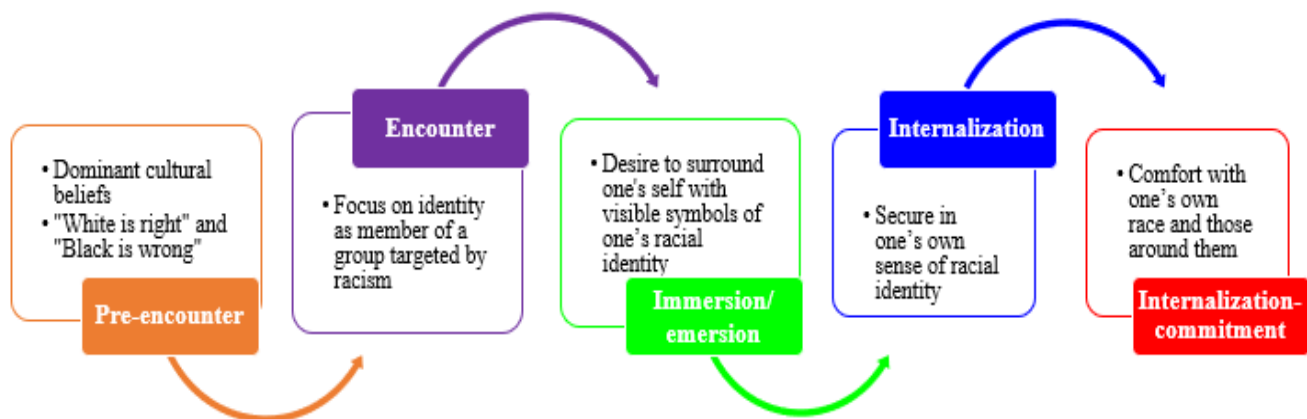
Implications for this study come from the existing research used to create a foundation for and validate this work, from data gathered from participants, from the limitations, and also recommendations for future study. The implications will be addressed in two sections below labeled implications for counseling practitioners and implications for criminal justice policy makers.

Implications for Counseling Practitioners. Counseling practitioners who currently work with people of color, specifically African Americans, or are in counseling training programs, need to be mindful of the intersectionality of experiences that factor into the reality of simply being an African American. An important component of starting to understand the complexities and intersections of cultural or racial groups involve cultural responsiveness. Multicultural and social justice competent counselors as characterized by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP, 2016) and Ratts, et al. (2015), have a duty to recognize their presumptions, worldviews, standards, convictions, and prejudices as adherents of privileged or marginalized groups and also express openness to being a life-long learner as it relates to procuring knowledge about their cultural framework. Multicultural competence can be examined through the lens of awareness, knowledge, and skills, as noted by (Sue, 1978). Sue (1978) and Beaumont (2010) further explicated that the expedience of cultivating an awareness of multicultural issues, comprehend how they impact the daily life of others and revolutionize the awareness and knowledge into skills that are culturally sensitive and receptive.

It is the mental health professional's responsibility to initiate a discussion with the client when this racial disparity exists. This disparity is also a deterrent in African American seeking services, as was expressed by participants in the study. It was also a consensus that participants were not adequately informed about what it meant to receive mental health care. Therefore, Educating African Americans about mental disorders and available treatments is fundamental in the process of reducing and eventually eliminating these barriers. Williams (2011) suggested models for removing these barriers which include public education campaigns [utilizing mass

media and social media], educational presentations in the community for example in Black churches, and open information sessions held at local health clinics.

LoFrisco (2011) pointed out that African American's stage of racial identity development plays a crucial role in feelings displayed towards the counselor and the counseling process. She also pointed out that it would be beneficial to the therapeutic relationship to assess the client's racial identity stage. The diagram below illustrates the African American's stage of racial identity development also known as the Nigrescence model or theory (Cross, 1995; Owens, 2010).



(Cross, 1995)

Figure 5: African American Stages of Racial Identity

African Americans, especially those in low-income, inner-city communities are at enhanced risk for exposure to traumatic experiences (Davis, Ressler, Schwartz, Stephens, & Bradley, 2008). Even though African Americans share similar issues that affect their wellbeing with the rest of the population, additional stressors due to racism, prejudice, and economic disparities exacerbates the African American experience (Williams, 2011). The data from this study showed that incarceration of an African male family member was not the entirety of what

families struggled with, but that incarceration was a major added stressor to families that were already marginalized by systemic racism.

