

**The Effects of Housing, Employment and Stigma in the Re-entry Process and  
Recidivism with Black and Hispanic Women aged 25- 40**

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**Abstract**

The objective of this study is to explore effective community reentry programs and their impact on recidivism among Black and Hispanic women aged 25-40. This exploratory study aims to show how challenges of housing, employment and stigma affect successful reentry for Black and Hispanic women after incarceration. It will explore a sample size of 30 to 40 female (n=15 Black, n=15 Hispanic, n=10 mixed ethnicity) inmates from prisons and jails across Illinois. Information was collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews. These participants were recruited through community outreach and flyers. The findings suggest the reentry programs need to adapt their programs to benefit and strengthen Black and Hispanic women's voices, which would include better trauma-informed care.

### **Introduction**

This study investigates the effect of community-based re-entry programs on recidivism among Black and Hispanic women. The U.S. prison system often traps incarcerated individuals in a cycle of recidivism by imposing numerous barriers to successful re-entry and limiting access to opportunities that could prevent re-incarceration. Community-based re-entry programs are designed to assist individuals in transitioning back into society and to reduce the likelihood of reoffending. While these programs are generally assumed to facilitate successful reintegration, it remains essential to critically assess their actual efficacy in achieving these outcomes.

As will be discussed below, there exists a significant gap in the literature concerning the impact of re-entry programs on Black and Hispanic women specifically. This population faces unique structural inequalities and barriers compared to both men of the same racial and ethnic backgrounds and women from other populations. This study will determine whether re-entry programs are effective in reducing recidivism in this population in the same way as they are for other groups. This will be achieved by collecting qualitative data directly from individuals who are currently experiencing the re-entry process.

The findings of this study will help determine whether current re-entry programs are accessible and effective for this population, and whether additional, less visible barriers may be hindering their success. Furthermore, if the programs are found to be less effective for Black and Hispanic women, this research will explore potential reasons for the discrepancy and implications for policy and practice aimed at improving re-entry outcomes.

**Problem Statement**

Most reentry community programs were designed through a male-centered framework, specifically focusing on the significance of Black men incarcerated and returning to their community. A main component in these reentry programs focuses on the aggression and antisocial behavioral issues that men face in society. Many of the community reentry programs have a disproportionately high number of black men, which is often correlated to systemic racism, such as barriers in housing and employment.

Many Black and Hispanic women face underrepresentation in prisons. This often leads to invisibility. Invisibility can occur in a multitude of ways. For Black and Hispanic incarcerated women, they may experience a lack of care or attention from prison staff that leads to feelings of being dehumanized or devalued (Law, 2022). Many Black and Hispanic women may feel unseen by certain policy changes or feel invisible to society. These feelings and experiences may affect their reentry to society and create barriers to employment and housing. It may also be a crucial component to how they think, especially in how they see themselves. It hinders their growth and creates a cycle of criminal behavior.

The gender-gap and invisibility are two major issues in research that impact Black and Hispanic women. Most reentry programs were created to redefine men's behavior, which has left many Black and Hispanic women feeling invisible in both the research and the community design. There is a significant lack of data on methods to reduce and improve the gender-gap among community reentry programs. Lastly, there is a lack of reentry programs that support mothers, which expands to post release (Greenfelder et al., 2021).

## Significance of Research

Recidivism remains one of the most pressing challenges within the U.S. criminal justice system, disproportionately affecting women of color. Black and Hispanic women encounter unique systemic barriers during the reentry process, including limited access to stable housing, employment opportunities, healthcare, and family reunification. These barriers are compounded by racial and gendered stigmas, resulting in higher rates of supervision violations and returns to custody. Despite the growing number of women in correctional systems, research on gender-responsive and culturally informed reentry programming is still underdeveloped. The proposed study, *The Effect of Community-Based Reentry Programs on Recidivism Among Black and Hispanic Women*, is significant because it addresses both an empirical gap and a pressing social justice issue.

Evidence suggests that programs tailored to women's needs can positively affect reentry outcomes. Salisbury et al. (2023) conducted a randomized controlled trial of gender-responsive probation with and without additional community health specialists. Although they found “no statistically significant differences in recidivism between groups” (p. 426), both conditions demonstrated substantially lower recidivism compared to baseline rates. This finding is significant because it confirms that gender-responsive approaches can disrupt cycles of reoffending. However, it also highlights the need to examine what additional supports, such as culturally responsive services for Black and Hispanic women, might further strengthen program outcomes.

Beyond program structure, the lived experiences of women of color reveal systemic inequities that reentry programs must address. Williams, Spencer, and Wilson (2020) used qualitative interviews to show how Black women navigate reentry amid overlapping oppressions

of racism, sexism, and classism. The authors observed that women often experience “the criminalization of mothering” (p. 1117), where surveillance and stigma undermine their identities as parents and caregivers. This insight underscores the significance of research that investigates not only recidivism outcomes but also the mechanisms through which reentry programs can alleviate or perpetuate these inequities. By focusing on Black and Hispanic women, the proposed study centers on populations often marginalized in mainstream corrections research.

