

DIRECT SERVICE PROVIDERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE ROLE OF
SPIRITUALITY AMONG MALES IMPACTED BY THE
JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM

by

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This capstone research study/project was prepared under the direction of the candidate's advisor, Dr. Morgan Cooley, Phyllis and Harvey Sandler School of Social Work, and has been approved by the members of the supervisory committee. It was submitted to the faculty of the Phyllis and Harvey Sandler School of Social Work and was accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Social Work.

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ABSTRACT

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Delinquency is a major social and public health problem for families, young people themselves, and law enforcement agencies, and it is a threat to public safety. Juveniles often present with multiple issues during arrest, such as mental illness, substance abuse, low socio-economic status, family dysfunction, academic problems, and poor peer relationships. One of these justice-involved youths more prevalent mental health issues is conduct disorders (CD). Research has shown that 50%-90% of justice-involved youth are diagnosed with CD. Growing research supports the integration of spirituality into professional social work practice. This study aims to bring awareness that spirituality is essential to these justice-involved youths' lives through the lived experiences of Direct Service Providers. This study aimed to understand better programming designed to meet the spiritual needs of juveniles with CD who were in juvenile residential treatment programs. This study examined the following questions:

RQ1: How do DSPs describe the current spirituality programming offered to juveniles

diagnosed with Conduct Disorder (CD) who are in a juvenile residential treatment facility? **RQ2**: What recommendations do DSPs have for enhancing programming to better meet juveniles' spiritual needs?

A cross-sectional qualitative research study utilized a thematic analysis to explore DSP's perceptions of the role of spirituality in the lives of juveniles diagnosed with CD and impacted by juvenile justice services. This study's results showed spirituality was critical and impactful to the lives of justice-involved youth. It also demonstrated the usefulness of Fisher's four-domain model in assessing spirituality in justice-involved youth. This study concluded six primary themes from the analysis. The researcher deductively coded the first two themes to explore the research questions in this manuscript. The last four themes resulted from inductive coding of the interviews: (a) programming and resources available to youth (**RQ1**); (b) recommendations for enhancing spirituality programming and resources for youth (**RQ2**); (c) viewing spirituality as religion; (d) support for religion and spirituality for youth; (e) facilitators to youths' spiritual development; and (f) barriers to youths' spiritual development.

DEDICATION

I want to dedicate this research to all those social workers and professionals working with justice-involved youth in every capacity. Keep working hard with the adolescents; they need your compassion and guidance. Your dedication and commitment are helping to shape their destiny, and you make a huge difference.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Problem and Justification

Juvenile delinquency is defined as habitually committing criminal acts or offenses by a young person at least 6 years old but less than 18 years old (Young & Giller, 2021). Delinquency is a major social and public health problem for families, young people themselves, and law enforcement agencies, and it is a threat to public safety. As a result, the United States must bear a high cost associated with delinquency cases (Young & Giller, 2021). Since the late 1980s, there has been growing concern about crimes committed by juveniles. According to Young & Giller (2021), crimes committed by juveniles aged 13-18 years old have risen by 1.8% from 2009 to 2019 in North America. For example, these offenses were associated with participating in street gangs, including homicide, robbery, theft, burglary, and vandalism. Throughout this manuscript, the terms “youth” and “juvenile” are used to refer to males between the ages of 6-18, and the term “adolescent” refers to males between the ages of 13-18. Although prior literature has often called youth “juvenile offenders” or “juvenile delinquents,” this author has decided to use a more person-centered approach or strengths-focused language by calling this population “youth,” “juvenile,” or adolescent or using terms like “justice-involved youth/juvenile” or “youth impacted by juvenile justice.”

Juveniles often present with multiple issues at the time of arrest, such as mental illness, substance abuse, low socio-economic status, family dysfunction, academic issues, and poor peer relationships (Haney-Caron et al., 2019). One of the more prevalent mental

health issues presented in these youth is conduct disorders (CD), and research has shown that 50-90% of justice-involved youth are diagnosed with CD (Stewart et al., 2019).

According to Haney-Caron et al. (2019), juveniles with CD are more likely to recidivate than those without such a diagnosis. Additionally, direct service providers (DSPs) in the juvenile justice system have reported that juveniles diagnosed with CD are more aggressive and defiant than those without a diagnosis of CD (Haney-Caron et al., 2019). Examples of DSPs in a juvenile justice setting may include social workers, nurses, recreation specialists, teachers, safety and security specialists, case managers, kitchen staff, administrative staff, maintenance staff, and outside providers that are contracted to fulfill specific programming needs.

Haney-Caron et al. (2019) found youth involved in the juvenile justice system met the criteria for psychiatric disorders at a much higher rate than youth in the general population and a large body of research has established a relationship between mental health problems and delinquency or recidivism. Among youth entering the juvenile justice system, 92% of boys and 97% of girls met the criteria for one of more of the following: a major depressive episode, a manic episode, panic attacks, posttraumatic stress disorder, conduct disorder, or substance dependence (Haney-Caron et al., 2019). This study reported that externalizing symptoms were very common among youth reporting a history of serious delinquency, with 77% of parents of such youth reporting substantial externalizing symptoms (rule-breaking, aggression, impulsivity). The researchers also found that youth who engaged in serious or violent delinquency also displayed internalizing symptoms such as (sadness, anxiety, and loneliness) (Haney-

Caron et al., 2019). Of note, Haney-Caron et al. (2019) found CD predicted the persistence of delinquency into adulthood.

Public health researchers have identified risk factors for CD in adolescents who may be more inclined toward violent behavior, which include a history of early aggression, exposure to violence at home and in their neighborhood, a failure in school, a family history of drug or alcohol abuse, a heightened sense of alienation, and association with peers who are prone to violent behavior (Abrams et al., 2003; Kann et al., 2014; Rosenblatt et al., 2000). Other studies have noted several other externalizing symptoms that overlap with CD. Bachmann et al. (2023) concluded that among severely antisocial adolescents involved in the juvenile justice system, there were high levels of callous-unemotional traits and low verbal IQ scores. Given the relationship between externalizing problems and delinquency severity, justice-involved youth referred for mental health treatment due to externalizing symptoms are evaluated and considered for interventions targeting criminogenic needs related to serious offending, including violence, aggressive behavior, and lack of coping skills (Bachmann et al., 2023; Caldwell & Van Rybroek, 2005; Guarnaccia et al., 2022). DSPs are in a unique position to observe and interact with these juveniles, and they can provide perceptions about juveniles' daily functioning. Given their experience with youth, this study was designed to engage DSPs regarding their lived experiences working with juveniles.

Rationale for Spirituality as a Focus Point of This Study

Spirituality has been identified as a viable social work assessment and intervention tool serving as a protective factor for youth in a juvenile justice setting (Burns, 2003; Haviv et al., 2020). However, there is somewhat limited understanding of

the role or function of spirituality in the lives of youth impacted by the juvenile justice system. Because of the protected nature of youth in this setting, this study sought to explore how spirituality was utilized by these juveniles daily and how the juveniles' spiritual experiences could be improved from the perspective of DSPs who have daily and regular interactions with youth. Fisher's (2011) spirituality model was used to conceptualize the impact of spirituality on the lives of youth involved in the juvenile justice system. Fisher's spirituality model provides a framework for understanding how an individual's spirituality determines their responsiveness toward themselves, others, and the environment, as well as their receptiveness toward God (Fisher, 2013a).

Spirituality is the essential nature of human beings based upon their strength of purpose, perception, mental powers, and frame of mind (Fisher, 2011). Spirituality is seen as a fundamental, vital component of being human (Fisher, 2011), and spirituality is innate within humans (McCarroll et al., 2005). For example, Nolan and Crawford (1997) concluded spirituality is at the heart of the human experience and that it is being experienced by everyone. Hay et al. (2006) and Oldnall (1996) reported that everyone has spiritual needs and that human spirituality unifies the whole person and is an inbuilt feature developed from the beginning of an individual's life. Jose and Taylor (1986) and Warren (1988) established that spirituality is emotive, as it touches people's hearts because it deals with the very essence of being. Priestley (1985) determined that spirituality is dynamic, in that it must be felt before it can be conceptualized. Palmer (1999) described spirituality as:

The ancient and abiding human quest for connectedness with something larger and more trustworthy than our egos, with our souls, with one another, with the

world's history and nature, with the invisible winds of the spirit and the mystery of being alive. (p.7)

Priestley (1985) states spirituality pertains to

A person's awareness of the existence and experience of feelings and beliefs, which give purpose, meaning, and value to life. Spirituality helps individuals to live at peace with themselves, to love God, and their neighbor, and to live in harmony with the environment. (p.112)

Parada (2022) researched integrating religion/spirituality into professional social work practice and found that, because of its significant influence on the human experience, religion/spirituality has been recognized by the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) as a core component of diversity competence. Whether a person associates with a certain faith practice or identifies more with atheism or agnosticism, exploring the role of religion/spirituality in a client's life can provide key insights into behavioral motivators, root causes of problems, and important sources of strength and resilience. According to Parada (2022), the NASW revised the Code of Ethics and included an amendment that religion/spirituality should be integrated into social work practice. In 2015 the NASW reinstated the term cultural competence regarding the social worker's obligation to demonstrate knowledge, understanding, and humility regarding diversity of race, *religion*, class, status, and ability (Parada, 2022).

Highlighting the importance of religion/spirituality in the human experience, social workers are encouraged to seek education where it is needed to be competent in the many aspects of diversity and work against oppression affecting diverse identities and lifestyles (Parada, 2022). Parada (2022) asserted that the NASW Code of Ethics calls for

social workers to hold institutions of higher learning accountable for promoting cultural humility including religion and spirituality education. Parada (2022) concluded that integrating religion/spirituality into the therapeutic environment, if a client so desires, can facilitate transformation because religion/spirituality influences the micro, mezzo, and macro levels. She found that social workers might avoid religion/spirituality out of fear of therapeutic exploitation, which can ultimately impede culturally competent practice. She recommended that social workers increase their understanding of personal and professional obligations and their commitment to self-awareness. This could be done by expanding education and training opportunities, as well as implementing decision-making models to reach effective social work practice concerning the ethical integration of religion/spirituality into the biopsychosocial assessment.

Cole (2021) also researched social work practice, education, and spirituality. She found the relationship between spirituality, social work, and social work education has fluctuated over time, making it complex and difficult for social work educators to address that relationship (Cole, 2021). Social work was founded in the context of Judeo-Christian principles and the Social Gospel Movement of the late 1800s (Cole, 2021). Despite this history, spirituality and religion have been excluded from contemporary social work curricula due in part to the profession's shift toward professionalism at the turn of the 20th century and its desire for scientific respectability based on empirical research (Cole, 2021). However, social work views people as holistic (bio-psycho-social-spiritual) beings (Crisp, 2011). Social workers cannot disregard a person's spirituality or religion in practice without neglecting a fundamental aspect of that person's being. Therefore, it is imperative that students be adequately trained in spirituality and religion matters so they

can effectively engage, assess, and intervene with clients. Moreover, trends in recent clinical social work practice indicate that clients are expressing a preference for their religion and spirituality to be included in treatment as well as a preference regarding therapists' spirituality (Oxhandler et al., 2017).

Cole (2021) found the fundamental rationale for spirituality integration into the social work curriculum to be the ecological model itself, specifically, the holistic approach of the profession. Social work views people as bio-psycho-social-spiritual beings; spirituality is part of being human. It was concluded that for many people, faith is a part of their core identity and that religious and spiritual issues are woven into the lives of all people regardless of whether they identify with a faith tradition (Cole, 2021). Additionally, her research provided support for integrating spirituality as a reflection of cultural competence by the profession: Social workers should recognize and appreciate spirituality and religion as a part of client diversity.

Background of the Problem

Juvenile delinquency impacts individuals of every race, gender, and socioeconomic class (Haney-Caron et al., 2019). The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) Juvenile Court Statistics report (2020) concluded that law enforcement agencies in the United States arrested, adjudicated, and processed an estimated 508,400 persons under the age of 18 from 2005 through 2020 through the juvenile justice system. Juveniles committed 16,200 robberies, 22,100 aggravated assaults, 32,200 burglaries, and 57,500 larceny thefts (OJJDP, 2020). The OJJDP report (2020) presented a point-by-point portrayal of the 508,400 criminal offenses committed by juveniles across the United States; these included four classifications of criminal

offenses: violations against an individual (175,500), property-related misdemeanors (161,000), drug offenses (56,900), and public order violations (115,000). Public order violations *are acts considered illegal because they conflict with social policy, accepted moral rules, and public opinion* (OJJDP, 2020). Out of the 508,400 juveniles, 27% (136,300) were female, compared to 73% (372,100) who were male (OJJDP, 2020).

Youth involved in the juvenile justice system have a higher rate of mental illness than nonoffending adolescents. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, 2023) reported that children and adolescents aged 3-17 are commonly diagnosed with mental health disorders such as depression (3.2%, 1.9 million), anxiety (7.1%, 4.4 million), or behavioral problems like attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and CD (7.4%, 4.5 million). Additionally, a national survey conducted by Kann et al. (2014) of juveniles in 9th through 12th grades concluded that 8.15% of adolescents reported being in a physical fight on school property in the last 12 months. Of those same adolescents 5.2% reported carrying a weapon (gun, knife, or club) on one or more days in the previous 30 days (Kann et al., 2014). Similarly, 7.15% reported that they did not go to school on one or more days because they felt unsafe at school (CDC, 2013). Lastly, 6.9% reported being threatened or injured with a weapon on school property one or more times in the last year (Kann et al., 2014). According to Mental Health America (2023), CD has a 6-16% prevalence rate among the general population in adolescent boys and 2-9% among adolescent girls. Stewart et al. (2019) found that 50-90% of justice-involved youth met the criteria for CD. These rates are generally the same for different races and ethnicities (Stewart et al., 2019). Furthermore, these children and adolescents present

with long-term dysfunctional behavior patterns and resistance to treatment (Sommers-Flanagan & Sommers-Flanagan, 1997).

The research on youth involved in the juvenile justice system suggests these juveniles are more likely to abuse substances, to be a minority, to have been physically abused, and to have parents in the criminal justice system (Abrams et al., 2003; Rosenblatt et al., 2000). Fraser et al. (2009) suggested that juveniles with mental health comorbidity had a diminished prognostic outcome, were at risk for adult criminality, and experienced more peer rejection. Moreover, Fraser et al. (2009) found that this population had more family dysfunction, increased trauma, increased high-risk sexual behavior, and were more likely to be victims of sexual abuse. Furthermore, they had more academic problems and affiliated themselves with deviant peers compared to youth in the juvenile justice system without mental illness issues.

The increase in juvenile delinquency activities has forced states to consider if their judicial proceedings offer effective treatment options to alleviate the causes of delinquent behaviors for offending juveniles and their families. A range of different treatments have been explored. Many of the treatment options have failed or resulted in only a brief alleviation of CD symptoms (Verghese, 2008). Research from 2010 to 2020 suggests that cognitive-behavioral treatment, care of criminogenic needs, strengths-based care, structured behavior modification interventions that include rewards and consequences for behavior, stimulant medication management, and parent management training for family members of juvenile delinquents are the most successful forms of treatment (Fortune et al., 2014; Harder et al., 2015; Koehler et al., 2013). Other research has suggested treatment options such as exploring secure attachment and the correlation

between adverse childhood trauma psychopathological symptoms and recidivism risk in justice-involved juveniles could also be helpful (Bachmann et al., 2023; Caldwell & Van Rybroek, 2005; Guarnaccia et al., 2022). Taubner et al. (2021) found success in utilizing mentalization-based treatment for adolescents diagnosed with CD. Sand play therapy has also been identified as an effective treatment for reducing the symptoms of CD and oppositional defiant disorder (ODD) (Chalfon & Ramos, 2022). Researchers also found that psychospiritual interventions within a cognitive behavioral therapy approach may be a viable treatment option for juveniles impacted by the justice system (Sahare & Kotnala, 2022). Other forms of commonly used treatments, such as residential treatment facilities, coping skills training, social skills training, anger management, and emotion regulation treatment are less effective than those previously mentioned (Abrams et al., 2008; Lambie & Randell, 2013; Verghese, 2008). Moreover, treatments such as antisocial peer group interventions, designed to target and reduce juvenile antisocial behaviors through group therapy, were found to worsen symptoms and increase levels of antisocial behaviors (Verghese, 2008).

Conduct Disorder

Conduct disorder (CD) among adolescent males is a growing problem in the United States (Young & Giller, 2021). Patel and colleagues (2018) estimated the lifetime prevalence of CD in the United States is 9.5% of the general population. The American Psychiatric Association (APA; 2013) defines CD as follows:

A repetitive and persistent pattern of behavior in which the basic rights of others or major age-appropriate societal norms or rules are violated, as manifested by the

presence of three criteria from a list of 15 criteria present in the past 12 months and at least one criterion present in the past 6 months. (p. 469)

CD is more commonly diagnosed among boys than girls, with studies indicating that the rate among boys in the general population ranges from 6-16% while the rate among girls ranges from 2-9% (American Association of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (2020); Mental Health America, 2023). Interestingly, it has been estimated that the worldwide prevalence among children and adolescents aged 6-18 is 3.2% with this prevalence estimate not varying significantly across other countries (Patel et al., 2018). CD can have early onset before age 10 or can develop in adolescence (APA, 2013). The median age of onset for CD is 11.6 years (Patel et al., 2018). Patel and colleagues (2018) indicated that the prevalence of CD is 2-5% in children between ages 5 and 12 and 5-9% in adolescents between ages 13-18. Children who display early-onset CD are at greater risk for persistent difficulties, however, they are also more likely to have troubled peer relationships and academic problems (Patel et al., 2018). Among both boys and girls, a CD diagnosis is one of the disorders most frequently diagnosed in mental health settings (Patel et al., 2018).

Krol et al. (2004) conducted a causal modeling analysis on CD. They determined it was conceivable to determine different components of the disorder, but it may take a multi-model approach to explain the entire diagnosis. They reviewed four causes of CD, the violence inhibition model (VIM), the social information processing model, the coercive parenting model, and the theory of life-course-persistent antisocial behavior. They determined each of these causes of CD was feasible but did not provide a decisive

diagnosis and treatment modality for the complete alleviation of symptoms of CD. They concluded more research was necessary for diagnosing and treating CD.

Male adolescents have been increasingly identified as perpetrators of violent, aggressive, and antisocial behaviors, as well as crimes (Jackson, 2021). These behaviors are reflected in the number of at-risk juveniles who have been arrested and processed through the juvenile judicial system. Most of the juveniles arrested for violent, aggressive, and antisocial behaviors are diagnosed with CD and other mental health disorders with some clinical attributes of anger or the lack of impulsive control, such as ADHD (Stewart et al., 2019). Research has shown that juveniles with disruptive behavior disorders such as CD and ADHD manifest substantially increased rates of physically aggressive behavior (Grisso, 2008).

