STRUCTURAL AND AGENTIC CONTRIBUTORS TO JUSTICE- AND SUBSTANCE-
INVOLVED WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT: A FEMINIST ANALYSIS

By

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ABSTRACT

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Using interviews with 60 women leaving substance use treatment after spending time in jail, this dissertation examines the structural and agentic contributors to the employment of justice- and substance-involved women. Qualitative and quantitative findings illuminate the relevancy of spatial mismatch and social capital to women's employment, the barriers women face looking for work and their strategies to overcome them, and the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on finding and maintaining a job. Policy and practice recommendations include 1) improved access to mixed-income housing in areas of high economic opportunity for justice-involved women of color, 2) mentorship programing with a focus on career development, 3) occupational licensing reform, 4) expansion of gender-responsive reentry programs and training for criminal justice practitioners, 5) increased access to state and federal support for justice-involved populations, and 6) a moratorium on employment requirements for supervision during crises of exceptional magnitude.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Land acknowledgement[1]

Aanii, boozhoo. Sineskwe ndizhnikaaz. Waabizheshi nidodem. Waawiyaatanong ndoonjbaa. I am of the Marten clan of the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe, given my father's Irish and Polish heritage. My name, given to me by the Creator, is Little Stone Woman. I was given this name because of my fascination with rocks as a child—I would often sit outside of my grandparents' home on the beach of Naadowewi-gichigami, also known as Lake Huron, to collect stones that mirrored the shapes of my imagination. My mother, sister and I would paint them to reflect whatever our minds conjured—sometimes a black bear with tiny paws, sometimes a sunflower with symmetric petals, sometimes a sun with a smile and tinted glasses, shielding itself from its own light.

<center>***</center>

Michigan State University occupies the ancestral, traditional, and contemporary Lands of the Anishinaabeg – the Three Fires Confederacy of Ojibwe, Odawa, and Potawatomi peoples. The University resides on Land ceded in the 1819 Treaty of Saginaw. Settler and Indigenous signatories understood the terms of the treaties in starkly different terms. According to a map within the University archive, Anishinaabeg maintained an 'Indian Encampment' south of the Red Cedar River when classes were first held at the University (then known as Michigan Agricultural College) on May 13, 1857.

As one of the first Land Grant colleges, Michigan State University is a beneficiary of Land allotted through the passing of the Morrill Act in 1862. The Morrill Act, which enabled the Land Grant system, was passed in the same year as both the Homestead Act–granting 160 acres to individual settlers who 'improved' and farmed land in the West–and the largest mass hanging

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in the history of the United States, the state-sanctioned murder of thirty-eight Dakota. There is an indelible relationship between the creation of Land Grant institutions, the simultaneous and ongoing expropriation of Indigenous Lands, and the governmentally-coordinated genocide against Indigenous peoples. It is important to recognize the ways that settler-colonial institutions benefit from these interconnected histories.

There are real ways that the State of Michigan, Michigan State University, and residents of this Land have benefitted from the forced and systematic removal of Anishinaabeg and other Indigenous peoples from Michigan, particularly during the Indian Removal period of the nineteenth century. The Burt Lake Band were literally burned from their houses in 1900. Likewise, we must recognize that parts of what is now Michigan includes Land within the traditional Homelands of the Miami, Meskwaki, Sauk, Kickapoo, Menominee, and other Indigenous nations.

***

Offering land acknowledgements does not absolve settler-colonial privilege or diminish colonial structures of violence. Land acknowledgements must be preceded and followed with ongoing and unwavering commitments to Native communities. It is my intention to continue the work of the many incredible Indigenous minds that inform my perspective. It is also my intention to use my privilege as a White-coded person to step up in spaces where Indigenous voices are needed, and to step back and support when my perspective should be ancillary rather than central. Speaking on my Native personhood is much like the rock painting of my youth. My experience is highly specific; one of many versions; placed among the vibrant, decorated stones of the women who came before me and the ones who will follow.

***

Personal acknowledgements

Note:

1. Much of this land acknowledgement was drawn from the extended statement provided by the American Indian and Indigenous Studies (AIIS) Department at Michigan State University, available at https://aiis.msu.edu/land/, and adjusted to fit this dissertation. Thank you to Dr. Dylan Miner and the fellow faculty responsible for its construction.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This dissertation presents a collection of research regarding the employment of substance-involved women leaving jail contexts. All quantitative and qualitative data used for empirical work were collected from interviews occurring between December 2020 and January 2022 with women after their stay at a residential substance abuse treatment program and after time in jail. The purpose of this work is to contribute to feminist scholarship acknowledging both structural (e.g. spatial mismatch, labor market discrimination) and agentic (e.g. resilience, self-efficacy) contributors to justice-involved women's employment outcomes.

The work is presented in a three-paper format, where Chapters 2-4 present unique empirical studies. The first paper examines the interconnections of race, spatial mismatch, social capital, and employment outcomes in a convergent mixed-methods analysis. The second paper identifies women's barriers to employment and their strategies to address them using an exploratory applied thematic analysis framework. The final paper is a qualitative investigation of the effects of COVID-19 on women's employment. Chapter 5 concludes the dissertation by outlining the findings of the three previous chapters and reviewing recommendations for policy and practice.

Though the articles are united by their basis in feminist methodologies, they are constructed in a format with independent introduction, methods, results, and conclusion sections. They are constructed as stand-alone works, each containing elements consistent with APA guidelines for empirical papers. The data for all three papers were drawn from the same study; as such, there exists repetition in the methods sections, specifically related to sample and data collection.

Significance of the study

This dissertation represents a unique and important contribution to the literature regarding the employment of an understudied population—women leaving jail contexts (Rodda & Beichner, 2017). Though women are capable of incredible feats in their work and employment (for example, see Vitak et al., 2017), women's achievements in this area are relatively unexplored, especially in justice-involved populations. Specifically, the articles identify a constellation of social and economic forces that impede or assist women with justice-involvement in their endeavors to find and maintain employment, and their efforts to overcome barriers to produce positive outcomes. The research is conducted in line with intersectional feminist methodologies that acknowledge the interaction of race and gender in justice-involved women's experiences and emphasize women's agency and resilience in the face of obstacles to employment (Burgess-Proctor, 2006; Daly, 1993; Daly & Stephens, 1995; Lynch, 1996; Weber & Parra-Medina, 2003). Mixed and qualitative methods are used amplify the voices of a subsample of women who are often underserved by social policy. The context of this research during a global pandemic constitutes an especially novel exploration of women's barriers and strategies to finding employment. This dissertation lends insight into the ways that the public health crisis affects justice-and substance-involved women and may exacerbate inequality. Findings hold implications for policy, practice, and employment programming for justice- and substance-involved women and are reviewed in the final chapter.

CHAPTER 2: THE SOCIAL AND SPATIAL MISMATCH OF JUSTICE-INVOLVED WOMEN

Abstract

Seminal work on spatial mismatch has shown that geographic isolation from job-rich areas resulted in unemployment for low-income, minority individuals. Though social capital is a critical component of the job search for justice-involved individuals, justice-involved minority women may have unique barriers to accessing social capital related to spatial mismatch. This concurrent mixed methods study addresses the interconnections of race, economic opportunity, social capital, and employment for a sample of 56 justice-involved women. Results reveal racial differences in the mobilization of social capital to address the spatial mismatch problem, identifying a source of inequity for women of color leaving carceral settings.

Introduction

The relationship between race, economic opportunity, and employment, known as the spatial mismatch hypothesis, has been well explored empirically. This research has shown that minority individuals are disproportionately isolated in areas away from job growth, which affects employment outcomes (Andersson et al., 2017; Fernandez, 2008; Ihlanfeldt & Sjoquist, 1998; Kain, 1992; Mouw, 2000; Stoll, 2006; Weinberg, 2000). However, few studies examine how spatial mismatch operates for justice-involved populations (for exception, see Chamberlain et al., 2016; Sabol, 2007; Sugie & Lens, 2017) and for justice-involved women in particular (for exception, see Roddy et al., 2021). Using a sample of women leaving substance use treatment after spending time in jail, this article makes practical contributions to the current research on spatial mismatch by examining this theory in an understudied population.

In addition to investigating spatial mismatch, this research also explores how justice-involved women navigate the spatial mismatch problem using their social networks. Economists have identified multiple mechanisms underlying the relationship between spatial mismatch and poorer economic outcomes, including long and costly commutes, high job search costs, and a lack of local information related to the labor markets of distant areas (Gobillon et al., 2007). Though these barriers can be mitigated through accessing social capital—or the resources embedded in an individual's social relationships (Bourdieu, 1986)—spatial mismatch has also been shown to affect the quality of resources in an individual's network, which then relates to employment outcomes (Bayer et al., 2008). Consequently, minority women who experience spatial mismatch may be exceptionally disadvantaged, both by their experiences of spatial mismatch and social capital deficits. The purpose of this research is to explore the intersections of spatial mismatch, social capital, and employment, and how these interactions vary based on

racial identity in a sample of justice-involved women. The results of this research hold distinct implications related to racial inequality and the economic marginalization of justice-involved women of color, which are discussed in the conclusion.

The study of justice-involved women of color necessitates the use of intersectional feminist methodologies. Thus, in addition to exploring these relationships quantitatively across racial groups, this research integrates qualitative data to further explicate the interconnections of spatial mismatch, social capital, and employment across women of different racial identities. Incorporating qualitative data improves the research in several ways that are consistent with intersectional feminist theory. First, a mixed-methods approach allows for the investigation of the mechanisms underlying spatial mismatch and social capital for women with justice involvement (i.e. *how* do women mobilize social capital to mitigate spatial mismatch across racial identity?). This improves the quality of policy recommendations for a population that is routinely underserved by social policy. Second, the use of qualitative data allows for a broader and more open-ended exploration of spatial mismatch and social capital. As such, this work investigates the ways in which traditional conceptions of social capital and spatial mismatch may not represent the lived experiences of women of color with justice involvement. Finally, asking women questions about their strategies to overcome barriers to employment highlights their agency and amplifies their voices. As noted by feminist theorists (Maher, 1995), some criminologists have depicted women in the justice system as lacking agency (e.g. because they have been led astray by partners or are victims who have used drugs or alcohol to cope with trauma). Feminist criminologists, alternatively, have recognized that women with justice system involvement assert themselves and act to circumvent the many barriers they encounter in pursuit of their goals (Bosworth, 1999; Morash, 2010; Roddy et al., 2020). Integrating qualitative data

underscores another important contribution of this research, which is the utilization of methods consistent with intersectional feminist criminological theory.

The objectives of this article are threefold: first, to investigate whether spatial mismatch and social capital relate to employment outcomes in a sample of justice-involved women; second, to explore the racialized differences in how social capital is mobilized to mitigate spatial mismatch in this population; and finally, to investigate these subjects in a way that provides greater insight into justice-involved women's experiences with intersecting race and gender systems (Burgess-Proctor, 2006; Daly, 1993; Daly & Stephens, 1995; Lynch, 1996; Weber & Parra-Medina, 2003).

Spatial mismatch

The theory of spatial mismatch originated with John Kain (1968), an economist who found that the disconnection between places of residence and places of employment was a key contributor to the high unemployment, low wages, and poverty in minority communities. This spatial mismatch was fostered by *de jure* housing segregation of Black, Hispanic, and Native American people until the Fair Housing Act of 1968, and by the *de facto* practices of money lending agencies that denied minority individuals access to credit sources. These inequities persist; considerable research shows that minority racial status is related to spatial mismatch between where people live and where employment opportunities are located (Andersson et al., 2017; Fernandez, 2008; Ihlanfeldt & Sjoquist, 1998; Kain, 1992; Mouw, 2000; Stoll, 2006; Weinberg, 2000), illustrating that spatial mismatch continues to impact the economic marginality of minority individuals in the United States. However, research regarding the extent to which justice-involved populations experience spatial mismatch is still limited.

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Three studies establish a connection between spatial mismatch and employment for individuals with a criminal history. The first found that the economic conditions of the census tracts where people supervised in the community lived were related to employment outcomes (Sugie & Lens, 2017). The second study revealed that, in a sample of prison reentrants across Ohio, a one-percentage point decrease in county unemployment rates improved the likelihood of returning citizen employment by five percentage points within six months of their return (Sabol, 2007). Finally, a third study investigated the relationships among spatial mismatch, transportation, and employment for women on probation and parole looking for work. This study found that racial and ethnic minority women were more likely to live in areas of lower job density, and this displacement was a significant predictor of employment outcomes (Roddy et al., 2021). Based on the findings of past research, it is expected that Black and multiracial women of color with justice involvement will have 1) fewer jobs available in their areas of residence and, 2) will have worse employment outcomes.

Geographic segregation and residential patterns for justice-involved women may also impact employment outcomes through a secondary effect: the location of potential network ties for referrals, job information, and resources to aid women during their job search (Bayer et al., 2008). Because individuals living in economically disadvantaged areas tend to have geographically constrained social ties (Campbell et al., 1986; Chaskin, 1997), area of residence has implications for their access to new information and resources networks. Specifically, women with smaller and denser networks may be less aware of employment opportunities or connected to potential employers (Ioannides & Datcher Loury, 2004), and these networks may be less resource rich (McDonald, 2011). It is expected that the inaccessibility of information and resources through women's social networks will be related to experiences of spatial mismatch.

That is, individuals with fewer jobs available in their area of residence will, in addition, have less social capital.

Social capital

Constrained social networks and low social capital are related to negative employment outcomes, a relationship that has been well-documented in the general population (see Mouw, 2003 for a review). Though there has been little research into how social capital relates to employment for justice-involved women, tangential lines of research suggest that social capital may be especially relevant to outcomes in this population. Employers often depend on employment references from trusted sources disproportionately for justice-involved applicants because of their criminal history (Visher & Kachnowski, 2007), making social capital in the form of references or job information critical. Justice-involved women are also likely to have transportation barriers (Northcutt Bohmert, 2016) and leverage the resources of friends and family to find rides to and from work (Goodson, 2018). Thus, individuals with access to greater resources related to transportation and ride sharing may be more successful in finding and keeping a job. Finally, research on socio-economically marginalized women has shown that low-income, single mothers have higher rates of employment instability as a result of limited social capital (Johnson et al., 2011), and low-income women without network support to assist with child care during work hours are more likely to be unemployed (Ciabattari, 2016; Parish et al., 1991). Because the majority of women returning from jail are low-income (Rose & LeBel, 2017) and are often primary caregivers for children under the age of 18 (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008), this research indicates the importance of conducting the current study of the association of social capital with justice-involved women's job search outcomes. Consequently, it is expected that unemployed women will live in areas of lower job density per capita and have lower levels of

social capital.