Substance use and mental health challenges also intersect with reentry outcomes. Miller, Miller, and Barnes (2016) found that participation in a Second Chance Act program for opioid-involved women was associated with “significantly lower recidivism” (p. 132). Qualitative data revealed that women attributed success to wraparound supports that promoted self-efficacy and recovery. This dual finding demonstrates the importance of combining quantitative outcomes with qualitative insights. For the proposed study, adopting a mixed perspective will illuminate not only whether reentry programs work for women of color, but *how* these programs address underlying barriers like substance use, housing, and employment.

The significance of this research extends beyond academic inquiry; it directly informs policy and practice. Black and Hispanic women are often overlooked in criminal justice reforms, even though they experience some of the most severe consequences of incarceration and reentry. By empirically evaluating community-based programs in this demographic, the study has the potential to guide resource allocation and program design. As Salisbury et al. (2023) emphasized, integrating public health approaches into supervision is promising, but “program fidelity and intensity” are critical to achieving measurable outcomes (p. 428). Similarly, Williams et al. (2020) illustrated that unless reentry initiatives address stigma, discrimination, and family disruption, their impact will remain limited.

This proposed study is also significant in its ability to bridge gaps between criminal justice, social work, and public health fields. Reentry is not simply a matter of correctional supervision; it is a holistic process requiring coordination across housing, employment, health, and family services. Investigating how programs meet the needs of women of color contributes to the development of more integrated service models.

### **Purpose of The Study**

The purpose of this study is to examine the effect of community-based reentry programs on recidivism among Black and Hispanic women aged 25 to 40. Specifically, the study aims to compare outcomes between individuals who receive structured reentry support, such as housing assistance, employment placement, therapy, and peer mentoring, and those who do not. It will further analyze how racial and socioeconomic disparities influence recidivism rates, exploring whether systemic inequities, including limited access to stable housing, employment opportunities, and fair parole conditions, contribute to these outcomes. A focused evaluation of specific reentry models, such as halfway houses or restorative justice circles, will provide deeper insights into the effectiveness of targeted community interventions in reducing recidivism for this population.

### **Summary**

The proposed research is significant because it (a) extends the evidence base on gender-responsive and community-based programming, (b) centers the lived experiences of Black and Hispanic women who face structural inequities in reentry, and (c) informs future program and policy development aimed at reducing recidivism. As Miller et al. (2016) demonstrated, comprehensive services can reduce reoffending, but without attention to cultural and systemic barriers identified by Williams et al. (2020), the benefits may be uneven. The

proposed study builds on these findings by explicitly examining the intersection of race, gender, and community support in reentry, thereby contributing to both knowledge and justice reform.

## **Literature Review**

### **Reentry Program Background**

During the 1970s, the United States saw a significant increase in the numbers of individuals incarcerated. The statistics reflected an increasing trend towards returning inmates, also known as reoffenders. It is believed that by 1975, there were an estimated 400,000 people incarcerated (Garland 2001, Maur & Chesney-Lind, 2002). The United States would see the incarceration population rise over 2 million, which would lead to the “mass incarceration” era.

During his State of Union Address in 2004, President Bush would announce the Prisoner Reentry Initiative (PRI) program. This program would be a precursor to the Second Chance Act. The Prisoner Reentry Initiative program would create pilot programs that centered around vocational skills, credentials, and planning. The PRI program was headed by the Department of Labor and was projected to be a 4-year \$300,000 million dollar plan. It consisted of both government and faith-based agencies, which helped provide services. The PRI program was primarily funded through the Department of Justice’s Offices of Justice Programs (OJP), along with the Department of Labor.

On April 9<sup>th</sup>, 2008, President George W. Bush signed the Second Chance Act (SCA) into law. One of the main aspects of the SCA would ensure that individuals leaving prison would have proper support by reducing obstacles in employment, housing, and education. The Second Chance Act would be embraced by countless organizations and leaders. Many individuals in the criminal justice system, corrections, law enforcement and behavioral experts backed the SCA and believed this would be a significant way to strengthen communities. Organizations such as

Catholic Charities USA and Prison Fellowship joined in supporting the SCA as it would lead to reducing recidivism and focusing on the root of the crime. The SCA would gain over \$400,000 million dollars in funds, which would aim in decreasing the \$8 billion annual burden of reincarceration costs. For each fiscal year, the SCA would receive over \$181 million dollars to use towards programs that helped individuals with substance treatment, education, and post-release. These funds were to be received through various federal and state grants. The Second Chance Act was reauthorized in 2018, then again in 2025. In 2018, the Second Chance Act would introduce a pilot program that would aid in the early release of elderly inmates (Federal Bureau of Prisons, 2024). In 2025, the Second Chance Act saw an expansion, especially focused on the substance use disorder (SUD) services. This includes peer recovery, overdose education and prevention.

Many community reentry programs were created to provide a pillar of empowerment and support for those transitioning back in their communities. These programs are dedicated to facilitating access to essential resources, such as healthcare or employment. It is crucial that individuals reentering society have both a stable and secure foundation. This allows individuals to navigate through the world with healthy support systems, while learning how to appropriately take care of their responsibilities. These programs ensure an individual builds a community, which gives them a sense of belonging. A critical piece of community reentry programs is helping individuals grow into responsibility and reliable community members.

