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An Ecological Approach to Improving Reentry Programs for Justice-Involved African American Men

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Abstract: *This article is a re-analysis of a previous study (please see https://doi.org/10.1080/10911359.2017.1402724). Considering the previous findings, in addition to the recent discussions around criminal justice reform, race, policing, and mental health in the United States, the data were reanalyzed using an updated version of QSR NVivo. The new findings revealed that reintegrating justice-involved African American men back into society requires reentry programs to utilize a different approach. Reentry programs must be constructed under the notion that the process involves multiple interrelated components that interact with larger systems outside the individual or organization's immediate control or organization advocating for them. Thus reentry programs should embrace an ecological approach by focusing not solely on the individual but also considering the environmental factors that may facilitate or inhibit their behavior. The authors' CARE model proposes that reentry programs implement four steps (i.e., collaboration, amend, reintegration, and empowerment) to successfully reunite justice-involved African American men with their families, the labor market, and their communities.*

Keywords: *Justice-involved African American men, incarceration, trauma-informed care, recidivism, reentry programs, ecological approach*

In the United States, approximately 77 million (1 in 3) adults have an arrest or conviction record (Council of State Governments (CSG), 2019; Umez & Pirius, 2018). Recently there has been a push to confront and remedy the mass casualties that mass incarceration has birthed. The multilevel devastation that imprisonment has imposed on society financially and emotionally has caused mass incarceration to become a weapon of mass destruction (Skinner-Osei & Stepteau-Watson, 2017). Over the last three decades, the United States prison population has exploded from 300,000 to more than 2 million (Alexander, 2012). The system's failure and spike in incarcerations result from stringent laws and harsh punishments (Alexander, 2012). Legislation such as mandatory minimums and three strikes were created to incarcerate more people under the illusion of enhancing public safety (Mauer, 2006; Alexander, 2012). Although recently there has been a consensus for systematic reform, there are still more than 2 million people incarcerated, and 1.1 million of them are African American men (Bondarenko, 2017; National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), 2016; Skinner-Osei & Stepteau-Watson, 2017; Statista Research, 2020; The Sentencing Project, 2018).

Over the last decade, the vast amount of African American men that have recidivated within 1 - 3 years of their release has led researchers to examine why reentry programs are not as effective for them when compared to others. Rehabilitative programming is considered one of the most effective methods to reduce recidivism (Petersilia, 2011). However, there is much debate about what constitutes an effective reentry program (Skinner-Osei & Stepteau-Watson, 2017). Many assume that the services reentry programs offer, such as family reunification, em-

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ployment, mental health, substance use, housing, and education/training, are the solution. All those variables are necessary parts of any plan to reduce recidivism, but the data also illustrate that they have been insufficient when other factors are not considered. Therefore, the present paper outlines why reentry programs should redirect some of their efforts away from transforming the individual and their immediate circumstances and direct more attention to broader environmental factors.

Reintegrating into society is not solely dependent on the program's effort to transform the individual impacted by incarceration, but also requires numerous external constructs outside the boundaries of the organizational structure (Watson et al., 2018). Therefore, reentry programs would benefit from engaging and enhancing their relationships with political, professional, and local entities to advance policies and procedures that will allow justice-involved African American men to engage more closely with the communities they are returning to. Improving outcomes for African American men in reentry programs must be centered on easing their transition into the complex systems of the family, workforce, and society at large, while also considering their mental and emotional well-being.

Scope of the Problem

More than 650,000 justice-involved persons are released from prison every year in the United States, and approximately 429, 000 are likely to be rearrested within three years (Bureau of Justice Assistance, 2005; Morenoff & Harding, 2014; National Reentry Resource Center (NRRC) 2015; Visher, Lattimore, Barrick, & Tueller, 2017). A culmination of research has shown that prison-based reentry programs positively impact recidivism and reunification (CJC, 2015; Eddy et al., 2008; Skinner-Osei & Stepteau-Watson, 2017). African American men are more likely to participate in these programs, yet they continue to struggle with recidivism and reunification at higher rates (CJC, 2015; Skinner-Osei & Stepteau-Watson, 2017). A potential explanation is that African American men frequently encounter caution, suspicion, and fear from their environment due to stigma (Austin, 2004). Also, African American men are more likely to be viewed as more aggressive and threatening (Thomas, 2007).