Though social capital is a critical component of the job search for justice-involved individuals, justice-involved women may have unique barriers to accessing that capital. Specifically, there may be differences in the way social capital is activated among White and minority women that are justice-involved. Research focused on low-income Black men and women looking for work confirms that social capital deficiencies are related to the mobilization of social capital (Smith, 2005). In other words, even when information related to a job applicant is available and contacts can influence hires, they often do not. Thus, in addition to exploring levels of job-relevant social capital, this research explores *if* and *how* women mobilized social capital to address the underlying spatial mismatch problem, and if there are differences across racial groups. In light of these findings, this research also discusses the implications these differences hold for racial inequality and identifies avenues for future research.

Purpose statement

This mixed methods study addresses the interconnections among race, spatial mismatch, social capital, and employment outcomes for a sample of justice-involved women leaving residential substance abuse treatment. A convergent mixed methods design was used, in which qualitative and quantitative data are collected in parallel, analyzed separately, and then merged in the presentation of results (Creswell, 2014). Measures of job density in women's area of residence, racial identity, and employment outcomes were collected and analyzed to test the theory of spatial mismatch. The theory of spatial mismatch predicts that: 1) Black and multiracial women of color will be less likely to be employed, 2) Black and multiracial women of color will live in areas of lower job density than White women, and 3) employed women, regardless of race, will live in areas of higher economic opportunity. Based on empirical research related to

social capital, this article also hypothesizes that 4) Black and multiracial women of color will have less social capital than White women, 5) employed women, regardless of race, will have higher levels of social capital, and 6) spatial mismatch affects access to social capital, such that job density in area of residence will be positively correlated with social capital. Qualitative analyses of data collected in one-on-one interviews will investigate how women who experience spatial mismatch utilize social capital in their job search, and how this mobilization of social capital varies by race. The reason for collecting both quantitative and qualitative data is to understand the mechanisms underlying the relationships between spatial mismatch, social capital, and employment, and to investigate these relationships in a way that is consistent with intersectional feminist methodologies.

Methods

Study sample and context

Two sites of residential substance abuse treatment programs, located in Warren and Detroit, Michigan, respectively, served as recruitment locations for the current sample. The two facilities varied greatly in the racial composition of the residents and the geographic locations to which women return. The facility located in Warren served White individuals predominantly. These women returned to Oakland County and Macomb County generally. The Detroit facility served predominantly Black and multiracial women who return to Wayne County. However, the two treatment centers were connected via a shared substance abuse recovery ideology and treatment protocol, so it is assumed there were minimal differences resulting from treatment effects. The average length of stay is 60–90 days at SHAR Warren, and 30-60 days at SHAR Detroit. Receipt of substance abuse treatment is treated as a "constant" for study participants.

Inclusion criteria for the study included having previously spent time in jail and being sentenced to treatment as a result of a court order. The focus is on drug-involved women because they account for the most common subgroup of women with justice-involvement (DeHart et al., 2014; Fazel et al., 2017).

The data for the study were drawn from two separate interviews. Interviews were conducted over phone or Zoom between December 2020 and January 2022. The first interview occurred one week after women left treatment, and participants were compensated with $15 using money order or through online payment services (e.g. Venmo, CashApp). This interview contained questions regarding women's demographic information, past justice involvement, and work histories. The second interview took place three months after women left substance use treatment, and women were compensated $25. This interview asked women questions about the composition of their social networks, employment outcomes, and their experiences finding and maintaining work. All interviews were conducted by the author.

A total of 93 women were recruited to participate in the research. Of the 93 women who were recruited, 11 women refused to participate, and five were deemed ineligible because they did not have a history of justice-involvement and were not court-ordered to treatment. Ten women were unable to be contacted between recruitment and the first interview. Sixty-seven women agreed to participate and completed the first interview. Four women were disabled and unable to work at the time of the second interview and were not included in the analysis. One woman passed away between the first and second interview, and her data were dropped from the analysis. Finally, six women were unable to be reached for the second interview. The final sample size used for this research was 56. Methods for participant retention were informed by

past work with justice-involved women on probation and parole (Northcutt Bohmert et al., 2019).

Study participants ranged from 21 to 64 years of age ($M = 40.38$; $SD = 11.69$) and were racially and ethnically diverse ($n = 32$, 57.14 % White; $n = 22$, 39.29% Black; $n = 1$, 1.79% multiracial Black and White, $n = 1$, 1.79% Native American (Ojibwe) and White). Thirty-seven of the participants had obtained full-time or part-time employment three months after leaving substance use treatment (66.07%); the remainder ($n = 19$; 33.93%) were unemployed.

Quantitative measures

The dependent variable of interest was constructed to reflect whether women were employed approximately three months after leaving substance use treatment after spending time in jail. At the second interview, women were asked whether they had legal full-time or part-time employment.[1] Women with full-time or part-time employment were coded as employed (1) and women who responded that they were unemployed but able to work were coded as unemployed (0).

The indicator of race and ethnicity was derived from responses to a series of questions asking about identification as each of the following: White or Caucasian; Black or African American; Asian; Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander; American Indian or Alaskan Native. Women were also asked about their ethnic identities as either Hispanic, Latina, or Chicana; or non-Hispanic, Latina, or Chicana.[2] Women who identified multiple racial categories were considered multiracial. Based on the responses, women were placed into two categories: Black and multiracial women (1), and women who identified as White or Caucasian (0).

To operationalize spatial mismatch, a variable was constructed to represent the number of job opportunities present within 2-mile buffers outside of an individual's census tract of

residence relative to the population size of each buffer. The buffer sizes used in this analysis were determined based on past research on spatial mismatch (Chamberlain et al., 2016; Stoll, 2006) and research on low-income, single parent commute distances in the United States. On average, low-income, single parents commute 8 miles to and from work, which is 6 miles shorter than the average distance for all working age adults (Blumenberg, 2004). Given that justice-involved women face a myriad of restrictions on their time that impact their ability to find work (Roddy et al., 2019) and experience exceptional transportation difficulties (Northcutt Bohmert, 2016), the expectation was that women on probation and parole may be further geographically restricted in their job search. Buffers were constructed using ArcMap (v. 10.7.1), and job opportunity measures were created by dividing the number of jobs by the total population in each buffer to create per-capita measures.

The measure of job-relevant social capital was constructed using an 8-item subset of the 26-item resource generator presented by Foster and Maas (2016). Resource generators tools are used to measure an individual's social capital by providing a list of resources (e.g., a small sum of money) and asking the respondent if each network member could provide that resource. The services and resources included: **(a)** recommend job openings or job search websites, **(b)** provide personal references to specific jobs **(c)** provide help with applications, and **(d)** provide information related to employment, **(e)** loan them $200, **(f)** provide consistent transportation or childcare, **(g)** help with emergency transportation or child care, and **(h)** provide companionship during times of stress (for similar uses of a subset of these questions, see Ciabattari, 2016; Gayen, Raeside, & McQuaid, 2019; Johnson et al., 2011). Women were asked to rate their agreement on a one to five scale (1 being completely disagree, 5 being completely agree) with the statement, "[Network member] could provide [resource or service]." Women's social capital

was scored based on the number of network members they "completely agreed" or "somewhat agreed" could provide the resources listed, and these scores were normalized to a z-score.

Qualitative measures

In the second interview, women were asked open-ended questions about their job search processes and employment outcomes. Specifically, they were asked about their process for looking for employment, results of efforts to find work, how they found their current job, and whether and how family or friends helped in finding their current jobs. Follow up questions probed women's responses, especially as they related to the role of family members in their job search and employment opportunities in their neighborhood.

Analytic strategy

A convergent mixed-methods approach was utilized (Creswell, 2014). Quantitative analyses included chi-square tests to investigate differences in employment outcomes across Black/multiracial women and White women to investigate spatial mismatch. Paired t-tests examined between group differences of job density and social capital across employed and unemployed populations within each racial group. Finally, Pearson's correlation coefficient was calculated to determine the relationship between job density and job-relevant social capital across White and Black/multiracial women to determine whether the interaction of these variables varied by race.

For qualitative analysis, applied thematic analysis (Guest et al., 2011) was used to code for the presence of several themes related to the mechanisms underlying spatial mismatch. Deductive coding occurred within a subset of the sample based on quantitative characteristics— namely, individuals with job density measures in the bottom half of the distribution to indicate

experiences of spatial mismatch (n=28). A subset of individuals rather than the full sample was used for two reasons. First, the purpose of the qualitative research was to explore women's strategies to mitigate spatial mismatch; as such, the research was primarily concerned with the experiences of women who were experiencing spatial mismatch to the greatest extent. Second, focusing on this subset allowed for the paper to center on the lived experiences and voices of the most underserved and to highlight their agency. In keeping with the objectives of the work, the subsample was analyzed to identify salient themes related to social capital.

Responses to interview questions were coded first to reflect whether women received help from friends or family in finding employment. If women did receive assistance from friends and family in their efforts to find a job, responses were subcoded to reflect whether women utilized their social capital to address spatial mismatch through assistance with <u>transportation</u> provided by social network members; <u>financial support</u> provided by social network members; <u>childcare</u> provided by social network members; and <u>information/references</u> related to employment provided by social network members, including direct job references. To establish reliability, a subset (*n*=10) of interview transcripts were independently coded by two researchers. Excellent reliability was established (κ =.80; Cohen, 1960). Frequencies of codes and subcodes were compared across individuals of different racial identities.

Results

Quantitative results

The first goal of this research was to assess the state of spatial mismatch, social capital, and employment across groups differentiated by their racial identity. Table 1 presents frequencies of employment outcomes across racial groups, and differences in spatial mismatch

(by way of job density in an individual's residential area) and social capital accumulation across

racial group and employment status.

[Table 1 here]

The first notable result of the quantitative analyses relates to differences in employment

outcomes by race. Though approximately 70% of White women in the sample were employed

(n=25), only 50% of Black and multiracial women found employment (n=12). A chi-square test

of independence revealed a statistically significant relationship between race and employment

($\chi^2(1, N = 54) = 4.83$, $p < .01$), in that Black and multiracial women were less likely to be

employed three months after leaving treatment.

The data were also analyzed to assess differences in the job density in women's area of

residence across racial groups. Black and multiracial women reported living in areas with lower

job density relative to White women, and t-tests revealed that these differences were statistically

significant differences ($t(54) = 1.98$, $p < .05$). Within racial groups, differences in residential job

density were assessed between employed and unemployed women. Results of within group t-

tests revealed no statistically significant difference in job density in area of residence for

unemployed and employed White women ($t(30) = -0.81$, $p = 0.42$). However, for Black and

multiracial women, employed women reported living in areas with higher job density, and this

difference was statistically significant ($t(22) = -4.73$, $p < .01$). In sum, unemployed Black and

multiracial women live in areas with lower job densities than employed Black and multiracial

women, which suggests that the spatial mismatch problem is especially salient in this population.

Job-relevant social capital, as well as its relationship to employment outcomes, was

assessed across White and Black and multiracial women. T-tests revealed statistically significant

differences between racial groups related to social capital. Specifically, White women had higher

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levels of job-relevant social capital than Black and multiracial women, and this difference was statistically significant ($t(54) = 2.22$, $p < .05$). Unexpectedly, employed and unemployed White women possessed similar degrees of job-relevant social capital. Minority women, conversely, varied in levels of job-relevant social capital based on employment status; employed Black and multiracial women possessed higher levels of job-relevant social capital ($t(22) = -4.14$, $p < .01$).

Finally, correlations between job density and job-relevant social capital revealed potential differences in relationships between the two constructs across racial groups. For White women, job density was inversely related to job-relevant social capital ($r(30) = -0.29$, $p = .10$), meaning that women living in areas of lower job density have higher levels of social capital, which could potentially improve their employment outcomes. However, for minority women, job density and social capital were positively related ($r(22) = 0.32$, $p = .12$), indicating that women living in areas with low levels of job density also had lower levels of job-relevant social capital. Though only one correlation coefficient reached the threshold for statistical significance at the .10 level, the differences in direction reveal tentative evidence of unique barriers for minority justice-involved women looking for work. Qualitative analyses further probe the relationship between social capital and spatial mismatch.

Qualitative results

A total of 28 interviews were coded to investigate if and how minority and White women mobilize social capital to mitigate the spatial mismatch problem to search for employment. Table 2 presents the distribution for the racial composition and employment status of women living in the lowest job density areas. It also delineates common themes relevant to the mechanisms underlying spatial mismatch across racial groups to identify differences in the ways White and minority women utilize social capital.

[Table 2 here]

Of the women who lived in areas in the bottom 50% of the job density distribution of the sample, minority women were disproportionately represented. Though minority women comprised around 43% (n=24) of the sample, they represented over 57% (n=16) of the individuals experiencing spatial mismatch. Of the minority women that experienced spatial mismatch, most (n=12; 75%) also had low levels of employment-relevant social capital. Finally, minority women in lower job density areas were highly unlikely to find employment; only four (25%) of the women found full or part-time work three months after leaving residential treatment. These results signal potential social capital and opportunity deficits that minority women experience. The following qualitative analyses delineate the ways minority women utilize social capital to find work.

For women who identified as Black or multiracial and who lived in low-density job areas, over half (n=10) reported receiving help from their family or friends in finding work. The most common subtheme was related to receiving information or references to employment opportunities through family members, friends, or recovery coaches (n=7). For three of these women, this involved receiving lists of felon-friendly employment opportunities from probation and parole officers. Two women, however, received direct references to jobs through network members, and both women found employment through these connections. Lisa[3] found a job as a server at a restaurant where her cousin also worked, and Bianca found a job at an automotive plant through her recovery coach. Bianca recalled, "[My recovery coach] gave me a link with the job ad. She had gotten it from a relative of hers who worked at the plant…She also helped me clean up my resumé so that it just looked a little bit more professional and up to date."

Women also reported receiving transportation (n=3) and financial assistance (n=1), though this was mentioned less often than receiving direct assistance. Bianca, who was the only minority woman who received multiple types of support, was able to use her mom's car to drive to and from her automotive job. She also said she received money from her mom to help pay for gas, making her the sole recipient of financial assistance in the subsample. She insisted that her social support was an important strategy in looking for employment.

> I think reaching out and using your resources as a main thing. Like I know a lot of people in our situation don't want to ask for help or [are] a little timid to, or don't use their recovery code. You don't use your sponsor, don't use, you know, those type of resources. But I used all of mine, you know, and it worked out in my benefit.

Bianca was willing to use the resources available to her through friends and family, and she believed that other women were less willing to ask for help.