Bonta et al. (2014) stated that CD can have negative outcomes on multiple levels such as adolescent personal dysfunction (i.e., the inability to initiate and maintain social relationships), high levels of emotional distress, poor peer relationships, financial burdens, family dysfunction and conflict, and academic failures. These negative outcomes are extremely costly and include such things as increased national juvenile crime rates, the cost of repairing schools damaged by vandalism, and the cost incurred to incarcerate juveniles with CD to prevent further offending (Bonta et al., 2014). Additionally, Bonta et al. (2014) found that the social cost included inadequate and unsafe learning environments created by the antisocial behaviors of these male adolescents diagnosed with CD, including the social cost of the reduced quality of life experienced by those victims whose rights were violated. Finally, some indirect victims

suffer from the crimes committed by these juveniles in the form of low property value, poor school ratings, and high-crime neighborhoods (Bonta et al., 2014).

Incidence and Prevalence of Juvenile Delinquency in Florida

In the State of Florida, it was found that 22,919 juveniles were arrested for 36,996 occurrences of juvenile delinquency in 2021 (Comprehensive Accountability Report, 2021). Juvenile arrest is defined as a juvenile being arrested for delinquent offenses (Jackson, 2021). Of the juveniles arrested, 72% were male and 68% were between the ages of 10-17 (Jackson, 2021). Jackson (2021) found that 31% (7,045) of the crimes committed in Florida were committed by juveniles under the age of 16 years. Most of the youths arrested (14,947; 65%) were between the ages of 15 and 17 at the time of the arrest (Jackson, 2021). The juvenile judicial system has seen an increase in the juvenile arrested being of a younger age (Jackson, 2021). The APA (2013) noted that the younger the onset of the CD the worse the prognosis and increased risk of criminal behavior. Jackson (2021) reported that there were only four (0%) children aged 6-7, 459 (2%) aged 8-11, 6,582 (29%) aged 12-14, 14,947 (65%) aged 15-17, and 927 (4%) youths 18 years and older. These statistics show an alarming trend suggesting that delinquency behaviors and the onset of mental health issues can start at ages younger than 10 years old and have an increased rate of adult criminality (Young & Giller, 2021).

The race distribution of arrests among males was as follows: 5,594 (24%) were White, 7,993 (35%) were Black, 2,730 (12%) were Hispanic, and 103 (0%) were other. The female representation of the gender and race distribution in Florida was as follows: 2,334 (10%) were White, 3,142 (14%) were Black, 992 (4%) were Hispanic, and 31 (0%) were juveniles who considered themselves other. Juveniles were arrested for four types of

crimes, including both delinquent acts and juvenile arrests. Delinquency acts are crimes committed by juveniles who are a part of the “at-risk” population in the State of Florida, numbering two million juveniles. These included crimes against a person, crimes against property, crimes involving illegal substances, and public disorder offenses (Jackson, 2021).

Justice-Involved Youth and Related Risk Factors

The following sections provide a brief description of several risk factors that have been linked to the etiology of CD and how they contribute to a juvenile’s mental health issues and subsequent delinquent behaviors. These risk factors include socio-cognitive, family and peer relations, and community influences.

Socio-Cognitive Risk Factors

Juveniles who experience socio-cognitive risk factors perform below average on IQ tests and possess an inability to process facial expression recognition (Farrington,1991). Additionally, they present with deficits in the amygdala (Frost et al., 1989; Stattin & Magnusson, 1989), (responsible for emotional information processing), the executive function of the brain, and in verbal and non-verbal intelligence (Moffitt, 1993; Schonfeld et al., 1988). These juveniles struggle to interpret the intentions of others and are thus prone to respond violently. Taken collectively, these studies strongly suggest that socio-cognitive deficits contribute to the development of CD. These studies suggest male juveniles perceive others as a threat while simultaneously seeing themselves as defenders. This perception provides a clear path to male juvenile delinquent behaviors (Burns, 2003; Crick & Dodge, 1994).

Family and Peer Processes Risk Factor

Several family and peer processes contribute to juvenile delinquency and the onset of mental health issues in juveniles that have been consistent predictors of CD. Parental criminal behaviors, harsh discipline, lack of supervision or parent involvement, neglect, family conflict, parental attitudes favorable to violence, single-parent households, and insecure attachment contribute to the development of delinquent behaviors and the early onset of CD (Kobak, 1999). A lack of social ties and involvement with anti-social peers, social rejection by peers, prior antisocial behavior, low socio-economic status, and minority racial group membership increases the likelihood of the development of CD in juveniles (Fergusson et al., 1996; Lipsey & Derzon, 1998; Newcomb et al., 1993).

Community Risk Factors

Minority group membership, stressful life events, poor neighborhood quality, low household socio-economic status, and community disorganization increase the likelihood of the development of CD in juveniles (Haney-Caron et al., 2019). Levels of criminal activity, availability of drugs, firearms, gangs, exposure to violence, and exposure to racial prejudice also increase CD development in juveniles (Haney-Caron et al., 2019). Additionally, norms favorable to violence, and poor housing were highly associated with pervasive violent behaviors in youth who become involved with the juvenile justice system and the early onset of CD and ODD (Hawkins et al., 1998; Lipsey & Derzon, 1998; Maguin et al., 1995). These risk factors describe the circumstances the average justice-involved youth may be experiencing at the time of their arrest. Once a juvenile is arrested, they are assessed for mental health issues, substance abuse issues, family issues,

academic difficulties, peer relationship issues, community connections and resources, health concerns, and developmental issues. Haney-Caron et al. (2019) identified that DSPs believe that juveniles with a CD diagnosis are more likely to recidivate. However, at this time, there is no systematic way in which spirituality is being assessed or integrated into the treatment provided to youth in the juvenile justice system. Despite the extensive and holistic assessment of the offender, there is a lack of assessment of the juvenile's spiritual well-being (Jackson, 2021).

The Definition of Spirituality and its Role in Treatment

In this study, spirituality was defined and viewed through the lens of Fisher's model of spirituality which posits that a healthy spirituality is viewed in four domains of spiritual well-being: (a) personal domain: how a person intra-relates with self; (b) communal domain: how a person connects to others; (c) environmental domain: how a person connects to nature; and (d) transcendental domain: how a person connects to "some-thing or some-one" beyond the human level (Fisher, 2011). Spirituality is a prescribed component of the overall treatment model of the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) (2021) system. DJJ has committed to treating the entire person including the spirituality and/or religious needs of each juvenile served under their care (DJJ, 2021). Because DSPs have firsthand knowledge of how justice-involved youth function daily, this study explored their perceptions of whether spirituality had any impact on the young people's lives and whether spirituality could be an integrated option to improve functioning for the juveniles served. Spirituality, like personality or emotion, has been recognized by the field of psychology as an innate dimension, or aspect of the human being, that needs to be studied (Burns 2003; Miller & Thorenson, 2003). Stanard

et al. (2000) concluded that spirituality requires consideration in patients in several helping professions such as counseling, medicine, nursing, social work, education, psychology, and addiction treatment.

In the past, the concept of spirituality has been defined as a religious construct (Burns, 2003). Throughout the past 20 years, spirituality has been explored apart from its religious roots. A review of the research revealed there is no consistent definition of spirituality in any of the helping professions such as counseling, medicine, nursing, social work, education, psychology, and addiction treatment. Verghese (2008) defined spirituality as an individual's quest to determine the purpose of their life, the search for the meaning of their life, and the ability to determine their connection to the world around them. Hodge (2001) defined spirituality as "a relationship with God, or whatever is held to be the Ultimate (for example, a set of sacred texts for Buddhists) that fosters a sense of meaning, purpose, and mission in life" (p. 204). Bessinger and Kuhne (2002) defined spirituality as a person's external communication that relates life meaning to transpersonal reality. Some researchers have sought to separate the meaning of spirituality from religion and have determined that people use their spirituality to view their connection to a universal source larger than themselves (Bessinger & Kuhne, 2002; Burns, 2003; Miller & Thorensen, 2003; Verghese, 2008). Miller and Thorensen (2003) made a distinction between religiosity and spirituality. He noted that an individual's spirituality is one's set of beliefs and practices that may include religiosity; religion, on the other hand, would include how an individual practices those sets of beliefs. Canda and Furman (2010) defined the construct of spirituality as follows:

A process of human life and development focusing on the search for a sense of meaning, purpose, morality, and well-being; in relationship with oneself, other people, other beings, the universe, and ultimate reality, however, understood (e.g., in animistic, atheistic, nontheistic, polytheistic, theistic, or other ways); orienting around centrally significant priorities; and engaging a sense of transcendence (experienced as deeply profound, sacred, or transpersonal). (p. 75)

Lastly, Senreich (2013) defined,

Spirituality as a human being's subjective relationship (cognitive, emotional, and intuitive) to what is unknowable about existence, and how a person integrates that relationship into a perspective about the universe, the world, others, self, moral values, and one's sense of meaning. (p. 553)

All these definitions regarding spirituality have a few commonalities regarding a person's ability to connect with God/the universe/transcendent one, other people, their environment, and the search to find meaning and purpose in their lives. For this study, spirituality was defined as the search for the meaning and purpose of one's existence, the ability to positively relate to others, connectedness to the environment, and connectedness to the transcendent one/God.

Spirituality and the Social Work Profession

The social work profession has always embraced spirituality as an integral part of assessing the entire person since its inception as a profession. This is evidenced by the development and utilization of the bio-psycho-social-spiritual assessment to determine areas of needed intervention for each patient. This in-depth assessment is the cornerstone assessment used by every professional social worker. The profession was established

utilizing a Christian foundation based on a religious/spiritual belief of helping your neighbor. Social workers were originally called “Friendly Visitors” and consisted of local, wealthy Christian women who went into impoverished communities to help occupants regain independence and self-sufficiency. The profession moved away from its Christian roots and its cornerstone practices at the turn of the 20th century due to mounting pressure from society that it needed to be more evidence based (Cole, 2021; Parada, 2022). Social work research has seen a return to that cornerstone belief and way of helping patients recover. Serra (2022) found psycho-religious counseling to be an effective treatment option to help clients find meaning in their lives and a way to connect to society. Similarly, Bhagwan (2022) stated that spirituality is a fundamental part of human well-being. He added that social work is predicated on the holistic paradigm, which views the bio-psychosocial-spiritual elements of human beings as inseparable.

Barker and Floersch (2010) concluded the social work profession's history of avoiding a genuine engagement with individuals' spiritual belief systems has contradicted its ethical standards regarding cultural competence and respect for social diversity. They further concluded spirituality has challenged students and clinicians to examine their own spiritual and religious perspectives and how these perspectives influence their work with their clients. There has been an increase in previously utilized spiritual and religious customs in recent social work literature and other related counseling literature encouraging the use of spiritual and religious treatment options by social workers. These customs include meditation, prayer, visualization, use of ritual, affirmations, spiritual dream-work, and mindfulness (Kim & Esquivel, 2011; Stansfield et al., 2017; Stewart et al., 2019). Senreich (2013) found significant contributions in the research between 2000

to 2020 regarding the implementation of spirituality into social work education and practice. He assessed that throughout the mid-and late 20th century, social work education and practice had failed to assess the entire human experience through its use of the bio-psycho-social model. Particularly given that Christianity was at the core of the social work profession, with charity organizations, social welfare agencies, and the settlement house movement (Senreich, 2013). Lastly, Brown et al. (2013) emphasized the need for social workers to assess whether the use of spiritual and religious resources in the community may be helpful for their clients and advocated referring clients to these resources when appropriate.

Spirituality and Adolescent Mental Health Outcomes

Religion and spirituality carry immense benefits for youth. Goodman and Dyer (2023) reported the following about adolescent spirituality in general:

Over 90 percent of American adolescents express a belief in God or some other “cosmic force,” while over 80 percent consider religious faith at least somewhat important in their daily and long-term decision-making. Additionally, over 65 percent of American adolescents engage in weekly prayer, with a majority praying daily. Regular church attendance is reported by almost 60 percent of adolescents, and the number increases to nearly 70 percent when the decision to attend is left to the adolescent. (p. 1)

Research has also shown that adolescent religiosity positively predicts pro-social behaviors and negatively predicts antisocial behaviors (Goodman & Dyer, 2023).

Adolescent religiosity tends to correlate with lower externalizing behaviors such as

delinquent activities. Additionally, religiosity also seemed to foster self-control and decrease risky sexual behaviors (Goodman & Dyer, 2023).

Spirituality may be a particularly important protective factor for justice-involved youth, as it encourages a sense of belonging and humanity and fosters a sense of both individuality and community (Sahare & Kotnala, 2022; Serra, 2022). Sahare and Kotnala (2022) found that justice-involved youth who report a spiritual relationship with their environment are more likely to report feeling connected to the rest of the world. They also found spirituality and religion promote mental health by strengthening connections with others, promoting emotion regulation, and allowing individuals to find solutions to questions about reason and the meaning of life (Sahare & Kotnala, 2022). One specific example of spiritual practice is mindfulness meditation, which Sahare and Kotnala (2022) found to improve stress, lessen nervousness, improve rest, strengthen moral control, and enhance self-esteem.

Bhagwan (2022) found high levels of personal religiosity and spirituality among adolescents. He stated that the holistic paradigm of the inseparable bio-psychosocial-spiritual elements of human beings applies to adolescents, particularly in the context of growing empirical evidence that religion and spirituality positively influence the psychosocial aspects of children and adolescents. Similarly, Haviv et al. (2020) found spirituality to be a protective factor among adolescents exhibiting problematic or deviant behavior. Specifically, higher reported spirituality among youth was related to several factors, such as the youth's identity, perception of parental love and support, social labeling, and social control. They summarized that religiosity is a factor that inhibits and prevents deviance, risk, and delinquency, both at the individual and community levels

(Haviv et al., 2020). To add more context, Sadovnikova et al. (2019) found that juveniles who reported more emotional instability and confusion about societal and religious expectations were more likely to exhibit delinquent behaviors. The researchers found that developing emotional intelligence contributed to the development of empathy, which was associated with consistent meetings with clergy and fewer criminal behaviors (Sadovnikova et al., 2019).

Despite the importance of spirituality and the studies noted previously, the literature search for this capstone revealed a limited body of empirical research related to the spirituality of adolescent males with severe mental health issues, particularly those diagnosed with CD. Generally, prior studies supported the need to further examine spirituality and mental health in adolescent males with CD; however, none of the studies were with youths currently involved in the juvenile justice system (i.e., only youths who had a CD diagnosis or who had been released or graduated from juvenile justice programming). Burns (2003) indicated that spirituality is a relevant topic to examine due to its positive impact on juvenile functionality, such as pro-social skills, coping skills, depression, anxiety, aggressive behaviors, suicidal ideations, self-harm, problem-solving skills, quality of life, delinquency, and psychosocial functioning. He also suggested that spirituality can be a positive contributor that protects juveniles from engaging in anger, aggressive, violent, and antisocial behaviors (Burns, 2003). Similarly, Sinha et al. (2007) found adolescent spirituality strongly associated with reduced internalizing and externalizing behaviors and lower recidivism. Additionally, Marsal (2009) found an association between juvenile spirituality and less risky behaviors, including a lower association with deviant peer groups. Lastly, Stewart et al. (2019) found that spirituality

has a buffering effect for juveniles showing that adolescents with a spiritual practice were less likely to engage in delinquency and report higher endorsement of interpersonal relationships and pro-social behavior. They also found that there is an increased interest in more general spiritual practices among adolescents, such as meditation, more than religion (Stewart et al., 2019). Moreover, they found that higher personal spirituality consistently predicted more positive adjustment in terms of well-being, parental relationships, and academic orientation (Stewart et al., 2019). Given the empirical support for spirituality as a protective factor for youth at risk of delinquency or recidivism and the relevance of DSPs in providing useful information on this population, religion/spirituality is a relevant factor to explore among juveniles in a Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) residential treatment facility.

Purpose of the Study

The overarching purpose of this study was to better understand programming designed to meet the spiritual needs of juveniles with CD who were in juvenile residential treatment programs. The researcher was particularly interested in the perspectives of DSPs and their experiences of current programming provided by the juvenile justice system for the spiritual needs of juveniles. The DSPs were privy and witness to the spiritual programming offered and regularly involved with youth because of their role or job responsibilities. Additionally, they were responsible for ensuring scheduled programming was followed. Typically, juvenile justice facilities do not employ on-site spiritual leaders for the spiritual programming of the youth. However, if a youth requested a spiritual intervention, then a community leader would be invited to the facility to provide these services. A community leader can be of any faith that the justice-

involved youth was requesting, and it is the facility's responsibility to locate the requested spiritual leader for the youth and ensure the service was provided. Consequently, no spiritual leaders were available for an interview during data collection given the parameters and practices of the facility.

Spirituality was conceptualized utilizing Fisher's (2011) model of spirituality, which is defined as a "life giving higher power that is essential to the human experience and provides strength, purpose, perception, mental power and positive frame of mind. Spirituality is innate, emotive, dynamic, and can be religious" (p.18). This model was chosen because of its ability to capture a more complete or holistic picture of a persons' perception of their relationship with others, their environment, themselves, and their relationship with their higher power. Justice-involved youth are facing difficult and challenging circumstances and require a thorough examination of their past, present, and future decisions. This model provided the lens to which the DSPs conceptualized and considered the spirituality programming offered to the youth. Given the need to understand DSPs' perspectives on the spirituality programming offered, the needs of youth, and their recommendations for enhancing the programming available for youth, the following research questions (**RQ**) guided this study:

RQ1: How do DSPs describe the current spirituality programming offered to juveniles diagnosed with Conduct Disorder (CD) who are in a juvenile residential treatment facility?

RQ2: What recommendations do DSPs have for enhancing programming to better meet juveniles' spiritual needs?

Definition of Terms

For this study, spirituality is defined as the search for the meaning and purpose of one's existence, the ability to positively relate to others, connectedness to the environment, and connectedness to the transcendent one/God (Fisher, 2011). Conduct disorder (CD) is defined as a repetitive and persistent pattern of behavior in which the basic rights of others or major age-appropriate societal norms or rules are violated. Direct service providers (DSPs) are staff members who care for these juvenile offenders daily. These are also staff who provide clinical services and general care to the offenders such as nurses, therapists, psychiatrists, youth care workers, and case managers.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The review of the literature first presents evidence of the effect spirituality has had on the social work profession as a point of assessment and intervention. Research on the impact of spirituality on mental health outcomes for adolescents is reviewed, including why spirituality is relevant to adolescent males in juvenile detention facilities. The literature on male juvenile offenders and how spirituality impacts their treatment outcomes are discussed. The impact and relationship that adolescent mental illness has on adolescent criminality are also discussed. The literature review then looks at male adolescents specifically and how spirituality affects this population. Finally, the literature review concludes with a discussion of a theoretical model guiding the structure of the present study.