Many factors contribute to the high recidivism rates of African American men, but how their environment perceives them plays a significant role. Consequently, African American men respond differently to the environment compared to their non-African American counterparts (Thomas, 2007). Bandura (1989) described this as a bidirectional influence, which illustrates how behavior and the environment influence one another. Individuals are both producers and a product of their environment. This leads to a reciprocal condition in which the environment alters the individual's behavior in response to hostility, which in turn creates a more hostile environment (Bandura, 1989). Bandura (1989) also implied that the socially conferred roles and status shape the beliefs, self-perceptions, and intentions of individuals, ultimately forming part of their behavior.

As the theory of African American Offending illustrates, incarceration and confinement have impacted African American men so severely that it is ingrained in their mentality from childhood, thereby distorting their worldview (Unnever & Gabbidon, 2011; Skinner-Osei & Stepteau-Watson, 2017). To address this problem, a more holistic approach is needed to account for the negative associations developed in the centuries of oppression and segregation that shape African American men's current interactions with society. Only when addressing the psychological and historical trauma in conjunction with the environmental factors that perpetuate the stigma experienced by African American men, can the chains of incarceration be broken.

Reentry is a complicated and often traumatic experience for individuals being released from prison. Maley (2014) compared incarcerated men's return to society to the likes of soldiers returning from war. Like soldiers, incarcerated men experience anxiety, panic attacks, paranoia, and cognitive dysfunction, which can hinder their reentry journey (CSG, 2015; Ma-

ley, 2014; Skinner-Osei & Stepteau-Watson, 2017).

Researchers, advocates, and policymakers agree that an influx of collaborative programs that strategically address criminogenic variables are needed. However, the problem is that the programs must extend their services to include cultural competency and emotional and psychological factors instead of just practical needs (e.g., housing, food, and employment). The previous study by Skinner-Osei & Stepteau-Watson (2017) found that 50 percent of the men that participated in the program recidivated within one year even with housing, food, and employment assistance, which confirms that the needs are more complex. Additionally, Visher et al. (2017) conducted a multi-site evaluation (N=1697) of men from 12 prisoner reentry programs with similar results. The evaluation utilized a two-stage matching quasi-experimental design, and multivariate models were used to examine the relationships among service and program receipt and recidivism (Visher et al., 2017). They concluded that primary services that focused on practical skills (employment, housing) illustrated "modest or inconsistent" impacts on recidivism, but services that focused on behavior change were more beneficial (Visher et al., 2017, p. 1). Thus, securing practical needs is not sufficient in assisting individuals impacted by incarceration, particularly African American men. For programs to be more effective for African American men, there must be significant consideration of the environmental and psychological elements influencing their behavior.

Methods

A qualitative phenomenological research design was utilized to explore African American men's reentry experience, family reunification, and recidivism. Non- random sampling was used. The participants (N=10) were selected from a reentry program in Florida's southeastern region and had been in prison more than once and participated in at least three reentry programs. The participant's ages ranged from 23 to 56 years. Informed consent procedures met the standards set by the National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects. A two-part instrument constructed by the researcher was used to collect data. The first part was a 13-question demographic questionnaire, and the second part consisted of open-ended questions that were delivered verbally in a semi-structured interview format.

Data Analysis

In the previous study the data were analyzed with QSR NVivo 10 qualitative analysis software and were interpreted by identifying similarities, differences, themes, and relationships. The findings yielded the following themes and subthemes presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Original Themes and Subthemes

Trauma	Self-identification	Reentry	Reunification	Recidivism
Stress	Institutionalization	Resources	Relationship with the child's caregiver	Post-release environment
Generational abuse and abandonment	Criminalization	Accountability	Parenting before, during and after incarceration	Outlook on the criminal justice system
Family membership and belonging		Employment		
		Housing		

Considering the previous findings, the recent discussions around race, mental health, policing, and incarceration, the data were re-analyzed using an updated version of QSR NVivo qualitative analysis software. As a result, four new themes emerged, as presented in Table 2.

Table 2

New Themes and Subthemes

PSYCHOLOGICAL PROFILE	COGNITIVE BEHAVIOR	EMOTIONS	ENVIRONMENT
Post-traumatic stress	Human behavior	Intent	Peer pressure
Emotional insecurity	Self-reliance	Behavioral response	Community influences
	Personal responsibility		Post-release rules

New Considerations for Model Development

As discussed below, the new themes and subthemes are significant regarding the success of reentry programs and recidivism reduction. The themes also further support what previous research has shown: the success of reentry programs relies heavily on the resources, programs, and environment. The new themes and subthemes contributed to considerations for a more effective reentry program model, which will be presented in a subsequent section.