> The other two women who received help in the form of transportation received rides from friends. Shayla received rides to and from work occasionally, but most often had to use ride share services to get to work on time due to issues with bus routes. Donna, who was unable to find employment, asked family and friends for rides as she searched for employment. She lamented that not having access to personal transportation directly interfered with her ability to find a job,

> Not having my own transportation has always been a big issue because sometimes we'll just straight up [be] asked, 'Do you have your own car?' And I don't. And I feel like sometimes they kind of are like, 'Oh, well, are you going to be reliable then?' And you kind of have to sell yourself on that.

Despite having family support in the area of transportation, Donna felt that employers would often discriminate against her based on her lack of access to a personal vehicle. This is especially problematic considering the low rates of vehicle ownership and high rates of license suspension among women with a history of drug- or alcohol-related offenses (Northcutt Bohmert, 2016).

Six women described receiving no help from family and friends in trying to find work, and only one of these women reported that she was able to find employment. Demi found a job using a temporary employment agency she was connected with through Michigan Works, a state agency devoted to employment assistance. However, she was laid off a month after she began her job and has been looking ever since. When asked about strategies to find work outside of asking family and friends for assistance, many women emphasized that their strategies were hindered by their lack of access to resources. Diamond explained that she looked for work by walking to meet potential employers and applying in person, but believed her felony record held her back from being considered from employment. She said, "I wanted Family Dollar, but I never got a call…I wasn't able to find [a job] after my first felony around my neighborhood. I still can't find one." Maybelle, who also did not activate any friend or family support while looking for work, used Indeed.com to search for jobs in her area. After applying, she said that a lack of transport prevented her from applying in person and providing context for her justice involvement. She explained,

> Normally I go in [to potential employers] and at least explain like, 'Hey, listen, I'm on probation. Yes, I do have felonies.' So they don't have to just look at it and not know who the person is coming in. They look at [the applications] and see felonies think that there's still an active addiction, and in person they will see they don't look strung out…

Maybelle's insights reveal the additional hoops that justice- and substance-involved women must navigate to find and maintain work.

In light of a lack of resources and experiences of rejection, women who did not receive family and friend support emphasized the importance of resiliency. Juliette believed that her efforts would result in employment if she continued to work hard. She looked for available positions primarily through job search websites. "The only way you can't find a job is really not trying," she explained. She also related her effort to find work to her effort in recovery. When asked about her strategy to find work, she replied, "Then the strategy I use, mainly just get up and stay focused and not use [drugs], you know, and to be online focused on stuff." Maybelle mirrored this sentiment when asked about her strategies to find work. She responded, "I just kind of worked my program. Yeah. And stayed consistent." Many women in the sample viewed staying clean as an important element of finding and maintaining work.

Of the White women living in low job density areas, nine (75%) reported receiving help from family and friends in finding a job. The most common form of assistance came through information or references for employment opportunities (n=5), closely followed by help with transportation (n=4) and financial support (n=4). Specifically, women who noted having a direct connection to a potential employer through their social networks, along with access to additional forms of support through transportation and financial assistance, were able to find employment. For example, Shania, who transitioned to a three-quarter house after treatment, reported working at a factory alongside her roommate. "One of my roommates here works there and knew that I needed work and was like, I'll bring you home an application." Shania also reported receiving help with transportation from her roommate. She explained, "We share rides, which is helpful because it is 30 minutes each way [to work]." Shania's ability to mobilize multiple types of

social capital improved her ability to find and maintain a job despite experiencing spatial mismatch.

Samantha was similarly able to leverage multiple sources of resources and support. When asked about her strategies to find work, she mentioned the difficulties associated with finding a job in her area. She stated, "[I]t depends on what area you're in as well because, you know, I was in Detroit for a while and there's not a whole lot of great jobs up there… But I ended up getting a good job through my sister-in-law." Samantha also noted that she was able to buy a vehicle from her boyfriend's family, which aided her in finding work. She said, "[M]y boyfriend's family has been very supportive, so I ended up buying a car from them for my first car after treatment. But before that, I was taking the bus and everything else… [Public transportation] gets tricky after a while if it's unreliable." When asked what made her successful in her job search, Janet was quick to recognize how the resources available to her through family in friends translated to her employment. "[J]ust getting help from other people, I guess, is what really helps me," she explained. Her ability to rely on family for multiple types of resources improved her ability to find and maintain a job in spite of the spatial mismatch she experienced.

Another woman, Shauna, was directly employed by her family. She acted as a caretaker for her mother, who was disabled and unable to care for herself independently. Shauna described her experience working for her family,

> I was like a live in caretaker at the house that I actually like grew up in. So the only downside to that is my family was my employer. And so there was a loss of trust because of my past, and that's… one of the bigger things that ended there…I was still kind of being treated as less than.

Despite the difficulties Shauna faced working as an employee to her family, she also explained that her family lent her money during times where her caretaker stipend was insufficient, and she was able to drive her family's vehicle to get to and from her mother's doctor's appointments, to run errands, and to use for leisure on the weekends.

Three White women (25%) reported that they did not ask friends and family for help finding employment. One woman, Dawn, was able to find employment in the automotive industry in Detroit using online job search methods. The other two women who did not ask friends or family for help did not find employment. Ashley explained that she was not able to work the types of factory jobs her friends were engaging in as a result of her disability. She said,

> I just didn't know anybody, like, the types of jobs that my friends were working or in like factories and shit and—so sorry that I swore—anyway, I just didn't really feel like those types of jobs, I could do because you know I got in that accident… I don't see anybody work in the types of jobs that I want to work.

Despite having social connections to aid in her job search, the jobs of Ashley's network members were not feasible for her to work. Natalie also expressed dissatisfaction with the jobs available to her through her networks because working in these environments could potentially inhibit her recovery,

> [Finding a job] just didn't feel like you know that was my number one priority. My number one priority this whole time has been, you know, trying to get back to trying to get back to a place where I feel confident in myself, and I feel confident in my recovery. And just I know a few people who they go to work they see the same people that they used to, and they get back with the same people that they used to, and that has meant that you know they're less strong in their recovery.

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Natalie's assessment of working with friends and family illuminated an important truth related to utilizing social capital to find a job: for women with individuals with network members in active addiction, activating social capital can result in damaging effects. In these instances, women are forced to choose between financial stability and recovery.

Discussion

Guided by sociological and economic theory, as well as intersectional feminist methodologies, this research investigated how justice-involved women experience and mitigate spatial mismatch through their social networks, and how these experiences and mitigation strategies vary across race. This article contributes to the broader literature by applying well-studied theories to understudied populations. Quantitative data confirmed the heightened experiences of spatial mismatch and resulting joblessness for justice-involved women of color, and suggested a relationship between spatial mismatch and job-relevant social capital in this population. Further, using qualitative data, this research illuminated how spatial mismatch and social capital deficits differentially affect Black and multiracial women of color in comparison to White women. The findings of this research provide evidence that minority women face unique barriers to finding and maintaining work after justice-involvement, and that these barriers stem from the spatial mismatch they experience.

The first objective of this research was to examine the spatial mismatch hypothesis as it relates to employment outcomes for justice-involved women. Based on the findings of past research (Rankin & Quane, 2000; Tigges et al., 1998; Wacquant & Wilson, 1989), Black and multiracial justice-involved women were expected to live in areas of lower job density, and this was reflected in the quantitative data. Consistent with the spatial mismatch hypothesis, employed Black and multiracial women lived in areas with higher job densities relative to unemployed

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Black and multiracial women. Notably, this was not the case for White women; employed and

unemployed White women did not live in areas with significantly different job densities. Taken

in tandem, these results complicate the narrative provided by the spatial mismatch hypothesis.

Could the lens of social capital provide additional context in explaining differences in

experiences of spatial mismatch and employment across racial identity?

Indeed, the integration of social capital theory elucidated how the spatial mismatch

problem differentially affects minority women. Initial quantitative analyses reveal that for Black

and multiracial women, social capital and job density in area of residence were positively

correlated (though the correlation coefficient did not reach statistical significance), indicating

that spatial mismatch may have consequences on social networks. However, for White women,

job density and social capital were inversely related, indicating that White women in

economically compromised areas may have greater access to job-related resources in their social

networks. This would allow White women to better navigate the challenges associated with

spatial mismatch using the resources embedded in their social networks. Additional quantitative

research in this area with larger sample sizes should be conducted to corroborate these findings.

Further, past work has investigated how social networks impact recovery during the transition in

and out of treatment contexts (Draus et al., 2015), which also has the potential to impact

employment. Future research should also incorporate these experiences as well.

Although the quantitative results were limited by sample size, differences in social capital

mobilization between White and Black and multiracial women experiencing spatial mismatch

were substantiated by the qualitative analyses, indicating convergence between the qualitative

and quantitative data. Based on the results of the applied thematic analyses, Black and

multiracial women were over-represented in the subset of women experiencing spatial mismatch,

were less likely to receive assistance friends and family in their efforts to find a job, and were also less likely to be employed. When Black and multiracial women did receive help from individuals in their social networks, they were less likely to receive a direct job reference than White women. This finding is corroborated by past research, which speaks specifically to the ways in which mobilized job-relevant social capital operates in Black communities. Specifically, reputation and status are important indicators of a network member's willingness to provide a direct job reference to an employer due to the effect this may have on their own careers (Smith, 2005). Reputation may be of heightened concern in this context given women's substance use histories and justice involvement. In addition to fewer direct employment references, Black and multiracial women also reported fewer instances of transportation and financial assistance than their White counterparts, as well as fewer instances of receiving multiple forms of support. Paired with the quantitative findings, this may indicate a lack of resources available to Black and multiracial women in their social networks as well as difficulty mobilizing these resources, a finding which has been documented in past research (Rankin & Quane, 2000; Tigges et al., 1998; Wacquant & Wilson, 1989).

As noted, White women experiencing spatial mismatch were more likely to mobilize resources from friends and family in their job searches than Black and multiracial women. They were additionally more likely to receive multiple forms of support, and this gave White women a distinct advantage in their ability to find and maintain work. However, it is clear that spatial mismatch still interfered with justice-involved women's employment. Even if they did receive assistance, women described the long commutes, poor working conditions, and the menial tasks associated with the jobs available to them. While social capital can mitigate the effects of spatial mismatch, the added layer of employment scarcity forced women to make constrained choices

about their jobs, which may have impacted their other long-term goals of recovery and desistence.

Policy implications

Based on the findings of this research, there are several relevant policy implications that can improve employment outcomes for justice-involved populations seeking employment. For example, providing Section 8 vouchers that cover costs of living in areas with increased job availability could help to address the spatial mismatch problem. Further, programs that help in overcoming housing discrimination could help women of color move to areas with available jobs, and, consequently, improve their employment prospects. Based on the positive correlation between job opportunity and social capital for Black and multiracial women, interventions that address spatial mismatch may also have positive spillovers related to resource access in women's social networks, further improving employment outcomes.

The findings of this research also demonstrate the dangers of reductions in social safety net programs. Empirical evidence shows a retraction in federal and state support for unemployed and low-income individuals, especially for people convicted of drug and other offenses (Allard, 2009). These changes pose especially problematic consequences for justice-involved minority women looking for work, who are less likely to receive employment-related resources from individuals in their social networks. Improving the accessibility of social support programs for justice-involved populations can consequently improve employment outcomes and reduce racial and economic inequality among justice-involved women.

Limitations and future research

Despite the novel findings of this research, there were several limitations that must be considered. First, the quantitative analyses were hampered significantly by sample size. Though the qualitative data provided additional richness and context, future research would benefit from analyses with sufficient statistical power. Increased sample size would allow for a full mediation analysis of the indirect effect of job density on the relationship between race and employment, which would effectively test the spatial mismatch hypothesis in full. It would also allow a comprehensive control for various confounding variables (e.g. education, employment history). In addition, the geographic context of the study may limit the generalizability of the findings. Because areas in Metro Detroit, where most of the women in the sample lived, is uniquely marginalized and segregated (Draus et al., 2013) and has public transportation limitations (Grengs, 2010), it may be that spatial mismatch is a greater determinant of obtaining employment in this area than in the U.S. population generally. Future research should consider how justice-involved women in other areas in the U.S. experience and mitigate spatial mismatch and mobilize social capital.

Finally, this research occurred during throughout multiple stages the COVID-19 pandemic. Women's ability to find and maintain work was undoubtedly affected by the changing circumstances of the virus, mandates, advice, and information provided by government and public health officials, and individual-level responses to the pandemic. With this limitation in mind, this article represents an important contribution to the literature *because* it explores the sources of financial and economic marginalization during a time in which women of color have been exceptionally marginalized in other dimensions (see Laurencin & McClinton, 2020 for a review).

Conclusion

The findings of this work have strong implications for racial inequality for Black and multiracial women of color leaving carceral settings. For justice-involved women who do not experience spatial mismatch, the process of finding employment is still incredibly challenging; justice involved women experience employer discrimination and human capital deficits that affect their likelihood of finding work. However, for women who are justice-involved *and* experience spatial mismatch, the difficulties associated with finding work are exacerbated. Further, for Black and multiracial women in this sample, spatial mismatch was paired with a lack of access to resources that may improve employment outcomes. These women experienced compounded disadvantage that affected their efforts to find work, contributing to the cyclical nature of economic inequality. It is critical to address the underlying inequities caused by decades of racist policy with an eye towards intersectionality.

Notes

1. Women were asked about their participation in formal and informal types of work, including freelance work, self-employment, and working for friends or family members in an unofficial capacity.
2. No women identified as Hispanic, Latina, or Chicana in this sample.
3. Pseudonyms were used in place of first names to protect participant anonymity.

CHAPTER 3: BARRIERS AND STRATEGIES TO FINDING EMPLOYMENT FOR SUBSTANCE-INVOLVED WOMEN LEAVING JAIL

Abstract

Women transitioning from jail contexts have cited employment as their greatest priority, though this population often has difficulty finding and maintaining employment. Using an applied thematic analysis and a sample of 60 women leaving substance use treatment after spending time in jail, this research identifies common barriers to employment, as well as strategies used to overcome these barriers. The most common barrier faced by women was transportation, followed by justice involvement and physical and mental disabilities. Less often, women mentioned caretaking and human capital deficits as barriers. Though transportation barriers were most often mentioned, women were also most likely to mention strategies to address them. Women were least likely to mention strategies to navigate caretaking responsibilities and mental/physical disabilities. The results of this research promote gender-responsive approaches to employment-related programming for women leaving jail contexts.

Introduction

Women make up a growing percentage of individuals involved with the criminal justice system (Carson, 2020). The growth of women's incarceration has disproportionately been in local jails (Kajstura, 2019), which notoriously lack transitional services relative to prisons (Yasunaga, 2001). Additionally, there is limited study concerning the needs of women reentering from jail and how best to benefit this growing population (Rodda & Beichner, 2017). Though there are many pressing concerns related to reentry, women transitioning from jail contexts have cited employment as their greatest priority (Ramaswamy et al., 2015), and this population often has exceptional difficulty finding and maintaining employment (Tonkin et al., 2004; van Olphen et al., 2009). The proposed research is designed to explore the relevant barriers to and facilitators of employment for substance-involved women after spending time in jail.