Social Work Profession and Use of Spirituality/Religion

Spirituality is a strengths-based and person-centered domain that could be very helpful to youths impacted by juvenile justice services. Spirituality is one of the fastest-growing topics covered in several areas of professional counseling relationships throughout the past few decades (Parker, 2011; Seybold & Hill, 2001). Serra (2022) found religious counselors are increasingly challenged to give more attention to their patients by integrating the biopsychosocial and spiritual domains when assessing them so that effective counseling can be performed. The biopsychosocial model is typically adopted to explain a way the main aspects related to human nature, and where the spiritual aspect is only an element within the psychological domain (Whitbourne &

Whitbourne, 2011). Serra (2022) identified that spirituality is considered a representative domain of human nature, as evidenced by the number of people who have difficulty understanding their problems and turn to religious counseling to receive guidance and encouragement to make constructive decisions. Moreover, these problems are commonly related directly or indirectly to alcoholism, conflict between relatives, abuse victims, understanding and coping with grief, feelings of emptiness, and juvenile delinquency, among others (Serra, 2022). Therefore, experts have communicated a need to integrate religion and human sciences, in developing effective counseling (Serra, 2022). Serra (2022) suggested this integrated approach for social workers because they are trained to observe and understand that the biopsychosocial and spiritual domains influence each other. Lastly, Serra (2022) stated the spiritual domain of the patient is interrelated, to a greater or lesser degree, with biological functioning, mental health, and social context. How patients present themselves during their counseling has a biopsychosocial and spiritual interrelationship (Serra, 2022).

Another study by Bhagwan (2022) found higher levels of personal religiosity and spirituality amongst social workers were associated with support for the role of religion and spirituality in practice. He argued that spirituality be included in social work practice and identified specific areas that needed to be nurtured when working with individuals and families: principles of a spiritually sensitive relationship, religious and spiritual diversity, spiritual assessment, spiritually based therapeutic interventions, and transpersonal social work (Bhagwan, 2022). The inclusion of religion and spirituality in a social work context to reconstruct individual and family life is necessary (Bhagwan, 2022).

Social work has built a foundation on a holistic, biopsychosocial, and spiritual paradigm, which views spirituality as a fundamental aspect of a person's being (Crisp, 2011). There is also evidence of spirituality enhancing levels of resilience, which supports its inclusion in a social work practice (Rajan-Rankin, 2014). Moreover, religion and spirituality have been deemed appropriate for intervention with vulnerable people such as children and those with mental health concerns (Crisp, 2017). Given social workers' roles across a variety of clinical settings intended to alleviate numerous health and mental health issues, practitioners must be well-trained and prepared to assess, discuss, and integrate a client's unique spiritual beliefs into treatment (Oxhandler & Giardina, 2017).

In a social work context, spirituality plays a significant role in the lives of individuals and families (Canda & Furman 2010). Hence, by understanding a person's religious and spiritual beliefs and their relationship to the presenting clinical issue, social workers are better positioned to develop appropriate treatment plans (Oxhandler & Giardina, 2017). Many facets of spirituality, such as relationships with others, respect for others, and the pursuit of meaning and purpose, relate to the goals of social work (Doe, 2004; Mulder, 2015). Moreover, there have been descriptions of the potential place of religious and spiritual traditions in social work and social work practitioners' lived experiences with religious and spiritual clients, which further embeds its position in social work practice (Gokani & Smith 2020). Furman et al. (2007) suggested a comprehensive biopsychosocial and spiritual assessment will enable practitioners to explore the nature and benefits of spiritual beliefs and practices. It would also enable practitioners to explore how the assessment provides proof of a potential support system

for clients (Furman et al., 2007). Others have concluded that a thorough holistic assessment would allow practitioners to treat clients according to their needs, as spirituality is deeply personal, and practitioners and clients likely hold different spiritual beliefs and understanding (Mulder, 2015).

Integrating spirituality into the counseling process could provide immense benefits to the welfare of individuals and families (Koenig, 2010). Researchers have been interested in examining how spirituality affects different aspects of a patient's functioning either physically, mentally, emotionally, or psychologically (Hayman et al., 2007; Paloutzian & Park, 2005). There has been growth over time in exploring the associations between spirituality and mental health (e.g., Resnick et al., 1997; Stewart et al., 2019). Researchers have focused on spirituality and its effects on adolescent mental illness on such topics as self-esteem, depression, and anxiety (U.S. Public Health Service, 2006; Wong et al., 2009). However, more research would be beneficial in understanding how the construct of spirituality impacts the intersections of mental illness, gender, and persons of different ages.

Spirituality and Mental Illness in Adolescents and Young Adults

Research supports spirituality as a protective factor for youth in the general population, particularly in buffering the effects of mental health issues. However, several studies are a little older or do not give much information about male adolescents. Wong et al., (2009) conducted a systematic review of 20 articles examining adolescent religiosity/spirituality (R/S) and mental health from 1998 to 2004. The results showed that higher levels of R/S were associated with positive mental health in adolescents, and this relationship was generally stronger for male adolescents and older adolescents than

for females and younger adolescents (Wong et al., 2009). They proposed that R/S may be more beneficial to older adolescents because they can choose and reflect on their own choices rather than being forced to choose an imposed set of values and traditions from their parents like younger children (Wong et al., 2009). Wong and colleagues (2009) could not determine any theoretical explanation for why R/S might be more beneficial to boys than girls. It is also important to note that this research did not include articles on youth with a diagnosis of CD or involved in the juvenile justice system.

A second article focused on youth R/S and mental health included youth not involved in the juvenile justice system. Pandya (2015) conducted a program evaluation on All Round Training in Excellence (ART-EXCEL) to examine well-being and spirituality among adolescents aged 13-15. The international sample consisted of 396 adolescents from four different cities: Vancouver, London, Johannesburg, and Mumbai. Results indicated that spirituality among adolescents served as a source of well-being and influenced close relationships, social support, moral conduct, personal growth adaptive coping, and the development of meaning and a purpose in life. The research findings supported that spirituality is generally perceived as having positive effects on the mental health and well-being of program participants.

Due to the gaps noted in the literature about adolescent spirituality among male adolescents or those with a diagnosis of conduct disorder, the search for relevant research was extended to include young adults. A couple of relevant studies were found, but there was still a gap in research specific to males with conduct disorder. Brown et al. (2013) conducted a cross-sectional study with 121 undergraduate and graduate college students ages 19-25 aimed at determining the relationship between spirituality and mental illness.

They concluded that individuals reporting higher levels of religiosity and spiritual well-being may also experience a reduction in mental and emotional illness (Brown et al., 2013). The findings of this study are consistent with previous research findings that concluded spirituality has a positive effect on mental health symptoms in individuals (Burns, 2003; MacDonald, 1997). Brown and colleagues (2013) concluded it is important to integrate spirituality into counseling interventions, as well as increase spirituality content in counseling education and training programs. Another study found slightly different results. Huber (2012) conducted a cross-sectional study with 157 college students aged 18 and older at a midwestern Catholic university to determine the relationship between spirituality and aggression. The results found no significant relationship between increased spirituality and any form of aggression, which is a common symptom among those with conduct disorder. More research on how or why R/S is beneficial to mental health would be helpful.

Male Adolescents and Spirituality

This author found only one study that specifically looked at the spirituality of adolescent males who may be dealing with mental health symptoms that overlap with CD. Burns (2003) conducted a study with a sample of 75 male students at a private Catholic high school to explore the relationship of spirituality to adolescent male anger and aggression. The results indicated that a significant relationship exists between higher levels of cognitive orientation to spirituality and existential well-being scored lower scores on total anger, reactive anger, and instrumental anger, which is indicative of higher levels of anger control and the ability to manage aggression more effectively (Burns, 2003). Interestingly, there was no significant association between religiousness and the

experiential/phenomenological approach to spirituality and anger or aggression (Burns, 2003). This research did not assess whether juveniles were diagnosed with a mental illness or CD, nor did it examine issues related to juvenile delinquency.

Adolescent Mental Health Issues and Criminality

There is some debate in the literature as to the exact role that mental health issues play in adolescent delinquency and criminal behavior, but lower functioning mentally or cognitively has generally been considered a risk (McCormick et al., 2017). According to Pliszka et al. (2000), 15-42% of detained juveniles have major mood disorders such as bipolar and depression disorders, 20-46% of juvenile offenders meet the criteria for ADHD, and 50-90% of juvenile offenders meet the criteria for CD. McGarvey and Waite (2000) suggested that 40% of incarcerated juveniles meet the criteria for special education services and nearly 50% of their sample scored 6 years below their chronological age on measures of language achievement. Those impacted by the juvenile justice system often struggle with significant mental, cognitive, or academic challenges that may be associated with or lead to impulsive or socially inappropriate behavior.

Rapp-Paglicci (2005) posited that many juvenile offenders have multiple mental health disorders, making comorbidity the rule rather than the exception. Moreover, some research suggests mental health issues are directly linked to delinquent behaviors and subsequent recidivism, while other research criticizes and proposes these studies use mental health issues as a broad stroke and do not consider other important factors like social context or economic vulnerability (Vermeiren et al., 2006). Others have suggested factors such as substance abuse, family problems, and peer influences may have a stronger impact on delinquent behavior than mental health issues (Bonta et al., 2014).

However, there is strong support that mental illness plays a role in justice involvement, as Fries et al. (2013) concluded that 40-90% of justice-involved youth suffer from mental illness. Moreover, Esposito et al. (2017) reinforced that mental health issues are more prevalent for juveniles in the juvenile justice system than in the general population. For example, only 18-20% of the general population of adolescents suffer from mental health issues (Esposito et al., 2017). Mental health is a serious problem for the juvenile justice system as many juveniles enter the system needing mental illness and substance abuse treatment (Stewart et al., 2019). These data provide evidence to support the many difficulties juvenile offenders face and the need for more effective assessments and interventions.

Risk Factors of Conduct Disorder

As noted earlier, youth involved in the juvenile justice system very frequently have a diagnosis of CD. Pisano et al. (2017) conducted an extensive review of CD and psychopathy in children and adolescents focused on the etiology, clinical presentation, and treatment strategies of callous-unemotional (CU) traits of CD. They also explored genetic liabilities, a term used to collectively describe all the genetic (heritability) and environmental factors that contribute to the development of a multifactorial disorder. They also considered parenting influences on the CD diagnosis with CU traits and the relevant environmental factors that can lead to elevated CU traits in children. They provided a narrative review of available evidence on CU traits in three domains: etiology (encompassing genetic liability 42- 68% accounted for CU traits being genetically driven), environmental risk factors, and clinical presentation (early signs and longitudinal trajectories). Their findings indicated that a strong genetic liability in conjunction with

negative parenting and relevant environmental factors can lead to elevated levels of CU traits (Pisano et al., 2017). Symptoms of CD can be detected in early childhood and may remain stable during adolescence, but a possible decrease following intensive and specialized treatment is possible (Pisano et al., 2017). This supports the need to examine different types of treatment options, particularly more holistic and person-centered treatment like spirituality.

Spirituality and At-Risk or Justice-Involved Adolescent Males

Resnick et al. (1997) and later Burns (2003) concluded spirituality was a protective factor and a coping strategy for adolescents in general and for adolescents who suffered from mental illness and stressful life events. Among adolescents exhibiting delinquency-related behavior, spirituality has been identified as a relevant protective factor because it becomes a resource a person may use in coping with negative life events (Haviv et al., 2020). The dominant factors contributing to the helpfulness of R/S are the protective mechanisms of social control and social pressure, which are exerted on adolescents and protect them from such risk behaviors as dropping out, detachment, deviance, delinquency, violence, and drugs (Haviv et al., 2020). Social control theory was used to explain why this occurs, and it is through the mechanisms of attachment, commitment, involvement, and beliefs (Haviv et al., 2020). Religious persons are obligated to obey certain rules of conduct, including behavioral codes that prohibit deviant and aberrant behaviors; thus, a commitment to religion and spirituality can inhibit delinquent behavior (Haviv et al., 2020). However, youth may also be rejected by their religious or spiritual community for participating in delinquent or criminal behavior, which could harm the youth (Haviv et al., 2020). An important implication was made by

Haviv and colleagues (2020) about the role of religion, especially its rigid boundaries, as a risk factor in cases in which the youths question their religious identity. This could make religion a risk factor or stressor for adolescents as much as a protective factor or inoculating factor.

Sahare and Kotnala (2022) identified two protective factors that reduce the likelihood of youth engaging in delinquent behaviors: psychological resilience and conscientiousness. Resilience has been a widely studied concept that has significant implications for the development of delinquency prevention and intervention programs, and it is important to recognize that youth in trouble have strengths and can become resilient. In the study, conscientiousness was defined as the root from which personal commitment, social responsibility, accountability, honesty, and integrity arise to make the individual morally and ethically good (Sahare & Kotnala, 2022). These attributes help the individual relate to parents, close relatives, and others in the family, neighborhood, society, and nation. Sahare and Kotnala (2022) indicated that spirituality can aid in developing resilience and conscientiousness because a spiritual outlook makes humans more resilient and mentally well. Increased resilience and pleasant emotions are linked to healthy spirituality and resilience and positive emotions may have a reciprocal effect on one another (Sahare & Kotnala, 2022).

Johnson (2021) completed a study with adults at the Louisiana State Correctional Facility. Although his study did not include juveniles, the findings were relevant to the behavior and perception of those involved in the justice system. He found that a modest intervention such as visitation, particularly from community volunteers like clergy and mentors, was associated with fewer rearrests, reconvictions, and reincarceration when the

participants were released from prison (Johnson, 2021). The positive effects on recidivism increased as visits increased. The findings suggest that visitation by community volunteers should be considered as a programming resource for those who otherwise lack social support. Johnson (2021) also found that offender-led religious movements (ORMs) could provide participants with a strong identity, an alternative moral framework, and a set of embodied practices that emphasize virtue and character development. He also stated that even though there may be significant roadblocks to the proliferation of ORM, this innovative approach to rehabilitation and reform holds significant potential to transform the character of not only individuals, but whole cellblocks or housing units, and possibly entire correctional facilities (Johnson, 2021). This research study provided some implications for whether those who have committed criminal offenses could experience an identity transformation and rehabilitation through experiences or interactions like pro-social behavior, spiritual awakening, service to others, prayer, perseverance, and forgiveness (Johnson, 2021).

Stewart and colleagues (2019) conducted a study with 148 male adolescents in a boot camp setting to examine the relationship between adolescent spirituality, mental health, and recidivism. The authors found that participating in spiritual activities while in juvenile justice programming was associated with improvements in private religious practices, daily spiritual experiences, and internalizing and externalizing behaviors (Stewart et al., 2019). The overall group increase in the private religious practice results was increased due to juveniles attending Sunday services while in the program (Stewart et al., 2019). The overall group increase in the daily spiritual experience may have been impacted by the juvenile's utilization of spirituality values during their stay in the

program (Stewart et al., 2019). The results from the study provided supportive empirical data that spirituality positively affects mental health and thus impacts the recidivism rates of male juvenile offenders (Stewart et al., 2019). The primary limitation was that this study only examined juveniles from a Christian background, and it failed to determine how spirituality affects male adolescents diagnosed with CD or more severe mental health diagnoses. There is still a great need for empirical research on this population and with juveniles from different spiritual backgrounds.

Treatment Options

There is a need for more treatment options for youth with CD. Two reviews were found for youth diagnosed with CD, and the focus of treatment is generally related to teaching or coaching social and emotional skills, helping youth develop appropriate coping mechanisms, and exploring medication-related treatment. Pisano et al. (2017) identified four treatment options that have been beneficial in reducing symptoms of CD among adolescents: CARES-coaching and rewarding emotional skills, emotion recognition training (ERT), coping power program, and psychopharmacology treatment/medication management. Erford et al. (2017) conducted a meta-analysis of 21 studies that explored various counseling interventions for juveniles with CD. They concluded that counseling produced a medium effect in treating CD in juveniles at termination; however, the longitudinal effects were unclear because of the limited number of follow-up studies (Erford et al., 2017). Thus, more research is necessary to further the literature on CD treatment options.

Among individual treatments or interventions, Taubner et al. (2021) found that mentalization-based treatment (MBT) may be appropriate for individuals with CD

experiencing cognitive deficits and that mentalizing might represent a protective factor against the development of the disorder. MBT focuses on helping youth understand social behavior and fostering mentalizing might help CD individuals to (re)gain an adaptive way of coping with negative emotions, especially in social interactions, and thus reduce aggressive behavior (Taubner et al., 2021). For example, mentalizing supports an individual's imaginative ability to perceive one's own and other's behavior as the product of affective and cognitive mental states (Taubner et al., 2021). Taubner and colleagues (2021) showed that adolescents with CD have a significantly lower mentalizing capacity compared to adolescents with no CD. Moreover, Taubner et al. (2021) focused more on a developmental perspective fostering insight into possible path mechanisms, as the researchers found that mentalizing (partially) mediated the relationship between childhood maltreatment and potential for violent behavior in adolescence (14-21 years). Lastly, they found that mentalizing partially mediated the link between childhood sexual abuse and externalizing problems (e.g., rule-breaking, and aggressive behavior) in children aged 7-12 (Taubner et al., 2021).

Chalfon and Ramos (2022) explored sand play therapy in the treatment of 41 male and female children with symptoms of oppositional defiant disorder and conduct disorder through 12 weekly sessions. The Child Behavior Checklist 6-18 was used to assess symptoms before and after the intervention. The authors found that sand play therapy was associated with reduced symptoms of oppositional defiant disorder and conduct disorder (Chalfon & Ramos, 2022).

Among studies specific to justice-involved youth, Caldwell and Van Rybroek (2005) utilized the decompression model, specifically the Mendota Juvenile Treatment

Center (MJTC), which is an intensive institutional treatment program designed to be highly responsive to the issues that generate treatment resistance in youth. MJTC provided mental health treatment to the most challenged or disturbed juveniles held in the state's secured correctional facilities and was uniquely housed on the grounds of a state mental health facility. Although operated under the administrative code of the Department of Corrections as a secured correctional facility, the facility employed the staff and operated the program allowing for a clinical correctional hybrid approach for high-risk youth. The results showed a significant reduction in the prevalence of recidivism in the treated group after controlling for time at risk in the community and other covariates (Caldwell & Van Rybroek, 2005). In conclusion, there was limited research found on spirituality and adolescent male juvenile offenders with mental illness within a treatment context, specifically treatments for CD. In addition, because prior research literature is missing a solid and replicable definition of spirituality that separates it from religion and most studies use religion and spirituality interchangeably, more research on using spirituality in interventions for youth with CD who are involved in juvenile justice services is needed.