Psychological Profile

Reentry programs often fail to address the emotional insecurity experienced by justice-involved African American men while they are incarcerated and post-release. As cited in Perry, Robinson, Alexander, & Moore (2011), research by Visher et al. (2004) showed that 20 percent of the respondents reported experiencing symptoms associated with post-traumatic stress disorder 1–3 months after their release. The symptoms included repeated disturbing memories, thoughts, or images of prison. Twenty-five percent of respondents reported experiencing severe anxiety and depression (Perry et al., 2011). Additionally, a 56-year-old participant in this study who spent 25 years of his life in jail and prison stated:

> I was going out of my mind. I didn't know if I was going over or under the fence. My head was running games on me, and I was hearing voices. The doctor gave me some medication. She said it's a depression I'm going through from drinking and drugging and my mind still going through what I went through in my life and my brain can't keep up. I think I'll be locked up right now because without knowing my problem I'll be done -done something crazy. I thought I was crazy-I'm serious. She told me don't use that word (crazy) in her office. She said "unbalanced" Your mind is unbalanced. (Skinner-Osei & Stepteau-Watson, 2017)

Four of the other participants shared similar experiences, which illustrates the need for more psychological interventions such as cognitive-behavioral group therapy, which has been found to produce significant symptom reduction among individuals experiencing anxiety (Butler et al., 2018).

Cognitive Behavior

Traditional cognitive behavior change models have assumed that behavior can be entirely shaped and controlled by the individual, whereby decisions are consciously planned, and actions subsequently ensue (Buchan, Ollis, Thomas, & Baker, 2012; Masicampo & Baumeister, 2013). This is partly the result of the philosophical concept of Intentional Causalism, which proposes that an action is caused by an agent's conscious intentions (Lumer, 2019). The Intentional-Causalist conception is based on the criminal justice system and hence, the source of the standard Western conceptions of moral and legal responsibility (Lumer, 2019). Following this notion has resulted in most behavioral interventions being rooted in the philosophy of self-reliance and personal responsibility. Consequently, reentry programs following the traditional behavioral interventions model focus primarily on the conscious effort of the individual to guide

their actions. Although this conscious approach does present some benefits to participants, it does not encapsulate the entire causality of human behavior (Masicampo & Baumeister, 2013). In contrast with the cognitive psychology tradition, the current understanding suggests that much of human behavior is initiated by the interactions of the individual in coordination with their environment (Bargh & Morsella, 2008). Behavior is not exclusively controlled by the individual but is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon influenced by multiple factors that interact with one another (Buchan et al., 2012). For example, a participant sentenced as an adult at the age of 11 and spent 14 years in prison shared:

> When you're a young kid like that going into an adult prison facility, you will see guys that you looked up to as you was out in society hustling, and you would see those guys as well—a couple of your friends from around the neighborhood. I was pretty much in a safe haven. With me, it was kind of like, I'm right at home. I was kind of comfortable. You got some - they call it cutting time, that's when you always getting in trouble, don't listen to the officers because of your age you feel like nobody can't tell you nothing, and they put you in confinement. (Skinner-Osei & Stepteau-Watson, 2017)

In response to similar stories, researchers are now embracing the use of ecological models of behavior, focusing not solely on the individual but also considering the environmental factors that may facilitate or inhibit individual behavior (Buchan et al., 2012). Consequently, any intervention designed to modify behavior would benefit from adopting an ecological approach by allowing participants to engage and adapt their responses to the situation's context. However, conscious strategies promoted in many reentry programs are not equipped to manage the overwhelming magnitude and ever-changing nature of environmental inducements. Fortunately, the system needed to decipher the complex interactions between the environment and individuals already exist in the form of emotional processing.

Emotions

Barrett, Mesquita, Ochsner, and Gross (2007) suggest that emotions measure an individual's relationship with the environment. They affect their perception, shape their worldview, and indicate whether a situation is helpful or harmful, rewarding, or threatening, requiring approach or withdrawal (Barrett et al., 2007). Although the influence of the emotional state on behavior is not always accessible to the individual, emotions can engender behavior that is antithetical to the goals of the agent (Lewis & Jones, 2004). To adapt an individual's response to be congruent with their environment, they must properly attune to the multitude of stimuli experienced. This requires them to be immersed in the environment to experience the contextual inputs necessary for the various psychological processes to harmonize with their surroundings. Therefore, any reentry program attempting to mediate the behavior of its participants must employ interventions that allow justice-involved African American men to interact and be informed by the environment they are tasked to navigate upon release.