In addition to identifying common barriers to employment, this article also investigates justice-involved women's strategies to overcome these barriers to find work. A prominent critique from feminist scholars in criminology is that justice-involved women are consistently framed as victims rather than individuals with multiple pathways into and out of the justice system (Daly & Maher, 1998; Franz et al., 1994; K. J. Maher, 1997). Using a framework rooted in feminist criminological theory to understand women's modes of resilience, coping, and agency in the process of finding work, this article examines not only the barriers women experience seeking employment, but also the strategies they use to transcend these difficulties.

Using interviews with 60 women leaving jail settings after spending time in substance use treatment, this work investigates women's experiences finding employment using qualitative methods. The objectives are: 1) to document the barriers and facilitators of employment for women leaving jail; and 2) to emphasize women's agency and resilience in the face of these

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obstacles. This paper contributes specifically to research related to the needs of women leaving

jail contexts, and more broadly to feminist literature highlighting justice-involved women's

ability to navigate difficult circumstances. Results are used to provide concrete policy

recommendations related to improving job search outcomes for women with justice involvement.

Employment and justice-involved women

Finding and maintaining work has been identified as an instrumental factor in promoting

successful reentry outcomes for previously incarcerated and reentering populations (Freeman,

1991; Lageson & Uggen, 2013; Petersilia, 2004; Uggen, 2000; Visher et al., 2005). However,

justice-involved women have reported disproportionately worse employment outcomes relative

to their male counterparts (Mallik-Kane & Visher, 2008), and are more affected by their criminal

records compared to men when it comes to labor market success (Sciulli, 2013). These factors

contribute to gender-based inequality across individuals with justice-involvement.

Women leaving jail contexts face gender-specific disadvantages that may contribute to

discrepancies in employment outcomes. More than their male counterparts, women in the

criminal justice system have high rates of mental illness, including substance dependence

(Sirdifield, 2012; Staton-Tindall et al., 2007). Individuals with mental illness are less likely to

find and keep employment, either as a result of physical symptoms or discrimination faced in the

labor market (Cregan et al., 2017; Kelloway, 2017). Compared to men, women in the criminal

justice system are also more likely to act as primary or sole caregivers to children and family

members in need of homecare (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008). Assisting relatives and providing and

procuring childcare are time-consuming tasks that can limit the time and energy available to find

and keep a job (Berman, 2005; Flavin, 2004). Finally, compared to similarly situated men,

women on supervision have more human capital deficits (i.e., defined by Boardman & Field,

2002 as lack of skills or knowledge with economic value). As a result, women lack resume competitiveness in the labor market, and often must participate in additional educational or vocational programs to find stable employment (Bergseth et al., 2011; Salisbury & Van Voorhis, 2009).

Though these barriers may affect women's ability to find and maintain work, there has been little research documenting the lived experiences of women leaving jail in this area; specifically, there are very few qualitative studies related to the barriers and facilitators of employment for justice-involved women. The one study that investigated a related subject matter provides important context. In a mixed-methods analysis, Morris and colleagues (2008) determined the relevant barriers to employment for formerly incarcerated women, including their criminal record, a lack of sufficient job training, histories of abuse, age, and work experience. Though this research documents the prevalence of these barriers, there has been little research documenting *how* women make strides to overcome them. To fill this gap, the present study documents the strategies women use to navigate the barriers they experience looking for work by highlighting women's resiliency and agency during their job searches.

Feminist frameworks and agency

Feminist criminologists have emphasized the assessment of common needs of justice-involved women when deciding on appropriate interventions, and researchers working from a variety of theoretical perspectives have supported this idea (Brennan et al., 2012; Sirdifield, 2012; Staton-Tindall et al., 2007). In addition, past criminological research has been acknowledged by feminist theorists as pathologizing the role of gender in offending patterns and pathways into and out of crime (Quadrelli, 2003). For example, feminist theorists critique the attribution of women's substance use trajectories to their partners' substance use habits or

experiences of victimization (Maher, 1995). In recent years, research has evolved to acknowledge the confluence of both structural disadvantage and agency in the outcomes of justice-involved women. This framework has been especially prevalent in explorations of desistence from crime (see Giordano et al., 2002). However, there is little literature acknowledging the role of both structural barriers and agency in the outcomes of justice-involved women searching for work.

Of note, only one study examines the strategies of previously incarcerated women to manage barriers to labor market participation using qualitative methods (Umeh, 2020). Using an intersectional feminist theoretical approach and interviews with women with jail and prison involvement, Umeh (2020) investigated women's strategic engagement in the labor market and how race may act as a differentiating mechanism for formerly incarcerated women's labor experiences and outcomes. This research found that women used specific strategies with potential employers to achieve employment, including the identification of employers with low barriers to entry, activation of social networks, and disclosure of criminal records and preemptive stigma management (Umeh, 2020).

A significant aspect of feminist theory and practice is to reflect and record women's experiences in a way that highlights agency and empowerment (Hester et al., 1996), and to acknowledge the unique experiences of women in the justice system. Following this approach, a feminist method was employed to illustrate women's experiences and empower women's voices while acknowledging the structural difficulties endemic among women leaving jail.

Present Study

This article outlines the barriers and facilitators of employment for an underserved group—namely justice-involved women leaving jail contexts. The analysis utilizes a feminist

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criminological approach by highlighting the ways in which women exercise agency and resilience in their strategies to overcome barriers to finding work. For women who expressed that they experienced no barriers to employment, this article documents their facilitators of employment. The research questions are as follows:

Research Question 1: What barriers do women transitioning from jail contexts experience during their job searches?

Research Question 2: How do women navigate these barriers?

Research Question 3: For women who do not identify barriers in their job search, what are the relevant facilitators of finding employment?

Methods

Setting and data collection

The sample for this work was recruited from residents of two sites of residential substance abuse treatment programs, located in Warren and Detroit, Michigan, respectively. All women in the study had previously spent time in jail and arrived at treatment as a result of court orders. Substance-involved women are the most common subgroup of women with justice-involvement (Sciulli, 2013) and, as such, were the focus of this work. The population at both sites ranges in age from 19 to 60, and most of the residents at this facility have transitioned from the county jails. About half of the residents at any one time meet the criteria for habitual offenders. The average length of stay is 60–90 days at SHAR Warren, and 30-60 days at SHAR Detroit. Receipt of substance abuse treatment is treated as a "constant" for study participants.

Data were collected through virtual interviews. Interviews were conducted with women leaving residential substance use treatment after spending time in jail between December 2020 and January 2022 via Zoom or phone call. Participants were compensated with $15 using money

order or through online payment services (e.g. Venmo, CashApp) for the first interview which took place one week after women left substance use treatment. The second interview took place three months after leaving substance use treatment, and women were compensated $25. Interviews were recorded and then transcribed to facilitate analysis. All interviews were conducted by the author.

Study sample

A total of 93 women were recruited to participate in the research. Of the 93 women who were recruited, 11 women refused to participate, and five were deemed ineligible because they did not have a history of justice-involvement and were not court-ordered to treatment. Ten women were unable to be contacted between recruitment and the first interview. Sixty-seven women agreed to participate and completed the first interview. One woman passed away between the first and second interview, and her data were dropped from the analysis. Six women were unable to be reached for the second interview. The final sample size used for this research was 60. Methods for participant retention were informed by past work with justice-involved women on probation and parole (Northcutt Bohmert et al., 2019).

Study participants ranged from 21 to 64 years of age ($M = 39.50$; $SD = 11.17$) and were racially and ethnically diverse ($n = 34$, 56.67% White; $n = 24$, 40% Black; $n = 2$, 3.33% multiracial women of color). Almost half (n=25; 41.67%) of the women in the sample were primary caregivers to children under the age of 18, and the average woman in the sample had a level of education equivalent to a high school diploma or GED. Thirty-seven of the participants had obtained full-time or part-time employment three months after leaving substance use treatment (61.67%); the remainder ($n = 23$; 38.33%) were unemployed.

Procedure

In the first interview, women were asked questions about demographic information, past justice involvement, and work histories. In the second interview, women were asked open-ended questions about their job search processes and employment outcomes since leaving jail. Specifically, women were asked if they encountered any barriers or difficulties in searching for employment. If women responded in the affirmative, they were asked what types of barriers they experienced and what strategies they used to address these barriers. If they did not experience any, women were asked what kept them from experiencing barriers to finding work or what made finding work easier for them.

Coding

To analyze the qualitative data, this research utilized an exploratory approach within an applied thematic analysis framework to code responses in multiple steps. In an exploratory analysis, the content of the participant's statements drives the development of codes and the identification of themes (Guest et al., 2011). Thus, themes were derived inductively after iterative readings of the transcribed interviews. Three codebooks were constructed to define the presence of themes related to: 1) the types of barriers women experienced, 2) the strategies women used to address these barriers, and 3) facilitators of employment for women who experienced no barriers to employment. Once codebooks were constructed, the data were systematically coded in steps to improve accuracy (Guest et al., 2011).

Initially, responses to interview questions were coded to reflect whether women identified barriers to employment. If women experienced employment-related barriers, responses were subcoded to reflect the type of barrier she experienced. After the types of barriers were coded, women's responses were coded based on whether women had or had not developed a

strategy to overcome the presented barrier. If they had, women's responses were subcoded based on her strategy to address the barrier. Passages were inductively coded to determine the presence of themes relevant to women's pathways to crime and structural barriers common to justice-involved women. For women who did not experience barriers to employment, facilitators of employment were deductively coded based on prior literature. To establish reliability, a subset (*n*=12) of interview transcripts were independently coded by two researchers. Excellent reliability was established (κ =.83; Cohen, 1960).

Results

[Table 3 here]

Barriers to employment

To address the first research question, interviews were coded based on the presence of gender-specific barriers to employment for justice-involved women. Table 3 displays the frequency of each barrier, as well as textual examples. Of the 60 women in the sample, 42 (70.00%) identified one or more barrier related to finding employment. The most prevalent barrier women experienced was transportation; almost half (n=27; 45.00%) of the women in the sample expressed difficulty finding the transportation necessary to navigate themselves to job interviews, and, once employed, to and from work. In some cases, women had suspended licenses as a result of their offenses, or their licenses had expired after time in jail and they lacked the funds to reinstate them. Other women had valid licenses, but their personal vehicles were unreliable. For example, Judy[1] explained, "[O]ne time I was late for an interview and it was legit an issue with my car, and, you know, it was a horrible first impression." Though some women were able to utilize public transit, they noted that it was difficult to commute to their

place of work by bus. Shayla, who used the bus regularly to attend Narcotics Anonymous (NA) meetings and probation meetings, stated, "The only problem is a lot of [jobs] are way out of the way and they're not on bus routes." Though she was able to find factory work on an assembly line in spite of this, she found herself walking multiple blocks at early hours in the morning when taking the bus. "I was kind of scared [walking alone], and I'm a very strong woman, so that was kind of upsetting to me…" For women using public transit, safety and accessibility of transportation were meaningful barriers in women's job searches. This finding is consistent with other research that has acknowledged transportation safety as a systematic disadvantage faced by justice-involved women (Northcutt Bohmert, 2016).

The second most frequent barrier to employment was women's justice involvement and employer discrimination (n=23; 38.83%). Women recalled the anxiety they experienced related to disclosing a criminal history to a potential employer. For example, Lydia spoke about finding employment online without knowing company policies on hiring individuals with past felony offenses. She said, "Looking for a job that I thought that I like and applying and not knowing if they were felon friendly... that was the most stressful for me." One woman, Mary, noted that her employers "already had a preconceived notion or judgment about what was possible for me to do and what wasn't possible for me to do" after disclosing her record. She stated that it limited her opportunities for advancement, which was frustrating because "…it had to do with my history, not my skills... and that isn't fair." Mary's impressions are consistent with a wealth of research that confirms that employers hold strong preferences for applications who do not have a criminal history (Agan & Starr, 2018; Pager, 2003; Pager et al., 2009; Smith, 2018; Western et al., 2001).

The third most common barrier was mental or physical disability (n=18; 30.00%). Mental disabilities included substance use disorder, depression, and PTSD from past experiences both in

and out of carceral settings. Many women mentioned prioritizing their recovery in the context of trying to find work. For example, Lisa expressed that she chose to focus on her recovery in leiu of finding work. She said, "My recovery came first this time. It [didn't used to] so much. It was always about a dollar, but I had to- I had to get grounded." In addition, some women had physical disabilities that limited their employment opportunities. Ashley noted that injuries from a car accident limited the type of work she could engage in. Though many of her friends engaged in factory work and could provide her references, she knew she was limited by her disability. She said, "I just didn't really feel like those types of jobs [my friends worked], I could do, because you know I got that accident, and so, since then, like I just know that I would have been more successful [in secretarial jobs]…" However, Ashley also noted that she lacked sufficient experience to be considered for these positions, which was another relevant barrier many women sought to overcome.

Some women noted their roles as caretakers inhibited their ability to find work (n=11; 18.33%). This encompassed multiple responsibilities, including childcare, eldercare, and caring for sick and disabled family members. For example, Shauna was responsible for the caretaking of her father, which interrupted her ability to search for other work. She said, "My father is older and I was worried about, you know, leaving and going somewhere and coming back…being gone for too long." Sheila was responsible for her children, which impacted her ability to keep her job. "With my work schedule and my kids' schedule, it's been a little hard for me to be able to focus on them… I am pulled a thousand different directions." Sheila's sentiments mirror the complexities of reentry and employment for women, as they are often asked to balance multiple needs that are sometimes in conflict (Roddy et al., 2019). Specifically, conflicts between

women's dual roles as caretaker and breadwinner were difficult to resolve, especially in tandem with their commitments to recovery.

Finally, women mentioned struggling with human capital deficits (n=9; 15.00%), specifically related to work experience, educational attainment, and knowledge related to the application and hiring process. Some women did not have high school degrees, which limited their employment options. Rachel, who was looking for a more stable job than her current position as a server, explained, "I went up to 11th grade, but while I was in high school, I did dual enrollment, so I took like a college class, but that didn't help me get a [better] job…They want a high school diploma or a GED." Other women had higher levels of academic attainment, yet were unable to pursue relevant to their training because of their record. Bea reflected on how her felonies affected her ability to utilize her credentials in her job search:

> I'm a high school graduate, and through a skill center in high school I got my CNA [Certified Nurse's Assistant license]. Which, I did that for three years, but, uh, ultimately ended up getting in trouble and they didn't allow me to do that anymore… [My felonies] made all of my past experience very unhelpful.