### **Effects of Employment on Recidivism**

The challenges facing individuals after incarceration extend beyond the prison setting, with employment serving as one of the most critical determinants of successful reintegration. Women generally face more disadvantages to post-incarceration reentry into the community and

workforce due to concurring social and economic factors. These can include caregiving responsibilities, health issues, and limited work experience. Much of the research on post-incarceration outcomes has centered on gender distinctions with marginal focus on ethnicity. The purpose of this literature review is to synthesize existing research findings to better understand barriers and support systems influencing employment success rates for women of Black and Hispanic ethnicities that promote equitable and viable reentry into the workforce.

Lalonde and Cho (2008) state that incarceration significantly reduces women's employment prospects when inmates do not participate in work-release programs or do not have these types of programs offered through their facility. Parsons and Warner-Robbins (2002) emphasize the role of social and health support in facilitating successful transitions back to the community by incorporating a holistic approach including faith, addiction, rehabilitation, support groups, mentorship and family initiatives. Richmond (2014) explores the effects of the Federal Prison Industries Program on recidivism. This program is operated by UNICOR and provides inmates skills to help with the transition from being an inmate to release back into the community. Western and Sirois (2019), along with Rucks-Ahidiana, Harding, and Harris (2021), analyzing how race and geography shape labor market inequality after incarceration like Richmond's study; however, they also include access to healthcare and case management. These studies highlight an association between gender, race, and social systemic barriers in post-incarceration employment outcomes using various support systems to analyze the impact on successful outcomes.

There is evidence that Black and Hispanic women face additional disadvantages in employment after incarceration compared to white women. Formerly incarcerated Black women have significantly higher rates of unemployment, with estimates showing rates as high as 43.6%

versus 23.2% for white women (Western & Sirois, 2019; Prison Policy Initiative, 2024). This disparity is attributed to the combination of several factors, race, gender, and criminal history, leading to a greater barrier to employment (Western & Sirois, 2019; Rucks-Ahidiana et al., 2021). One study outlined that Hispanic women experience pronounced disadvantages, with lower employment rates and earnings post-release, due to both racial discrimination and insufficient access to stable job networks (Rucks-Ahidiana et al., 2021; Harding et al., 2021).

These disadvantages are compounded by structural factors, such as living in communities with limited access to “felon-friendly” employers and reduced social capital (Western & Sirois, 2019; Rucks-Ahidiana et al., 2021). Overall, the literature indicates that Black and Hispanic women are at a marked disadvantage in the post-incarceration labor market (Western & Sirois, 2019; Rucks-Ahidiana et al., 2021; Prison Policy Initiative, 2024).

The literature provides evidence to support the successful implementation of gender specific reentry, including vocational training, mental health and substance abuse treatment, and childcare resources. Research is available that focuses on gender variations; however, they provide little distinction for women from diverse ethnic backgrounds. This lack of granular data highlights a gap in the available resources to support the purpose of our study and emphasizes the potential for additional studies to be conducted in this area.

### **Effects of Housing on Recidivism**

Housing is a critical determinant of successful reentry following incarceration. Individuals transitioning from correctional facilities often face intersecting challenges—limited access to stable housing, employment barriers, and health disparities—that collectively heighten the risk of recidivism. Recent scholarship has focused on the relationship between post-incarceration housing conditions and reentry outcomes, highlighting both structural and

individual-level factors. This review synthesizes findings from three empirical studies: Jacobs and Gottlieb (2020), Raber et al. (2018), and Walter et al. (2021), each examining distinct but related aspects of housing and reentry.

Jacobs and Gottlieb (2020) investigated how housing circumstances affect recidivism among individuals on probation in San Francisco. Using administrative data and regression analyses, the authors found that stable housing significantly reduced the likelihood of reoffending. Conversely, individuals experiencing housing instability—defined by frequent moves, temporary accommodations, or homelessness—were at a greater risk of violating probation conditions or committing new offenses. Importantly, the study underscored that housing instability often interacts with other vulnerabilities, such as unemployment and substance use, suggesting that interventions must be holistic rather than purely housing-focused. Jacobs and Gottlieb's (2020) findings provide strong empirical support for policy initiatives that integrate housing assistance into community supervision programs. Significantly, Jacobs and Gottlieb (2020) found that each residential move increased the risk of recidivism by 12% and that homelessness increased the risk of recidivism by 50%. The authors discovered that having secure housing has positive outcomes on recidivism and that there was no significant difference between the type of housing secured, whether cohabitating with friends, family or alone.

While Jacobs and Gottlieb (2020) emphasized general probation populations, Raber et al. (2018) focused specifically on incarcerated women applying to a transitional housing reentry program. Their study profiled the socio-demographic and health characteristics of women seeking housing support post-incarceration. The sample revealed a high prevalence of chronic health conditions, mental health issues, and histories of trauma and substance use. The authors argued that transitional housing programs must account for these intersecting needs, as the lack

of adequate housing upon release exacerbates both physical and mental health challenges. Furthermore, the study highlighted gender-specific barriers, such as caregiving responsibilities and histories of abuse, that differentiate women's reentry experiences from those of men. Raber et al. (2018) thus advance the literature by framing housing not only as a logistical resource but as a form of health and social support essential to women's successful reintegration.

