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Testing Levinson's Theory Using a Sample of Mothers in the Criminal Justice System

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Abstract

The ability of mothers in the criminal justice system to obtain stable employment upon release has been shown to be a crucial aspect for successful reentry into society. Stable employment is a key predictor of mothers' success in their transition from the criminal justice system back into society. Levinson's theory was used to determine if life eras predicted mothers' ($N = 1,040$) career needs related to education, employment, and counseling. This study failed to support Levinson's theory. Specifically, mothers in the criminal justice system did not differ, by age, on their education needs, employment needs, or career counseling needs.

Keywords: Levinson, mothers, women, criminal justice system

In 2011, approximately 7% of the 1.6 million federal and state prisoners in the United States were female (Minton, 2013). Approximately 2.3% (1.7 million) of the estimated 74 million children in the United States have an incarcerated parent (Carson & Golinelli, 2013). The United States accounts for almost 20% of all women in the world's

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criminal justice system (Minton, 2013), and more than 70% of incarcerated females have minor aged children (Glaze & Maruschak, 2010).

Incarceration negatively affects both the mother and her children. Children of incarcerated mothers are at risk of poor school behavior (Trice & Brewster, 2004) and poor physical and mental health (Lee, Fang, & Luo, 2013), and suffer from anxiety and depression symptoms (Dallaire, Zeman, & Thrash, 2015). The overrepresentation of incarcerated mothers of low socioeconomic status who have low educational attainment and are minimally employed or unemployed is associated with many preexisting or selection effects (Murray, 2005). Following incarceration, mothers usually return to their families and neighborhoods and face various barriers to successful reentry. Besides the barriers of reconnecting with their children, working on substance use problems, physical and mental health concerns, and meeting parole requirements (Berman, 2005; O'Brien & Young, 2006), the negative effects of one's employment prospects are related to residing in communities of origin, which has often limited access to public transportation, job openings, and industries using their skill sets. State laws differ; however, it is common for individuals to be permanently or temporarily restricted from certain trade and licensed health care professions after incarceration (American Bar Association, 2013, Thompson & Cummings, 2010). Many times, educational and vocational interventions concentrate on low-paying and gender-traditional occupations (Chartrand & Rose, 1996). These factors can negatively impact incarcerated mothers' hope for the future and their employment prospects.

Mothers in the criminal justice system who are incarcerated and on community control (probation) are challenged by many interrelated and complex problems (Brown & Ross, 2010). Mason and Stubbs (2010) acknowledged that the problem is contextualized in the intersectionality of the female prisoner as she moves between being identified as prisoner, victim, mother, perpetrator, and unemployed person. The responsibilities for their children and the lack of financial stability, lack of possible job opportunities or training, limited post-release assistance, lack of housing opportunities and stability, complex paperwork, and struggle in attending court and custody hearings can limit these individuals' successful reentry into the society. Mothers in the criminal justice system often lack social and professional skills to find useful resources and to open doors for quality employment opportunities (Brown & Ross, 2010; O'Brien, 2001; Willis & Grace, 2008, 2009). As reported by Small (2000), property crimes committed by females have increased over the last decade and are primarily a response to poverty and disadvantages in the workforce because of inadequate education and limited employment skills. For this reason, the criminal justice system and care providers must concentrate on the economic struggles that emerge partially from lack of education and career development in mothers in the criminal justice system (Brown & Ross, 2010; Deschenes, Owen, & Crow, 2007; Willis & Grace, 2008, 2009). Robbins, Martin, and Surratt (2009) and Brown and Ross (2010) recommended the implementation of more gender-specific treatments and provision of work-related counseling programs for mothers in the criminal justice system.

Counseling can help mothers in the criminal justice system to enhance their beliefs in themselves and influence their future outlooks positively (Cobbina & Bender, 2012; Mason & Stubbs, 2010). A strong relationship exists between supposed sense of power over one's future and successful reentry into society following release from the criminal justice system (Burnett & Maruna, 2004; Mason & Stubbs, 2010). More

education and career-related counseling while in the criminal justice system will empower this population, assist them in finding employment, and interrupt their negative cycle of victimization and recidivism. Employment is an important element for building a healthier personal identity (Giordano, Cernkovich, & Rudolph, 2002) and one of the most significant factors in reducing recidivism in females in the criminal justice system (Brown & Ross, 2010; Schram, Koons-Witt, Williams, & McShane, 2006).