Having an African American male family member incarcerated, highlight the inequities and disparities that exist in this country, as African American males have a 20% risk for incarceration, contrasted to a three percent risk factor for White males (Durrah, 2013; Pettit & Western, 2004). Explicit as well as covert racism and classism underpins and fuels the sustained inequality faced by minorities, especially African Americans. Ming Liu, Pickett and Ivey (2007) assented that America struggles with the blind spot of social class. Having this knowledge, practitioners will be able to better understand that a one size fits all conceptualization or treatment goal will not serve marginalized populations. LoFrisco (2011) added that the first clinical encounter with African Americans presents a significant occasion to address any present uncertainty concerning the helpfulness of treatment. She added that it is the helping professional's duty to interpret and simplify the process, avoiding any unspoken assumptions.

McGoldrick et al. (2005) reported that even educated members of the African American community reported that they lacked sufficient knowledge of the signs and symptoms of mental illness (i.e., depression, anxiety, etc.). They further stated that the lack of experience with mental health conversations or access to literature, creates a general difficulty among Black people to discern when a situation or condition has reached a stage requiring professional services. Thompson et al. (2004) added that when faced with having to choose between exorbitant hourly fees for mental health care, or other demanding financial needs, counseling is often considered an unaffordable luxury item.

The social, emotional and financial demands on African American families, are exacerbated due to greater exposure to adverse circumstances such as poverty, drugs,

incarceration, death from crimes in the community, and killing of unarmed Black men at the hands of the police (Arditti, 2016). Family roles in African American communities as a result becomes even more adaptable and tend to exhibit greater flexibility. It leads to many African American families becoming single parent families headed by females, as corroborated by the data in the researcher's study (LoFrisco, 2011). Wing-Sue and Sue (2008) contended that African American females manage to cope well, as they believe it is crucial to be strong, in order to rise above obstacles. Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2009) and Nelson, Cardemil, and Adeoye (2016) added that the distinguishing characteristic and pivotal part of the identity of Black womanhood is strength, which creates an allusion to the strong Black woman (SBW) or superwoman role. Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2009) further affirmed that the claim of strength promotes a compelling story of perseverance which can oftentimes be a problematic notion.

Having a growing understanding of racial and cultural diversity is important in accessing the skills needed to provide acceptable service to African American populations. Doing one's own research, not alluding to single stories, and taking opportunities to step out of one's comfort zone to practice cultural immersion is highly recommended. This is also an excellent way to build authenticity and trust with the individuals who require and deserve quality care.

Implications for Criminal Justice Policy Makers. Incarceration used to be punishment allotted for criminals who committed heinous crimes. Contrariwise, inmates today are most likely to be people of color, individuals involved in minor or non-violent offenses, and parents (Wakefield & Wildeman, 2014). Pervasive changes in policing, trials, and criminal justice policy at the local, state, and federal levels have increased growth in incarceration, particularly for non-violent property and drug offenders (Sykes and Pettit, 2014). The Sentencing Project (2017) reported that United States prison population grew in excess of 500% within the past 40 years at

a rate outpacing crime and population rates. They further noted that sentencing laws and policies, serve to explain most of this upsurge, as there have not been any remarkable changes in the country's crime rates.

Wagner and Walsh (2016) noted that in the 1970s, United States policymakers resolved to establish incarceration of Americans at worldwide unparalleled rates. That mass incarceration, conversely, does not significantly or proportionally improve the public's safety but rather contributes to decreased health and wellbeing of those incarcerated and also their loved ones. Drug sentences account for the bulk of the increase in incarceration, and it is noteworthy that these convictions disproportionately affect African Americans, although Whites and Blacks use and peddle drugs at similar rates (Lee, 2018). Alexander (2012) added that in some parts of the United States, Black men are imprisoned on drug offences at over twenty times the rate of White men. She included that in areas like Washington, DC, it is expected that three out of every four African American men will experience incarceration in their lifetime.