Theoretical Framework: Fisher's Four-Domain Model of Spirituality

This research study is predicated on Fisher's four-domain model of spirituality (Fisher, 2011). This model was used to provide a clear and relevant framework for defining multiple aspects of spirituality that are pertinent to different social populations and all aspects of human life and experience (Bhagwan, 2022; Fisher, 2011). As discussed previously in this manuscript, justice-involved youth face many challenges before, during, and after their experiences in juvenile detention; thus, they need

protective factors that support their capacity to navigate their past, present, and future decisions. Although Fisher's model has not specifically been adapted to youth in the juvenile justice system, defining spirituality using this model provides a multifaceted basis for evaluating the physical, mental, social, and emotional perspectives of spirituality (Fisher, 2011). This is well-aligned and relevant for youth in the juvenile justice system because programming is often targeted at treating the whole person (DJJ, n.d.). In addition, youth involved in the juvenile justice system often need more holistic protective factors to create an environment of belonging, resilience, and acceptance (Sahare & Kotnala, 2022). Additionally, Fisher's four-domain model has been used with youth in prior research (Fisher, 2013b). In youth, the model was found to be a useful tool in measuring the youth's perceptions about the four spiritual areas of their lives (self, environment, community, and God). Thus, this model was selected as a means of defining and providing a framework for DSPs to consider and evaluate spirituality programming for justice-involved youth.

Fisher's model of spirituality (2011) posits that healthy spirituality is viewed in four domains of spiritual well-being: (a) a personal domain: how a person intra-relates with self; (b) a communal domain: how a person connects to others; (c) an environmental domain: how a person connects to nature; and (d) a transcendental domain: how a person connects to "some-thing or some-one" beyond the human level. These domains explain how an individual's spirituality determines their responsiveness toward themselves, others, the environment, and their receptiveness toward God. Spiritual health or well-being is defined by Fisher (2011) "as the affirmation of life in a relationship with God, self, community, and the environment that nurtures and celebrates wholeness" (p. 21).

These relationships can be developed in the four corresponding domains of human existence described above. According to Fisher (2011), the personal domain represents how one intra-relates with oneself concerning meaning, purpose, and values in life. Self-awareness is the driving force of the transcendent aspect of the spirit in its search for identity and self-worth. The communal domain reviews the quality and depth of interpersonal relationships, between self and others, relating to morality, culture, and religion. This domain is expressed and assessed through the ability to love, forgive, trust, hope, and have faith in humanity. The environmental domain is the notion that a person can have unity with the environment or nature. The transcendental domain represents the relationship a person has with something or someone beyond the human level. This involves faith in, adoration of, and worship of the source of the mystery of the universe.

Fisher's model provided the lens through which the spiritual well-being of the target population of justice-involved adolescent males was examined and defined. Fisher's (2011) model provides insight into why male juvenile offenders may struggle with CD. For example, the personal domain can be understood by looking at the symptoms of CD that lead youth to commit criminal offenses. The personal domain examines the meaning, purpose, destiny, and value people put on their lives. Justice-involved youth diagnosed with CD struggle with internalizing symptoms such as low self-worth, sadness, and anxiety (Stewart et al., 2019). Additionally, it has been revealed youth with CD struggle with below average on IQ tests and possess an inability to process facial expression recognition (Farrington, 1991). Due to these symptoms, it is difficult for them to value themselves. Youths with CD may also grow up in homes where there are different types of child maltreatment (e.g., verbal or physical abuse, lack

of parental/caregiver supervision) or socio-economic struggles associated with higher risk of internalizing symptoms (Stewart et al., 2019), which may interfere with personal spirituality development.

Examining the communal domain for justice-involved youth provides some understanding of how youth with a diagnosis of CD appear or are actually emotionally disconnected from their victims. Using the communal domain, it can be identified that justice-involved youth diagnosed with CD struggle with externalizing symptoms such as aggression, rule-breaking, and impulsivity (APA, 2013). Due to additional factors, such as parental criminal behaviors, harsh discipline, lack of supervision or parent involvement, neglect, family conflict, parental attitudes favorable to violence, single-parent households, and insecure attachment, youth can become emotionally detached from others (Farrington, 1991). Researchers have suggested that these early adversities make it difficult or even impossible for youth to accurately process facial expressions, which can lead to misinterpreting others as a threat to them (Farrington, 1991). Thus, these symptoms make it difficult for them to socialize appropriately with others.

The environmental domain of Fisher's (2011) model can be used to understand how youth struggle with connection to nature. As discussed previously, justice-involved youth face a number of risks or deficits in their homes and neighborhoods, such as poor neighborhood quality, poverty-stricken or high-stress environments, and elevated crime rates (Haney-Caron et al., 2019). Due to these living conditions, it is difficult for the juveniles to connect and feel safe in their living environments, which may leave them less capable or incapable of cultivating their environmental spirituality.

Although this is less studied, within the transcendental domain, it appears that many youths are missing a connection to God, as evidenced by the types of struggles they present with. The transcendental domain can be used to understand how juveniles' negative behaviors or CD are correlated with a lack of acknowledgment of a higher power or disbelief in God. For example, due to the risk factors present in these justice-involved youth such as socio-cognitive, family and peer, and community risk factors (Haney-Caron et al., 2019), youth have often not been given the support, knowledge, or reinforcement necessary to acknowledge a relationship with a higher power. In summary, it is well established that spirituality is an important protective factor for youth, and it may be particularly salient for justice-involved youth, as spirituality encourages a sense of belonging and humanity, and fosters a sense of both individuality and community (Sahare & Kotnala, 2022; Serra, 2022). Taken together, the four-domain model can be useful in identifying relevant risk factors and potential protective factors for justice-involved juveniles, and it provides a helpful framework for describing or evaluating the spirituality needs or programming of youth in the juvenile justice system.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology section is presented in the following order:

1. Sample
2. Recruitment
3. Human Subject Protection
4. Data Collection
5. Semi-structured Interview Guide
6. Analysis
7. Strengths and Limitations of the Study Design.

Research Design

This was a cross-sectional qualitative research study that utilized a thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to explore DSPs' perceptions of the role of spirituality in the lives of juveniles diagnosed with CD and impacted by juvenile justice services. The Florida Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) is responsible for delinquency proceedings for juveniles charged with criminal acts. These criminal acts, if committed by adults, would result in criminal prosecution. However, DJJ is tasked with developing and coordinating comprehensive services and programs statewide for the prevention, early intervention, control, and rehabilitative treatment of juvenile delinquent behavior. DJJ manages the juveniles under their supervision with a strategic plan enacted in 2000 called the "Tough Love" plan, which utilizes redirection and rehabilitation, rather than punishment. Although this plan strengthened the punitive consequences of delinquent

behavior, it was designed to affect positive behavioral change in juvenile offenders. DJJ has committed to ensuring juveniles and their families will live in safe, nurturing communities that provide for their needs, recognize their strengths, and support their success. DJJ has further committed to increasing public safety by reducing juvenile delinquency through effective prevention, intervention, and treatment services that strengthen families and turn around the lives of troubled juveniles (DJJ, n.d.).

Sample

The sample was obtained utilizing a non-probability sampling method, specifically, convenience sampling. The researcher obtained a sample of 30 DSP participants (Charmaz, 2006). The number of participants was recommended to increase the potential for reaching saturation and achieving a sufficient sample size to both examine nuances in the themes and subthemes present in the data and identify differences between potential themes (Charmaz, 2006; Morse, 1994). The data were collected from DSPs working in the DJJ Youth Opportunity Investment residential treatment facility in Okeechobee, Florida. All participants needed to speak English, be able to comprehend the interview questions, and have direct and regular interaction with youth to participate. There were no other inclusion or exclusion criteria. The program was a locked, maximum-risk correctional and treatment facility designed to rehabilitate criminal delinquent behavior and provide treatment for mental illness and substance abuse. The facility had a maximum capacity of 80 residential beds available.

The participants worked an average of 7 years for DJJ. Six (20%) participants identified as male and 24 (80%) identified as female. Half of the participants ($n = 15$; 50%) identified as African American, two (7%) identified as Biracial, three (10%)

identified as Hispanic, and 10 (33%) identified as Caucasian. Staff roles and descriptions were based on job titles and classifications given by DJJ; there were 19 (63%) operations staff (e.g., floor staff and non-clinical staff) and 11 (37%) administrative staff (e.g., clinical staff). Table 1 shows demographic information.

Table 1

Participant Characteristics

Characteristic	n (%)	M (SD)
Years of service		7 (48.23)
Gender		
Female	24 (80%)	
Male	6 (20%)	
Race/ethnicity		
Black	15 (50%)	
White	10 (33%)	
Hispanic	3 (10%)	
Biracial	2 (6.6667%)	
Job role		
Safety Security Specialist	11 (36.67%)	
Teacher	4 (13.333%)	
Therapist	4 (13.333%)	
Kitchen staff	2 (6.6667%)	
Nurse	2 (6.6667%)	
Trainer	1 (3.3333%)	
Administrative	2 (6.6667%)	
Case manager	1 (3.3333%)	
Recreation Specialist	1 (3.3333%)	
Maintenance	1 (3.3333%)	
Home Builders Institute	1 (3.3333%)	
Education		
High School	11 (36.67%)	
Some college	5 (16.67%)	
Associates	2 (6.6667%)	
Bachelors	6 (20%)	
Masters	4 (13.333%)	
Doctorate	2 (6.6667%)	

Recruitment

The researcher primarily worked with the DJJ Youth Opportunity Investment's regional clinical director to gain access to the correctional facility staff. First, a flyer (Appendix) was submitted to the regional clinical director for approval and posting in the facility. The flyer was used to announce the research project and to garner the support of staff for the proposed research project. Second, the regional clinical director reached out directly to the facility to identify dates the staff were available. Third, the regional clinical director provided the available dates to the researcher and the dates were agreed upon and scheduled by both parties. Fourth, on the date scheduled to collect the data, the researcher arrived at the facility and was met by the administrative assistant of the facility. She provided the researcher with a private office for interviews to be conducted in a confidential and private area. Fifth, the researcher met with each DSP willing to participate in the research study to determine if they met the inclusion criteria for the study. Sixth, once the researcher confirmed the eligibility of the DSP, the DSP was invited to participate in the study. Finally, once the DSP agreed to participate in the study, a semi-structured interview was conducted utilizing a video and audio recorder. No compensation was provided to study participants.

Human Subject Protection

Before beginning data collection, the researcher completed the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) certification, and no research activities were conducted until approval was granted by the Florida Atlantic University Institutional Review Board on 10/25/2022 and the Department of Juvenile Justice Institutional Review Board on 11/1/2022. The human subjects' protection of the research study was taken into

consideration by the researcher and the research committee. The researcher and research committee acknowledged the data came from a sample that was not a vulnerable population. First, the sample consisted of adult participants over the age of 18. Second, they are adults working in a State of Florida Juvenile Justice Residential Treatment Facility. Finally, each adult in the study worked directly with juveniles in the program and had direct knowledge of the juveniles' spiritual practices. Even though these adults did not comprise a vulnerable population, the researcher went to great lengths to ensure the participants in this study were treated with dignity and respect and that all appropriate protocols and requirements were taken.

Data Collection

The data were collected in December 2022. Each interview was completed in 15 to 30 minutes. The data were collected using face-to-face interviews. All interviews were conducted at a DJJ residential facility. All interviews were conducted by video and voice recorded for transcription. Data were transcribed within 3 weeks of collection. Once transcription was completed, all video and audio recordings were permanently destroyed. All interview data were transcribed into a Word document for analysis.

Semi-Structured Interview Guide

The semi-structured interview guide was developed by the researcher following the completion of the literature review for this project and in consultation with the research committee. The open-ended questions were designed to elicit information about the participants' lived experience working with juvenile offenders, as well as align with the different aspects of Fisher's model of spirituality such as how DSPs observe justice-involved youths' spirituality practices and needs from a personal, communal,

environmental, and transcendental perspective. Specifically, the questions were designed to obtain a DSP's perception of the role spirituality plays in the lives of juveniles, its impact on youths' lives, and recommendations to improve the spiritual programming offered to juvenile offenders. The interviewer provided each participant with a definition of Fisher's model and talked through the model to ensure participants understood the definition prior to asking the questions below. Because the interviews were semi-structured, the interviewer referred to the elements of the model or general definition of spirituality, if needed during the interview.

The interview guide contained the following questions:

1. Do you think spirituality has any impact on the juvenile in the facility?
2. How does the juvenile in the program practice or use their spirituality while in the program?
3. What does the program do to support the juvenile's spirituality?
4. What could the program do to enhance the support of the juveniles' spiritual practices?
5. Is there anything else you think the facility should know about the juvenile's spirituality and/or the services they provide to the juvenile?
6. What types of spirituality programming or services are available to juveniles in the facility?
7. In your experience with the juveniles and families, is there anything else you think the facility should know or consider about providing spirituality programming or services to juveniles?
8. What is your current role at the facility?

9. What is your race/ethnicity?
10. What is your gender?
11. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
12. How long have you been working at a DJJ treatment facility?

Analysis

Prior to analysis descriptive statistics were analyzed and reported in the demographic table to describe the sample participants. For continuous variables (number of years working for DJJ), the mean, standard deviation, and minimum through maximum were computed using SPSS 27. For categorical variables (participants' job titles, gender, race, education level), frequency and percentage were computed and reported.

This study utilized thematic analysis to analyze the data collected from the transcripts of the participants. Thematic analysis was identified as the appropriate means for data analysis in this study given the exploratory nature of the study (Braun & Clark, 2006). This process allows flexibility, while also providing a rich and detailed interpretation of the data. By explicitly identifying this form of analysis, the researcher intended to be overt and transparent about their analysis process (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Braun and Clark (2006) outlined aspects of thematic analysis that involved some decision making on the part of the researcher. The first step in this process was defining what constituted a theme in the analysis process. A theme represented any idea that captured something important concerning the research questions and that was stated by more than one participant. Second, the researcher elected to provide a rich description of the data set, rather than focusing on one aspect of the data. The researcher utilized inductive

thematic analysis to address the first research question of this study (**RQ1**), with an essentialist or realistic approach, as they read and re-read the data looking for themes in the data to understand DSPs emergent views and experiences of spirituality programming and youths' needs. An inductive thematic analysis was also used to address the second research question (**RQ2**) to specifically extract the recommendations of DSPs with regular interaction with youth in the context of the juvenile justice facility. Deductive analysis was also used to capture any emergent themes that came from participants' interviews. The purpose of this approach was to give voice to the participants, displaying the reality of their experiences (Braun & Clark, 2006).

In addition to the decisions that must be made during thematic analysis, Braun and Clark (2006) clearly defined six phases or steps that should occur. Phase 1 involved becoming familiar with the data. The researcher of this study served as an independent coder and read through the transcripts in their entirety before beginning the coding process. Once the researcher felt comfortable with the data, she moved on to Phase 2, the first level of coding, which involved independent coding and verification of codes. Phase 3 involved sorting the initial list of codes into different themes. Again, this process involved a review of the initial themes by the capstone advisor. After this verification, the researcher moved on to Phase 4, which involved reviewing all the codes to condense them into themes that represented relationships among the initial list of codes. During this process, the researcher generated what is known as a thematic map and included themes and codes that coincided with those themes. After this thematic map was generated, the researcher began Phase 5 by defining and naming the themes. Consistent with the earlier stages, the researcher completed this process, and the capstone committee verified it. The

final phase involved the researcher generating the report of the data in the form of the results section of the analysis.

Reflexivity in Analysis

The researcher recognized that the nature of qualitative work involves interpretation, which can be influenced by personal experiences. The researcher had previous experience providing therapeutic services to juveniles and families involved in the DJJ system, as well as providing spiritual guidance as a pastor of a local church. Additionally, the researcher had previous experience administrating therapeutic services such as crisis stabilization and inpatient and outpatient mental health treatment. The researcher discussed potential biases and interpretation of results with the capstone committee, which consisted of persons with both practice and research expertise in youth mental health, families facing multiple social adversities, child welfare and intersecting systems, and research/spirituality. It was intended that this representation of expertise would be helpful in limiting potential bias among the results.

CHAPTER 4: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This research project addressed two research questions:

RQ1: How do DSPs describe the current spirituality programming offered to juveniles diagnosed with Conduct Disorder (CD) who are in a juvenile residential treatment facility?

RQ2: What recommendations do DSPs have for enhancing programming to better meet juveniles' spiritual needs?

Six primary themes were identified from the analysis. The first two themes were deductively coded to explore the research questions in this manuscript. The last four themes resulted from inductive coding of the interviews: (a) programming and resources available to youth (**RQ1**); (b) recommendations for enhancing spirituality programming and resources for youth (**RQ2**); (c) viewing spirituality as religion; (d) support for religion and spirituality for youth; (e) facilitators to youths' spiritual development; and (f) barriers to youths' spiritual development.

Programming and Resources Available to Youth

This primary theme can be described as participants' responses related to the different types of approved programming or resources provided to the youth while in the program to support their spiritual development. This primary theme had three subthemes: (a) religious reading materials, (b) facilitated programming and activities, and (c) youth-initiated supports or activities.

Religious Reading Materials

The subtheme of religious reading material can be described as any reading material the participants witnessed the youth reading while in the program that was related to their spiritual development. Despite asking about both spiritual and religious materials in the interviews, only religious reading materials, specifically Christian reading materials, were discussed by participants. Multiple participants discussed that religious reading material is offered and provided to the juveniles while they are committed to the facility to support their continued spirituality. The participants also described times they saw youth reading religious reading material during their time in the program. Several participants witnessed “the juveniles reading their Bibles during their leisure time.” Participants explained how the program generally supported the juvenile’s spirituality during their stay.

Participants also verbalized that “the program gave the juveniles Bibles when they asked for them” or “when they [youth] came in the program with Bibles, they were able to keep them [during their time in the facility].” Another participant described another way youth may be exposed to religious devotionals. One participant described how a colleague was reading a daily Christian devotional while on shift and a juvenile became interested in what the staff was reading. That participant stated, “there is one [juvenile on unit redacted] now, he wants to learn [more about his spirituality]. You know, those books *Our Bread*. He always asked for those books.” *Our Bread* is a popular Christian pamphlet that is published monthly, and the staff has permission to provide these to youth who request them, especially when it is seen as helpful for calming youth down.