A theoretical underpinning may serve as an aid to understand this population's career needs and challenges. Various theorists and researchers have investigated career development and behavior, including the selection of conventional and nonconventional occupations, interactions between work and other life spheres (family, work and no work-related resources), consequences of stress, and multiple life roles. The most well-known theories have concentrated on career development over the life span, such as Super (1992), Levinson (1986), and Gottfredson (2003). Super's career development theory refers primarily to a process of career development without crucial interruptions, such as incarceration or manifested hardship, that females in the criminal justice system face. On the other hand, Gottfredson's career theory attempts to explain how children develop and how individuals obtain specific occupations at an early age. This theory focuses on younger individuals' occupational goals and their external barriers to building a successful career.

The sample in this study includes females of various ages, races, and ethical backgrounds who faced mostly a complexity of limitations to obtain a rewarding career in an early age. Many of those women did not develop an appropriate career and, therefore, difficult life circumstances and lack of property may have fostered deviant behavior such as stealing or shoplifting. Levinson's (1986) model proposes that the adult's maturation process is based on age rather than on psychological stages, in contrast to Super's psychological stages of career development. Levinson proposed that each person progresses through the same eras of life, which are marked by particular changes and tasks that must be mastered as one progresses through each era. He categorized the adult development process into the four eras of pre-adulthood (ages 0–22), early adulthood (ages 23–40), middle adulthood (ages 41–60), and late adulthood (older than 60). Levinson suggested that each era consists of a stable period and a transitional period that ends the current era and opens the subsequent era. The stable period is the era when a person makes important choices in life, develops a life structure around these choices, and pursues goals within the structure. The transitional period requires several years and assists in a smooth transition from the end of one era to the beginning of a new era (Levinson, 1986; see Table 1).

Levinson's theory may be helpful when investigating needs of mothers in the criminal justice system as he implied that each era is based on age rather than psychological development. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to determine if mothers in the criminal justice system differ in their career counseling needs. More specifically, the researchers examine if there are differences by the age groups defined by Levinson's theory depending on the participants' self-reported career counseling needs related to education, employment, and counseling.

Theoretical Background for the Study

Mothers in the criminal justice system vary in the way that they cope with post-release challenges. Uggen (2000) revealed that stable employment is a more significant predictor of successful reentry into society for older women in the criminal justice system than younger women. According to Levinson's (1986) theory of adult development, individuals of various ages focus on specific life tasks associated with their personal lives and career development. Levinson's theory of adult development over the lifespan describes the maturation process of individuals and involves personality, family, relationships, and career. He suggests that adult maturation occurs during repeating patterns of growth, transition, and stabilization. Levinson proposed that the adult maturation process is based on four age-defined eras, rather than on psychological stages. Levinson further suggested that individuals go through various life eras to resolve important psychological concerns and to master specific work activities (Levinson, 1986). While Levinson's concept was initially developed by studying men, he later analyzed women's life stories and affirmed that the concept applies equally to both sexes (Levinson, 1997).

Levinson's (1986) comprehensive theory of adult development consists of three main components: (a) *life course* and *life cycle*; (b) *individual life structure*; and (c) *adult development*. Life course describes the individual character of life in its progress from beginning to end and implies sequence and temporal flow. In contrast, *life cycle* explains the major order and basic sequences in the human life course, although every person's life is unique. Levinson (1986) described life course as a complex and ongoing process with different eras that have various qualities. Transitions help people shift from one era to the next. Every era is a segment of and influenced by the whole and, like the seasons of the year, has its own time (Levinson, 1986). The theory is based on the conceptualization that our lives change dramatically from one era to the next and there are changes within eras as well. Levinson claims the conceptualization of age-linked eras in adults is empirically grounded but needs to be verified in different cultures (Levinson, 1986).