Policymakers and the wider community in recent years, have developed a mounting interest in helping incarcerated people succeed after release from prison. This is in response to overarching reality of prison, and the earlier beliefs that long sentences and prisons in general increased public safety (Rabuy & Kopf, 2015). Contrariwise, incarceration separates people from their family members, in addition to placing an enormous and unwarranted burden on non-incarcerated loved ones. This separation is noted to disparately affect black and brown communities. Rabuy and Kopf, (2015) noted that in tradition and by construct, prisons are isolated locations. Lockwood and Lewis (2019) added that the majority of prisons across the United States are situated far from major cities that are home to numerous inmates and their

families. Over 60 percent of people in state prisons are incarcerated in over a 100-mile radius from their loved ones (Lockwood & Lewis 2019; Rabuy & Kopf, 2015).

The Marshall Project conducted a study where approximately 200 individuals shared their experiences of visiting an incarcerated loved one. Due the extraneous distance and difficulties involved, most participants divulged that time, money, and childcare were challenges that prevented them from making the journey more often. Other participants noted that they could not visit at all due to financial constraints (Lockwood & Lewis 2019). Beatty and Snells (2004) attested that data from government sources indicated that visits to incarcerated loved ones are not seemingly prioritized or encouraged as part of the inmates' rehabilitation program. They added that in an average month, a small fraction of individuals in state prisons amounting to less than a third, receive visitation from their family members. Studies have nonetheless demonstrated that visiting with incarcerated loved ones have positive effects for both the incarcerated and their family members (Mitchell, Spooner, Jia, & Zhang, 2016). Lockwood and Lewis (2019) and Mitchell et al. (2016) further noted that constant visits during incarceration was helpful in decreasing the risk of recidivism after inmates were released. Therefore, Considering the impact that incarceration has on families, it is expedient that policy makers give consideration to the location where inmates are housed, in proximity to where their family members reside.

Scholars have referenced the overarching impact of incarceration on Black communities as the new 'Jim Crow' (Alexander, 2012 & Forman, 2012). The Jim Crow analogy capably places the spotlight on the dilemma of Black men who have experienced the permanent devaluing of prospects in their lives by way of losing their rights as citizens, coupled with the stigma endured as convicted criminals (Forman, 2012; Lee, 2018). Foreman added that the term

also highlights how nonchalantly race-neutral criminal justice policies unjustly target African American communities, highlighting inequalities that are oftentimes hidden.

Policymakers have been engaging in dialogue over the years on different strategies to reform or overhaul the criminal justice system. Lee, et al. (2015) and deVuono-Powell et al. (2015) agreed that this feat cannot be successfully accomplished without considering the function and impact that incarceration has on families and wider communities. To initiate any lasting change, it is vital that institutions in decision making positions first recognize the disparate effect the current system has on women, low income neighborhoods and communities of color, specifically African American families. It is important to tackle and resolve the policies that started the problem (Sawyer & Wagner, 2019). Sawyer & Wagner noted that with over two million people presently domiciled in American correctional facilities, with family members left behind, the blatant negative impacts of poor systemic policies on mass incarceration can no longer be disregarded.

Recommendations for Future Research

Descriptive data have evolved from the findings of this study that can be utilized to provide guidance for future research. The development of this study has the potential to steer other investigators in the formation of innovative hypotheses and construct theories that can enhance education, clinical practice and the overall continued research on the ways African American families are impacted by incarceration. Several areas of relevant research necessitating further study are addressed below.

The data from the study informed the researcher that there was an emotional desensitization of African American fathers towards their children after experiencing incarceration. They seemed to have a very difficult time forming an attachment or bond with

their children regardless of how much effort the children made. There seems to be a limited amount of studies addressing this phenomenon, and the researcher would like to qualitatively explore this further. The researcher would also like to explore the phenomenon with fathers from other cultural or ethnic groups, fathers in different age ranges, and fathers who had an established relationship with their children prior to incarceration versus those who didn't, to see what similarities and differences exists.

The researcher would also like to explore the lived experiences of African American male military and ex-military service members and how service impacts their wellbeing added to the other stressors of being an African American. Two participants in the study, Clara and Darren, talked about their incarcerated loved ones being ex-military service members who had documented mental health issues, but still felt victim to the justice system instead of being helped by the country they served. The researcher would like to explore this further and hopefully give voice to the experiences of these service members.