Facilitated Programming and Activities

The subtheme scheduled programming and activities can be defined as any activity offered or facilitated by the treatment facility to the juveniles to support their spiritual development or any approved activity related to their rehabilitation that DSPs thought could support youths' spirituality. DJJ primarily provided access to community spiritual leaders, and non-religious activities that participants thought could overlap with their spiritual development, and supported youths' creative efforts to develop their spirituality. Multiple participants discussed the facility's use of community spiritual leaders to work with the juveniles. Overall, most spiritual leaders represent the Christian faith. One participant stated, "On Sundays, they have somebody [from the community] come and minister to them, you know, like teach them about the Bible and stuff because there's a lot of kids out here that want to learn about the Bible." Some participants reflected that the facility has brought in a minister with musical talent to come in and engage with the youth spiritually or work with the youth on their music. For example: "There was a guy that they normally bring down here every three to six months. [Name redacted], he comes here and performs rap spiritual songs, he speaks about God with the juveniles." Participants also indicated that youth could request that DJJ bring in community spiritual leaders as well.

After reflecting on the definition and domains of spirituality, participants also verbalized several activities or programs that were not ostensibly religious that allowed the juveniles to engage in and connect with nature. Thus, participants came to recognize many activities or programs as spiritual activities throughout the interview. Multiple DSPs in this study said they witnessed the juvenile's connection to nature and their

environment as a spiritual experience. A participant who was involved in planning environmental activities for the youth stated, “I am starting to put the greenhouse together outside, we got chickens for the farm, we developed a hydroponic gardening system, and I’d like to start an animal farm for the juveniles who love being outside.” When explaining how environmental programming is helpful and their experience working with youth, the same participant stated,

It is time outside. It is away from the monotony that is going on in here. And you know, it is very pleasing to see it, because you see the ones that want to make it out here and [who are] interested in being successful upon their release. I am looking at them and I am glad. You know what, that was me a long time ago.

Others reflected on programming that is not necessarily intended to be spiritual but has connected youth to nature or other ways of connecting with their physical environment.

For example, one participant described sports and special programming as spiritual activities for many youths:

The juveniles enjoyed going outside to play basketball, football, and stuff like that. We offer recreation time for the juveniles to go outside and enjoy downtime for themselves. We also offer the Home Builders Institute (HBI) program here at the facility, which also takes place outside.

HBI is the nation’s leading nonprofit provider of trade skills training and education for the building industry. Another participant stated we offer recreation time “to help the youth take care of the physical bodies which can be spiritual because it helps them maintain their temple which is where the Holy spirit resides.”

Several DSPs also indicated that the facility offered a music studio that youth could use for spiritual entertainment or creative arts activities. Some discussed that the facility built a music studio to entertain, engage, and build the skills of youth in the facility. For example, “we do have that room [a studio] back there where they do music

and everything... The kids love music. They are writing lyrics all day long. Everybody wants to be a rap artist.” Participants recognized that some juveniles engage in performing music about their higher power or spirituality. Overall, participants indicated they frequently saw “juveniles’ love for music” and they saw “music being used in the juveniles’ worship and leisure.”

Youth-Initiated Supports or Activities

Another subtheme was youth-initiated support or activities, which can be described as any spiritual/religious practice or activity created by juveniles while in the facility. Multiple participants observed ways that the juveniles developed activities to worship their higher power. One unit was identified by staff because the youth developed their own church service and weekly Bible study. “They were having a whole church service, like literally talking about the Word of God, talking about how they can live their life better, once they get out of here.”

Another participant described the youths’ Bible study:

[I’m] on that unit all the time. They used to hold Bible study two days a week. And they use that to kind of guide each other through problems that they may have in that week, or they’ll come up with a common theme like there’s a certain couple of verses in the Bible that they’re using or something like that. They ask each other, how they can help each other out more. They discuss those things in their mental health groups, but they kind of expand on it more [in this Bible study], and how it relates to their relationship with God and stuff.

Another participant described how one youth took leadership in organizing the religious activities:

He [a youth on the unit] has such a big impact and [has] the support of his parents as well, and he kind of just grabbed the other four kids that had been there for months and put it together and made it happen. And he welcomed anyone else who wanted to join.

Overall, the participants felt these youth-initiated activities were beneficial for youth:

“they are the ones who tend to be more positive and accepting... ‘I did this, I am paying

for it, and I accept it'. And they have [the perception that they are] building or repairing their relationship with God.”

Youth were also described by a few DSPs as developing self-care activities that included elements of spirituality and working on their self-connectedness through self-evaluation or reflection time. One participant stated, “they have daily recreation time and they have a weight room” so that youth can have time to take care of themselves mentally and physically. Another DSP expressed the facility provides a space where the juveniles can have a space for self-reflection, which “gave them [youth] what we call quiet time to just self-evaluate, give yourself a breather.”

Recommendations for Enhancing Spirituality Programming and Resources

Recommendations for enhancing spirituality programming and resources were comments or specific recommendations made by the participants to improve how the facility could enhance youths’ spiritual or religious development. Although several recommendations are not ostensibly related to spirituality or religion, participants in this study were reminded of Fisher’s model of spirituality throughout the interview. Thus, these recommendations are related to improvements in both spirituality and religion for youth. Three subthemes emerged: (a) support and enhance family engagement, (b) increased compassion for youth in the facility, and (c) recommendations for DJJ administration.

Support and Enhanced Family Engagement

Several DSPs discussed their observations and recommendations related to families related to the barrier of poor family engagement. One recommendation was that the program try harder to improve the relationships between the justice-involved youth

and their families. Another participant stated, “DJJ needs to increase the amount of contact the youth have with their families because the youth need more connection with their families.” They expressed that this would make the youth feel less alone and it would provide the love and support they need. Finally, they added it would help the youth feel a part of something and help them develop the ability to attach to other people. Another participant stated, “it is important for the youth to reconnect with their families even while they are still in the facility, so they can still feel connected while they are away from them.” Overall, participants did not have specific recommendations for how to improve family engagement, but they certainly recognized the need for them to remain connected to their families.

Increased Compassion for Youth in the Facility

Several participants described that many staff demonstrated a lack of compassion toward the juveniles. Thus, some DSPs in this study suggested improving how the staff provided care to the juveniles, which they felt would ultimately improve the lives of the youth who were admitted to the facility. For example, one participant confidently stated that youth “need more emotional support and sensitivity from the staff.” Multiple participants agreed, as evidenced by statements like: “the kids need more kindness and more understanding. Yes, we know they are in here for things they have done wrong, but they are still humans, and they still need emotional support.”

More specific recommendations to improve the staff’s relationships with youth as a means of demonstrating more compassion were discussed:

These kids out here, to be honest, are hungry for love and knowledge. They want somebody they could connect to and talk to them. You know, if they trust you, they will talk to you. If you say, ‘okay, me and you talking’. They build that trust

with you. [The youth knows] I can go to him or her, you know, talk about this and that.

In a similar frame, another participant discussed that the lack of compassion toward youth had a systemic impact on the facility:

Colleagues [need to] increase their compassion and sensitivity toward the juveniles because their current behavior and attitudes are negatively impacting their staff relations, the relationship with the juveniles, and the work environment as a whole system. Because there is so much inconsistency between how each staff handles the juveniles, it causes too much tension. Some staff follow the rules with compassion and others are just 'to the letter' and that can be unfruitful. The juveniles just want to know you care about them and their life.

This staff member appears to suggest that being more empathic toward youth would also benefit relationships among the DSPs at the facility. Interestingly, another participant similarly agreed that staff would "...benefit from showing compassion for each other as well... see when you do things wrong it makes other people's job with the kids harder. We need to be the same [compassionate] across the board with each child."

Related to compassion, another commented that programming needed to be available to all juveniles equally. For example, one participant indicated that youth who act out more can receive differential treatment; however, differential treatment may limit youths' ability to grow and develop.

I think we should be compassionate to all the kids. Like letting more kids get into the programs we offer. We offer stuff like the kitchen program, the sports program (football), and the studio program. But there are only certain kids that can be a part of those programs. I think that if we put some of the kids that they feel are in trouble into those programs, it will maybe change their behavior and perspective on things. They can do it. The child may feel like okay, you believed in me, you gave me a chance, let me do better. And that is what I think we should do.

This participant expressed that the program's policy of only allowing juveniles who have been well-behaved into certain programs was not compassionate.

Recommendations for DJJ Administration

The subtheme recommendations for administration explored suggestions from the DSPs about how the administration can improve the spirituality programming for the juveniles. The theme investigated several areas of concern by the DSPs such as downtime, lack of resources, and improving training for the staff. A few DSPs described downtime as the juveniles having too much free time for video games or other less fulfilling activities and not having enough structured activities that could be used for supporting their spiritual development. For example, one participant stated, “Instead of being on the unit with nothing to do the youth can be in church or some structured spiritual activity.” Another participant suggested the administration could allow more spiritual entertainment because the youth were heavily into creative arts. One participant suggested,

So, I think we could provide spiritual musical entertainment. I think they would participate in a choir too, because a lot of them you could tell they probably were raised in the church, they just happen to go a different way. And we could also do a dancing class. Or something like we have a big talent show for them or something.

Finally, another participant provided similar feedback about spirituality entertainment stating,

We should have talent shows so the juveniles can showcase their talents such as singing and rapping. We could also have gospel choirs come in to sing to the juveniles to lift their spirits. The juveniles have expressed a desire to start a gospel choir of their own some of them can sing.

On another note, however, others described a desire for the administration could allow the youth to have more interaction with different spiritual leaders in the community. For example, one person indicated:

I think we should be more open to spiritual leaders coming in to speak to the youth. For example, I know some of them [the youth] were requesting somebody from the outside like a pastor to come in, at least on Sundays, to help them worship and lead them into prayer of some sort. I think that will be helpful.

Another participant elaborated on why community engagement is important to youth in the program:

I do feel like outside preachers should be the ones that come to the prison and should be allowed to minister to the juveniles. Because to them [youth], it may be a sign of weakness if they say, 'hey, I want to read the Bible together'. But if you got an outsider coming in, that is cleared, and says, 'Okay, we are having church on this day'. I think you would see a higher number of boys going back to their roots. We will see how they were raised. I believe we are going to find out that at least 80% of our kids that we have in this program, have been raised by their grandma and have been raised in the church and do understand spirituality. Because if we leave it up to them to express a desire to worship their higher power, they will feel embarrassed and will not say anything. They do not understand that it is okay to have a higher power and it does not make them weak.

Many DSPs verbalized they were not equipped to help the youth in their spirituality development, and they need more training or support. Most participants stated we need "More training, knowledge, and skills in spirituality, so they can help the youth with their questions." They also stated, we need to know what we can say about God and not get into trouble. Another, participant suggested that the staff should be, "Trained on how to help [the juvenile with their spirituality]." The participants expressed interest in attending training offered by the company so that the staff was better prepared to handle such an abstract topic. One participant stated, "Maybe having a class about it and explaining how to address it with the kids? Having a class about definitely teaching them that they have a purpose and helping them to understand their purpose." The participants expressed that juvenile spiritual expressions and growth could be better supported if each staff were taught and expected to show more compassion and sensitivity to the juveniles.

Additionally, the DSPs described the need for more training and resources to enhance their spiritual knowledge to better support the youth in the facility at discharge specifically. “This lack of programming and resources [for supporting discharge] negatively impacts the juveniles not only in their spirituality but also with programming while the juveniles are in the program.” Another participant stated, “We need more training on how to help them spiritually.” A few participants specifically discussed the need for training or other resources to support youths’ spirituality at discharge. One participant stated, “The facility should provide the youth mentors to help them prepare for their discharge. I think that is why they keep messing up because they don’t have no one to turn to when they leave the facility.” Combined with a lack of resources and knowledge to help the juveniles in their spiritual journey about the fulfillment of their destiny and purpose, the staff desired to do better for the youth.

These statements were offered after the participants were given the definition of spirituality and asked how the program could better assist the juveniles with their spirituality. One participant stated, “They’re not a lot [of spiritual programming], not enough at all.” Another participant stated,

One thing I think they can do is get them ready for the future when they get out of here. You know what I mean? You know, like have programs they can attend while they are here. It is like you have some of the kids who do not have anywhere to go when they get out and nothing constructive, they can do when they leave. That is why, I keep seeing a lot of these kids get in trouble repeatedly.

Other than recommendations specific to spirituality, participants felt youth needed to acquire more life or vocational skills to take care of themselves at discharge and give them a better chance at success. The DSPs offered these vocational suggestions based on what they have heard from the juveniles expressing what they want to do to better themselves, “HVAC, Mechanic, Plumbing, Barber/Cosmetology, CDL, and culinary

programs.” The participants stated, “These programs could help the kids be successful upon discharge and help them accomplish their destiny and purpose in life.” Moreover, the participants expressed that, “The creation of vocational programs would improve the juvenile’s spiritual connection to their purpose and destiny based on the research project’s definition of spirituality.”

Viewing Spirituality as Religion

This primary theme can be described as participants’ responses related to viewing spirituality synonymously with religion. There were two different subthemes associated with this theme: (a) lack of knowledge of spirituality and (b) viewing spirituality as religious practice.

Lack of Knowledge of Spirituality

Lack of knowledge of spirituality emerged as a subtheme when it was observed that all the DSPs in this sample needed clarification that spirituality was not synonymous with religion. Although it was planned to provide participants with Fisher’s model and the definition of spirituality, the researcher had to provide further elaboration or explanation to differentiate spirituality from religion to the participants. All participants thought that spirituality referred to practicing Christian religion. One participant stated, “I don’t know, like I am confused at the whole spirituality thing, because I thought it was just like, a religious thing, but your definition is a whole different meaning.” Another participant stated, “You said spirituality is you know, when I hear spirituality, I immediately think about the way you carry yourself, pray and stuff like that.”

Viewing Spirituality as Religious Practice

Similarly, despite being given the definition of spirituality, most participants continued to frame or conceptualize spirituality as religious practice. Throughout the interviews, all the participants gave religious examples when describing how spirituality was practiced by the juveniles in the program. As an example, after being given the definition of spirituality, one participant described: “the juveniles read their Bibles and they pray. Like some juveniles pray in their rooms on break and some of them told me, they pray before they go to sleep.” However, some were able to reflect on Fisher’s definition of spirituality and expand their responses over the span of their interview (e.g., see Facilitated Programming and Activities).

Overall, participants saw spirituality through religious lens was the subtheme Christian religious practices. An example of Christian-only activities when asked about spirituality included answers like “having ministers and pastors come to minister to the juveniles on Sundays’ and having Bible study, going to church, and stuff like that.” Other examples of spiritual practices were participants’ describing how spirituality to them meant Christian religious practices, they discussed their own spirituality, the spirituality of their colleagues, and how their spirituality helped them handle the juveniles and their daily struggles working with them. One participant stated, “I am saved, and I have been where they are. I ‘ve been there and done that already. I tell them my truth; I know God and I have his spirit in me. He changed my life for the better. He changed my old friends to new friends and changed my old playgrounds to new playgrounds. He can do the same for you if you want him to. I use my life as an example.”

Support for Religion and Spirituality for Youth

Overall, participants supported and encouraged the juveniles' beliefs, activities, and knowledge of their spirituality. The primary theme support for religion and spirituality for the youth was defined as any statements or behaviors done by the youth and the participants provided support for the youths' spirituality. There were four subthemes that supported the primary theme: (a) impact and importance of spirituality, (b) spirituality as a coping mechanism, and (c) youth suffer without spirituality.

Impact and Importance of Spirituality

The subtheme of the impact and importance of spirituality can be described as DSPs' perspectives on spiritual activities that impacted youths' behavior while in the program and their descriptions of the importance and benefits of spirituality for youth while engaged while in the program. The vast majority (24 of 30) participants verbalized "yes" when asked whether spirituality had an impact on the juveniles while they were in the residential treatment facility. Participants frequently verbalized their belief that, "everyone needs some type of spirituality." Multiple agreed with more simple statements like: "I think spirituality does have an impact on the juveniles. Absolutely." Additionally, several participants noted multiple benefits of spirituality. For example, one participant stated, "I do feel like it does affect the juveniles, it does make a big impact on some of them. Spirituality kind of gets them through the program as if they [come in and] do what they [need to] do, they'll get out of here on time." Others expounded on some of the impacts of spirituality. For example, one participant reinforced the impact of spirituality when describing how youth who made more positive gains were those who were more aware or invested in their spirituality:

Well, most of them expressed a belief in God. They are the positive ones. You know, like I said, they are the ones who tend to be more positive and accepting of their situation, 'I did this, I am paying for it', and 'I accept it'. And they have, quote, unquote, the relationship they are building or repairing with God.

Another participant agreed that spirituality seemed to help youth reflect more while in the facility by indicating that spirituality "made them [youth] think a little bit more about their behavior and choices." Additionally, a participant expressed witnessing juveniles who were able "to utilize self-control, self-talk, and the ability to weigh options and think through choices and consequences" because of their spirituality. One participant stated,

I believe that it helps with a lot of decision making, you know. For example, like making the right decisions while in their normal day-to-day activities. Like trying to just help them better manage their behaviors, thoughts, feelings and stuff like that.

Others discussed how spirituality improved participants' perspectives of their situation or involvement in the program. For example, one participant felt "spirituality gave the juveniles hope" while they were working through the juvenile justice programming.

Another gave a description of how youth who practiced their spirituality more regularly were more optimistic than those who did not practice regularly. One participant expressed, "On that dorm, [unit redacted], it's a more graceful and peaceful walk for both the staff and juveniles." A second participant noted a similar experience:

That dorm is different, and just to be honest, they are the SO's, sex offenders, but they are not as rowdy as the other dorms. You can see the difference. It does not take much. You do not have problems out of that dorm. You do not have fights in that dorm at all.

Another participant added, "And reading your Bible and stuff can also help you get through a lot of triggers and traumas."

Spirituality as a Coping Mechanism

Multiple participants specifically discussed spirituality as a coping skill. The participants provided examples of when they have seen the juvenile use their spirituality to calm themselves down when something occurred to trigger negative emotions or violent behavior toward another juvenile. One participant expressed:

Honestly, there are days when they just want to give up. I mean, some juveniles seem like [they were] a ticking time bomb. But they stepped back, [and say to themselves] you know what? I am going to chill out today. I am not going to let anyone ruin my day. So, I have seen that happen. And that is just [the juvenile] trying to practice doing better and trying to be a better person.