Life structure is the pillar of Levinson's adult development theory and is different from personality structure (Levinson, 1986). While the concept of personality structure describes what kind of person an individual is, life structure addresses what the individual's life is like at any particular time. To determine one's life structure, people should reflect on life and the important areas where they spend most of their energy and time (Levinson, 1986). This reflection process includes consideration of relationships to partners, children, family, occupation, spirituality, leisure, and their meaningfulness and connectedness to each other.

Some studies have examined differences of developed life structures in individuals related to gender and education. Kittrelli (1998) examined Levinson's adult development of men and women and the formation of their individualistic dreams. The findings showed that men usually formed their dreams in their late teens and 20s. In contrast, most women sought motherhood and marriage as their first goals in their early 20s and did not have a clear vision of a long-term career. The development of individualistic dreams were usually delayed until the women's Age 30 Transitions (28–33). Those few women who had a clear dream to pursue a profession in their 20s gave up due to lack of occupational mentors (Kittrelli, 1998). In contrast, a study by Smart and

Peterson (1994) tested predictions from the stability-transition hypothesis of Levinson's theory in 498 female dieticians who had earned university degrees. The results showed that they did not interrupt or delay their career paths.

Table 1

Levinson's Stable and Transitional Periods and Characteristics at Each Era

Era	Periods of Life Structure	Age range	Life tasks	Structure type
<i>Pre-Adulthood</i> <i>Birth–22 years</i>		0–17 years	The first few years of life provide a transition into childhood and adolescence and establish the process of individuation.	
	1. Early Adult Transition	17–22 years	Accomplishing the transition into psychological adulthood .	Transitional
	2. Entry life structure for early adulthood	23–28 years	Creating a stable life structure while keeping options open.	Stable
<i>Early Adulthood</i> <i>23–40 years</i>	3. Age 30 transition	28–33 years	Reappraising and modifying the initial structure.	Transitional
	4. Culminating life structure for early adulthood	33–40 years	Establishing a niche through ambitious goal achievement.	Stable
	5. Midlife transition	40–45 years	Reappraising and modifying the initial structure.	Transitional
<i>Middle Adulthood</i> <i>41–60 years</i>	6. Enter life structure for middle adulthood	45–50 years	Creating a self-expressive life structure.	Stable
	7. Age 50 transition	50–55 years	Assessing, modifying, and improving the middle adulthood structure.	Transitional
	8. Culminating life structure for middle adulthood	55–60 years	Achieving the goals formulated during the 50s transition.	Stable
<i>Late Adulthood</i> <i>over 60 years</i>	9. Late Adulthood Transition	60–65 years	Separating and connecting both eras.	Transitional
		65–older		

Note. Period numbers, names, and age ranges are taken from Levinson (1986, p.7).

Problem Statement

Many mothers in the criminal justice system committed non-violent crimes related to poverty (Brown & Ross, 2010; Deschenes et al., 2007; Mason & Stubbs, 2010;

Willis & Grace, 2008, 2009). Small (2000) argued that this deviant behavior can be viewed as a response to poor education and underemployment. Research from the last decade shows that most of these women found many barriers to becoming fully employed after their release from the criminal justice system (Brown & Ross, 2010; Flower, 2010; Freudenberg, Daniels, Crum, Perkins, & Richie, 2005; Mason & Stubbs, 2010; Willis & Grace, 2008, 2009; Zarch & Schneider, 2007).

Mothers in the criminal justice system are a little understood and underserved population (Mason & Stubbs, 2010; Small, 2010), yet most have a desire to build stable lives (Opsal, 2012). Developing a better understanding of the employment concerns of mothers in the criminal justice system and how they vary across age groups, will help professionals improve the quality of counseling provided to women in the criminal justice system. In addition, it benefits society by reducing recidivism and its associated costs. Petersilia's (2003) 500 study meta-analysis reported that employment is the one variable that accounted for the most variance in reducing offender recidivisms.

Levinson's theory would suggest that age differences should be explored as possible options to ensure that the most effective services are being offered to improve employment opportunities for mothers in the criminal justice system. By understanding how the age of mothers in the criminal justice system is linked to career counseling needs, counselors working in the criminal justice system will be able to take action to prescribe age-appropriate services to this particular underserved population.