Data gathered from the study showed that there was a lack of information or focus on parents with incarcerated children. My research question how does incarceration of a child impact the wellbeing of parents? was not addressed as parents contacted were collectively not emotionally ready to address this experience. The researcher hypothesizes that parents refusal to talk about this experience, might be related to the paucity of studies regarding this phenomenon. The researcher proposes that resources concerning social/emotional support should be provided for parents in addition to a support group that will first destigmatize the shame and loneliness of the experience. This will also assist them in sharing their experience at their own pace and in their own unique ways. There is an obvious gap in the research regarding this piece of data, and the researcher hopes to contribute to addressing it.

Additionally, the researcher recommends quantitatively exploring the impacts of incarceration on the wellbeing of family members of African American males who experience the U.S Prison system. This would be set up to attract a larger and more diverse pool of participants from around the country and ascertain how widespread the phenomenon is in the African American community. Also, the researcher proposes qualitatively researching the impact of incarceration of African American fathers on children with non-Black mothers. Based on the experience shared by the one White participant in the study, the researcher thinks there is merit in further exploration of this phenomenon from the mother's perspective and also the biracial children's perspective. Finally, the researcher recommends using the qualitative method Photo Voice to also explore the phenomenon studied.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore the impacts of incarceration on the wellbeing of family members of African American males who Experience the U.S Prison System. The study's design, recruitment of participants, collection of data prolonged a and data analysis were all directed by Moustakas (1994) transcendental phenomenological approach. Participants were recruited from the South-Central region of Arkansas. Data collection included the use of one semi-structured interview, participant journals, researcher observation/field notes, and participant member checks. After the collection process, the data was then arranged and clustered to form themes.

The themes were further revised and merged into five emergent themes. The aim of the themes was to provide a description of the shared lived experiences of participations who experienced the phenomenon.

Data analysis also included using the theoretical framework and existing research about the phenomenon to help boost the study's validity. The researcher was careful throughout the process to prioritize trustworthiness and rigor through reflexivity and data triangulation. Additionally, textural and structural descriptions provided further guidance to the researcher in clarifying the phenomenon studied. It is the researcher's belief that the findings from this study efficiently captured the essence of the lived experience of family members of African American males who experience the U.S Prison system.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Approval Letter



To: Tremaine Leslie
BELL 4188

From: Douglas James Adams, Chair
IRB Committee

Date: 03/03/2020

Action: **Expedited Approval**

Action Date: 03/03/2020

Protocol #: 2001243465

Study Title: The Impact of Incarceration on the Wellbeing of Family Members of African American Males who experience the U.S Prison System: A Phenomenological Study

Expiration Date: 02/16/2021

Last Approval Date:

The above-referenced protocol has been approved following expedited review by the IRB Committee that oversees research with human subjects.

If the research involves collaboration with another institution then the research cannot commence until the Committee receives written notification of approval from the collaborating institution's IRB.

It is the Principal Investigator's responsibility to obtain review and continued approval before the expiration date.

Protocols are approved for a maximum period of one year. You may not continue any research activity beyond the expiration date without Committee approval. Please submit continuation requests early enough to allow sufficient time for review. Failure to receive approval for continuation before the expiration date will result in the automatic suspension of the approval of this protocol. Information collected following suspension is unapproved research and cannot be reported or published as research data. If you do not wish continued approval, please notify the Committee of the study closure.

Adverse Events: Any serious or unexpected adverse event must be reported to the IRB Committee within 48 hours. All other adverse events should be reported within 10 working days.


Amendments: If you wish to change any aspect of this study, such as the procedures, the consent forms, study personnel, or number of participants, please submit an amendment to the IRB. All changes must be approved by the IRB Committee before they can be initiated.

You must maintain a research file for at least 3 years after completion of the study. This file should include all correspondence with the IRB Committee, original signed consent forms, and study data.