One participant stated, “When the youth talk about their relationship with God and consider their current situation, they express, it’s more like they express an acceptance of their situation because of their relationship with their higher power.” Overall, the participants communicated a firm belief that juveniles’ daily spiritual practice makes it is easier to reason with youth. DSPs similarly indicated that they observed youth display more maturity in relationships with staff, other juveniles, their families, and seemingly with their higher power when they were involved in spiritual practice. Finally, one participant verbalized, “I have this youth on [unit redacted] when he really going through it, he sought me out so we can talk about his problems. So, I know our relationship is helping him do better.”

Youth Suffer Without Spirituality

The subtheme youth perishing emerged when several DSPs indicated that youth suffer due to staffs’ lack of knowledge and a lack of resources on how to reach them spiritually. This theme reinforced participants’ beliefs of the importance of spirituality. Many participants expressed concerns that youth leave the facility with the same behaviors that they arrived with and sometimes they leave worse than when they arrived.

For example, “That due to the vicious cycle mentioned earlier, some of the juveniles are not being rehabilitated and have begun to repeat their criminal behavior.” When talking about staffs’ ability to connect with youth, some felt they did not have the skills to spiritually connect with youth: “Due to the lack of compassion the youth experience [from staff in the facility], they often times become more disconnected from others and the belief they are alone increases.” Others felt youth suffered due to insufficient focus on youths’ religion or spirituality in the program: “There was not enough scheduled spirituality programming opportunities for the juveniles in the program for them to have a chance to explore their higher power or to learn about themselves relating to a higher power.”

Facilitators to Youths’ Spiritual Development

Facilitators to youths’ spiritual development included supports that increased youths’ connections to others, their environment, or higher power. There were three subthemes identified: (a) interpersonal supports, (b) characteristics of spiritual leaders, and (c) religious freedom.

Interpersonal Supports

The subtheme interpersonal support included participants’ perspectives of family support, peer support, staff support, and emotional support, and how these relationships impacted the juveniles’ spirituality. Family support is comprised of descriptions of positive behaviors, attitudes, and interactions between youth and their families, particularly because participants felt that family support was important to the juvenile’s spirituality maturity. Participants generally agreed on the importance of family interaction and support around spirituality as important for youth. For example, one

participant indicated that “being connected to their families aids in behavior control because they want to reconnect with their families when they get released.” The participants expressed that this type of connection makes the juveniles feel supported and loved by their families. Specifically, relating to spiritual development and family support, one participant described that a lot of youth had been exposed to spirituality by their family, despite their current predicament of being incarcerated.

You would never know; a lot of kids have been raised up with spirituality and they’ve been raised the correct way. You can’t tell that they’ve been brought up in the churches, but you can tell that because they demonstrate respect for their elders by showing proper manners by responding with Yes, ma’am or No, ma’am.

Another participant described a time they supervised a juvenile’s telephone call to their grandparents, and they witnessed the family saying,

Baby, you weren’t raised like that, you know. God's going to look out for you and making this right. So just affirmations like that, I believe can like just make them get a grip on reality and change their behavior.

Peer support was discussed by a small portion of participants who verbalized seeing juveniles in the facility supporting each other’s spiritual development or well-being. Generally, participants observed activities or behaviors that were spiritual in nature where the juveniles are talking to, encouraging, or comforting each other during Bible study or church services. One participant stated they saw juveniles ask, “Each other how they can help each other out more during the week.” The participant felt that this type of peer support made the juveniles living environment peaceful and easy to manage. Another participant described how the juveniles use spirituality to calm each other down and work through daily problems “by coming up with a common theme, like there's a certain couple of verses in the Bible that they're using or something like that to encourage positive engagement with each other and staff.”

Staff support was identified by several participants who discussed success in sharing their spirituality with the juveniles. They specifically felt that this type of interaction with youth helped improve the success of the juveniles' while they are in the program. Examples of staff support included times where the DJJ staff were talking to, encouraging, or comforting the youth from their own spiritual identity and resources. Many of the participants discussed sharing their spirituality with the juveniles in hopes of encouraging them to change their lives moving forward. A participant stated, "I do pray with some of them because some of them do come to me and ask me to pray with them or pray for them." Another participant indicated, "I feel like yes, staff sharing our spirituality with the juveniles gives them some type of sense of recollection or rebooting themselves for the new week coming and a new lease on life." Multiple participants discussed trying to impart influence, relationship, or advice to help youth use their spirituality to stay out of trouble. One participant stated, "I try to encourage them to do the right thing, to go out and get on the right track. So, they do not have to get locked up again." Another participant expressed,

I believe there is a level of spirituality that can affect their life while they are here and can make it something that they can take from us. As I would say, especially as believers in Christ, they can learn some of our spiritual ways and how to respect us, you know. They can leave here and go home to their families, hopefully, that they would remember what we taught them on a spiritual level [about respecting their elders]. To make sure that this is what you need to do to remain focused once you get out of here.

Multiple participants felt they were able to see how sharing their spirituality could help the youth get back on track. For example, a participant stated, "I guess it all depends on what they believe in. If [staff sharing their spirituality] can get them out of some dark places, it can also help keep them in a straight line. You know, if they drift off and reflect on that, or whatever they believe in and kind of, get their head back right."

After reflecting on Fisher's (2011) domains of spirituality, some of the participants expressed more generally how the relationship they built with the juveniles was spiritual and that they felt it improved the juvenile's behavior and the staff's ability to connect with the juvenile. Specifically, the staff's bond with the juvenile improved the redirection of behavior and the ability to support the juvenile during difficult times in the program. They expressed the improved relationship with the juvenile supported the juvenile's spirituality. For example, one staff verbalized how having a more spiritual connection with youth was important for interacting with them and helping youth avoid negative behavior:

Yeah, cause some kids listen to some staff. Some staff can handle certain kids. You know, they can say, 'hey, look, calm it down', or just be like, 'calm down'. So, they [youth] will calm all the way down. Whatever they [youth] did, that staff would say something like, 'you know you want to go home'.

Another participant stated the juvenile looked forward to her engagement with them because she encouraged and lifted their spirits:

But I also go around, and I try to talk with kids that are having trouble times and stuff like that. So, I kind of take it upon myself to go and help the kids when they are having a bad day or stuff like that. Because, you know, sometimes it is like our children, you cannot just come out screaming at them and you know, whatever. You must be sensitive to them because they have feelings too and they are already feeling 1,000 different emotions. So, I go in there and say, 'Hey, what's bothering you? What is going on?' I have also made affirmation books for kids, like every day, like a few juveniles I had, I gave them a composition book, and I will print out affirmations and give it to them so they can put them in their books. And when they are feeling down, they can go back to look at them. And they really enjoy that. They look forward to what I am going to bring them every day. I always try to keep them in high spirits. Because like I said, they are already down.

Several participants agreed that positive relationships were important and facilitated by practicing empathy and support. One participant stated: "we need to provide more kindness and more understanding toward our juveniles. Because, yes, we know they are

in here for things they have done wrong, but they are still humans, and they still need support.”

Characteristics of Spiritual Leaders

This subtheme can be described as participants’ perception of the characteristics needed by the community leaders. It was identified by some participants that the community leaders needed to be formidable to handle the youth in the program. Formidable was defined as not easily offended by the youth’s lack of manners or disrespectful behaviors. Among that group most participants verbalized that the community leader should be spiritually formidable. One participant described:

They [DJJ] should have somebody that is strong, and could tolerate disrespect, because the kids are disrespectful in here. That person could do like Bible studies and stuff like that. But you cannot have nobody weak in here or have somebody that take things personal. So, you need to have somebody strong headed and know how to put a child in its place without embarrassing that youth.

Additionally, another participant stated, “I feel as though, they need strong men and women of God to come out here and minister to them, because they really need it.”

Finally, another participant stated the program needs spiritual leaders that have “been through the struggle and can relate to these juveniles.”

Religious Freedom

Multiple DSPs also discussed the importance of religious freedom as a facilitator to youth spiritual development, which they described as the juveniles having the liberty to practice their own religion and spiritual beliefs freely. One participant stated, “If they [youth] want extra [spiritual reading] materials when they come in [we have them]. We ask kids are they Jewish, etc.? Or we may ask what religion they are?” Some juveniles chose a different spiritual path than their family of origin: “I think we had two that were

saying they were Islamic, but not based on their family [of origin].” DSPs indicated that this difference of belief from their families is usually identified during their intake process and that the intake is usually where religion or spiritual beliefs are asked of youth. A few DSPs reported that youth may also express a desire to practice their spirituality without permission from their parents: “Some youths have come to the program and their religion was different from their families. It was their right so we did not have to get permission from their families, and we could disclose their choice to their families.” The participants expressed an opinion that all juveniles should be offered spirituality opportunities but not forced to go. One participant stated, “I mean, at the end of the day, you give them an opportunity to join in, everybody is not going to join in, but you just give them the opportunity to do something more spiritual, more positive.”

Barriers to Youths’ Spiritual Development

This primary theme was defined as any barriers experienced by youth, staff, or administration identified that hinder the youths’ spiritual development. There were four subthemes defined and described in this theme: (a) youth-related issues impeding spiritual development, (b) poor family engagement, (c) staff-related concerns about integrating spirituality into work with youth, and (d) administrative or systemic challenges in providing spirituality programming.

Youth-Related Issues Impeding Spiritual Development

DSPs identified a few issues facing youth, and multiple identified spiritual vulnerability. In this frame, spiritual vulnerability is defined as any way a juvenile may feel embarrassed or humiliated due to their belief or actions toward their higher power. Overall, one of the DSPs indicated that “the juveniles are afraid of being laughed at or

teased by their peers.” One of the participants shared that in the past it “embarrassed or humiliated them [youth] to be associated with spirituality, so they shunned any belief in the spiritual around their peers.” One DSP attributed youths’ vulnerability to being in a group setting like the facility,

Because sometimes when we are in a group setting, they kind of want to do what their friends want to do or do not want to get laughed at... It would be better to pull them aside and ask them those type of questions.

Others further discussed that they observed youth perceiving that religion can make them appear weak: “to them [youth], it may be a sign of weakness to say, ‘hey, I want to read the Bible’, or ‘I want to attend Bible study’. Today's generation, they do not want to look weak.” Similarly, another participant indicated that, “The juveniles often felt embarrassed or humiliated by their desire to worship their higher power or felt their peers would view them as weak if they wanted to participate in spiritual practices.” Another participant similarly observed that youth can perceive religion as a weakness: “the juveniles feel that spirituality makes them vulnerable and soft.” One participant differentiated between the youth in the facility, particularly those with more aggressive or assault-related offenses compared to those who committed a sexual offense:

A lot of the juveniles here since it is all males, [spirituality signifies] vulnerability. So, vulnerability just scares them, so they are not going to do it. They are going to lash out. But there are a few that might want to just sit there and meditate or allow you to put on calming music. It is just more common for the ones that do have [committed] sexual assaults [against others]. They are just an open book. They do not mind showing that vulnerability while the other ones are more aggressive. I am tough. I am not going to show you that I am scared or anything like that. So, it is a little harder.

DSPs in this sample also talked about youth having no experience with spirituality, particularly no interest in engaging in spirituality. According to another participant,

To be honest, I do not want to be a cynic. If [they are] forced [into the DJJ facility], most of the kids do not see anything wrong with themselves. Most of them feel like their only mistake was getting caught. And I will say it is about 51% of them. The other 49% do realize when you talk to them that they do need to change. Mostly they do not want to go to prison. Some of it is about not wanting to hurt other people.

This lack of spirituality was discussed by many participants as juveniles not being raised with spirituality. For example: “Juveniles in the program were not exposed to any spirituality in their home life, so they are not interested in hearing about spirituality while in the program.” Another DSP similarly indicated that “you must look at how many of them grew up in that dog-eat-dog environment. That is the thing, they go right back to the same environment.” Other participants discussed their experiences that some youth just reject spirituality outright: “You have juveniles that don't believe in it, they feel like there's no such thing as faith, or God, any of it, they don't have no hope.” Another DSP similarly shared:

As far as spirituality [goes], these kids say stuff like, ‘I hate God’... but when something is happening the first thing they say is, ‘Oh, Lord!’ I mean, that is my honest opinion. I do not think spirituality is anything important to these kids. You can try to talk to some kids, and they do not want to hear it. Then on the other hand, you have some kids that are really going through it [tough times], they do want to hear it [about spirituality], and some do ask about it.

Finally, one participant stated this about the juvenile's interest in spirituality, “Very little of them are interested in God. So, I do not see it. Very seldom do you hear them talk about spiritual stuff. Everybody [is] talking about Illuminati.”

Challenging behaviors due to mental health, cognitive needs, or trauma exposure was another youth-related barrier. This theme explored how the youths' mental health, cognitive needs and trauma exposure has negatively impacted their ability to develop spiritually. One participant stated that, “Juveniles often feel like they are alone and that

no one sees them, which causes their negative emotional and physical behaviors.” Several DSPs observed juveniles displaying heightened negative feelings and behavior such as excessive profanity, verbal disrespect toward staff and each other, physical aggression, or property destruction. Several participants expressed that these behaviors were challenging: “Every day we come into work where there is tension in the air. On one side of the building it is quiet and the other it is like boom. It is too stressful.” Consequently, “these negative behaviors [make it] difficult to introduce spirituality practices into the lives of the juveniles because we cannot trust they will not become violent, disruptive, or agitated.” Participants generally agreed these behaviors make it a challenge to provide spiritual programming to juveniles. For example, one participant expressed, “Juveniles who displayed this type of negative behaviors would be excluded from any spirituality practices in a group setting for fear of violence toward staff or other juveniles.”

Similarly, participants observed that youth experienced trauma and “the existence of trauma in their past negatively impacts their attitudes, behaviors, and perceptions.” One participant stated that “...trauma, certainly from the juvenile’s perception, made them appear and feel weak” and that youth would often react or externalize their feelings and experiences. Several participants similarly expressed agreement that “past trauma causes the juveniles misbehavior while in the program, which makes introducing spirituality so difficult.” Other discussed that youths’ trauma led “juveniles [to] present with many trust issues; thus, causing an inflated sense of vulnerability and the need to be in control.” Reflecting on their experience of working with you who have experienced trauma, one participant stated, “the juveniles here are broken and we need to provide some help for them in this state, where we don’t have to embarrass them.”

Another barrier contributing to the difficulty of developing the youths' spirituality is their educational or cognitive deficits. One participant represented the overall concern "that our juveniles are below academic standards for their age." According to one participant, "The educational deficits the juveniles have exhibited are the catalyst to many problems the juveniles face." Others elaborated in how educational or cognitive deficits can easily result in poor behaviors that inhibit intellectual and spiritual gains: "Due to this decreased academic presentation, there is no way to introduce such an abstract concept of spirituality." Similarly, another participant stated, "They can't even manage to do a little bit of classwork much less deal with something much more profound like spirituality." When verbalizing specific concerns around the Bible being less accessible for youth facing cognitive deficits, a DSP indicated:

I know a lot of kids want to read the Bible; however, it is too complicated for them. So, I know that they make a junior-type Bible. I suggest we get a dumbed down Bible for kids, for those that may not have the educational level to read the Word and understand the Word of God. And so, I think that would be good to get a Bible they can read at their academic level. But ignoring this fact that they struggle to read is a major problem for our youth.

Although religious freedom can be positive for youth, there was also some fear of spirituality freedom from the DSPs. For examples, there were a few participants who were afraid of the juvenile's right to exercise spirituality freedom and the potential consequences that freedom may cause for the program due to the youths' history and background. For example, "the consequences of spirituality freedom [could lead to] gang development, it may cause spirituality gang riots and religious wars among the juveniles." Other participants stated,

We acknowledge the juveniles' spirituality, but I mean, Is it suitable? We can get into some confusion here. This can turn into juveniles saying I am a Satanist and

other juveniles join in and now we have a Satanist gang. We have gang members up in here. So, I know, we can make efforts, but they can backfire.

Poor Family Engagement

Poor family engagement was described by multiple participants as a lack of family support for the juveniles, which made them feel alone in the world. For example, many participants stated, “They have heard the juveniles say ‘where was God when I needed him? F**k God.” One participant described the importance of family engagement as: “Due to the juveniles not having family support such as a safe living situation, and financial or emotional support they often exhibit negative or aggressive behaviors toward others and sometimes themselves” [at the facility]. Another indicated that, “This lack of family support causes the juveniles’ hearts to be hardened and unreachable at times.” Participants also seemed to agree that not getting support from family inhibited youth in trusting and engaging with DSPs or community spiritual leaders, as well as engaging in spirituality practices. One participant expressed, “Due to the juveniles not having family support, they do not care about themselves and often lash out on others and reject God altogether.” According to one participant,

Some of the juveniles do not have mothers or fathers. These are project kids. There is no mother there all day. There is no daddy there all day. They are out in the streets doing them and the kids are out there raising themselves.

Staff-Related Concerns About Integrating Spirituality Into Work With Youth

This theme represents barriers staff face when trying to integrate spirituality into the programming of the juveniles. Multiple staff discussed a lack of knowledge or skill in how to guide youths’ spiritual development and fear of repercussions for sharing spirituality with the youth. A number of DSPs discussed encountering different spiritual perspectives, beliefs, or practices than the Christian beliefs held by the staff members,

and this influenced how they engaged with those in the facility. “Many of them [youth] expressed a belief, some believe in God, and some refer to themselves as Muslim, and some say they believe they worship the devil.” Multiple participants did not know how to support these youth. One participant verbalized, “I am a Christian, so I don’t know what to do when their beliefs are different from my own. I don’t know how to support the youth.”

Participants also discussed struggling with providing spiritual development for the juveniles for fear of proselytizing or appearing coercive. DSPs were clear in wanting to avoid any perception that they are pushing their religion onto youth or forcing youth into any spiritual activity that they did not want to participate in. “No one had the right to coerce juveniles into believing what they believed.” Others shared similar sentiments like “You can't make somebody believe what you believe in.” Some participants expressed concerns that by speaking to the juveniles about spirituality this could be falsely perceived by their peers or administration that they were forcing their own religion onto the juveniles. “If staff shared their beliefs and it was different it may cause an offense or may be viewed by others as doing something wrong or coercive.” Some even expressed “fear of being accused of pushing their faith onto the juveniles.” One participant expressed a fear of proselytizing because they did not want to lose their job or feel like they were crossing the line by sharing their beliefs with the juveniles:

But I never took the initiative to move forward with it because I do not know how this place operates. Even though I have been here for a whole year now, and it will be two years coming up in January. I still do not know how this place operates. So, when I did have a moment, I did not talk to the juveniles about the Word of God. I did not want to get in any trouble. However, I did pray with some of them because they came to me and asked me to pray with them or pray for them. So, I do it because they asked me and that is who I am. Because somebody had to pray for me, and I understand the situation that they are in as well.