The purpose of this study was to test the adult development component of Levinson's (1986) theory among a population of mothers in the criminal justice system. The authors compared the self-reported opinions of mothers in the criminal justice system about their educational and career needs across the first three of Levinson's age eras. Further, we compared participants' employment-related needs, such as employer-provided health insurance, quality of employment, availability of employment in the neighborhood, need for help finding employment, and the impact of their criminal record on their job search.

Method

Participants

The data used in this study were from a subset of data collected by a study by Benjamin et al. (2007) funded by the Federal Bureau of Justice Assistance. That data set consisted of a total of 1,170 women in the criminal justice system who self-identified as mothers. The participants were recruited from jails, courts, probation departments, and counseling services in Ohio. The current study included a total of 1,040 participants who fell within the 18 to 60 age range. Fifteen women from the original data set were eliminated because they did not report their ages. Another 25 were eliminated because their age was over 60 years.

The sample's mean age was 33.3 years ($SD = 10.0$, range = 18–60). Participants were fitted into one of Levinson's three age categories in the following way: 18 to 22 years ($n = 178$, 17.1%), 23 to 40 years ($n = 591$, 46.3%), and 41 to 60 years ($n = 271$, 26.1%). African Americans represented the largest ethnic group ($n = 481$, 46.3%) followed by European Americans ($n = 452$, 43.5%). The proportion of participants who were Latinas was 7.1% ($n = 74$), and 1.3% ($n = 14$) reported other ethnicity such as

Arabic, Asian, Native American, and biracial. There were 19 participants (1.8%) who did not report their race or ethnicity. In terms of marital status, 29.9% ($n = 311$) defined themselves as single with a partner, 28.8% ($n = 300$) single with no partner, 16.3% ($n = 170$) were currently married, 14.7% ($n = 153$) were divorced, 6.6% ($n = 69$) were separated, and 2.0% ($n = 21$) were widowed. Sixteen participants (1.5%) did not report their marital status. Participants were asked about their highest educational level and 33.6% ($n = 349$) had a high school diploma or GED, 29% ($n = 302$) reported less than a high school diploma, 22.2% ($n = 232$) had some college but no degree, 9.2% ($n = 96$) reported having a college degree, and 3.7% ($n = 38$) had some vocational training. There were 23 (2.2%) participants who did not report their highest educational level. Of all participants, 63.2% ($n = 657$) reported they were not employed, 35.4% ($n = 368$) were employed at the time of the questionnaire, and 1.4% ($n = 15$) did not state their employment status. The median number of birth-children was 2 and ranged from 0 to 11. The mean number of birth-children was 2.5, with a standard deviation of 1.7. The median number of children residing with the mother was 1 and ranged from 0 to 16.

Materials and Procedure

Assessment questionnaire. The purpose of the parent study from Benjamin et al. (2007) was to understand the needs of women in the criminal justice system. A 142-item questionnaire was developed that covered a range of variables, including employment, education, housing, substance use, illegal behaviors, medical concerns, and the needs of respondents' children (Laux et al., 2008). Of these 142 items, five items dealt with educational needs and five items were related to career needs. Specifically, items that related to educational needs and their respective response options were: Do you lack the education or training necessary to get a good job (strongly disagree, disagree, I don't know, agree, strongly agree, does not apply)?; Do you need help to obtain more education (yes/no)?; How effective was the help you received to obtain more education (poor, fair, good, very good)?; Do you need more job training (yes/no)?; and How effective was the job training you received (poor, fair, good, very good)?

Career-related needs were assessed by the following items: Do you receive health insurance from your employer (yes/no)?; Have you been turned down for a job because of your criminal record (strongly disagree, disagree, I don't know, agree, strongly agree, does not apply)?; Are there good jobs in your neighborhood (strongly disagree, disagree, I don't know, agree, strongly agree, does not apply)?; Do you need help finding employment (yes/no)?; Do you have quality employment (yes/no)?; and How effective was the help you received finding employment (poor, fair, good, very good)?