Appendix B: Informed Consent

University of Arkansas, College of Education
Department of Counselor Education and Supervision

Principal Investigator: Tremaine Leslie, M.Ed., M.S., LAC

 email: tnleslie@urak.edu

Faculty Advisor: Kristin Higgins, Ph.D., LPC-S

Ph. 479-575-3329 email: kkhiggi@uark.edu

Description: The purpose of this research is to investigate the impact of incarceration on the wellbeing of family members of African American males who have experienced the U.S prison system. The study will be conducted by Tremaine Leslie, a doctoral candidate in the Department of Counselor Education and Supervision, College of Education, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, AR 72701. Many studies over the years have focused primarily on the mental health status of incarcerated individuals and very little attention has been given to the experiences of their family members. Additionally, when reference is made to the various effects of incarceration, the literature is generally centered around the statistics of prison policies and inmates' experiences, but the important stories of family members are not highlighted. Your participation in this study will include a 60-90 minutes interview, and the questions are designed to capture your unique story. The interview will be audio-recorded to ensure that your participation remains authentic. You will have the opportunity to journal any post interview thoughts or feelings that may come up, or any additional information that you might want to share. After I transcribe the interview, you will be contacted to participate in a member check, where you will get a chance to review the transcript and confirm the information you shared is represented correctly. This should take 45-60 minutes.

Risks and benefits: There are no physical risks associated with this study. However, talking about your loved one being incarcerated and how that has affected you can be stressful and also bring up negative emotions. Benefits include having an outlet to talk about your experiences and be connected to community mental health services if needed. There will be resources such as counseling brochures and contact information for providers available to participants.

Voluntary participation: Participation is completely voluntary, and you are free to refuse to participate in the study. In the event the interview becomes too difficult to continue, or you just want to discontinue for any other reason, you have the right to do so. A decision to stop participation will not cause you any consequences.

Confidentiality: The interviews will take place in a private and secure meeting room that I will reserve at a public library closest to the participant's residence. Privacy of the space means that there will be no interruptions during the interview, and security means that outside of my tape recorder, the room will not have any other audio or video recording equipment that can affect the privacy and safety of the participants. All

information associated with the interview will be kept securely by me. You will also be assigned a participant code that will be used to protect your identity, and all identifying information will be kept confidentially to the extent allowed lawfully and by university policy. After data collection for each participant is complete, physical documents containing the link between the coded transcript, journal information and participants' identities in addition to electronic documents, will be destroyed in order to maintain participants' anonymity.

Compensation: There will be a \$25 gift card which will be awarded at the end of the interview.

Contact information: If you have any questions or comments about this research project, please feel free to contact the principal investigator, Tremaine Leslie at [REDACTED] email: tnleslie@urak.edu, or my faculty advisor at Ph. 479-575-3329 or email: kkhiggi@uark.edu.

If you have any further questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), you may contact the University of Arkansas Institutional Review Board at 479-575-2208, email: irb@uark.edu

I HAVE READ AND UNDERSTOOD THIS CONSENT FORM AND HAVE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO ASK QUESTIONS. I UNDERSTAND THAT MY PARTICIPATION IS VOLUNTARY, AND THAT I AM FREE TO WITHDRAW AT ANYTIME WITHOUT PROVIDING A REASON AND WITHOUT CONSEQUENCE. I UNDERSTAND THAT I WILL BE GIVEN A COPY OF THIS CONSENT FORM. I VOLUNTARILY AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY.

Participant's Signature

Participant's Name

Date

Researcher's Signature

Researcher's Name

Date

Appendix C: Letter of assent

LETTER OF ASSENT FOR MINORS TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY

Tremaine Leslie

University of Arkansas, College of Education

[REDACTED] email: tnleslie@urak.edu

Date:

Dear Participant:

I am kindly asking you to participate in this study that is designed to investigate the impacts of incarceration on the wellbeing of family members of African American males. The study is conducted by Tremaine Leslie, a doctoral candidate in the Department of Counselor Education and Supervision, College of Education, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, AR 72701.

Participation will involve one (1) face-to-face interview with the researcher. This meeting will take about 60-90 minutes. Prior to the interview, you will be asked to fill out a short background/demographic data sheet, which will take about 5-10 minutes. There will be a \$25 gift card compensation at the end of the interview. If for some reason, the interview is interrupted, a second face-to-face meeting can be scheduled. If you have more to share after the interview, a journal will be provided in which you can write or draw. After I transcribe the interview, your parent/guardian will be contacted for you to participate in a member check, where you will have a chance to review the transcript and confirm that the information you shared is documented correctly. This should take 45-60 minutes.