Walter et al. (2021) expanded the discussion by examining longitudinal residential trajectories following incarceration. Using data from a reentry cohort, they identified several patterns of post-incarceration housing stability, ranging from continuous stable housing to chronic instability. The study found that individuals who transitioned directly into stable, independent living situations had better long-term outcomes, while those cycling through temporary or institutional settings faced ongoing instability and higher risks of recidivism. Walter et al. (2021) emphasized that housing stability is a dynamic process rather than a fixed status, influenced by systemic factors (such as local housing markets and parole restrictions) and personal circumstances (such as family support or employment). Their findings call for reentry programs that offer sustained housing assistance beyond the immediate post-release period.

Taken together, these studies converge on the conclusion that housing stability is a central factor in the reentry process. Jacobs and Gottlieb (2020) provide evidence linking stable housing to reduced recidivism, while Raber et al. (2018) and Walter et al. (2021) illustrate how health, gender, and long-term trajectories shape housing outcomes. Collectively, they highlight the need for reentry policies that move beyond short-term housing placement to address structural inequities, health disparities, and individualized support. Transitional and supportive housing models—particularly those tailored to women and individuals with complex needs—emerge as

key interventions. Furthermore, these studies point to the importance of cross-sector collaboration among criminal justice agencies, public health systems, and housing providers.

The reviewed literature underscores housing as both a social determinant of health and a cornerstone of successful community reintegration. While each study approaches the issue from a different perspective, all affirm that without stable and supportive housing, individuals leaving incarceration face heightened risks of recidivism and poor health outcomes. Future research should explore longitudinal impacts of housing interventions, intersectional factors (e.g., race, gender, and disability), and the role of community-based partnerships in promoting sustained reintegration.

### **Effects of Stigma on Recidivism**

Stigma following incarceration remains one of the most persistent barriers to successful reentry, particularly for Black and Hispanic women. Although community-based reentry programs aim to support individuals transitioning from incarceration, the broader societal and structural stigma attached to criminal records continues to undermine their effectiveness. Stigma manifests not only in overt discrimination but also through institutional practices that restrict access to stable housing, employment, and social belonging (Gunn, 2022). For women of color, these barriers are magnified by the intersection of racialized and gendered stereotypes that frame them as untrustworthy, deviant, or unfit for rehabilitation. Understanding how stigma interacts with housing and employment is therefore essential to addressing the disproportionate rates of recidivism among this population and advancing equitable reentry practices.

Access to housing is one of the most significant predictors of successful reentry, yet it remains one of the most stigmatized domains for formerly incarcerated individuals. Policies that permit landlords and housing authorities to deny applicants with criminal records perpetuate

cycles of instability and homelessness (NIJ, 2022). For Black and Hispanic women, these challenges are compounded by racial bias and gendered assumptions about motherhood and responsibility. The *National Institute of Justice* report (2022) found that formerly incarcerated women of color are more likely to be denied housing or placed in unsafe environments due to background check restrictions and limited social networks. As Gunn (2022) notes, these women often experience “layered stigma,” meaning that their criminal history, race, and gender intersect to create a compounded form of exclusion that transcends individual prejudice.

Housing discrimination not only undermines physical stability but also erodes a sense of safety and belonging. Without access to safe and affordable housing, many women are forced into temporary or high-risk living arrangements, which can increase exposure to unsafe neighborhoods or previous social networks associated with substance use and criminal activity (Montclair University, 2021). This instability can trigger stress and desperation, which research identifies as significant contributors to recidivism (NIJ, 2022). Moreover, the fear of rejection from housing applications reinforces internalized stigmas and self-doubt. For many women, the inability to secure stable housing becomes symbolic of a broader message from society, which is that they are unworthy of full reintegration. Such exclusionary practice highlights how stigma functions as both a social and structural determinant of reoffending.

Employment is a critical factor in reducing recidivism, yet it is also one of the most visible arenas in which stigma operates. Employers routinely use background checks to screen out applicants with criminal records, perpetuating what scholars call “invisible punishment” (OJP, 2021). Even when women have completed vocational training or obtained certifications through reentry programs, they continue to face rejection once their conviction status becomes known (Montclair University, 2021). The *I Am Not Your Felon* study (2021) illustrates how

Black and Hispanic women often internalize the shame and distrust projected onto them by potential employers, leading to diminished self-efficacy and reluctance to apply for positions. The stigma associated with incarceration also interacts with broader racialized labor market inequities. Research shows that Black and Hispanic women already face lower wages, fewer benefits, and less job security compared to their White counterparts (NIJ, 2022). When combined with the “felon” label, these inequities compound, leaving women with limited employment options or forcing them into low-paying, unstable work. This cycle of underemployment contributes directly to recidivism: without consistent income, many women struggle to meet basic needs, maintain housing, or support children (OJP, 2021). The *Formerly Incarcerated Women and Reentry* report (NIJ, 2022) emphasizes that employment stigma not only affects material outcomes but also undermines women’s sense of identity and belonging. The social rejection they experience reinforces feelings of isolation, shame, and alienation; psychological states that can make sustained reentry even more difficult.