Procedure

The present research project was approved by the sponsoring university's institutional review board (IRB) and was consistent with the ethical guidelines for research found in the American Counseling Association's *Code of Ethics* (2014). The inclusion criteria for this study were that prospective participants had to be adult women who identified as mothers (either biological or step) and had an arrest history that caused them to be involved in the criminal justice system. Questionnaires were distributed to female offenders in the criminal justice system at the following locations: a county family drug court, a county jail, a county probation department, a

municipal court, a county job and family services organization, a community mental health agency, a municipal probation department, a residential treatment center, and a state women's prison and its prerelease center. Participants, except for those in the care and custody of the state ($n = 18$), were paid \$5. The state of Ohio does not allow incarcerated persons to be paid for research participation. It took participants between 15 and 20 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

Statistical Analysis

The data were analyzed using chi-square goodness of fit tests with post-hoc analysis of residuals. The chi-square goodness of fit test was selected because the predictor variable (Levinson's age groups) is categorical and has three levels and the criterion variables are nominal (Leech, Barrett, & Morgan, 2005). Observed cell counts will be determined to be significantly different from the expected count if the chi-square is statistically significant and the associated standardized residual is equal to or greater than the absolute value of ± 2.0 . We used Cohen's (1992) effect size guidelines such that a phi of .1 was considered small, .3 medium, and .5 large.

Results

Educational Needs

A 3x6 chi-square analysis was conducted to determine if mothers in the criminal justice system differed across Levinson's age categories in their perception that they lacked the necessary education or training required to obtain a good job. The results, $\chi^2(10, N = 1003) = 23.10, p = .01, \Phi = .15$, indicated that there was a statistically significant difference between the age groups and the degree to which mothers in the criminal justice system perceived that they lacked the necessary education or training required to obtain a good job. Despite a statistically significant chi-square, none of the cells' standardized residual values met or exceeded ± 2.0 . Therefore, we were unable to identify an age group that had more or fewer participants than expected by chance. A 3x2 chi-square analysis, $\chi^2(10, N = 464) = 5.73, p = .06, \Phi = .11$, indicated that there was no difference between the age groups and the degree to which mothers in the correctional system perceived that they needed help to obtain more education. A 3x6 chi-square analysis, $\chi^2(6, N = 284) = 3.35, p = .76, \Phi = .11$, indicated that there was no difference between the age groups and the degree to which mothers in the criminal justice system rated the effectiveness of the help they received to obtain more education. A 3x2 chi-square analysis, $\chi^2(2, N = 484) = 2.63, p = .27, \Phi = .07$, indicated that there was no difference between the age groups and the degree to which mothers in the criminal justice system said that they needed job training. A 3x2 chi-square analysis, $\chi^2(2, N = 405) = 7.85, p = .02, \Phi = .14$, indicated that there was a statistically significant difference between the age groups and the degree to which mothers in the correctional system received help obtaining job training. Despite a statistically significant chi-square, none of the cells' standardized residual values met or exceeded ± 2.0 . Therefore, we were unable to identify an age group that had more or fewer participants than expected by chance.

Career Needs

A 3x2 Chi-square analysis, $\chi^2 (2, N = 872) = 7.18, p = .03, \Phi = .09$, indicated that there was a statistically significant difference between the age groups and the degree to which mothers in the criminal justice system reported receiving health insurance from their employers. Despite a statistically significant chi-square, none of the cells' standardized residual values met or exceeded ± 2.0 . Therefore, we were unable to identify an age group that had more or fewer participants than expected by chance. A 3x6 chi-square analysis, $\chi^2 (10, N = 994) = 11.7, p = .30, \Phi = .11$, indicated that there was no statistically significant difference between the age groups and the degree to which mothers in the criminal justice system perceived that they have quality employment. A 3x6 chi-square analysis, $\chi^2 (10, N = 1004) = 20.64, p = .02, \Phi = .14$, indicated that there was a statistically significant difference between the age groups and the degree to which mothers perceived that there are not many good jobs in their neighborhoods. Despite a statistically significant chi-square, none of the cells' standardized residual values met or exceeded ± 2.0 . Therefore, we were unable to identify an age group that had more or fewer participants than expected by chance. A 3x2 chi-square analysis, $\chi^2 (2, N = 537) = 6.10, p = .05, \Phi = .11$, indicated that there was no difference between the age groups and the degree to which mothers in the criminal justice system perceived they needed help to find employment. A 3x 6 chi-square analysis, $\chi^2 (10, N = 991) = 33.81, p < .001, \Phi = .19$, indicated that there was a significant statistical difference between the age groups and the degree to which mothers in the criminal justice system perceived they had been rejected because of their criminal records. Those participants who were in the 18–22 age category disagreed with this statement more than would be expected by chance (standardized residual = 2.3). Participants in this same age group also strongly agreed with this statement much less than would be expected by chance (standardized residual = -3.1).