Thus, though some women lacked sufficient human capital to find work, many women also had skill mismatches caused by industry restrictions. In addition to deficits in education and training, some women were unfamiliar with job search websites, or lacked experience constructing resumés for employers. Cindy, an older woman who spent years incarcerated before her most recent time in jail, reflected on searching for a job, "Everything has changed so much. It's all online…It seems like they don't call you for jobs anymore, they just email.…Well, it was it was really different." Joy, a woman in her late 50's looking for work, echoed the sentiment, "I have

no idea what the hell you make out of apps or computers…" Cindy and Joy's unfamiliarity with new forms of job searching created additional stress to an already daunting process.

In sum, women faced a wide variety of barriers as a result of resource constraints, justice involvement, substance use disorders and other disabilities, and the myriad of obligations justice-involved women are expected to balance while reentering. In spite of this, women were often resilient and resourceful in their approaches to tackling these problems.

[Table 4 here]

Strategies to navigate barriers

Women developed multiple strategies to navigate the labor market and address the barriers they encountered. Table 4 presents the number of women who reported they were able to find strategies to circumvent these barriers within each barrier category, as well as the types of strategies women used for the barriers they faced.

Consistent transportation was the most common barrier that justice-involved women experienced related to their job searches. However, the majority (n=19; 70.37%) of women found ways to address their transportation difficulties through various means. The most common strategy women used was to solicit rides from family and friends. In some cases, their families lent them a car or purchased one for them. Otherwise, family or friends would drive them to and from job interviews, and sometimes to and from work. Sam found a job at a packaging plant, where she and her father both worked. She said,

> I've worked at a job and my dad works those jobs too, you know? So it's been like a
> communal type thing where I know I'm set up for a job and like set up for a ride…It also
> helped build trust [with my father] because he knows where I am.

In some cases, family and friends were happy to provide rides because they wanted to support their loved ones in bettering their life and circumstances. Women also commonly addressed employment difficulties by looking for jobs that were within walking distance of their residence. Sharon explained, "I just kind of look for [jobs] that are close to me…if it's something that that does end up, you know, getting selected for [the job], I know that I can commit…I don't want to set myself up for failure." Judy's strategy for finding employment was centered around transportation accessibility. She described her strategy for addressing barriers systematically:

> Yeah, my main strategy is like wherever I'm living at the time, I'll Google all the businesses in the area, just like go online to the Yellow Pages and just see what's around and kind of make a list of places that sound good to work at.

Women reported that transportation difficulties often shape the nature of the jobs they take as well as the methods they use to search for work. As emphasized in prior literature (see Roddy et al., 2020), employment opportunities located in women's area of residence are of unique consequence for women that are justice-involved, especially for those with low transportation access.

Less common strategies for dealing with transportation difficulties included using ride sharing programs (e.g. Uber, Lyft) and public transit. Two women were able to find employment that provided them with transportation to and from their place of work. Natalie worked at a banquet company that drove her to and from event spaces, and Suzanne worked at a factory that provided a shuttle service from a location close to her residence. Both women indicated that their decision to work in these positions was influenced by the provision of transportation. "I have 3 DUIs…" Suzanne said, "I am not getting a car anytime soon. It made [the job] more appealing." In sum, though most women were able to address their transportation difficulties in their job

searches through multiple avenues, these barriers often dictated the types of work women were able to engage in.

For women who named their justice involvement and employer discrimination as a barrier to employment, the majority (n=15; 65.21%) had deduced a strategy to mitigate this barrier. Most women did so by identifying employers that were open to applicants with justice involvement. Some used resources provided to them through probation officers, staff at the treatment center, or though lists compiled on the internet. Nicole described how asking treatment staff about felony-friendly employers quelled her concerns as she applied for potential jobs. "Asking people…helps me know what places were receptive to people that had a background like me, and it made it so that I was less nervous…" Having a list of offender-friendly employers allowed Nicole to feel more confident that her application would be considered despite their record.

In addition to locating potential job opportunities with flexible hiring practices, they asked other women with justice-involvement to recommend them for available positions. Stacie described how she asked friends from treatment about potential employment opportunities. She said,

> I might ask [them] like, 'Hey, are you guys hiring? Do you think you could, you know, put a word in for me?' But like my friends' lifestyles, a lot of them didn't have very good jobs. But the few that did, you know, I would inquire, like, 'Hey, next time there's an open position, put in a good word, I'll apply.'

In Stacie's response, she notes that many of the women she knows with criminal histories work jobs that are undesirable, and she use a targeted strategy in her approach to asking for references. Women in the sample, including Stacie, acknowledged that having an inside reference increased

the likelihood that they would be considered for the position. She explained, "It's all about who you know…It's harder to get a job if people can't vouch for you." The topic of "vouching" for credentials is consistent with past research that emphasizes the importance of a justice-involved person's need to establish credibility while searching for work (Smith, 2018).

In addition to finding employment that is friendly to justice-involved individuals, women also voluntarily disclosed their criminal history and constructed recovery narratives contextualizing their substance- and justice-involvement. Maybelle, who had several felony offenses in her history, preferred to turn in her job applications in person (rather than online) so she could explain the circumstances of her record. She said,

> Normally I go in [to potential employers] and at least explain like, 'Hey, listen, I'm on probation. Yes, I do have felonies.' So they don't have to just look at it and not know who the person is coming in. They look at [the applications] and see felonies [and] think that there's still an active addiction, and in person they will see they don't look strung out…

By voluntarily disclosing her history in person, Maybelle was able to give context for her past and improve her credibility. Other women mentioned the importance of providing context. When asked about her strategy to address her justice involvement and employer discrimination, Jamie explained, "I'm like honest and upfront about it [in the application]…I started putting, 'Would love to explain more at an interview.' I feel like face-to-face I can sell myself much better." Tammy also described her process to addressing her criminal history in interviews by constructing a narrative for her recovery:

> I'm like, 'I used to live a different lifestyle than what I live today, and I got into some legal trouble. Um, you know, I had a drug addiction, but I've got x amount of time clean

and I'm turning a new leaf, and I think that I'll be more determined and work harder than

anyone else because I have something to prove.'

Women who identified their criminal history as a barrier emphasized the importance of

explaining the circumstances of their records. They attempted strategies to build credibility with

employers, who may be otherwise skeptical of hiring individuals with past justice-involvement.

Women who named mental and physical disabilities were less likely to develop strategies

to address this barrier during their job search, and less than half (n=8; 44.44%) of the women

with disabilities were able to find effective strategies to address this limitation. Among named

solutions, a few women mentioned applying for social security in place of finding employment.

Daisy, an older woman, expressed exceptional difficulties applying for social security despite

having invested time and money in the process. Three months after filing initial paperwork, she

emphasized, "I applied for disability… I hired a lawyer but I still don't have it." In addition to

applying for Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Monique mentioned utilizing job placement

services through Michigan Rehabilitation Services; however, she still had not received SSI or

found employment at the time of the interview.

Most women who mentioned a successful strategy for combatting barriers related to

mental health and recovery mentioned prioritizing their recovery, and this shaped their options

for employment. Judith recalls working at a factory right as she left treatment, and that the

experience illustrated the tenuous relationship between work and recovery. She said, "I worked

for a factory for a little bit and then I relapsed... It helped me realize I wasn't ready for that kind

of environment. So then I kind of got this job through somebody that I knew, a job that was

better you know, for people in recovery and it's been pretty good ever since." When asked what

about factory work interfered with her recovery, she explained, "It's a very high-pressure

environment… you are on your feet daily. You are tired… the stress triggers me [to use drugs]."

Suzanne also identified her focus on her recovery as a barrier to her job search. She noted that

she avoided searching for work in the areas where she used to use, and avoided working in bars

and restaurants that served alcohol. She said, "I just don't go. Don't go to a bar if you're if you're

an alcoholic. No, I don't go to the part of town where I used to do drugs and tricks, you know

what I mean? Right? This is reality."

Finally, some women who identified recovery as a barrier to employment decided to

postpone their job searches until they felt stable in their recovery. For example, Natalie

expressed that her "number one priority this whole time has been, you know, trying to get back

to trying to get back to a place where I feel confident in myself, and I feel confident in my

recovery." This caused her to postpone her job search, lest she "get back with the same people

that [she] used to," which may cause her to be "less strong in [her] recovery." Negotiating the

stresses of work while managing recovery was a common theme for women in the sample, and

women often had to make difficult choices to promote their well-being.

Only three women (27.27%) were able to identify strategies to systematically overcome

barriers related to caring for children or family members. Two women asked family and friends

for help with caretaking. Both women had small children at the time of their job search and

relied on their families to watch their children as they searched for work, though this strategy

was sometimes limiting. Jemma, who had joint custody of her 6-year-old daughter and 12-year-

old son, worked part time as a server at a restaurant near her house. She said, "My sister will

sometimes watch my kids when I have them, but she works too. If our schedules overlap, I have

to find a replacement [for my shift]." Jasmine's grandmother, who had primary custody of her

three-year-old, watched her son when she worked. "We have a good system… It makes her

happy to be with him, so I don't think she minds." Having family support to supplement childcare, while rare, was a successful solution to caretaking barriers.

One woman was able to turn her role as a caretaker of her family into a financial position. Shauna, who felt too limited by her father's illness to seek employment, received money from her mother to be his caretaker full time. However, she explained that the situation was unsustainable, saying, "I was doing what I needed to do for myself and for probation and for my mom, and I was still kind of being treated as less than [by my mother], so it was like a reoccurring argument." Despite finding a solution to her barrier of caretaking, she was negatively affected by her family's perception of her past drug use and their resulting distrust. She planned to look for other work once she felt her father was in a stable position. Thus, even though Shauna was able to solve her caretaking dilemma temporarily, her situation was untenable in the long-term.

Most women had difficulty finding solutions to caretaking barriers. The women who were successful at managing barriers of this type had family support in the form of childcare or, in Shauna's case, financing her role as caretaker of her father. For women without family support, these problems largely remained unresolved.

Many women (n=6; 66.67%) were able to develop feasible strategies to address human capital barriers. When asked how women navigated human capital barriers, most (n=4) women spoke about the importance of developing realistic goals and expectations. This involved searching for jobs that aligned with their work experience and identifying entry level positions that would be open to women with unspecialized backgrounds. Jane, a woman without a high school diploma or GED, acknowledged that she would have better employment prospects if she went back to school; however, she did not have the time to pursue her degree. When asked how

she managed this barrier, she said, "Honestly, factory work is super easy to get into. So that's mainly what I looked for." Jane's ability to identify an industry with requirements consistent with her background allowed her to find work. This type of research was common among women who identified their employment and educational histories as a barrier to finding work. Lydia acknowledged, "I know how to strategize... You've got to have a plan and it has to be a realistic plan and it will work…Work at something that you've either done or you know how to do." Cynthia, who found work in the fast-food industry, reiterated this sentiment,

> Just don't try to get a job that you have no chance of getting... You're not going to come out here and automatically find something that you want right now. It's going to take time. So I mean, just don't be picky. Get a job you can get for now and work your way to the top.

Cynthia emphasized the importance of finding entry-level employment, with the expectation that it may lead to better opportunities in the future.

In addition to developing realistic plans for employment, women also asked family members and friends for assistance with resumés and job search websites. Cindy said her niece was helpful in teaching her how to navigate websites like Indeed.com. Bianca, who was also nervous about her qualifications and navigating the job market, asked her recovery coach for help with her job search. "[My recovery coach] gave me a link with the job ad she had gotten it from a relative of hers who worked at the plant…She also helped me clean up my resumé so that it just looked a little bit more professional and up to date." Family and friends acted as crucial sources of support for women unfamiliar with the process of applying to jobs.

Facilitators of employment

Though the majority of women in the sample named at least one barrier relevant to employment, a small number (n=18; 30%) of women expressed they did not experience any barriers to finding work. Table 5 outlines the facilitators of employment for women in this group.

[Table 5 here]

The most common facilitator was aid from family and friends in the area of employment. Six of the women who did not report barriers to employment attributed their success to leveraging family and friend connections. For example, Amanda was able to find work at a local sandwich shop as the result of a connection to another employee. "I knew somebody who works here, and so I was able to get in pretty easily," she explained. Janet, who also did not experience barriers to employment, reflected on the importance of family assistance in her job search. "I ended up getting a good job through my sister-in-law. So, yeah, so I guess, you know, it's just… I'm just helping getting help from other people, I guess, is what really helps me." Family and friend connections helped ease many of the barriers women faced (e.g. transportation, caretaking).

Outside of family support, women described that they were able to find work at places where they were employed before their time in jail. When asked if Mina experienced any difficulties finding work, she explained,

> No, not really, especially because I just chose the [job] that I was already working and that made it made it a lot easier. I think I would have had trouble if I tried to find one just because of my felony convictions… I didn't want to go through the whole process of being rejected or trying to find a new job that I have to start, you know, like getting the ropes of.

By returning to a place where she previously worked, Mina was not only able to find work quickly, but she was also able to avoid the rejection and stigmatization that many women experience while looking for work with a criminal record. Women reported returning to employers even when they were unhappy with their positions. June, who returned to her previous employer, expressed discontent with the position, "I hate my job, but that's a job and it's paying my bills…" She continued to look for other work while she maintained a full-time job with her previous employer.

An additional facilitator of employment was education, as well as past job and job search experience. When Tiffany was asked if she experienced any barriers to employment, she responded, "I can't really answer that question… I have education and I ran my own business." Lindsey explained, "[I]'ve had a lot of different experience or as I just know what they're looking for when they interview." Nicole, who began work at an elder care center, reflected on the advantages she had in the labor market. She said, "They knew that I had a bachelors and stuff, so I didn't really set the norm of the regular clientele [from treatment]." Overall, women with work experience and education that matched the jobs they applied for recalled limited barriers to employment.

Finally, some women felt they were especially successful in the job market because of self-efficacy, confidence, and persistence. Jamie, who also had work experience across multiple occupations, stated that her interviewing skills and unique pathway into the justice system made her more likely to find employment than her peers. When asked why she had encountered few barriers to working, she said,

This is going to be crazy. Every job I applied to, I got… When I talk, I talk a good game. That's how I got in trouble being a criminal. My all my criminal background was white

collar crime. It's different. It wasn't because I was a drug addict. It wasn't because I like

to make money easily and not work so hard for it.