Environment

Successfully reintegrating justice-involved persons back into the environment of the family, workforce, and community is the fundamental purpose of any reentry program (CJC, 2015). Environmental factors play an essential role in the manifestation of the behavior exhibited by the individual. Heft (2018) suggested that to function and adapt as individuals in a community it is paramount to understand how to engage with that community. A participant stated that the multiple pre- and post-release reentry programs he participated in failed to teach him strategies on dealing with the criminogenic risks in his community; therefore, he continued to recidivate. He shared:

> Once I got out, you know in my neighborhood they glorify stuff like that. Yeah, like the first thing they will say is like yeah, my homeboy done got out. They come looking for you, not looking for you in a bad way but looking for

> you to hang out with you. If you have like loyal guys you grew up with, they gonna come and show you love - we call it breaking bread. They gonna come and give you $3-400 and some drugs to sell. When I got out, they came and got me. They showed me love, and I ain't never think about no job. (Skinner-Osei & Stepteau-Watson, 2017)

The environment justice-involved African American men are entering poses significant challenges, which negatively impact their chances of reintegrating into their families, workforce, and community (Skinner-Osei & Stepteau-Watson, 2017). The political, economic, and social post-conviction penalties designed to prevent recidivism are inadvertently isolating individuals impacted by incarceration from the communities they are expected to reintegrate (Clear et al., 2001). Governed by these rules and restrictions, they remain in a virtual prison, leading them to recidivate at higher numbers (Alexander, 2012; Morenoff & Harding, 2014; Skinner-Osei & Stepteau-Watson, 2017).

The Care Model

The task of successfully reintegrating justice-involved African American men into society is a complex issue that involves multiple interrelated components. Based on the findings from the previous study and re-analysis, the CARE model was constructed. The model proposes that more reentry programs consider the indifferences African American men endure, particularly trauma, their environment, and the impact both have on their social and cognitive functions. Scutti (2014) stated that African American men experience traumatic childhood incidents 28 percent more than white men. The CARE model further proposes that a trauma-informed component be added to more men's reentry programs and that post-release resources include more access to trauma-informed care (TIC). The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [SAMHSA], (2014) defines TIC as a framework of service delivery that utilizes a universal precautions approach to incorporate evidence about the prevalence and impact of early adversity on individuals the lifespan. TIC has four guiding principles: (1) realizing that trauma is extremely prevalent and can create lifelong implications in many facets of functioning; (2) recognizing that many presenting problems are best conceptualized as signs and symptoms of trauma; (3) incorporating knowledge about trauma into system-wide policies, procedures, and practices; and (4) avoiding the repetition of retraumatizing and disempowering dynamics in the service delivery setting (SAMSHA, 2014).

The CARE model has 4 components: Collaboration, Amend, Reintegration, and Empowerment.

1.) *Collaboration:* When constructing the CARE model, several other reentry models were considered, such as the Risk-Need-Responsivity (RNR) and the Boston Initiative models. Like the CARE model, they have gone beyond focusing on practical needs and collaborated with other entities. The RNR has a heavy emphasis on cognitive-behavioral and social learning techniques (Petersilia, 2011). It focuses on high-risk justice-involved persons and integrates family and peers to reinforce positive messages (Petersilia, 2011). The data from 38 programs utilizing the model was analyzed and found that recidivism for high-risk justice-involved persons decreased by 20 percent for some programs (Petersilia, 2011). The Boston Reentry Initiative focused on high-risk justice-involved persons and offered various resources with a significant emphasis on treatment modalities. In 2011, the participant's recidivism rates decreased an estimated 30 percent compared to a matched group (Petersilia, 2011). Both models have shown significant results. However, the CARE model goes further by making cultural competency and communities part of the intervention. This is especially important to African American men who feel disenfranchised when returning to their communities. Another significant component of the CARE model is that it is not designed for just high-risk justice-involved persons like the other models, and it has an emphasis on African American men.

