The environmental context of the Allegheny County Jail (ACJ) in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania is typical of most jails in the U.S. and is characterized by limited resources and a highly institutionalized environment. Inmates are housed in close quarters for extended periods of time, which can lead to social isolation and a lack of privacy. These conditions can negatively impact an inmate’s mental and physical health and can hinder their ability to engage in meaningful activities and social interactions. The ACJ is no exception to these challenges, with its high population density and limited space for recreation and educational opportunities.

Community Reintegration

Ex-offenders face multiple barriers to community reintegration. In most states, an ex-offender can be denied jobs, have their credit history information available through the Internet, can be denied federally assisted housing, and in some cases, can be denied jobs, can be banned from public assistance, food stamp or student loan programs, can have their rights to vote and obtain/retain employment and successfully reintegrate into the community once released.

The Community Reintegration Project (CRP) is an OT program at the ACJ. Its primary goal is to reduce recidivism and facilitate community reintegration. Inmates participate in skill training and therapy programs that are designed to help them obtain/retain employment and successfully reintegrate into the community once released. The CRP is unique in that it is an evidence-based program, and its effectiveness is supported by a growing body of research.

Research Design

This study employs a phenomenological design to understand the lived experience of community reintegration from ex-offenders’ perspectives. In particular, we are interested in these men’s descriptions of time use, habits, and person-environment interaction. The interview was pilot tested with 2 former CRP participants who met inclusion criteria. These participants provided feedback on the clarity of the interview and reintegration and selected interview questions. Sample interview questions are shown below.

Methods

Participants: Men who successfully completed the CRP curricula and maintained community tenure 1 year post-release were identified from an extant data base maintained by CRP staff. Names were cross-checked with a Bureau of Corrections database to check re conviction status. To date, 7 men have been interviewed. Conducting interviews was a 25% increase in completion of the interview.

Instrumentation: An Electronic RESEARCHER® JOURNAL was initiated as a tool for initial bracketing of ideas of incarceration and reentry and analysis of the data and data analysis procedures. It works as one method of generating an audit trail for the study. Selected content was turned into a >DECODING DATA sheet that could be used to describe the participants (e.g., age, release date, educational and criminal histories, etc.)

Data Analysis: Data generated during interviews was analyzed using axial coding with the purpose of producing meaningful categories. Axial coding as used to refine codes into meaningful categories. The interview was pilot tested with 2 former CRP participants who met inclusion criteria. These participants provided feedback on the clarity of the interview and reintegration and selected interview questions. Sample interview questions are shown below.

Data Generation: Preliminary findings from the preliminary interview were described to the research team for their support and assistance, especially Joy Lisak, Teressa Garcia, Cecilia Vaughn and Kristi Lynch.

References

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