There is no physical risk associated with this research. Should you experience feelings of sadness and/or anger as you share your story, and if you feel like you may need to talk to someone to process the thoughts and feelings that might come up from this interview, you can talk to your parent/guardian or contact your school counselor. Participation in this research is voluntary and it is up to you to decide whether or not you want to participate. If you agree to participate feel free to ask any questions that you might have about the process. You have the right to refuse participation, or you can withdraw or stop at any point in the interview without any consequence.

Yours sincerely,
Tremaine Leslie

Your name and signature below indicate that you agree to participate in this research project. If you choose not to sign, then there is no commitment to participate. You will receive a copy of this form after you have signed it.

Participant's Signature

Participant's Name

Date

Researcher's Signature

Researcher's Name

Date

Appendix D: Letter of consent from parents

University of Arkansas, College of Education
Department of Counselor Education and Supervision

Principal Investigator: Tremaine Leslie, M.Ed., M.S., LAC
[REDACTED]; email: tnleslie@urak.edu

Faculty Advisor: Kristin Higgins, Ph.D., LPC-S
Ph. 479-575-3329 email: kkhiggi@uark.edu

The purpose of this document is to request permission for your child to participate in a research project for my doctoral dissertation. The study is conducted by Tremaine Leslie, a doctoral candidate in the Department of Counselor Education and Supervision, College of Education, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, AR 72701.

The research project will investigate the impacts of incarceration on the wellbeing of family members of African American males who have experienced the U.S prison system. Participation will involve one (1) face-to-face interview with the researcher. This interview will take about 60-90 minutes. The first part of the interview will consist of filling out a brief background/demographic data sheet, which will take about 5-10 minutes. There will be a \$25 gift card compensation at the end of the interview. Your child will have the opportunity to journal or draw any post interview thoughts or feelings that may come up, or any additional information they might want to share. After I transcribe the interview, you will be contacted for your child to participate in a member check, where they will get a chance to review the transcript and confirm that the information shared, is represented correctly. This should take 45-60 minutes. To ensure that your child's confidentiality is maintained, their names and personal information will be removed and will be replaced by participant codes and pseudonyms. Audio recordings will also be destroyed promptly after transcription is completed. After data collection for each participant is complete, physical documents containing the link between the coded transcript, journal information and participants' identities will be also be destroyed in order to maintain your child's privacy.

There are no physical risks associated with this study. However, talking about your loved one being incarcerated and how that has affected you can be stressful and also bring up negative emotions. Your child might experience feelings of sadness and/or anger as a result of sharing their story. I will be very understanding, respectful, and thoughtful throughout the interview process to minimize any harm to your child. Benefits include having an outlet to talk about experiences and be connected to community mental health services if needed. There will be resources such as counseling brochures and contact information for providers available to you and your child.

Participation in this research is voluntary and you can decide if you want your child to participate. If you choose not to allow participation, there is no penalty. If you give

consent and your child chooses not to participate, there is still no consequence. The child can also choose withdraw participation at any time in the study.

If you need further information or clarification, feel free to contact me at Tremaine Leslie at [REDACTED] email: tnleslie@urak.edu or my faculty advisor Dr. Kristin Higgins at 479-575-3329; email: kkhiggi@uark.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), you may contact the University of Arkansas Institutional Review Board at 479- 575-2208, email: irb@uark.edu

Your name and signature below indicate that you agree to participate in this research project. If you choose not to sign, then there is no commitment to participate. You will receive a copy of this form after you have signed it.

Your name and signature below indicate that you agree to participate in this research project. If you choose not to sign, then there is no commitment to participate. You will receive a copy of this form after you have signed it.

Child's Name

Parent/Guardian Name

Parent/Guardian Signature

Date

Researcher's Name

Researcher's Signature

Date

Appendix E: Invitation Letter

My name is Tremaine Leslie and I am a doctoral candidate in the Counselor Education and Supervision program at the University of Arkansas. I am conducting my dissertation research on *The Impacts of Incarceration on the Wellbeing of Family Members of African American Males who Experience the U.S. Prison System*

I invite you to participate in this study if you:

1. Are a parent, sibling, child (10 and older), or spouse/partner of an African American male who has experienced incarceration.
2. Live in the South-Central Arkansas region.