The impact of stigmas on housing and employment cannot be understood in isolation from race, gender, and socioeconomic status. The intersectional nature of stigma means that formerly incarcerated Black and Hispanic women experience discrimination through overlapping systems of oppression, including racism, sexism, and classism. These structural dynamics contribute to what Gunn (2022) calls a “wounded healing” process, in which women must navigate personal recovery while simultaneously confronting external rejection.

Community-based reentry programs that recognize and address these intersecting stigmas are therefore essential to promoting long-term reintegration.

Social justice theory provides a useful lens for understanding this relationship. It posits that equitable access to opportunity and resources, not individual willpower alone, is central to

reducing recidivism. Programs that provide case management, advocacy, trauma-informed therapy, and employment partnerships can help mitigate the effects of stigma by fostering environments where women are seen as whole persons rather than permanent offenders (NIJ, 2022). However, without broader policy reform and societal attitude shifts, even the most well-designed reentry programs operate within a stigmatizing context that limits their impact. Addressing stigma is thus both a psychological and systemic imperative.

### **Research Methods**

The study will use a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore how Black and Hispanic women experience stigma, housing barriers, and employment discrimination during the re-entry process. A phenomenological approach is appropriate because it centers the lived experiences of participants and captures the emotional, relational, and structural dimensions of re-entry that quantitative designs often overlook. Semi-structured interviews will be used to allow participants to describe their experiences in their own words while still ensuring consistency across interviews. Purposeful sampling will help recruit women with varying backgrounds and time since release to capture a broad range of experiences.

Interview data will be examined using thematic analysis to identify shared patterns, meanings, and challenges related to stigma, housing instability, and employment discrimination. This design not only aligns with the exploratory nature of the research questions but also provides a foundation for future studies. Findings can inform the development of quantitative measures, mixed-methods evaluations of re-entry programs, and policy-focused research aimed at reducing structural barriers for women of color. By highlighting key themes and lived realities, this design supports both deeper understanding and practical recommendations for enhancing successful re-entry and reducing recidivism.

**Methodology**

The target population for this study is Black and Hispanic women aged 25 to 40 who have experienced incarceration and participated in community-based reentry programs. This focus is justified by the unique structural and systemic barriers faced by women of color in the criminal justice system, as well as the underrepresentation they experience in both research and practice. A third, distinct subset will include individuals from this demographic who have violated parole or the reentry program to assess unaddressed needs and barriers.

A purposive sampling strategy will be employed to ensure the research centers highlight areas most affected by community reentry challenges. Purposive sampling is appropriate for qualitative inquiry where the focus on relevant experience is prioritized over randomization and allows the flexibility to adjust criteria as the study progresses. The primary sample will intentionally include women who identify as Black or Hispanic, have been recently released from incarceration, and enrolled in, or completed, at least one community-based reentry program. The target sample size is 40 participants that will be divided into the following groups: 15 Black women, 15 Hispanic women meeting standard inclusion criteria, and 10 women (across both ethnicities) who have violated parole or dropped out of reentry programs. This sample size allows for thorough in-depth interviews while ensuring enough participants to uncover recurring themes in the data. Sample selection will be identified through program records, parole officer referrals, and connections with community organizations that support former inmates. The justification for these procedures is due to their effectiveness at reaching populations often overlooked through normal volunteer protocols while ensuring relevant subject diversity.

Eligibility screening will take place through initial phone calls and outreach sessions hosted at partnering agencies. Participants will receive detailed oral and written explanations of

the study's purpose, voluntary nature, and confidentiality measures before any data collection begins. Informed consent will be obtained in writing, with time allotted for questions and withdrawal at any stage without penalty.

Qualitative data will be collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews conducted either in person or via secure video teleconferencing platforms, depending on participant preference and public health considerations. Each participant will be interviewed for between sixty and ninety minutes. Each round of interviews will be conducted over the span of two months then revisited every 4 months. Interview protocols for the third group will focus specifically on perceived gaps in reentry programming, the barriers that contributed to parole or program violations, and recommendations for program improvement to promote better outcomes.

Participants will be offered compensation for their time and receive a \$75 incentive per interview completed, with a total of up to four interviews per participant during the study's duration. The incentive budget will be a total of \$75,000 assuming all forty participants complete a total of four sessions each. This incentive amount is justified as an ethical way to recognize the value of each participant's lived experience and time and also encourages participation among populations who might otherwise face economic barriers to engagement.

Data from the subset of participants who have violated parole or exited programs prematurely will be analyzed to identify recurring limitations, system gaps, and contextual barriers contributing to unsuccessful reentry. These insights will be critically important for informing both future program development and broader policy recommendations, spotlighting overlooked or unmet needs within the existing reentry framework.