Discussion

The authors investigated whether mothers in the criminal justice system differ across Levinson's age eras in their self-reported career counseling needs related to education and employment. In his theory of adult development Levinson (1986) hypothesized that the role in society as a professional, mother, or wife is an important factor of life structure. The main elements of a person's life structure are the relationships with other elements in the external world. For instance, the person's connection with another person, a group such as a family, an organization, a culture, or a specific place remains an element of a life structure. Not only do relationships present both stability and change over time, but also the life structure itself changes over the life span (Levinson, 1986). By conducting this study, the researchers hoped to find distinct career counseling needs for all three age eras of the four defined by Levinson's theory of adult development. Statistically significant differences of career counseling needs of mothers in the criminal justice system could build a foundation to develop career counseling programs appropriate to age groups. The results failed to support Levinson's theory in this sample. The following sections discuss these results and contextualize them in the existing literature.

Education

The majority of the participants believed that they lacked sufficient education or training necessary to get a good job. Contrary to our expectations that age would define career counseling needs related to education, our sample's belief that they had insufficient education was consistent across all age groups. It is a recognized problem that the majority of individuals who are in the criminal justice system have limitations in education and work experience (Laux et al., 2008; Rakis, 2005). Nevertheless, not all mothers in the criminal justice system may respond to these difficulties in the same way. For instance, Uggen (2000) found that stable employment predicts successful reentry into society to a higher degree for older women than younger. Levinson's theory of adult development over the life span suggests that individuals of different ages who are in specific life eras concentrate on distinct and particular life tasks. His concept describes the maturation process of individuals and involves personality, family, relationships, and career. He suggests that the maturation process of adults is based on age rather than on psychological stages (Levinson, 1986). Consequently, this facet of Levinson's theory could not be supported for this population.

Employment

More than half of respondents did not receive health insurance from their employer, while only one fifth of participants reported that they received health insurance from their employer. This is consistent with previous research that indicates mothers in the criminal justice system work primarily in positions that do not provide benefits such as health insurance (Small, 2000). The findings of this study indicate there are no significant differences between the age groups and the degree to which mothers in the correctional system received health insurance from their employer. This is in contrast to research by Mishra, Ball, Dobson, and Byles (2004), who found that women in the age range of 55–59 were less often insured than younger women.

The general conclusion the authors drew from this study is that the findings do not support Levinson's theory of adult development in mothers in the criminal justice system. Although the study failed to find support for Levinson's theory, the results do provide suggestions for consideration. One implication of these findings is that counselors who work with mothers in the criminal justice system are likely to find that their clients have similar educational and occupational experiences, regardless of age. Counseling can help mothers in the criminal justice system reveal their strengths and modify their feelings, thoughts, beliefs, and expectations, which influence one's effectiveness in decision making and career problem solving (Galles & Lenz, 2013).

The findings show that while the majority of the sample lacked the education or training necessary to get a good job, most did not receive the help needed to obtain more education or training. Our results suggest that counselors should explore and promote educational opportunities for mothers in the criminal justice system. Counselors can advocate for individuals in the criminal justice system so that they can receive adequate opportunities to gain education and training for finding employment, preventing recidivism (Halasz, 1993), and increasing the chance that these mothers can raise their own and their children's standard of living.