Jamie did not feel her addiction or criminal history affected her ability to find a job; in fact, she

described her ability to speak persuasively as her "superpower" even though it "got [her] in

trouble." She felt she had a unique ability to capitalize on available employment opportunities,

which led to her success in the job market. Natalie attributed her success in the job market to the

strategies she used to communicate with employers, which included persistence and signaling

interest. She described her process for looking for jobs,

The [jobs] that are my favorites, like I'll call them and say, 'Hey, I put in an interview or

application two days ago. I'm really interested in the interview. Do you have any coming

up or any open positions that I could interview for?' I kind of like, stay on top of them…

It seems like you show initiative.

Natalie's system for following up on potential employment opportunities resulted in multiple job

offers, including a position at a tire shop and car service center was working at the time of the

interview. Finally, Erica explained how her confidence set her up for success in her job searches.

"I have pretty good confidence… [N]o matter what job I've had, I've never messed it up, like I

just relapsed or something. I always know that I can prosper pretty much wherever I go as long

as I'm working." This perspective allowed her to enter job interviews with confidence, and she

accepted a position working in communications for a shipping company.

Discussion

A key objective of this research was to explore the barriers that women faced in their

ability to find and maintain work after spending time in jail. In a sample of 60 women, a large

majority identified employment-related barriers. The most common barrier faced by women in

the sample was transportation, followed by their justice involvement and employer discrimination, and mental and/or physical disabilities. Less often, women mentioned caretaking responsibilities and human capital deficits as substantial barriers to employment. As observed by Morris and colleagues' (2008), many of these barriers related to resource constraints, illustrating that inequality and poverty were important contributors to the barriers women were experiencing. In addition, women often experienced more than one of the barriers listed, illustrating that women were forced to manage multiple needs during their reentry while they attempted to find work (Roddy et al., 2019).

A second contribution of this work was an emphasis on women's resiliency and agency, and the documentation of women's strategies to address the barriers they experienced. Though transportation barriers were most often mentioned, women in the sample were also more likely to mention strategies to address these difficulties. Women were least likely to mention strategies to navigate barriers related to caretaking responsibilities and mental and physical disabilities; often, women would forgo finding employment to prioritize their recovery, health, or the caretaking of loved ones. The analysis of women's strategies to resolve barriers to employment revealed two important findings: first, that justice-involved women are adept at resolving the barriers they faced related to finding and maintaining work, and second, that women were more successful at finding strategies to resolve some barriers more than others. Agencies that serve justice-involved women should consider the development of programs to address women's needs that are least likely to be resolved without intervention.

Finally, this study also examined prominent facilitators of employment. For the small subset of women that experienced no barriers to employment, they identified multiple techniques and attributes that aided in their job searches. As was the case in many women's strategies to

overcome barriers to employment, facilitators included resources, information, or employment connections from family and friends to find work, which promoted positive employment outcomes. In addition, women with past employment experiences had less difficulty finding work. This was because women either returned to their previous employers after time in jail, or because women were able to leverage their past experiences to find new employment opportunities. Finally, women expressed that confidence and persistence improved their employment outcomes. This finding is consistent with research related to employment for non-offenders, which identifies self-efficacy as an important determinant of employment outcomes (Côté et al., 2006; Kanfer et al., 2001; Wanberg et al., 2005). In this sample, persistence allowed women to signal interest in particular positions, and self-efficacy and confidence improved women's ability to successfully convert interviews into offers of employment.

Policy implications

The findings of this research have specific policy-relevant implications. First, the finding of barriers unique to women highlights the importance of gender-responsive reentry programming that reflects women's lived experiences (Duwe, 2015; Messina et al., 2010; Wright et al., 2012). Research provides considerable evidence of the effectiveness of gender-responsive treatment programs (for reviews see Fagan & Lindsey, 2014; Gobeil et al., 2016; Grella, 2008). Consistent with gender-responsive practice, women leaving carceral settings should be given appropriate resources to improve their job search and eventual job prospects. For example, given that women often had difficulties with transportation, providing women under supervision with bus passes or gas money would reduce the economic strain of the job search and promote well-being (for a discussion, see Walker et al., 2014). For women without family support, assistance

with childcare or the caretaking of older family members during and after the job search process would also provide support for women and their job searches.

In addition, women should feel capable and prepared to search for work through job search websites, construct resumés, and successfully interview by creating recovery narratives. The general job-search literature has established that self-efficacy is a key determinant of employment outcomes for men and women (Côté et al., 2006; Kanfer et al., 2001; Wanberg et al., 2005). As such, practitioners can improve job search readiness by conducting mock interviews and application workshops. Social support is also likely to be especially important to women seeking work, in part because women in the justice system have quite limited support networks (Reisig et al., 2002). Research has illustrated that in addition to promoting positive employment-related outcomes (Roddy & Morash, 2019), social support contributes to women's desistance from crime (Brown & Ross, 2010) and drug use (Holmstrom et al., 2015; Strauss & Falkin, 2001). Thus, practitioners can be most effective in promoting employment success if they foster clients' feelings of being supported and having self-efficacy.

Third, referrals and collaborations hold promise in helping women succeed in finding work. Few women identified engagement with local employment agencies, especially ones that service justice-involved populations, as a way to improve their efforts to find and maintain work. Providing women with comprehensive information regarding employment agencies that focus on job placement can improve employment outcomes. Cooperation and collaboration of departments with agencies and potential employers have been shown to be helpful to justice-involved individuals (Hodgson et al., 2019). Given that many women experienced structural barriers related to their justice involvement, building collaborative relationships between employers, employment agencies, criminal justice agencies, and women leaving jail can improve

the efficacy of the job search process and mitigate the challenges that a criminal record presents. Public and employer education programs about the actual risk and benefits of hiring individuals with criminal histories can provide appropriate context.

Consistent with research that has shown the importance of social networks for assisting people in finding work (Granovetter, 2005), most of the women who did not experience barriers to employment had connections to potential employers via references. Creating a mentorship program of employed women who were formerly incarcerated could facilitate the development of networks that include pro-social, employed network members. There is evidence of the effectiveness of peer mentoring for individuals with a history of incarceration for men (Harrod, 2019; Valentine & Redcross, 2015). Connecting justice-involved women looking for work with women who have successfully navigated the process of finding and maintaining a job would allow for the transmission of helpful information regarding employment as it is unique to women with criminal histories. Such programs can also provide informal connections to employment opportunities at the mentors' places of work.

Finally, passing legislation that effectively addresses employment discrimination for justice-involved women is equally important. Based on recent evidence that "ban the box" campaigns can have the unintended consequence of increasing race-based employer discrimination (Doleac & Hansen, 2020), hiring practices that center improve training, resources, and accessibility for justice-involved employees rather than increasing criminal offense blindness will be more effective in improving employment in this population. For example, occupational license reform that allows justice-involved women with felony offenses to work as healthcare professionals, estheticians, or in childcare/caretaking will improve women's outcomes. These careers are both more likely to be occupied by women (Thomason & Macias-Alonso, 2020) and

more lucrative than jobs that do not require such certification. Allowing justice-involved women to engage in this work provides opportunities to address some fundamental inequalities identified in this work. These reforms would also create opportunities to begin training and certification in these fields in jail contexts, which have far fewer employment certification programs available to women relative to women's prisons and even men's jails (Yasunaga, 2001). In sum, this work identifies multiple potential policy and practice developments that hold promise for improving the livelihood of justice-involved women.

Limitations and future research

Despite the novel findings of this research, there were several limitations that should be considered. First and foremost, questions about employment were asked in the context of a larger study examining the effects of spatial mismatch and social capital on employment outcomes. Though open-ended questions about barriers to employment occurred before questions related to social capital and spatial mismatch, there may have been other ways in which the interviewer primed women's responses to engage with concepts related to spatial mismatch and social capital. Further, the geographic context of the study may also affect women's responses. Metro Detroit is a very specific context in which recovery, gender, and economic marginality intertwine in unique ways (see Draus et al., 2010), and individuals experience exceptional public transportation limitations (Grengs, 2010). As a result, it may be that the barriers to employment in this area are different than those experienced by the broader U.S. population.

In addition, this work did not explore how industry and types of employment may affect women's experiences of certain types of barriers. Further, recent work has suggested that though individuals leaving carceral contexts may be successful at finding work, the work they were able to find was not conducive to financial security or upward mobility due to low wages and

inconsistent work schedules (Wang & Bertram, 2022). Further exploration is necessary to understand the multiple barriers associated with the distinct industries justice-involved women enter, as well as barriers women encounter as they find employment and endeavor to maintain it.

Finally, this research occurred during throughout multiple stages the COVID-19 pandemic. Women's ability to find and maintain work was undoubtedly affected by the changing circumstances of the virus, mandates, advice, and information provided by government and public health officials, and individual-level responses to COVID-19. As such, women's responses may not reflect the frequency of these barriers under conditions outside of a global pandemic.

Conclusion

The results of this research promote gender-responsive approaches to employment-related programming for women leaving jail contexts. Future research should continue to examine justice-involved women's barriers to employment, with attention to women's resilience and agency. Practitioners working in cooperation with criminal justice agencies could assist women by aiding them in ways that promote building relevant connections, skills, and experience to facilitate job market success. Increased attention to women's unique needs will help women be more successful in their employment pursuits. Overall, though the current research suggests that though women are capable and able to mitigate the constraints they face searching for work, increased access to resources and information related to employment serve as useful channels to improve employment outcomes for women leaving jail.

Notes

1. Pseudonyms were used in place of first names to protect participant anonymity.

CHAPTER 4: THE EFFECTS OF COVID-19 ON EMPLOYMENT FOR JUSTICE- AND SUBSTANCE-INVOLVED WOMEN

Abstract

Using a sample of 56 women leaving substance use treatment after spending time in jail, this research employs an applied thematic analysis framework to identify the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on women's employment. Results indicate that women identified negative and mixed results of the pandemic on their employment resulting from job security and labor market effects, caretaking effects, mental health/recovery effects, and effects on physical health and health-related concerns. A minority of women identified positive effects of the pandemic on their employment resulting from reduced labor market competition and progress in their recovery. The findings of this work have distinct implications related to policy and practice, including a moratorium on employment requirements for justice-involved women during crises of exceptional magnitude and gender-responsive training for practitioners.

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic marks a period of intense societal turmoil. In addition to the direct consequences of the virus on public health, the pandemic continues to negatively impact the wellbeing of individuals through a constellation of auxiliary effects, including unemployment and economic hardship (Matthay et al., 2021). Preliminary research suggests there are gendered effects of the pandemic as they relate to economic outcomes (Collins et al., 2021; Craig, 2020; Raile et al., 2021), though further exploration is necessary to comprehensively document these effects across populations subsets. Specifically, there has been no research on the effects of COVID-19 on justice- and substance-involved women's experiences finding and maintaining employment. This research intends to fill this gap.

Though there is no study that documents the effects of COVID-19 on justice-involved women's employment, there is reason to suspect that the pandemic may have especially detrimental effects in this population. Women make up the majority of minimum-wage, lower-wage, and part-time workers, as well as the majority of service industry workers in the US (Thomason & Macias-Alonso, 2020), and women with justice involvement are disproportionately situated in these professions (Flower, 2010). Because the positions that women commonly hold were especially impacted by the business closures resulting from the pandemic (Alon et al., 2020), it is likely that industry and labor market changes affected justice-involved women's employment. It is also likely that women whose service sector employers did not shut down had an increased risk of being exposed to COVID-19. That increased risk comes with anxiety, and justice-involved women already suffer disproportionately from mental health issues (Belknap & Holsinger, 2006; Bloom et al., 2003). In addition, preliminary studies of COVID-19 and the subsequent stay-at-home recommendations that shut down businesses and

schools exacerbated already existing labor inequity in households and added additional responsibilities related to caretaking (Carlson et al., 2020). Given that justice-involved women are disproportionately the primary caregivers of children and older adults who may need additional care (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008), it is expected that justice-involved women's employment may have been affected by increased caretaking responsibilities. Similarly, the increased risk of exposure also leads to increased anxiety that women might expose vulnerable family members to a deadly disease.

It is also expected that women's substance involvement may impede their employment. The policy of "social distancing" to curb the spread of COVID-19 has introduced new challenges for those in recovery, including, but not limited to, reduced access to treatment and recovery support services. The disruption of service provision further magnifies increased risk for relapse due to multiple factors—by reducing the effective constraints on substance use (Acuff et al., 2020), decreasing the availability of many rewarding substance-free activities, and by increasing the likelihood of stress and other negative affective states that may trigger substance use (Marlatt, 1996; Ramo & Brown, 2008). Given that substance use is negatively associated with employment for individuals with substance use disorder (Bray et al., 2000; Zarkin et al., 2002), the pandemic's interference with women's recovery may also interfere with their ability to find and maintain work. Finally, substance-involved women often suffer from co-occurring physical health conditions (Larson et al., 2005; Reif et al., 2011), making them especially vulnerable to contracting COVID-19 and experiencing negative health effects. The increased risks associated with COVID-19 exposure to substance-involved women's physical health may affect their employment.

The topic of COVID-19's role in justice- and substance-involved women's employment

is of particular importance for several reasons. First, courts and parole boards often require individuals to find and maintain employment as a condition of community supervision (i.e. probation and parole) (Petersilia, 2004). For women on supervision, the fines, fees, and restitution associated with consistent interaction with the justice system necessitate a steady source of income. Thus, finding and maintaining employment is often a primary concern of justice-involved women (Ramaswamy et al., 2015; Tonkin et al., 2004). Moreover, research has shown that employment benefits individuals in the correctional system by decreasing recidivism, increasing financial stability, and increasing general well-being (Lageson & Uggen, 2013; Leverentz, 2010; Petersilia, 2004; Skardhamar & Savolainen, 2014; Uggen, 2000), and limited research focusing on justice- and substance-involved women explicitly has shown decreases in recidivism resulting from decreased economic marginalization (Morash & Kashy, 2022). Finally, employment and employment-related indicators (e.g. self-efficacy and self determination) are related to improved treatment outcomes in the short- and long-term (Sahker et al., 2019). Investigating relevant barriers to employment opens avenues to improving employment outcomes for justice-involved women, which could improve women's experiences in recovery and reduce the likelihood of future justice involvement.

The current study investigates the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on justice- and substance-involved women's experiences finding and maintaining work. Using qualitative methods, this research investigates how the pandemic directly and indirectly affected women's employment. The categories of effects included 1) job security and labor market effects, 2) caretaking effects, 3) mental health/recovery effects, and 4) physical health and health-related concerns. Findings of this work have distinct implications related to policy and practice, discussed in the conclusion.