This methodology ensures that the research is rigorous, ethically sound, and tailored to the realities faced by Black and Hispanic women during reentry, while also systematically

capturing the feedback from participants whose current programs have not been sufficiently supportive of their employment re-entry.

### **Instrumentation**

The main instrumentation method we will be using for this study will be our list of interview questions, as seen in the appendix attached to this proposal. We will not be using any specific assessment when conducting this study. Our main concern when utilizing interview questions as our method of data collection is reliability. Reliability in research requires that data from experiments be replicable and consistent. This is not the case in our study because we are collecting qualitative data about individual experiences. If we repeated these questions at a later date, even if we assumed exactly the same participants, there is no guarantee we would get the same answers. Rather, we chose to pursue qualitative methods and collect data via interview questions because we are more interested in obtaining data with high validity. We want to know what the true experience of Black and Hispanic women going through the re-entry process is like. An important consideration with our data collection is that it will be difficult to keep the researchers' bias out of the equation. We strive to make a list of questions that do not lead the participants to any particular answer, but it will be difficult to create a completely neutral set of questions. In addition, care must be paid to the environment the interviews will be conducted in as well as the interviewer themselves so that no external factor influences the answers our participants give.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

We will not be using any statistical test to analyze the data from this study because we are not collecting statistical data. Rather, we will be examining the information we gather through the lens of an Exploratory Qualitative Study. We will be looking for common themes in the

answers of our study participants and identifying previously unseen unique barriers to re-entry that this population faces. The information from this study could be, and we hope will be, utilized to examine the current re-entry process in Illinois and make systemic changes. Programs and grants could use this information to justify requesting additional funding or to establish whole new services based on identified needs.

### **Research Questions**

The proposed study aims to explore the lived experiences of Black and Hispanic women ages 25-40 who have participated in community-based re-entry programs. Because this is a qualitative design, the study is guided by open-ended research questions rather than testable hypotheses. The central research question is: How do stigma, housing, employment challenges shape Black and Hispanic women's experiences of re-entry following incarceration, and how do these barriers influence their vulnerability to recidivism? Secondary guiding questions include: How do women describe the role of community re-entry programs in supporting their transition? What barriers feel most significant in disrupting stable re-entry? How do participants perceive discrimination or stigma related to past incarceration as impacting housing and employment access?

Although qualitative studies do not test hypotheses, the research is guided by the assumption that perceived stigma, lack of stable housing, and limited employment opportunities are likely to emerge as the most significant obstacles to successful re-entry. The intention of the study is to explore participants' experiences rather than confirm predicative relationships.

### **Threats to Validity**

In qualitative research, internal validity is conceptualized as credibility, or, the degree to which findings accurately reflect participants' lived experiences. A primary threat to credibility

includes researcher bias. To address this, the study will incorporate reflective journaling of the interviewers, where researchers document assumptions, reactions, and power dynamics throughout the interview process and while analyzing the responses. Member checking will also be used by summarizing themes and offering participants a chance to clarify or confirm interpretations (Sybing, 2025). Another threat to validity involves incomplete or superficial data, which may occur if participants feel uncomfortable discussing stigma or trauma. To mitigate this, interviews will be semi-structured, conducted by trained researchers, and designed to allow participants control over the depth and direction of their answers.

Qualitative studies do not seek statistical generalizability, but they do aim for transferability, which is the extent to which findings may apply to similar populations of contexts (Leung, 2015). A threat to transferability includes a limited or homogenous sample, which may not capture the diversity of re-entry experiences among women of color. To strengthen transferability, the study will use purposeful sampling to ensure variation in experiences (e.g., different types of offences, time since release, length of participation in the re-entry program) (Leung, 2015).

### **Ethical Procedures**

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) was established to protect the rights and welfare of human participants in research studies. The IRB requires that researchers submit their material prior to conducting research to ensure protocol for confidentiality and safety is being met. Researchers are not allowed to conduct any research prior to receiving a stamp of approval from the IRB. If they do not get a stamp of approval, researchers must go back and modify their research protocol then resubmit it to the IRB.

One of the first steps our research team must do is to complete the required ethics training. Once we've completed this, we must submit the certificate in the IRB application. If we do not include the certificate, the IRB will not process our application. The IRB requires us to submit a research protocol. This will be considered a "blueprint" of our reentry study. The application will cover subjects such as our purpose, hypotheses, population, and the risk and benefits. The IRB will also want a step-by-step breakdown of our research methods. Another step in the application process is to include a precise timeline of the research study. Another part of the IRB application is recruitment material. Our research team must include our flyers used to recruit participants. If we used any form of social media or emails, this must be included in the application process as well. The IRB also requests that any surveys or interview questionnaires created for participants also be included in the application process.

Populations such as inmates require additional safeguards because their circumstances make them more vulnerable to coercion or influence. Those with a history of incarceration may feel compelled to obey those they perceive as authority figures, which can often make them feel like they must comply with orders. This can also be experienced among researchers and their studies. It is our duty to ensure the safety of our participants.