Participation: Your participation in this study will include one 60-90-minute semi-structured interview which also include completion of a demographic information section. The interview questions are designed to capture your unique story. The interview will be audio-recorded to preserve the integrity of your participation. There will be a \$25 compensation for participation in the interview. After the transcription of the interview, you will be contacted to participate in a member check, where you will get a chance to review the transcript and validate or make any needed corrections regarding the information you shared. This should take 45-60 minutes.

If you meet the above criteria and are interested in participating in the study, please email me at tnleslie@uark.edu. Additionally, if you know someone that might be interested in participating, please feel free to pass on my contact information.

I appreciate your time and consideration.

Warmest regards,

Tremaine Leslie, M.Ed., M.S., LAC

This study is supervised by the University of Arkansas Institutional Board (IRB). If you have any queries about your rights as a research subject, please contact the IRB Coordinator at 479-575-2208.

Appendix F: Study Flyer

Do you have an African American male family member who is currently incarcerated, or has been locked up in the past?

You are invited to participate in a research study about the above experience.

Purpose: To understand the impacts of incarceration on the wellbeing of family members of African American males who experience the prison system.

Who: Family members of African American incarcerated males (parents, siblings, children: 10 years and older).

What's involved: One confidential interview where family members share their experience with having an incarcerated loved one.

Compensation: A \$25 gift card which will be awarded at the end of the interview

Contact: For more information contact Tremaine Leslie at [REDACTED] or tnleslie@uark.edu

PARTICIPATION:

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. This means that you can choose to participate or stop at any point in the interview without penalty.

Appendix G: Demographic Information

Date of interview: _____

Time of interview: _____

Place: _____

Interviewer: _____

Interviewee: _____

Pseudonym: _____

1. Age: _____
2. Gender: _____ Male _____ Female _____ Other
3. Ethnicity: _____ African American _____ Hispanic _____ White _____ Other
4. Highest level of education: _____ Elementary school _____ Middle school _____ Junior high school _____ Some high school _____ High school _____ GED _____ Some college _____ Associate _____ Bachelors _____ Masters _____ Ed.D/PhD
5. Employment status: _____ Student _____ Employed _____ Unemployed _____ Retired
6. Income Level: _____ 0 – 25,000 _____ 26,000 – 35,000 _____ 36,000 – 45,000 _____ 46,000 – 55,000 _____ 56,000 – 65,000 _____ over 65,000
7. Relationship to incarcerated individual: _____ Parent _____ Child _____ Sibling _____ Spouse/Partner _____ Other (state relationship)

Appendix H: Interview Protocol (Adult)

1. Is your family member currently incarcerated or is he out of prison?
2. How long is/was his sentence?
3. Tell me about your relationship with this family member.
4. In what way(s) would you say your family changed when your family member went to prison?
5. What was it like for you personally adjusting to life without that individual?
6. If you could use feeling words to describe the experience of having your loved one locked away, which word(s) would you choose?
 - a. What is it like for you to say these feelings out loud?
7. Who can you talk with or what kind of support do you have from family and friends?
(There is also the possibility of “no one” as a response).
 - a. Possible “no one” response: What is it like having to experience this on your own? (Offer resources).
8. Is there anything else you would like to share before we wrap up?

(Thank the participants for participating in the interview and reassure them of confidentiality)

Appendix I: Interview Protocol (Child)

1. Is your family member currently incarcerated or is he now out of prison?
 2. Tell me about your relationship with this family member.
 3. In what way(s) would you say your family changed when your family member went to prison?
 4. What was it like for you personally adjusting to life without that individual?
 5. If you could use feeling words to describe the experience of having your loved one locked away, which word(s) would you choose?
 - a. What is it like for you to say these feelings out loud?
 6. Is there anyone you can talk with about your feelings concerning your incarcerated loved one? (There is also the possibility of “no” as a response).
 - a. Possible “no” response: What is it like having to experience these feelings on your own? (Offer resources).
 7. Is there anything else you would like to share before we wrap up?
- (Thank the participants for participating in the interview and reassure them of confidentiality)