Methods

Setting and data collection

The sample was recruited from residents of two sites of residential substance abuse treatment programs located in Warren and Detroit, Michigan. Because both locations share resources, staff, and treatment ideologies, it is assumed that both locations deliver similar quality of treatment and, as such, location of treatment should not drive differences in employment outcomes. The population at both sites ranges in age from 19 to 60, and most of the residents at this facility have transitioned from the county jails. About half of the residents at any one time meet the criteria for habitual offenders. The average length of stay is 60–90 days at SHAR Warren, and 30-60 days at SHAR Detroit. Receipt of substance abuse treatment was treated as a "constant" for study participants. All women in the sample were court ordered to treatment after spending time in jail. Interviews were conducted virtually with women leaving congregate-care substance use treatment after spending time in jail between December 2020 and January 2022. Participants were compensated with a $15 using money order or through online payment service (e.g. Venmo, CashApp) for the first interview, which took place one week after women left substance use treatment. The first interview contained questions regarding women's demographic information, justice involvement, and work history. The second interview took place three months after leaving substance use treatment, and women were compensated $25. This interview contained questions about the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on their employment. All interviews were conducted by the author, which were recorded and then transcribed to facilitate analysis.

Study sample

A total of 93 women were recruited to participate in the research. Of the 93 women who were recruited, 11 women refused to participate, and five were deemed ineligible because they did not have a history of justice-involvement and were not court-ordered to treatment. Ten women were unable to be contacted between recruitment and the first interview. Sixty-seven women agreed to participate and completed the first interview. Four women were disabled and unable to work at the time of the second interview and were not included in the analysis. One woman passed away between the first and second interview, and her data were dropped from the analysis. Finally, six women were unable to be reached for the second interview. The final sample size used for this research was 56. Study participants ranged from 21 to 64 years of age (M = 40.38; SD = 11.69) and were racially and ethnically diverse (n = 32, 57.14 % White; n = 22, 39.29% Black; n = 1, 1.79% multiracial Black and White, n = 1, 1.79% Native American and White). Thirty-seven of the participants had obtained full-time or part-time employment at some point during the three months after leaving substance use treatment (66.07%); the remainder (n = 19; 33.93%) were unable to find employment. However, at the time of the interview, 32 (57.14%) women were employed.

Procedure

The first interview collected information about women's demographics. The qualitative data is drawn from the second interview, where women were asked open-ended questions about their job search processes and employment outcomes after treatment. Specifically, women were asked if the COVID-19 pandemic affected finding and maintaining work, and, if so, how.

Coding

      To analyze the qualitative data, this research utilized an exploratory approach within an applied thematic analysis framework to code responses in multiple steps. In an exploratory analysis, the content of the participant's statements drives the development of codes and the identification of themes (Guest et al., 2011). Thus, themes were derived inductively after iterative readings of the transcribed interviews. Initially, responses to interview questions were coded to reflect whether women indicated that COVID-19 affected their employment.[1] Responses were then subcoded to reflect the type of effect. Finally, responses were coded by whether COVID-19 had a positive, negative, or mixed/unclear effect on employment.[2] To establish reliability, a subset (*n*=12) of interview transcripts were independently coded by two researchers. Excellent reliability was established (κ =.88; Cohen, 1960). Table 6 displays the results of this analysis.

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Results

[Insert Table 6 here]

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Job security and labor market effects

      When asked about the consequences of COVID-19 on their employment, women identified the ways in which the pandemic affected their options for employment. Specifically, multiple women explained that the pandemic affected job security. June[3] spoke about the job she had before she entered treatment, where she worked as a server at a restaurant in downtown Detroit. After treatment, she returned to the same restaurant, but her employment was affected by the pandemic. She explained, "I had worked a little bit and then COVID hit and they closed. So it was like, 'Okay, well, now I'm out of a job.'…And I couldn't find another one because no

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restaurants [were] open…Waitressing is what I know." Another woman, Jennifer, also identified how the pandemic made her employment more tenuous. She began work at a factory at the start of the pandemic. She described the trajectory of her job as the pandemic began:

> We were laid off for a while when COVID first hit, and you know, that was tough too. And then they brought people back slowly. And it just seemed like everything was slowing down and then people were always exposed or, you know, getting sick. And then, it wasn't like a steady work area because, you know, exposures… You lose people, so it's just like up and down, nothing steady.

The sequence of events that Jennifer described illustrates the ebb and flow of her employment over the course of the pandemic. After an initial period of unemployment, Jennifer's income was still inconsistent as the factory opened and closed because of outbreaks within the staff. These types of setbacks were common among women who were able to find work during the pandemic.

Maureen had similar experiences to Jennifer and June. She worked at a distribution fulfillment warehouse when the pandemic began. However, the pandemic instigated several shutdowns at her place of work, and she was ultimately laid off. When asked how COVID affected her employment, she said, "Yeah, I mean, it's been awful… just- [my work] shut down, it's just- you're sort of stranded…" Though she was able to find a new position, the pandemic continued to affect her work. She found the personal protection equipment uncomfortable given the strenuous nature of her job. She also mentioned having to work additional hours because of the effect of the pandemic on her compensation. She explained, "A lot of businesses have closed because of COVID, depending on what type of business it was or is, so we're not making as much. So I have to work double the hours, basically." For women who were able to successfully

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find employment, the pandemic negatively affected their job security, work environment, and quality of life in their positions.

Though many women identified how the pandemic negatively impacted their likelihood of maintaining steady employment, some women expressed that it may have improved the likelihood that they were able to find work. For example, Nancy was able to find work at an automotive shop near her home within days of leaving treatment. When asked how the pandemic affected her ability to find work, she replied, "I feel like the job market—It's easier to find a job right now because of COVID." When asked to elaborate, she said it was due to fewer people looking for jobs, creating less competition. She explained, "[I]t's—the incentives are so good with unemployment right now that if people don't have to work, they're not going to work." Other women also believed that a labor shortage contributed to the ease of finding employment. Mischa, who had a felony on her record, expressed that COVID improved the job search process and created opportunities for her. She found employment at a clothing store quickly after she began searching for work. Though a friend had recommended her to the employer, she attributed her labor market success to the pandemic. She said,

> I think [the pandemic] helped me find a job just because there were so many openings, it
> was like they hired me right away. As soon as I turned in the application and they told
> [my friend], 'You bring her in, we'll have her start tomorrow.' Like, it just seems like
> places are so desperate for people that they will start you right away.

Despite the reference she received for the position, Mischa believed that she was hired quickly due to an absence of interested applicants. She concluded, "So, yeah, especially with the job market, how it is after COVID and nobody really wanting to work, it was pretty easy getting a job…" It is worth noting that these sentiments are inconsistent with past literature, which finds

that economic events and labor market changes are especially detrimental to the employment of justice-involved populations (Finlay, 2008).

Caretaking effects

In addition to the effect of COVID-19 on the labor market, women also mentioned how the pandemic affected their ability to take care of children and family members. In some cases, the pandemic pressured women to choose between their financial wellbeing and the health and safety of older family members they were living with. For example, Jean recalled being fearful of contracting an illness while at work and infecting her mother, whom she lived with. Though her mother had been living alone for the past several years, she was starting to need help around the house and Jean moved in after treatment to assist her. When asked about how the pandemic affected her employment trajectory, she first acknowledged how difficult it was to find a job as a server or bartender. "I think the pandemic has played a big role… It was really hard to find jobs that fit my skill set. It took until things opened back up for me to even be able to look for jobs where I work in the service industry." Even when businesses began to reopen after stay-at-home orders, she was conflicted about finding work because she was concerned about her mother's health. Jean noted, "I think COVID made it all so scary for me to want to find work. I didn't want to get sick and I didn't want to get my family sick. I was living with my mom, so it was just kind of hard…" Ultimately, Jean found a job as a server in the same area that her boyfriend lived. When she experienced COVID-19 exposures, which happened twice, she stayed at her boyfriend's apartment to quarantine. Overall, Jean relayed that the pandemic affected her willingness to find work, saying, "It was hard for me to want to find a job, especially one that involves dealing with people, because my mom could have gotten sick too." The fear of

contracting and spreading illness was a consistent theme in interviews with women taking care of

and living with older family members while simultaneously working in high exposure positions.

School closures resulting from the pandemic were also relevant to women's job searches.

For some women, closures affected their ability to schedule work shifts. Amy said, "When I had

to manage my kids' school, that's when everything went out the window… there was no way I

could work a job then. What would my schedule be like?" Further, additional childcare

responsibilities resulted in additional stress, which affected women's recovery. Erica recalled the

circumstances early in the pandemic, "[O]ne week the kids were off school, and I had to quit my

job. And I also wasn't getting any child support because the father of my children wasn't

working." This put Erica in a tenuous position financially, which resulted in stress and negative

behavioral changes. "I think it was just stress. I relapsed, I think I relapsed like three days in

March when they locked down…" Her obligations to her children kept her from working and

seeking treatment. "I was supposed to go into their three-quarter housing, but just with the

kids…it would have just been chaotic." Instead, she sought outpatient treatment, which was

ineffective. Once schools reopened, she was able to seek inpatient treatment. "I just didn't work

at all, and then I entered [a residential treatment program]. So then I kind of got this job through

somebody that I knew [in treatment], and it's been pretty good ever since." For Erica and other

women in the sample, increased responsibility and uncertainty resulted in an increased level of

stress, which affected their recovery, and, consequently, their employment.

Mental health/recovery

As evidenced by Erica, the pandemic affected employment through the channel of

recovery. For example, Libby, who was in treatment for her alcohol use, began a job at a factory

just before the start of the pandemic. "I was working for that company... And that's when

COVID had hit. So it did shut down production a lot because we weren't getting stuff from overseas. And so it did kind of break down hours for me." With inconsistent hours, and a lack of fulfilling activities to participate in, Libby began to use alcohol. "I did relapse because- and that was about the time COVID and came around." Libby explained, "And it just like, you know, everybody, everything started shutting down, [I] couldn't really leave the house." The stay-at-home orders impacted Libby's ability to look for work and seek treatment. She also spoke about the effect of the pandemic on her recovery network. "Everyone around me that was in this recovery just started like, you know, falling off, which made it harder." She recalled. At the time of the interview, she was looking for employment and stringing together multiple days of sobriety. "I did fall off, but I did get back up… I do feel motivated [to find work]. But I think that has a lot to do with the fact that I'm sober, too, so…" In Libby's case, her employment and her recovery were fundamentally intertwined, and the pandemic interrupted both.

Though most women explained that the pandemic negatively affected their recovery and job searches, some women identified positive and mixed effects. For example, Bianca struggled with her recovery during the early stages of the pandemic. When asked about the pandemic's effect on her employment, she said, "I decided to just go get a fix instead of go fix my life…And with the pandemic kind of shutting everything down, it kind of had me isolated which kind of, you know, it can bother you at times." After treatment, her mindset changed and she felt differently about her isolation. She explained,

> I kind of look at [the isolation] now as an opportunity to have peace of mind, you know, and just have that downtime to continue to work on my recovery instead of looking at it as boredom. I look at it as peace and like an opportunity for me to continue to grow in the

areas I need to grow. So now that I think that my mindset is completely different, that

offered a lot of other opportunities for me to work.

At the time of her interview, Bianca had found employment at an automotive plant. In her spare

time, she engaged in creative pursuits, like mentoring young students in dance and music. In this

way, Bianca saw the pandemic as "a double-edged sword;" though it contributed to her initial

relapse, it also gave her time to reflect and return to her recovery, which was related to her

success at finding and keeping a job.

Physical health and health-related concerns

Finally, women acknowledged the role that COVID played in their physical health and

health-related concerns, which kept them from finding or maintaining employment. Many

women in the sample had health conditions that made a COVID diagnosis especially concerning.

For example, Christine had taken a job at an events company while pregnant. As events began to

move indoors and COVID case counts began to rise statewide, Christine had to make a difficult

decision to protect her health and the health of her unborn child. She said, "I stopped working,

and I actually was on unemployment for a while because of just the environment. You know,

they weren't following the guidelines and I was pregnant… I didn't want to hurt the baby, and at

first nobody knew you know what I mean. So it was really scary." The fear of getting COVID as

a result of her job's lax protocols kept her from keeping her job.

Like Christine, Chelsea also spoke about how the pandemic affected her employment.

Chelsea was an intravenous drug user whose substance use history affected her health. She had

chronic health conditions that made her especially susceptible to COVID and the long-term

effects associated with infection. "I mean, because of the pandemic I felt unsafe at work, because

COVID was everywhere…" she recalled. Chelsea continued,

Like the whole facility would get COVID. In the end, we have to shut down for like a

week. It was just more so like that when people are getting it and bring it into the

workplace and other people got taken into the chain reactions… That's when work was

hard.

In light of her fears about COVID exposure, she felt that work was an important element of her

sobriety. When asked about how she managed her worries about contracting an illness, she

explained, "I just stayed working… I didn't want to deal with the unemployment and get lazy."

In many ways, she concluded, the pandemic aided in her sobriety. She said, "You know, that's

one thing. I think it helped me stop looking for drugs and stuff like that… I think COVID really

helped a lot because it kept me on my toes- really kept me moving and working." As she

reflected on the role of COVID on her future employment, she clarified, "It's in God's hands.

And I believe that if He brought me through the last epidemic I was in with my addiction, He

could bring me to anything." Though the pandemic created fear for her physical health, Chelsea

believed that it also aided in her recovery.

Discussion

The purpose of this research was to explore the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on

substance- and justice-involved women's ability to find and maintain work. The findings

illustrate the multifaceted impacts that the pandemic had on women's employment, including

women's job security, labor market competition, caretaking obligations, mental health and

recovery, and women's physical health and health concerns. Because women experienced

multiple different effects, their reflections regarding the effects of the pandemic reveal a complex

picture on the interconnectedness of health, recovery, and employment.

Women specifically noted the effects of the pandemic on their job security and their caretaking obligations. Women, especially those in the service industry, experienced bouts of unemployment as a result of business closures. Women were also responsible for the care of children and older family members, which prevented them from finding work. Given that low-income women are disproportionately concentrated in the service sector and the sole or primary caretakers of children and older family members, it is evident how the pandemic could exacerbate inequality. The pandemic also worsened women's experiences of stress, anxiety, and isolation, and sometimes these affective states resulted in substance use. Because justice-involved women also disproportionately suffer from mental health disorders including substance use disorder, this finding also has implications for women's economic marginalization. Indeed, preliminary research reveals gender-based gaps in earnings, work hours, and unemployment for women during the pandemic (Alon et al., 2020), though research has not investigated the effects on justice-involved populations explicitly.

In this sample, many women emphasized the importance of finding work in order to fill time, distract from urges to use substances, and create a regular daily routine, which has been established as a consistent need for regular drug users (see Draus et al., 2010). While women acknowledged the risk of working in facilities where outbreaks were possible and even common, they acknowledged that the costs of idle time outweighed the benefits. This was true even for Black women, who had disproportionately higher rates of COVID-19 mortality (Rushovich et al., 2021). Often women situated the risks of falling ill while working as a necessary evil in the process of their recovery, or compared COVID-19 to the disease of addiction. In those cases, women chose to work in light of potential infection.