Although several staff were relatively comfortable sharing their faith, if appropriate or allowed, one participant did feel that religion or spirituality should be more private. “Spirituality practices should be done in a private location away from others who do not want to practice so no one is offended or feels pressured to participate.”

Another staff-related barrier was their lack of knowledge of DJJ’s policy pertaining to the freedom juveniles had with practicing their spirituality. Some staff described difficulty in approaching juveniles’ spirituality because they were unaware of their responsibilities to the juveniles and unaware of the services the juveniles should have access to daily. Some staff indicated that they were prohibited from sharing spiritual beliefs. One participant stated, “No, ma’am, due to the fact of the separation between church and state we are in between a rock and a hard place. We cannot provide church to the juveniles in this program.” Similarly, another participant believed some spirituality practices were not allowed by DJJ. “Because some kids say, ‘I’m a Satanists, and I want to worship the devil’. We are like [to the youth], ‘that’s not DJJ acceptable’.” Finally, another participant was under the impression outside people were unable to come and provide spiritual services because of the risk level of the facility. “I don’t know how they could do that. Because, you know, I’m not sure how they can bring other people in because it is a level 10 facility.”

Administrative or Systemic Challenges in Providing Spirituality Programming

This theme administrative or systemic challenges in providing spirituality programming was defined as any systemic issue verbalized by the participants that contributed to the youth not obtaining effective and consistent spiritual programming. Multiple participants commented on the lack of spiritual programming. “Spirituality is

important to the juveniles, but I've witnessed the program's efforts to provide limited spiritual programming." Participants perceived that both the quality and quantity of spirituality programming offered by the DJJ residential treatment program was not sufficient. One participant expressed it like this,

So, it has not been a push to have spirituality programming out here. Because the administration says it must be a need for the facility. So, if the juveniles are not asking or speaking of it, then we do not know if they want it. So, we do not offer it.

There were even a few staff who did not think there was any spirituality programming provided at all. "They do not offer that here."

Another barrier was related to a lack of accountability. Several participants described that DJJ systems put in place to govern the program's daily functioning were not always followed by the facility's administration. Some participants perceived the programs lack of accountability contributed to the juvenile's lack of spirituality programming. One participant stated, "There is no structure" for implementing spirituality programming. Similarly, many participants stated, "That lack of leadership accountability contributed to the juveniles not having any accountability for their actions thus causing the lack of spiritual programming availability."

A few DSPs talked more generally about a barrier being the program not following their own behavior management system. This is a barrier to spiritual development because they felt that negative or challenging behaviors of youth inhibited youths' spiritual development and the ability for staff to interact with them in a meaningful way. Some participants felt, "If these behaviors are not dealt with accordingly by the program management it is perceived by the juveniles as permitting the behaviors to continue due to the behavior not being corrected." Another participant stated,

If there were a little more structure, in the program we would not have the issues we have. Do not misunderstand me, I am not, talking about harshness, or anything like that. But discipline is not necessarily harshness, discipline, means certain things are communicated to the juvenile that are unacceptable behaviors and they will not be tolerated. Because the people that work here, many of them simply cannot understand why the company behaves the way it does with the kids. They do not understand specifically, why it is when the kid does something destructive or bad; there are no consequences to it. Because the kids are so unruly, we cannot bring in books, because they are going to tear the books up.

Finally, another participant verbalized their concern for the juvenile's behavior and the effects it is having on the facility. She said,

Most of them, most of the time, they are not even paying attention to what I am trying to teach them. In my opinion, the juveniles are running the facility. They are fully aware nothing is going to happen to them for whatever they do wrong. And we are finding that out, there are no consequences for what they do wrong.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

The primary research questions guiding this study were to examine the available programming and the recommendations of DSPs regarding spirituality programming for justice-involved adolescent males in a DJJ residential treatment facility, and each of these questions constituted a deductive theme. However, inductive coding led to the identification of four additional primary themes. This discussion compares and contrasts the findings with relevant research, describes strengths and limitations of the research, and concludes with recommendations for research, practice, and programming or policy. As previously indicated, six primary themes were identified from the analysis. The first two themes were deductively coded to explore the research questions in this manuscript. The last four themes resulted from inductive coding of the interviews: (a) programming and resources available to youth (**RQ1**); (b) recommendations for enhancing spirituality programming and resources for youth (**RQ2**); (c) viewing spirituality as religion; (d) support for religion and spirituality for youth; (e) facilitators to youths' spiritual development; and (f) barriers to youths' spiritual development.

Programming and Resources Available to Youth

Participants in this study highlighted a variety of different types of resources and programming that would or could be made available to youth related to: (a) religious reading materials, (b) facilitated programming and activities, and (c) youth-initiated supports or activities. However, participants also seemed to indicate that religion or spirituality was primarily assessed in the beginning of the program or that youth had to be

responsible for requesting readings or resources. This may not necessarily be as supportive or conducive to youths' spiritual development, as youth often need support from their families or others when contemplating or examining their faith or spirituality (Dollahite & Marks, 2019). Federal law prohibits the government from substantially burdening any aspect of religious observance or practice while youth are in detention (Florida Department of Juvenile Justice, 2021). Thus, DJJ must allow justice-involved youth to practice their religious or spiritual beliefs as they wish, as long as it is in accordance with federal law. There is no directive or indication that DJJ has to provide spiritual programming for justice-involved youth, but facilities must provide youth the opportunity to practice their religion without any hinderances (Florida Department of Juvenile Justice, 2021).

There is very little research on the integration or use of spirituality with adolescents in a DJJ setting; however, Stewart et al. (2019) studied justice-involved youth and found similar types or amounts of spiritual programming in the facilities studied. The research provided support that participation in facilitated spirituality programming and activities was associated with improved their daily functioning, mental health, and improved their personal spiritual practices (Stewart et al., 2019). Stewart et al. (2019) was the only prior study that could be found that studied spiritual programming for justice-involved youth. This author could find no prior research that investigated religious reading material or youth-initiated spirituality programming. One article explored spirituality practices in a prison setting with adults (Johnson, 2021). Johnson (2021) demonstrated how spiritual programming combined with offender-initiated activities was associated with a more stable social environment for inmates in the program, improved

personal characteristics, and improved integration of community support from spiritual leaders.

Although the present study is not generalizable to other facilities, this study does make a contribution to prior research by reflecting on Fisher's (2011) four-domain model of spirituality as a definition for spiritual practice among justice-involved youth from the perspective of DSPs. As a reminder, Fisher's model of spirituality posits that healthy spirituality is viewed in four domains: (a) personal domain: how a person intra-relates with self; (b) communal domain: how a person connects to others; (c) environmental domain: how a person connects to nature; and (d) transcendental domain: how a person connects to "some-thing or some-one" beyond the human level (Fisher, 2011). In regard to the personal domain of spirituality, participants in this sample discussed how youth were provided with implicitly or explicitly spiritual activities that allowed them to take better care of their mind, body, and spirit, and they observed a positive impact of spirituality on youth. The participants also described a more general positive effect on youth's elevated mood after taking care of themselves spiritually. These are aligned with the personal domain of Fisher's model and aligned with prior research because when youth were able to focus on themselves the staff observed improvements. Among prior studies, one found that among justice-involved youth, adding spirituality to psychotherapy is associated with increased resilience and conscientiousness compared to youth who do not receive a spirituality-enhanced intervention (Sahare & Kotnala, 2022). Johnson (2021) also found that adults who reported developing virtues and better character while in custody were more likely to report feeling better about themselves.

Fisher's (2011) model appears appropriate and helpful for understanding personal spirituality of justice-involved youth.

The communal domain was reflected in how the program included community spiritual leaders to support youth and through participants' perspectives that relationships were spiritual and beneficial to youths' spiritual development. Overall, research has found that people who practice spirituality have reported improved social functioning and a stronger connection to their community, as well as benefits such as better biological and mental health (Serra, 2022). Among those involved in the justice system, Johnson (2021) found that a modest intervention such as visitation with family or community volunteers like clergy and mentors, was associated with fewer rearrests, reconvictions, and reincarceration when adults were released from prison. This is relevant for youth in DJJ because they are separated from their family of origin and other aspects of their culture at a particularly important developmental time in their life. Thus, the communal domain for youth is largely reflected in their interactions with other youth and their relationships with the staff at the facility. Research has found that more positive relationships with staff are associated with better success for youth when released from DJJ (Marsh & Evans, 2009). However, there are gaps in prior research for understanding how DJJ staff support spirituality, as no research could be found by this author. Thus, the finding that staff perceived that their relationships with youth were helpful in both a spiritual sense and for youths' well-being adds to prior understanding of communal spirituality for justice-involved youth. Fisher's model provided a helpful framework for understanding communal spirituality for youth in the DJJ facility.

One particular contribution of this study was the finding related to environmental spirituality. There has been some research on the collateral consequences of youth being detained; for example, justice-involved youth are often cut-off from social, recreational, or environmental activities that are important to their health and well-being due to being detained in punitive environments (National Governors Association, 2023). However, there is very little research to describe how implicit or explicit spiritual programming in DJJ could be associated with environmental spirituality for justice-involved youth. Fisher's (2011) research supported the connection to the environment as a necessary component of spirituality for all humans. When given a chance to reflect on Fisher's model, participants in this study were able to identify a few different types of activities that they felt enhanced youths' environmental spirituality (e.g., gardening, building a greenhouse on the facility premises, the chicken coop development project, outdoor recreational activities). The fact that participants could see how participating in environmental activities was beneficial to their spiritual development expands prior understanding of spirituality among justice-involved youth and supports the use of Fisher's model with this population.

The transcendent domain of spirituality was observed by DSPs through youths' connections to God or their higher power through explicitly religious activities or by engaging in self-led spiritual activities. DSPs indicated that youth in the facilities engaged in spiritual self-care, led their own church services, participated in Bible study, and engaged in spiritual entertainment and creative arts activities (e.g., choir, studio time). Research supports the idea that attendance in religious services and positive religious values are associated with decreased delinquency behavior for youth (Mapp,

2009). However, there seem to be potential barriers to integrating spirituality programming in justice settings (e.g., Cox & Matthews, 2007). Overall, participants in this study felt that there were opportunities to develop transcendental spirituality but not all youth in the facility developed their transcendental spirituality for a number of factors. This study provides some support that this DJJ facility programming could support youths' transcendental spiritual development.

In summary, all domains of Fisher's (2011) four-domain model of spirituality were represented among the youth in this facility. Although research is somewhat limited, Johnson (2021) found that religious movements led by adults in correctional facilities are associated with gains in personal, communal, and transcendent spirituality. Improvements can include improved pro-social behavior, spiritual awakening, service to others, prayer, perseverance, and forgiveness (Johnson, 2021). Stewart et al. (2019) similarly found that when justice-involved youth were allowed to practice their spirituality, they reported improvements in multiple areas: private religious practices (overlaps with transcendent and personal domains), daily spiritual experiences (overlaps with transcendent and personal domains), and internalizing and externalizing behaviors (personal and communal domains). Thus, Fisher's model appears to be an appropriate model to conceptualize and examine spirituality for justice-involved youth.

Recommendations for Enhancing Spirituality Programming and Resources for Youth

The recommendations for improving programming and resources for youths' spirituality while in DJJ custody reflected recommendations related to (a) supporting and enhancing family engagement, (b) recommendations for the DSPs, and (c)

recommendations for DJJ administration. There is a high level of support that family plays an important role in youths' spiritual development (Dollahite & Marks, 2019), and prior research supports that family engagement can help support youth while they are in the program and reintegrating into society (Burns, 2003; Pisano et al., 2017). However, the researcher could not find any research describing how parent engagement in DJJ enhances justice-involved youths' spiritual development while youth are in the custody of DJJ. Not specific to spirituality, researchers have found that providing parenting classes for the family of the justice-involved youth is beneficial to youth as they prepare for and reintegrate into society (Burns, 2003; Pisano et al., 2017). Furthermore, prior research has suggested DJJ facilities could potentially facilitate parents attending church services with youth or time for families to pray with youth as well (Goodman & Dyer, 2023), but this is an underdeveloped area of research.

The researcher could not find any research studies that discussed spirituality training for DSPs who work with justice-involved youth. However, research more generally supports that spiritual training should be included in social work education (Cole, 2021; Parada, 2022). Given that justice-involved youth present with specific needs or challenges, this is an important implication that arose from the findings of this study. Participants in this research expressed a keen and proactive interest in attending training offered by the company to better prepare themselves for handling the topic of spirituality with youth. Research supports the idea that practitioners must be adequately trained in spirituality and religious matters so they can effectively engage and intervene with clients (Cole, 2021). Interestingly, multiple participants emphasized that DSPs in the facility could better support youths' spiritual development if they learned to show more

compassion and sensitivity toward the juveniles. Research has highlighted the importance of creating a caring and understanding environment to facilitate youths' spiritual development (Crisp, 2017) and other support that relationships with DJJ staff are beneficial to youths' long-term success when they are released from the facility (Marsh & Evans, 2009).

Although no prior studies were found related to how DJJ administration can improve spirituality programming offered to justice-involved youth, the recommendations made by DSPs in this study support the more purposeful implementation of spirituality programming. This is generally reflected by studies that call for more structured and explicit exploration of spirituality or religion due to the benefits for youth and families (Cole, 2021; Johnson, 2021) and consideration of systemic barriers when integration of spiritual programming (Cox & Matthews, 2007). It is important to consider how the administration can better support youths' spirituality, as spirituality can impact youths' future personal growth and development in multiple areas of their life (Crisp, 2011). A number of participants expressed concern not only about youths' future reintegration in society, but also how the lack of programming and resources negatively impacts the juveniles' spiritual growth and overall progress during their time in the program itself. Another consideration is that participants discussed explicitly spiritual or religious programming, as well as non-spiritual program as a means of helping the juveniles succeed upon discharge and fulfill their destiny or purpose. The participants attributed the lack of resources as one of the reasons why some juveniles end up returning to criminal behaviors after discharge, indicating the potential impact of

adequate spiritual support and programming in reducing recidivism (Oxhandler et al., 2017).

Viewing Spirituality as Religion

There were two different subthemes associated with participants viewing spirituality as religion: (a) lack of knowledge of spirituality and (b) viewing spirituality as religiosity. Interestingly, all participants in this study required clarification about the broader definition of spirituality, indicating that they lacked a comprehensive understanding of spirituality beyond its religious connotations. Similarly, most of the participants viewed spirituality only as Christian religious activities. This observation suggests that within the facility, there was a narrow view regarding religious practices and forms of spirituality. Older research from Burns (2003) and Palmer (1999) concluded the concept of spirituality has often been defined as a religious construct. However, prior research has also sought to separate the meaning of spirituality from religion (Bessinger & Kuhne, 2002; Burns, 2003; Miller & Thorensen, 2003; Verghese, 2008). Miller and Thorensen (2003) attempted to make a distinction between religiosity and spirituality. They noted that an individual's spirituality is one's set of beliefs and practices that may include religiosity; religion, on the other hand, would include how an individual practices those sets of beliefs (Bessinger & Kuhne, 2002; Burns, 2003; Miller & Thorensen, 2003; Verghese, 2008).

Helping DSPs differentiate between spirituality and religion may be particularly helpful for youth in DJJ who are often dealing with multiple different sociocultural challenges and may not be interested in religion or may not have grown up with religion. Beyond religious practice, research has supported that spirituality for justice-involved

youth could be particularly important as it encourages a sense of belonging and humanity, and spirituality fosters a sense of both individuality and community (Sahare & Kotnala, 2022). Spirituality has also been found to promote mental health by strengthening connections with others, promoting emotion regulation, and allowing individuals to find solutions to questions about reason and the meaning of life (Sahare & Kotnala, 2022).

Moreover, it appears that the participants' primary understanding of spirituality was linked to their own religious beliefs or activities, and that DSPs' personal spiritual beliefs influenced their perspective on spirituality in the context of the facility. They expressed how their views of spirituality were rooted in Christianity, and their spirituality helped them handle the juveniles and cope with the challenges they faced while working in the program. Prior research supports that is spirituality frequently seen from a Judeo-Christian perspective (Cole, 2021), and religion or spirituality can be a helpful coping mechanism for dealing with challenges (Parada, 2022).

Support for Religion and Spirituality Among Youth

Three subthemes associated with DSPs' support for religion and spirituality among youth: (a) impact and importance of spirituality, (b) spirituality as a coping skill, and (c) youth suffer without spirituality. Overall, participants were very supportive of the beneficial impact and importance of spirituality for youth in the program, and they discussed a number of benefits that have been reflected in prior research (e.g., improvements in attitudes, cognitions, behaviors; Haviv et al., 2020; McCarroll et al., 2005). Spirituality has been viewed as an innate human desire and construct (McCarroll et al., 2005), and researchers have also claimed that spirituality is at the heart of the human experience and experienced by everyone at some point during their life or across

their lifespan (Hay et al., 2006; Oldnall, 1996). Spirituality may be particularly important for protecting youth who are preparing the exit DJJ programming. Fisher (2011) also indicated that a connection to a higher power can be associated with benefits in the personal and communal domains of spirituality due to improved self-control, stronger connections to others, and the ability to respect others by refraining from violating others' rights. Stewart et al. (2019) suggested that spirituality is related to stronger interpersonal relationships and more pro-social behavior, which may help youth succeed on their own when they no longer in DJJ programming. For example, higher personal spirituality consistently predicted more positive adjustment in terms of interpersonal relationships, parental relationships, and academic orientation (Stewart et al., 2019). Importantly, spirituality has a buffering effect for juveniles and adolescents with a spiritual practice appear less likely to engage in delinquency (Stewart et al., 2019).

The participants specifically supported the juvenile's spirituality, especially when they saw it as a protective factor and coping skill. Research has explicitly identified spirituality as a protective factor for justice-involved youth (Haviv et al., 2020). It has been postulated that spirituality is protective because it encourages a sense of belonging and humanity, resilience, and conscientiousness, and fosters a sense of both individuality and community (Parada, 2022; Sahare & Kotnala, 2022; Serra, 2022). Research has found that adolescent spirituality is associated with reduced internalizing and externalizing symptoms and lower rates of recidivism (Sinha et al., 2007). Stewart and colleagues (2019) found that participating in spiritual activities while in juvenile justice programming was associated with improved pro-social behavior and better mental health functioning.