One of the most crucial pieces of research is the informed consent. We want to ensure our participants are fully informed to empower them to make decisions regarding their involvement in our research. The informed consent process requires our team to provide information to the forty participants in a language that they understand. Allowing the participants to make their own decisions in a language they can understand will help create trust between the women and our researchers. It is also important for our participants to know that they have the right to withdraw at any time. There is no pressure to remain in our study and there will be no monetary penalties if

they do choose to leave the study early. Remaining transparent in our goals and research will help create participants who remain engaged in our research. This will improve our overall success of the research and the outcome of the results.

Another important ethical procedure is confidentiality. It is a critical part of the research study for our participants. As researchers we must be sure to implement safety measures when protecting the data of this study. One of the first steps we should consider is how we are going to protect the data of our participants. Any written paperwork should be filed in a locked cabinet. If data is collected by a computer, an encrypted digital file with a password should be created. The only individuals who will have access to both are our research team. Secondly, it would be important to alter identifying information. Any documents that contain sensitive information of our participants will be redacted prior to being shared. This should include social security numbers, names, addresses, or other sensitive personal information. Our researchers will assign participants with specific numeric codes to track them over the next 12 months. By assigning a numerical code to each participant, we can ensure their confidentiality.

Lastly, an important aspect of our ethical procedures is protection from harm. It is our duty as the research team to ensure that our participants are not exposed to harm. This harm can come in many different forms including physical, emotional, or mental. During our research, we must provide a safe environment that allows our forty participants to describe their lived experiences. As we ask interview questions, we must monitor participants. If anyone seems noticeably uncomfortable or their stress level significantly increases, we must end the interview. During the research study, we must learn to respect our participant's personal boundaries and privacy. If there is something one of the women does not want to discuss, we must respect this. Pushing someone to speak about a matter they're uncomfortable with can cause push back. Our

researchers must be patient. It is important that our team gives each woman the space to express themselves. Another important factor to consider is showing each participant support by acknowledging and validating their lived experiences. This may demonstrate that our research team deeply cares and wants the best for all forty participants.

### **Conclusion**

The findings from this study highlight the need to rethink how community reentry programs support Black and Hispanic women after incarceration. Despite the abundance of community initiatives, gaps in housing, employment opportunities, and the impact of stigma remain real barriers to successful reintegration for many of the participants. Existing programs tend to center around men's experiences, leaving women, especially mothers, feeling unseen in both research and in practice.

The interviews in this study will work to provide a personal perspective on issues that have been fully captured. Future reentry programs need to be intentionally designed with not just gender, but race and cultural context. This requires stronger investments in trauma-informed care, practical assistance, and ongoing advocacy, rather than short-term solutions. When the goal is to reduce recidivism and promote lasting change, listening to women's voices will be crucial. Their stories will challenge the system to address the bigger picture and to build programs that are inclusive and responsive to lived experiences.



### **IRB APPROVAL LETTER**

The Chicago School  
325 N. LaSalle Street  
Chicago, IL 60643

**Subject:** Site Approval Letter

To whom it may concern:

This letter acknowledges that I have received and reviewed a request by Ashley Garber, Caitlin Bracy, Charlotte Allen, Tomas Hidalgo to conduct a research project entitled "*The Effects of Housing, Employment and Stigma in the Re-entry Process and Recidivism with Black and Hispanic Women aged 25- 40 yrs old*" at Illinois prisons and jails and I approve of this research to be conducted at our facility.

When the researcher receives approval for his/her research project from The Chicago School Institutional Review Board/NSU IRB, I agree to provide access for the approved research project. If we have any concerns or need additional information, we will contact The Chicago School's IRB at (888) 888-8888 or [irb@thechicagoschool.edu](mailto:irb@thechicagoschool.edu)

Sincerely,

Dr. Dana Laughlin, MA, NCC, LCPC  
IRB Coordinator  
[dlaughlin@thechicagoschool.edu](mailto:dlaughlin@thechicagoschool.edu)



# YOUR STORY. YOUR STRENGTH. YOUR VOICE.

HELP SHAPE BETTER REENTRY SUPPORT  
FOR BLACK AND HISPANIC WOMEN.

## Why Participate?

- ✓ Share your story in a safe, respectful space
- ✓ Contribute to improving reentry programs
- ✓ Your voice can help change the system
- ✓ Receive a thank-you gift card for your time

## What This Study is About

We're conducting a community-based study exploring how reentry programs can better support Black and Hispanic women returning home after incarceration.

Your experience and perspective can help shape more effective, compassionate services for women in your community.

## What Participation Looks Like

- ✓ A 45–60 minute confidential interview
- ✓ In-person, phone, or video options available
- ✓ Flexible scheduling — we work around your time



## Why Does It Matter?

- ✓ Many women face barriers to housing, employment, and healthcare after incarceration.
- ✓ Sharing your story helps break the cycle of recidivism and promote fairer reentry opportunities.
- ✓ Your voice helps raise awareness and inspire change for women returning home.

## Interested in Participating?

- 🌐 [reentry@gmail.com](mailto:reentry@gmail.com)
- 📍 123 Anywhere St., Any City
- 📞 +123-456-7890

Your name and information will remain completely confidential. All responses are kept private and used only for research purposes.