Though most women noted negative effects of the pandemic, some women noted mixed effects, or felt that the pandemic may have improved their employment prospects. Women identified that the pandemic discouraged people from working, and this increased the likelihood that they were considered for the positions they applied for. Women also stated that the pandemic allowed them more time to work on their recovery, gave them space from bad influences, and provided needed perspective. Several women couched their assessments of the threat of COVID-19 in their own recovery. In these cases, some women determined that their addictions were more deadly than the virus, which shaped their decisions in pursuing treatment or employment.

Limitations

There were several limitations of this work that should be considered. First and foremost, this study was based on women's own assessments of the effects of COVID-19 regarding employment. A qualitative, self-report mechanism is insufficient to draw generalizable conclusions about whether, for example, the pandemic increased the likelihood that women with criminal records were considered for certain positions. Future research should utilize quantitative techniques to discern whether changes in the labor supply resulted in improved employment outcomes for justice-involved populations during the COVID-19 pandemic. This will shed light on whether women's perceptions of this phenomena are consistent with broader trends.

Second, questions about employment were asked in the context of a larger study examining the effects of spatial mismatch and social capital on employment outcomes. Though open-ended questions about the pandemic's effect on employment occurred before questions related to social capital and spatial mismatch, there may have been other ways in which the interviewer primed women's responses to engage with concepts related to spatial mismatch and

social capital. Finally, this research occurred during throughout multiple stages the COVID-19 pandemic. Women's ability to find and maintain work was undoubtedly affected by the changing circumstances of the virus, mandates, advice, and information provided by government and public health officials, and individual-level responses to COVID-19. As such, the time at which the interview took place may have affected women's reflections on the effects of the pandemic on their employment.

Implications and conclusion

In light of the findings of this research, there are several practical takeaways and implications for policy and treatment practitioners. First, in line with past research findings, it is clear that women with justice involvement face a litany of barriers finding employment (Roddy et al., 2020), many of which were intensified during the COVID-19 pandemic. As such, it may be that employment requirements for supervised women during times of extreme economic instability may exacerbate inequality. Changing the conditions of supervision during national and global health emergencies seems especially prudent given the large number of women who have experienced effects stemming from concerns for their health and the well-being of children and elderly family members.

Second, practitioners working with justice- and substance-involved women looking for work should understand the interconnectedness of health, recovery, and employment during this especially dangerous time in public health. Educating staff on the difficulties associated with obtaining financial stability in addition to recovery can help them provide important context and advice to women looking for work. Further, given the common experience of layoffs and closures resulting from COVID-19, it is acutely important for women to have access to consistent streams of income; providing women with resources to pursue state or federal support

through welfare programs is instrumental to long-term economic stability. These recommendations are consistent with calls for gender-responsive practice (Wright et al., 2012).

The results of this research illustrate potential externalities of the COVID-19 pandemic on justice- and substance-involved women's employment. Future research should continue to examine the consequences of the pandemic on justice-involved women's employment over time. Increased attention to the interrelatedness of health, recovery, and employment for justice- and substance-involved women will encourage the development of appropriate programming for this population.

Notes

1. A small number (n=6) of women responded that COVID-19 did not have an effect on their employment; however, as they elaborated on their responses, these women mentioned positive effects consistent with the inductively derived themes. These women's responses were coded accordingly and included in the analysis.

2. Subcodes related to the categories of effects were not mutually exclusive; as such, women's responses can fall into multiple categories. Valence of the effect, however, was mutually exclusive (i.e. responses could not be coded indicating both a positive and negative effect).

3. Pseudonyms were used in place of first names to protect participant anonymity.

CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

Though women leaving jail identify employment as one of their greatest priorities (Ramaswamy et al., 2015), there is an absence of research regarding their experiences seeking employment after spending time in jail. Using a sample of women returning from jail contexts, this dissertation aimed to fill this gap using interdisciplinary theories, frameworks, and intersectional feminist methods. This collection of articles represents a contribution to a growing body of literature that acknowledges the role of both structural barriers and agency in the outcomes of justice-involved women searching for work, and the importance of gender-responsive considerations for justice- and substance-involved women as they navigate their multiple needs in their reentry. The following section represents the key findings and implications to be garnered from this research.

The social and spatial mismatch of justice-involved women

Findings

Guided by sociological and economic theory, as well as intersectional feminist methodologies, this article investigated how justice-involved women experience and mitigate spatial mismatch—or the discrepancy between the locations of available job opportunities and the places where individuals live—through their social networks, and how these experiences and mitigation strategies vary by race. Not only more likely to experience spatial mismatch and unemployment, Black and multiracial women were also less likely to ask for or receive resources from family or friends. White women experiencing spatial mismatch were more likely to mobilize resources and were more likely to receive multiple forms of support. These findings

corroborate past research that recognizes the inter-relatedness of economic opportunity and social capital, as well as differential barriers to accessing resources by racial identity.

Implications for policy and practice

Black and multiracial women were more likely to live in areas with fewer jobs available to them, and fewer resources to help mitigate this barrier. Efforts targeting the racial distribution of opportunity and resources are consequently required to reduce this disparity. Interventions of this nature include providing Section 8 vouchers that cover costs of living in areas with increased job availability, programs that help in overcoming housing discrimination so women can move to areas with available jobs, job development in economically depressed areas, and increasing public transit access (Hughes, 1995). In addition, extending the access of safety net programs, especially for people convicted of drug and other offenses would improve access to resources for this population (Allard, 2008), which could in turn improve outcomes for individual who are unable to access such resources through their social networks.

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Barriers, strategies, and facilitators of employment

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Findings

This article explored the relevant barriers to and facilitators of employment for substance-involved women after spending time in jail, as well as women's strategies to overcome these barriers. Women identified a variety of barriers, including transportation, justice involvement and employer discrimination, and mental and/or physical disabilities. Less often, women mentioned caretaking responsibilities and human capital deficits as substantial barriers to employment. Though transportation barriers were most often mentioned, women in the sample were also more likely to mention strategies to address these difficulties. Women were least likely

to mention strategies to navigate barriers related to caretaking responsibilities and mental and physical disabilities. For the small subset of women that experienced no barriers to employment, they identified multiple techniques and attributes that aided in their job searches. As was the case in many women's strategies to overcome barriers to employment, facilitators included resources, information, or employment connections from family and friends to find work.

Implications for policy and practice

The findings of this research have specific policy-relevant implications. First, the finding of barriers unique to women highlights the importance of gender-responsive reentry programming that reflects women's lived experiences (Duwe, 2015; Messina et al., 2010; Wright et al., 2012). Women leaving carceral settings should be given appropriate resources to improve their job search and eventual job prospects. In addition, women should feel capable and prepared to search for work through job search websites, construct resumés, and successfully interview by creating recovery narratives. As such, practitioners can improve job search readiness by conducting mock interviews and application workshops. Few women mentioned identifying agencies as a way to improve their efforts to find and maintain work. Providing women with comprehensive information regarding employment agencies that focus on job placement can improve women's employment outcomes. Finally, occupational license reform to allow women with felony offenses to pursue careers in healthcare, caretaking and cosmetology can reduce inequality.

The effects of COVID-19 on employment

Findings

This article investigated the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on justice- and substance-involved women's experiences finding and maintaining work. The findings illustrate the multifaceted impacts that the pandemic had on women's employment, including women's job security, labor market competition, caretaking obligations, mental health and recovery, and women's physical health and health concerns. Women, especially those in the service industry, experienced bouts of unemployment as a result of business closures. Women were also responsible for the care of children and older family members, which prevented them from finding work. The pandemic also exacerbated women's experiences of stress, anxiety, and isolation, and sometimes these affective states resulted in substance use. Though most women noted negative effects of the pandemic, some women felt that the pandemic may have improved their employment prospects. Women identified that the pandemic discouraged people from working, and this increased the likelihood that they were considered for the positions they applied for. Women also stated that the pandemic allowed them more time to work on their recovery, gave them space from bad influences, and provided needed perspective.

Implications for policy and practice

There were several practical takeaways and implications for policy and treatment practitioners. First, in line with past research findings, it is clear that women with justice involvement face a litany of barriers finding employment (Roddy et al., 2020), many of which were intensified during the COVID-19 pandemic. Changing the conditions of supervision during national and global health emergencies seems especially prudent given the large number of

women who have experienced effects stemming from concerns for their health and the well-being of children and elderly family members. Practitioners working with justice- and substance-involved women looking for work should understand the interconnectedness of health, recovery, and employment during this especially dangerous time in public health. Educating staff on the difficulties associated with obtaining financial stability in addition to recovery can help them provide important context and advice to women looking for work. Further, given the common experience of layoffs and closures resulting from COVID-19, it is acutely important for women to have access to consistent streams of income. Providing women with information and resources to pursue state or federal support through welfare programs is instrumental to long-term economic stability.

APPENDIX

Table 1. Differences in job density in area of residence and social capital racial groups and employment outcomes

Variables	White Women (n=32)			Black/Multiracial Women (n=24)		
	Employed	Unemployed	Test statistic	Employed	Unemployed	Test statistic
Frequency n(%)	25 (69.57%)**	7 (30.43%)**	--	12 (50%)**	12 (50%)**	$\chi^2 = 4.83$
Job density $M(SD)$	0.42 (0.11)*			0.37 (0.10)*		$t = 1.98$
	0.43 (0.02)	0.40 (0.04)	$t = -0.73$	0.44 (0.08)**	0.30 (0.07)**	$t = -4.73$
Job-relevant social capital $M(SD)$	0.25 (0.98)*			-0.33 (0.94)*		$t = 2.22$
	0.32 (1.04)	-0.02 (0.66)	$t = -0.82$	0.28 (0.67)**	-0.95 (0.78)**	$t = -4.14$
Pearson correlation coefficient, job density and social capital:	$r = -0.29$ (p = 0.10)[†]			$r = 0.32$ (p = 0.12)		

[†] p<0.10, * p < .05, ** p < .01

Table 2. Emergent themes and subthemes across racial groups related to family and friend assistance finding employment

Level of job density	Race	Low social capital (%)	Employed (%)	Emergent themes and subthemes[1]
Low (bottom 50%; n=28)	Black and multiracial women (n=16)	12 (75%)	4 (25%)	• Received help (n=10) ○ Information/references (n=7) ○ Transportation (n=3) ○ Financial assistance (n=1) • No help (n=6)
	White women (n=12)	3 (25%)	9 (75%)	• Received help (n=9) ○ Information/references (n=5) ○ Transportation (n=4) ○ Financial assistance (n=4) • No help (n=3)

Note: subthemes are not mutually exclusive.

Table 3. Frequencies of barriers to employment

Barriers and corresponding frequency	Participants coded		Example
	n	% (of total)	
One or more barriers to employment	**42**	**70.00**	
Transportation	27	45.00	"Not having my own transportation has always been a big issue…"
Justice involvement/discrimination	23	38.33	"I wasn't able to find [a job] after my first felony around my neighborhood."
Mental and/or physical disability	18	30.00	"I worked for a factory for a little bit and then I relapsed... I wasn't ready for that kind of environment."
Caretaking responsibility	11	18.33	"My father is older and I was worried about, you know, leaving and going somewhere and coming back"
Human capital deficits	9	15.00	"Everything has changed so much. It's all online.…Well, it was it was really different."
No barriers	**18**	**30.00**	

Note: Subcategories of barriers are not mutually exclusive.

Table 4. Strategies used to address barriers to employment

Barrier and corresponding strategy	Found strategy		Example
	n	% mentioned	
Transportation	**19**	**70.37**	
Asked family/friends for rides	10		"When I came home, my mom had bought a vehicle for me, so I was okay."
Looked for jobs in areas around residence	8		"When I first started out, I picked something close to where I live that I can get to or walk to…"
Used ride share/public transit	5		"We had to take the bus like 12 miles…It would be very hard."
Found employment that provides transportation	2		"Actually, the place that I worked for did provide a ride to work because of my situation…"
Criminal history/discrimination	**15**	**65.22**	
Located offender-friendly employment/asked for references	10		"Asking people…helps me know what places were receptive to people that had a background like me, and it made it so that I was less nervous…"
Disclosed background/constructed recovery narratives	7		"I tell them, 'I don't do that anymore. I don't even think about doing it anymore because I am not ever, ever, ever going back to jail. Never.'"
Mental and physical disability	**8**	**44.44**	
Prioritize recovery	5		"Then the strategy I use, mainly just get up and stay focused and not use…" [307]
Applied for social security	3		"I applied for disability… I hired a lawyer but I still don't have it."
Utilized job placement services	1		"Michigan Rehabilitation Services is a place that offers help with people that have disabilities and they help with job placement… I used them."
Caretaking responsibility	**3**	**27.27**	
Asked family for help	2		"My sister will sometimes watch my kids…but she works too. If our schedules overlap, I have to find a replacement."
Turned caretaking into employment	1		"I was like a live in caretaker at the house that I actually like grew up in…my family was my employer."
Human capital deficits	**6**	**66.67**	
Applied to "realistic" jobs	4		"You've got to have a plan and it has to be a realistic plan and it will work."
Asked for family/friend assistance	3		"[Recovery coach] helped me clean up my resumé so that it just looked a little bit more professional and up to date"

Note: Categories and subcategories of barriers were not mutually exclusive.

Table 5. Facilitators of employment

Facilitators	Participants coded		Example
	n mentioned	%	
No barriers to employment	**18**	**30.00**	
Friends/family provides employment/reference	6		"I knew somebody who works here, and so I was able to get in pretty easily."
Returned to previous employer	4		"I just went to the same job that I used to have. I didn't want to go through the whole process of being rejected..."
Education/work experience	4		"It's never been difficult for me to find a job if I need one… because I've had a lot of different experience or as I just know what they're looking for when they interview."
Self-efficacy/confidence/persistence	3		"I have pretty good confidence…I always know that I can prosper pretty much wherever I go as long as I'm working."

Note: Subcategories of barriers were not mutually exclusive.

Table 6. Categories and valence of effects of COVID-19 on women's employment

| Category of effect | Valence of effects | | | | | | Total |
| | Negative | | Positive | | Mixed/Unclear | | |
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n
Job security and labor market	16	66.67	4	16.67	4	16.67	**24**
Recovery/Mental health	11	61.11	3	16.67	4	22.22	**18**
Physical health/health-related concerns	9	81.82	0	0.00	2	18.18	**11**
Caretaking	6	75.00	0	0.00	2	25.00	**8**

Note: Categories of effects were not mutually exclusive.

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