The present study found a significant statistical difference between the age groups and the degree to which mothers in the criminal justice system perceived that they had

been rejected for employment because of their criminal record. The results indicate that younger mothers perceived that their criminal record had been less of an impediment to employment than did their older peers. Previous research (Berkshire, 2011; Johnson, Kawachi, & Lewis, 2009; Richardson, Webb, Webber, & Smith, 2013), however, suggests that not only participants' criminal records but also older age itself may be responsible for job rejection.

Limitations

It is important to identify the study's limitations. First, the study is a retrospective ex post facto design and, therefore, has limited internal validity (Ary, Jacobs, Sorensen, & Razavieh, 2009; Campbell & Stanley, 1963; Montero & León, 2007) and external validity. Causal relationships cannot be claimed and findings cannot be generalized to populations that differ meaningfully from those mothers who are in the correctional system outside of northwest Ohio. Third, the data are based on self-reports made by mothers in the criminal justice system. Participants' answers about their needs refer to their recent situation and may be influenced by current or past events.

Suggestions for Future Research

The authors wish to offer suggestions that may guide future researchers. First, a prospective study design would offer the opportunity to use more specific questions that refer to particular areas that are concerns of mothers in the criminal justice system. Another suggestion is to select a sample that is representative; therefore, the results can be used to make predictions to the entire prison population. Future researchers may also wish to use measurement tools with demonstrated high reliability and validity. More research is needed to understand particular aspects that influence mothers in the criminal justice system to seek help for obtaining job training and gaining skills. Some work has been conducted to investigate how the distress of unemployment varies across age groups (Hanna, O'Riain, & Whelan, 1997), but more studies on mothers in the criminal justice system are needed to understand the best approaches for providing effective career counseling. There is also a need for more studies that explore the needs of prison populations related to their age to minimize risks of recidivism and to increase their hope for the future.

Implications

The present study failed to find support for Levinson's theory of adult development in a sample of mothers in the criminal justice system. Specifically, the results were not consistent with Levinson's theory that career needs would vary across age groups. Considering these findings, Levinson's theory of adult development may not be applicable to the population of mothers in the criminal justice system. While these data did not support Levinson's theory, the results do provide implications of note for practicing counselors and counselor educators.

Counselors

As described in Levinson's (1986) theory, the role in society as a mother, wife, or professional is an important aspect of life structure. Counselors focus on the development of personal and professional growth of individuals to enhance their subjective well-being and to increase their potential to begin a meaningful life. Counseling can help mothers in the criminal justice system reveal their strengths and modify their feelings, thoughts, beliefs, and expectations that influence their effectiveness in decision making and career problem solving (Galles & Lenz, 2013). Assisting mothers to work on their self-concept and to set appropriate goals for the future describes counseling. To support mothers in the criminal justice system in their empowerment to achieve a career and successful reentry into society, enhancement of education, employment, counseling, and hope for the future are crucial components. These are the main areas examined in the present study. Although the study did not find in most areas that mothers in the criminal justice system differ significantly across the age groups as defined by Levinson, the findings are valuable for various reasons.

For instance, the majority of the mothers in the sample described themselves as good. Further, they expressed a belief that a counselor could empower them and help them access necessary resources. The individual may feel encouraged to make it visible to others that she is a good person and, therefore, modify her behavior and set different goals for the future. Concentrating on the construct hope when working with mothers in the criminal justice system may be another important takeaway from this study. The shift from a person who was involved in deviant actions, such as shoplifting, to a person who has hope to establish a stable life may be motivating for this population.

A further implication for counselors is to promote educational opportunities for mothers in the criminal justice system. The findings show that most participants responded that they had a lack of education or training to get a good job and did not receive help in obtaining more education or training. The concept of counseling is to assist individuals in their personal and vocational development and to establish a successful life. The concept of *calling* in relation to career choice could be of interest for mothers in the criminal justice system, who have to learn to believe in themselves and their abilities in order to succeed after their release from prison. The construct of calling refers to the extent to which a person feels called to enter a particular career or life role with heart and intensity (Galles & Lenz, 2013). A counselor may work with the client to discover this individual's calling to motivate her to strive toward a particular career role with heart and passion. Counselors can advocate for individuals in the criminal justice system to receive adequate opportunities to gain education and training for building a successful career. The establishment of quality employment would provide mothers with health insurance for themselves and their children. This is important since results indicate that the majority of the sample did not receive health insurance from their employer. The provision of basic academic and vocational skills, and the opportunity to change personal behaviors, attitudes, and values to decrease recidivism, are accepted goals of correctional education (Halasz, 1993).