2.) *Amend:* Aside from entering problematic situations in their communities, individu-

als are also affected by post-release restrictions designed to surveil and control. Post-conviction penalties restrict their voting rights, housing, employment opportunities, and the ability to associate with other felons, which includes close relatives (Clear, Rose, & Ryder, 2001; Alexander, 2012). The penalties designed to prevent recidivism are inadvertently isolating individuals from the communities they are expected to reintegrate (Clear et al., 2001). Governed by these rules and restrictions, they remain in a virtual prison, causing them to recidivate at higher rates (Alexander, 2012; Morenoff & Harding, 2014; Skinner-Osei & Stepteau-Watson, 2017). Post-conviction policies not only burden individuals impacted by incarceration, but they also restrict organizational-level systems and processes.

Although the conversation around criminal justice reform has recently included modifying laws that directly and indirectly impose post-conviction penalties, many are still leaving out the need for more psychological services and mental health resources. The CARE model suggests that legislation and policies be amended to include more of these resources, particularly post-release and in the communities where these men are returning. Sawyer and Wagner also (2019) suggested that substantial investments be placed in social services and communities. Amending the current policies will not only benefit the individual impacted by incarceration but may also keep others from offending.

3.) *Reintegrate:* One of the main goals of reentry programs is to assist justice-involved individuals in reintegrating into their communities. Many reentry programs collaborate with local businesses, community organizations, and churches, which allow disenfranchised justice-involved men to engage in community matters. An example is Volunteers of America (VOA). VOA allows justice-involved persons to gain valuable exposure to potential future employers. More importantly, they also gain the ability to display job skills and reduce organizational concerns about their past infractions, which is a common issue voiced by potential employers conducting traditional job interviews with justice-involved persons. Although these programs are effective, the CARE model suggests that these organizations should also be aware of and informed on implementing TIC strategies when working with these men. Six study participants stated that insecurities from their trauma played a significant role in their success of reintegrating into home life and the workforce (Skinner-Osei & Stepteau-Watson, 2017).

4.) *Empowerment:* Reducing post-conviction penalties and giving individuals impacted by incarceration a stake in their communities' success will empower them to become productive citizens. Being perceived as a valuable member of society allows for reducing the stigma and emotional insecurity perpetuating the increased recidivism rates of African American men. The CARE model proposes that reentry programs become more inclusive of mentors and peer specialists from the communities these men are returning to. The study participants stated they would prefer more external support in addition to internal support (i.e., psychiatrists, social workers, and probation officers) (Skinner-Osei & Stepteau-Watson, 2017). In addition to mentoring, the model is inclusive of volunteer and educational opportunities. Both will provide connections to potential employers and allow them to contribute to their communities and possibly shed the stigma attributed to them.

Discussion

Reentry programs provide participants with financial assistance, housing, employment, familial assistance, and numerous other services to counteract some of the difficulties experienced by justice-involved persons (Perry et al., 2011). Nevertheless, according to the World Prison Brief, America boasts the highest recidivism rates at 76 percent (Zoukis, 2017). Reentry programs must do a better job of addressing the trauma and emotional insecurity experienced by individuals impacted by incarceration.

Another confounding variable contributing to the demise of justice-involved African American men is the socially conferred roles placed on them by their environment. Society essentially regards their criminal history as a contagious disease that further isolates them from

the community they are supposed to reintegrate (Austin, 2004). For African American males, the consequences of low status due to incarceration are compounded by racial discrimination and stereotypes that perceives them as unintelligent, dishonest, and aggressive (Austin, 2004). Consequently, the portrait of African American males puts them under heightened scrutiny and increases the number of adverse encounters with police and society. African American men, especially those involved in the justice system, face many oppressive factors. Therefore, part of the solution to reducing recidivism lies outside the individual's immediate control and the organization advocating for them. Institutions involved in the criminal justice system must be part of the solution to alter the hostile environment experienced by African American men.

Implications for Policy, Practice, and Research

In addition to new themes, there are also more implications for policy, practice, and research related to reentry programs and justice-involved African American men.

Policy

There have been significant legislative changes and progress, such as The Second Chance Act, The First Step Act, bipartisan collaborations, and a newly formed Council on Criminal Justice. Even with the considerable amount of progress that has been made, there is still a need for more legislative change. For example, The First Step Act covers federal justice-involved persons; however, an estimated 90 percent of people are incarcerated in state prisons (Hall, 2018). Also, employment barriers such as "blanket bans" and "good moral character clauses" must be eradicated (Umez & Pirius, 2018). Alleviating economic restrictions would make it easier to participate in the labor market and fulfill financial obligations to parole and probation officers and support spouses and children.