## **Informed Consent**

### **The Effects of Housing, Employment and Stigma in the Re-Entry Process and Recidivism with Black and Hispanic Women Aged 25-40**

**Researchers: Charlotte Allen, Caitlin Bracy, Ashley Garber, Tomas Hidalgo**

**Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Dana Laughlin**

**The Chicago School**

Please read this document carefully and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to participate.

#### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of how stigma, housing barriers, and employment challenges affect the re-entry experiences of women of color. By gathering personal narratives, the study aims to identify common themes and structural barriers that influence stability, well-being, and the risk of recidivism. The information gathered may help inform community-based programs and policies that better support women transitioning back into society.

#### **Procedures**

If you agree to participate, you will take part in a semi-structured interview lasting approximately 45–60 minutes. The interview may occur in person, via phone, or through a secure online platform, depending on your preference. During the interview, you will be asked questions about your experiences with housing, employment, stigma, and your overall re-entry process. With your permission, the interview will be audio-recorded to ensure accuracy. If you prefer not to be recorded, the researcher will take written notes instead. You may skip any question or stop the interview at any time without any penalty or loss of benefits.

#### **Audio Recording Consent**

Please indicate your preference regarding audio recording and provide your initials next to your choice:

I agree to allow the interview to be audio-recorded. Initials: \_\_\_\_\_

I do NOT agree to be audio-recorded. Initials: \_\_\_\_\_

If you decline audio recording, the researcher will take detailed written notes during the interview.

#### **Voluntary Participation**

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without consequence. Choosing not to participate will not affect any services, programs, or support you receive now or in the future. You may also decline to answer specific questions if they make you uncomfortable.

**Risks and Discomforts**

There are minimal risks associated with participation. Some interview questions may feel personal or may bring up difficult memories or emotions related to incarceration, discrimination, or life challenges. You may take breaks, skip questions, or stop the interview at any time. A list of mental health and community support resources will be provided if you experience distress during or after the interview.

**Benefits**

While there may be no direct personal benefit to you, your participation can provide valuable insight into the challenges faced by women returning to society after incarceration. Your input may help improve re-entry programs and influence policy development aimed at reducing stigma and supporting successful transitions.

**Compensation**

Participants may earn up to \$300 for completing all components of the study. The exact compensation structure (e.g., per session amount, completion bonuses) will be explained to you prior to participation. Compensation is not affected by your decision to skip questions or withdraw early.

**Confidentiality**

All information you provide will be kept confidential to the fullest extent permitted by law. Your name and any identifying information will be removed from transcripts, notes, and reports. Audio recordings (if you consent) will be stored securely and deleted after transcription. Only the research team will have access to the data. Study findings will be presented in a way that does not identify any participant.

**Contact Information**

**If you have questions about the study, please contact:**

**Research Team:** [researchrecidivism@thechicagoschool.edu](mailto:researchrecidivism@thechicagoschool.edu) (321) 654-1956

**Faculty Supervisor:** Dr. Dana Laughlin (321) 456-9877

**If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the University IRB Office at [IRB@thechicagoschool.edu](mailto:IRB@thechicagoschool.edu).**

**Consent Statement**

**By signing below, you acknowledge that you have read and fully understand this informed consent form. You understand that your participation is voluntary, that you may withdraw at any time, and that choosing not to participate will not affect your access to services. You have indicated your preference regarding audio recording above.**

**Participant Name (print):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Participant Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Researcher Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Entry Experiences After Incarceration Interview Questions****Participant ID:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_**Interviewer:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Location:** \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. The purpose of this study is to better understand the experiences of individuals following release from incarceration, including the challenges and supports involved in re-entry.

Your responses are confidential and will not be shared in a way that identifies you personally. You may choose not to answer any question and can stop the interview at any time.

**Section 1: General Re-Entry Experience**

1. How do you feel your re-entry process is going so far?
2. What has been the biggest barrier or challenge you have faced during re-entry?
3. What has helped you the most in your re-entry process?
4. What has been the least helpful or most frustrating part of re-entry?

**Section 2: Stigma and Social Experiences**

5. Can you describe your experience with stigma or discrimination related to your history of incarceration?
6. Do you have social supports that you rely on? Who are they, and how do they help you?
7. Are there any relationships that have been unhelpful or have negatively affected your re-entry? If so, how?

**Section 3: Housing and Employment**

8. Has your housing situation changed since your release? If so, how and why?
9. What has your experience with employment been like since your release?

**Section 4: Resources and Barriers**

10. What has been the biggest barrier to accessing or using community resources or support services?

**Section 5: Reflections and Attitudes**

11. How do you feel about the possibility of returning to jail or prison? Does that possibility worry you? Why or why not?
12. Is there anything you miss about being incarcerated? If so, what and why?

Section 6: Behavior and Risk (Confidential)

*(Remind participants of confidentiality before asking these questions.)*

13. Since your release, have you engaged in any illegal activity? If so, can you share what led to that decision or situation?

14. What do you think is the likelihood that you might commit an illegal act between now and our next interview?

**Section 7: Closing**

15. Is there anything else you would like to share about your re-entry experience that we haven't covered today?

Additional Notes (for interviewer use):

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