The present study found a significant statistical difference between the age groups and the degree to which mothers in the criminal justice system perceived they have been rejected because of their criminal record. The results indicated that younger mothers reported less experience of being rejected for a job because of their criminal record.

However, looking at the significant difference between the age groups, not only the criminal record but also age itself may be responsible for being rejected for a job. Previous research supports this tendency (Berkshire, 2011; Johnson et al., 2009; Richardson et al., 2013). To discuss such topics with the client may help prepare them for particular challenges and assist them with enhancing persistence and optimism. The study found that more than half of respondents reported having a desire to share their experiences with others to help them avoid similar experiences. Thus, the promotion of group counseling in the criminal justice system is an important implication for counselors.

Counselor Educators

Counselor educators assist practicing counselors in their professional development. The implications of the present study can also apply to counselor educators who shape counseling students and their ability to conceptualize the needs of their future clients. Despite the less than robust results supporting Levinson's theory of adult development in mothers in the criminal justice system, there are some findings that can be examined in more detail in future research. Counselor educators can use the results of this study to assist their students in understanding the particular needs of mothers in the criminal justice system related to education, employment, counseling, and hope for the future. In addition, counselor educators may consider developing a course for students that concentrates on this specific population in the criminal justice system. The development of interventions targeting the particular needs of this population may be a further implication for counselor educators.

The researcher suggests that counselor educators perform more research with populations in the criminal justice system in order to enhance knowledge for the benefit of this underserved population. Collaborations with professionals of the criminal justice system could help directly link results of studies to policies in correctional settings. For example, the provision of regular counseling sessions addressing personal and professional areas of improvement can have a significant impact on mothers in the criminal justice system, and it can influence the criminal justice system itself through provision of feedback and evaluations.

Counselor educators can develop professional relationships with correctional settings and establish internship opportunities for interested students. Counselor educators can contribute crucial perspectives and ideas to the national dialogue about public policy concerning goals for career interventions, who will plan and deliver career interventions, and to whom and how career interventions will be made accessible (Savickas, 1996). In conclusion, counselor educators may advocate for implementing more counseling interventions in the criminal justice system to help this population establish careers and succeed in their reentry into society.

Criminal Justice System

The study may contribute to policy changes in the criminal justice system by advocating for more specific counseling services related to career development in mothers in the criminal justice system. The criminal justice system may offer mothers more psychoeducational or support groups that decrease feelings of despair and economic dependence, and increase career opportunities and hope for the future. In addition,

established programs for this population should implement particular career needs related to education, employment, counseling, and hope for the future. Because there are similarities in responses of this population, programs directed at their particular needs may be more effective than programs developed for individuals more advanced in their careers. For instance, mothers in the criminal justice system may benefit from exposure to and training in non-traditional gender typical occupations.

The criminal justice system could provide opportunities for mothers in the criminal justice system to seek out non-traditional career areas and promote unexplored career areas. This may be a motivating factor for them to move toward education and, in the longer term, to find employment in a higher quality job. The increased provision of counseling services can help mothers in the criminal justice system gain insight and strive toward their vocational choices. The movement toward a preparation for quality employment of mothers in the criminal justice system should become an urgent priority for policymakers in part because it will help to reduce the costs for society in the long term.

Summary

The authors investigated whether mothers in the criminal justice system differ across Levinson's (1986) life eras in their career needs. Specifically, this study was based on Levinson's theory of adult development and used the first three out of four age categories to investigate possible differences in career needs related to education and employment. The results did not support Levinson's theory as applied to this sample. In fact, it may be that the experience of being in the criminal justice system overshadows any influence that age plays among these mothers when it comes to differentiating educational and career needs.

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