Another policy issue that requires more attention concerns the various post-conviction restrictions designed to surveil and control these men's behavior. There is an opportunity to coordinate policies and services between law enforcement, judges, legislators, local businesses, and communities to facilitate a healthier relationship between these external constructs and the individual impacted by incarceration. Reevaluating the effectiveness and potentially amending some of the post-conviction restrictions placed on justice-involved men will alleviate some of their emotional insecurity that contributes to the increased recidivism rates of African American men.

Practice

In the United States an array of professionals work in the criminal justice system, such as social workers, psychologists, probation officers, and correction officers. In many instances, these professionals work with justice-involved persons before and during incarceration and post-release. One significant improvement they can implement in their practices is a change in the language they use. As explained by Bandura (1989), socially conferred roles and stereotypical views influence individuals' thoughts and emotional states, which ultimately form part of their behavior. Revising the language used to address justice-involved persons will allow them to gain a more positive self-image and shed some of the stigma associated with incarceration (Skinner-Osei & Stepteau-Watson, 2017). The San Francisco Board of Supervisors adopted person first language guidelines, which have excluded the terms felon, offender, convict, and juvenile delinquent (Matier, 2019). Now persons impacted by incarceration will be referred to as formerly incarcerated persons, justice-involved, returning residents, a person under supervision, or a young person with justice system involvement (Matier, 2019).

Also, practitioners in reentry programs could benefit from applying a more ecological approach by allowing individuals to engage and adapt their behavior to the environmental context as part of their program. There is an opportunity to use the transitional and heavily monitored parole and probation period to coach and prepare for the complexity of reintegrating back into society. This would require reentry programs to conduct much of their behavioral training post-release to allow justice-involved African American men to report their lived experiences

with society to trained professionals that can make situational assessments and help recalibrate and improve their interactions. To foster behavior change, individuals need to be informed by how the environment responds to their actions instead of conducting interventions in a sterile prison environment devoid of the contextual elements informing their behavioral responses.

Research

Over the last decade, numerous programs have been implemented to help people impacted by the justice system. To further improve program outcomes, the Council on Criminal Justice identified three key elements that will further enhance reform efforts, 1.) disseminate conclusive evidence between the jails, prisons, and courts; 2.) continue to support ideas across the entire reform spectrum; and, 3.) conduct additional research to determine effective methods (Head, 2019).

It is also imperative that researchers further explore how external factors outside the organization's boundaries affect the outcomes of reentry programs. External implementation contexts are beneficial for complex interventions that involve multiple interrelated components that extend and interact with larger systems and communities in which they are embedded (Watson et al., 2018). A systematic literature review by Watson et al. (2018) examined how the external implementation context constructs could serve as barriers or facilitators in program implementation. The constructs were (1) professional influences, (2) political support, (3) social climate, (4) local infrastructure, (5) policy and legal climate, (6) relational climate, (7) target population, and (8) funding and economic climate. All these constructs interact with each other and constrain the organizational implementation without being in their direct control. Therefore, to improve current reentry programs' effectiveness, organizations cannot rely on internal administrative manipulations alone to solve the complex problem of integrating individuals impacted by incarceration back into society (Watson et al., 2018).

An example of an organization that has benefited from an external implementation context approach is the Housing First model. The model is used with chronically homeless individuals with serious mental illness and substance use disorder (Watson et al., 2018). The significance of the model is the fostering of relationships and coordination with external entities. Reentry programs could benefit from adopting a similar approach, as many participants involved in the Housing First model have also been impacted by incarceration.

Conclusion

In 2019, 45,075 justice-involved persons were released from federal custody, and an estimated 3,100 were released per the First Step Act (Federal Bureau of Prisons, 2019). Despite the progress, there are still many issues that are not being addressed and will continue to foil all efforts to successfully reintegrate justice-involved African American men into society and their families. The common conception of assisting individuals impacted by incarceration is to provide practical needs such as housing, food, and employment, which are often insufficient when the core of their issues is related to psychological factors. In addition to providing practical needs and psychological assistance, reentry programs should serve as a mediator between the individual impacted by incarceration and the various environmental constructs they are encountering upon release.

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