Multiple participants expressed that spirituality is particularly important because youth suffer due to staffs' lack of knowledge and the facility's lack of resources. For example, participants expressed concerns that youth leave the facility with the same behaviors that they arrived with and sometimes they leave worse than when they arrived. Prior research has agreed that justice-involved youth suffer when their spirituality is not addressed, particularly when youth lack in self-confidence, social responsibility, and accountability, which are needed to succeed after reintegration (Sahare & Kotnala, 2022). Conversely, prior research also recognized that religion can be a risk factor if it is presented too rigidly (Haviv et al., 2020). Religion could also be a risk factor or stressor if the information is presented in a manner where youth are made to question their religious identity. Overall, the findings highlight a complex and evolving understanding of spirituality within the facility.

Facilitators to Youths' Spiritual Development

Facilitators to youths' spiritual development included: (a) interpersonal supports, (b) characteristics of spiritual leaders, and (c) religious freedom. Findings from this study support that relationships were very important for youths' spiritual development. DSPs specifically commented on the importance of family, peers, and staff as interpersonal supports for youths' spiritual development. Research has indicated that spirituality is important because it helps youth relate to parents, family, neighborhood, society, and even the nation (Sahare & Kotnala, 2022). In addition, positive adult relationships have been found to have a positive effect on justice-involved youth's personal relationships and spirituality (Sahare & Kotnala, 2022). In regard to family, parental religiosity and religious behavior has been associated with youths' spiritual development through

modeling and support-related behaviors (Goodman & Dyer, 2023). Although there are some differences in how this family support can occur, according to participants in this study, youth in the facility represented in this study have weekly telephone calls to the family and have weekly visitation privileges. In relation to staff, when youth are away from their family of origin, staff necessarily play a vital role of support and encouragement for the youth. Goodman and Dyer (2023) found that non-parental adult figures can play a positive role in nurturing spirituality, providing relational support that helps them feel closer to God, and decreasing externalizing behaviors for justice-involved youth. Although they cannot replace the role of family for youth, this study supports that they can play an important role in youths' spiritual development.

Peer support was also verbalized by participants as important because many witnessed juveniles receiving spiritual support from other juveniles. Johnson (2021) found that offender-led religious movements (ORMs) could provide participants with strong peer support, an alternative moral framework, and a set of embodied practices that emphasize virtue and character development that could influence multiple people in the prison at once. Although some participants in this study were concerned that peers could be a negative influence, which has been echoed in prior studies (Confer et al., 2023). For example, Goodman and Dyer (2023) found that youth feel connected to other youth who encourage delinquent behaviors. However, DSPs in this study were generally hopeful that youth in the facility could provide each other with an important source of accountability and fellowship.

Another important finding was that participants felt there were characteristics of the spiritual leaders from the community that would support youths' spiritual

development; specifically, the leaders were formidable, strong in their faith, and able to manage youths' negative behaviors. The author was not able to find research that investigated the needed characteristics of spiritual leaders to be effective in working with justice-involved youth. However, research has found that youth want their service providers to show personal commitment to them, for providers to be supportive, accountable to youth, and honest with youth (Sahare & Kotnala, 2022). Given that youth in DJJ have experienced multiple adversities and negative peer influences (Haney-Caron et al., 2019), spiritual leaders working with youth need to be skilled in working with youth who may not be as open to adult influence or spirituality. Although it from the perspective of adults in the justice system, they have reported that service providers should demonstrate prosocial behaviors toward those who are incarcerated, be forgiving, prayerful, and demonstrate perseverance when working together (Johnson, 2021).

Religious freedom was also identified as a facilitator to spiritual development. Prior research focused on spiritual development has indicated that youth grow spiritually when they perceive a more open or welcoming environment for exploring their questions and beliefs (Crisp, 2017). The DSPs in this sample recognized the need to be open and supportive of youth from different religious or spiritual backgrounds or youth with different experiences. When examining youths' spiritual development, research and theory support that youth typically put a large amount of trust in external authority figures, and they often do not realize they are developing a belief system because their beliefs are internalized and have not yet been examined (Fowler, 1981). This supports DSPs concerns related to having adequate knowledge and skills for supporting youths' spiritual development. Overall, the findings of this study underscore the importance of

DSPs or DJJ facilities in general providing a safe and open place for youth to explore and seek spiritual support of guidance while away from their families and spiritual or religious communities if they had one.

Barriers to Youths' Spiritual Development

There were four subthemes identified as barriers to youths' spiritual development: (a) youth-related issues impeding spiritual development, (b) poor family engagement, (c) staff-related concerns about integrating spirituality into work with youth, and (d) administrative or systemic challenges in providing spirituality programming. Youth behaviors and history were a primary concern among DSPs in terms of youths' spiritual development. Prior research has identified that youth with CD often have a difficult time with appropriate social behaviors, negative emotions, and aggressive behaviors (Taubner et al., 2021). All these behaviors were noted as concerns keeping youth from participating in spiritual programming among participants. Some participants reported that the juveniles perceived spirituality as making them vulnerable and weak. Research has found that justice-involved youth often present with extensive trust issues, which can lead to an inflated sense of vulnerability and a need to be in control (Haney-Caron et al., 2019). This lack of trust and need to be in control can negatively affect their willingness to embrace or engage with any type of spiritual elements in their rehabilitation process. DSPs also reported that youth had academic or cognitive struggles that make it difficult for youth to understand abstract concepts like spirituality. Youths' emotional vulnerability and academic capacity are critical components to consider when providing spiritual interventions to justice-involved youth (Caldwell & Van Rybroek, 2005; Guarnaccia et al., 2022).

Another highlight from this study was the participants expressed that the juveniles lacked family support, including safe living conditions, financial aid, and emotional support that could have contributed to youths' refusal to engage in any spiritual programming. Concerns about youths' background and life experiences have been well-studied. For example, research has established that parental criminal behaviors, harsh discipline, lack of supervision or parental involvement, neglect, family conflict, parental attitudes favorable to violence, single-parent households, and insecure attachments are prevalent concerns among justice-involved youth (Burns 2003; Kobak, 1999). Because families are often gatekeepers and facilitators to youths' spirituality (Fowler, 1981; Goodman & Dyer, 2023), growing up in a more resource-limited environment or home can influence youths' receptivity and spiritual development.

Some participants expressed a fear of sharing their faith with youth or potentially proselytizing, as well as limited skill in using spirituality to support youth. They were concerned about crossing professional boundaries and the potential repercussions, such as losing their job, if they were perceived as imposing their beliefs on the juveniles (Cole, 2021). This indicates a sensitivity to maintaining a respectful and professional environment while acknowledging the importance of spirituality. However, it could be a hindrance to youths' spiritual development if participants were too afraid to provide the youth with spiritual or religious interventions due to a lack of training or appropriate knowledge and skills on how to help the youth. Both Cole (2021) and Parada (2022) supported the need for training for the implementation of spirituality when working clients.

There were a number of participants that shared the perception that the program's efforts to provide spiritual programming to youth were limited or insufficient. Although federal law does not require DJJ facilities to provide religious or spiritual programming (Florida Department of Juvenile Justice, 2021), it certainly does not forebode it. There are a number of potential issues or reasons that facilities may not provide spirituality programming unless requested (and feasible) or led by youth (Cox & Matthews, 2007). However, it is also important to consider that spirituality should not be presented too rigidly or in a rule-driven or punitive manner; it must be presented with love, care, and compassion to be protective for youth (Haviv et al., 2020). The findings of this study may indicate that there is a disconnect between the understanding of the juveniles' spiritual needs and the program's actual provisions. Given the benefits of spirituality (Stewart et al., 2019) and the needs of youth in DJJ facilities (Haney-Caron et al., 2019), it is important to understand structural barriers to spirituality programming at the administrative level.

Strengths and Limitations

There are a few strengths and limitations of this research. First, this study contributes to understanding the application of Fisher's four domain model of spirituality with adolescents, particularly justice-involved youth in a DJJ facility. Although Fisher's model has been applied to youth in the past (Fisher, 2013b), it has not been utilized within a DJJ facility or with justice-involved youth. Another strength was the study gave a voice to DSPs regarding their lived experience and their recommendations for improving the spiritual programming for justice-involved youth. Given that these professionals have daily and in-depth contact with youth who are living away from their

families, they play an important role in youths' lives and could potentially enhance or inhibit youths' spiritual development.

In regard to limitations, the study only examined one residential treatment facility in the juvenile justice system. This means the results cannot be generalized to all juvenile justice facilities, as programming was specific to this facility. Another limitation is that juveniles were not observed or evaluated directly, instead responses are somewhat indirect and come from DSPs. This means the data collected may not reflect the experiences or opinions of youth in terms of their preferred spiritual programming. Another limitation was all the interviews were collected in a single day back to back. This means there was no opportunity to adjust the interview guide between interviews. Another limitation was the researcher made some errors by providing some participants with some samples or examples of possible answers to the interview questions, which could potentially biased the participant's answers or limited their response to the interview questions. Finally, another limitation identified was the utilization of a convenience sampling method, which means that only participants who felt comfortable or felt strongly about the topic may have volunteered to participants.

Recommendations

Several recommendations for research, practice, and programming or policy emerged from the findings of this study. Overall, more quantitative and qualitative research is needed to further develop the application of Fisher's (2011) four-domain model to justice-involved youth. The responses of the participants indicate that the model is relevant to justice-involved youths' experiences while in DJJ custody. Given that Fisher's (2012) study utilized the four-domain model to assess youth in Australia and was

successful at surveying spiritual functioning, future research should more objectively observe and rate youths' spiritual activities or participation. Future research should also include youth and their families in quantitative and qualitative research regarding their experiences, perceptions, and spiritual needs or recommendations while youth are in DJJ custody. In regard to the limitations of this study, future research should also include multiple facilities with a more diverse population as well to account for the various needs of families from different social, cultural, ethnic, or religious or spiritual backgrounds.

In terms of practice recommendations that emerged from the DSPs' experiences, all levels of juvenile justice including residential treatment facilities could benefit from integrating an age-appropriate in-depth spiritual assessment for all incoming juveniles (Parada, 2022). Upon completion of the in-depth spiritual assessment, all results from the assessment be reviewed with the juvenile and their family to identify areas needing intervention (Bhagwan, 2022). Next, given the benefit that spirituality can have on youths' mental well-being and conduct, a master treatment plan should be developed to incorporate identified areas of need and appropriate interventions to support youths' spiritual development and behavioral health (Parada, 2022). In addition, facilities need to consider ways to better engage parents or families of youth in spiritual programming in order to facilitate success in the facility and help prepare the youth for their reintegration into their family and community.

Another recommendation is the development of spirituality training for all staff working with juveniles, as the vast majority of participants had limited knowledge of spirituality, of different religious or spiritual preferences of youth and families, and how to integrate religion or spirituality into their work with youth. Training should ensure

adequate knowledge for all staff working with justice-involved youth at all levels of spiritual interventions from informal daily conversations, to engaging with youths' parents or family members, to non-spiritual programming, to explicitly religious or spiritual activities (Parada, 2022). Additionally, the implementation of this recommendation will ensure all DJJ staff have the knowledge of the mission statement that DJJ treats the entire juvenile including their spirituality and what this might look like in their facility (DJJ, n.d.). Moreover, staff need to know the policies, and procedures on how and when to spiritually intervene, implementation of spiritual interventions, and appropriate ways to manage the spiritual needs of juveniles in the care of the juvenile justice system (DJJ, n.d.).

Another potential practice and programming recommendation is that participants receive ongoing coaching or supervision during staff or team meeting related to showing compassion and equity to youth in the facility. For example, some participants were concerned that staff were not treating all juveniles consistently and equally, and this led to some youth missing out on spirituality programming. Other participants expressed a differing opinion on the program's practice of only allowing well-behaved juveniles to participate in certain programs and privileges. Because of the benefit of spiritual programming to youths' well-being and behavioral health, it is suggested that DJJ programs practice a higher level of inclusivity and provide equal opportunities for spiritual development to all juveniles, regardless of behavior. Another practice and programming recommendation that was emphasized by participants was the need for more spiritual programming for all juveniles, both implicitly and explicitly spiritual programming. The participants recommended offering a variety of options, such as

weekly Sunday services and Bible study, mentoring, Big Brother programs, motivational speaker programs, and vocational and culinary programs to cater to the four domains of spirituality and the diverse needs and interests of the juveniles to better support their spiritual journey and purpose.

It is also recommended that the juvenile justice system develops spiritual programming to enhance the rehabilitative experience of each juvenile in their care with careful consideration of the educational deficits and emotional vulnerabilities of youth (Johnson, 2021). Youth in this program have largely experienced trauma, even if it is just the separation from their caregivers or loved ones, and they come from environments where they may not have their spiritual needs met by their families or significant others. An in-depth spiritual assessment upon admission would provide some of this information and could potentially be helpful for facility staff to provide youth with more coping resources or tools than the youth was aware they needed (Parada, 2022). DJJ facilities should also include programs that enhance the functioning of the juveniles and prepare them for their discharge back into society, regardless of whether they are implicitly or explicitly spiritual (e.g., vocational or trade training, skills for reintegration). Thus, DJJ programs should also explore wider options for supporting youths' spiritual development and helping them fulfill their purpose.

Conclusion

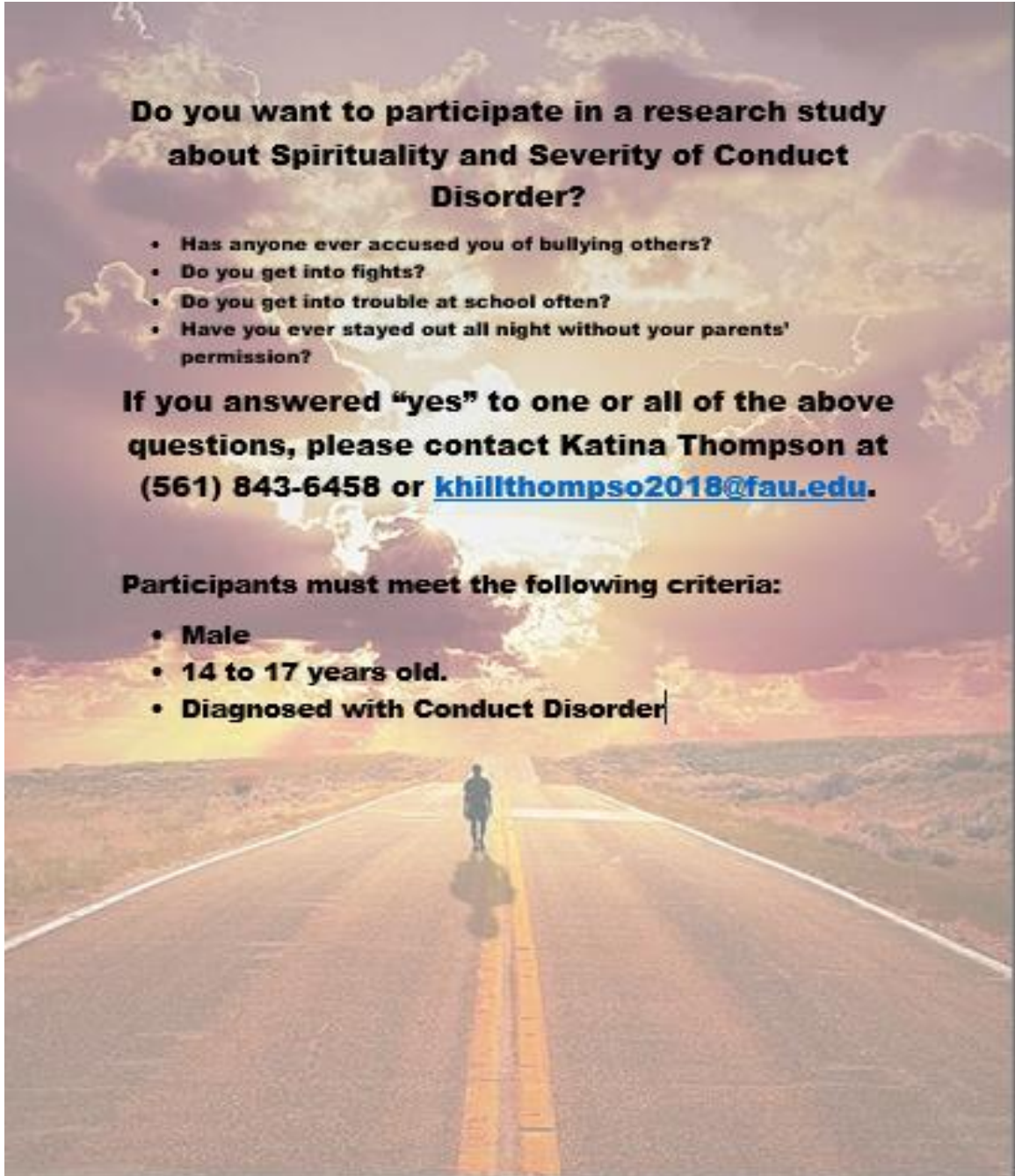
Overall, it is hoped that the findings of this research can support the development of future spiritual interventions for justice-involved youth (Crisp, 2017; Rajan-Rankin, 2014). A growing number of juveniles are entering the juvenile justice system with complex and multifaceted mental health issues. By integrating such activities as an in-

depth spiritual assessment, appropriate spiritual interventions, and a diverse spirituality programming for all justice-involved youth DJJ could better address the needs of their residents and DSPs working with justice-involved youth (Crisp, 2017 & Rajan-Rankin, 2014). Given the important role of DSPs and the need for DSPs to be ready to meet the diverse spiritual needs of youth in DJJ, this study provides information on things that are currently going well and things that could be added or adjusted to better meet the needs of youth and families.

With this possibility, DSPs must have a foundational understanding of spiritual knowledge, competence, and skills to provide relevant, effective, and safe services to the juveniles they serve (Parada, 2022). Although there are limitations to the generalizability of the findings of this study, this study does support the relevance and application of Fisher's (2011) four-domain model of spirituality with justice-involved youth, as well as the need to include spirituality assessment and intervention options in practice (Mulder, 2015). Additionally, there is a contextual understanding that a significant gap exists in the general understanding of fundamental components or aspects of spirituality and how spirituality can be used by DSPs. It is hoped that the results of this study serve as a starting point for future research on spirituality assessment, intervention, and programming among DSPs, particularly social workers in DJJ facilities.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Recruitment Flyer

The flyer features a background image of a person walking away on a long, straight road that stretches towards a bright, hazy horizon under a dramatic, cloudy sky. The overall tone is contemplative and hopeful.

Do you want to participate in a research study about Spirituality and Severity of Conduct Disorder?

- Has anyone ever accused you of bullying others?
- Do you get into fights?
- Do you get into trouble at school often?
- Have you ever stayed out all night without your parents' permission?

If you answered “yes” to one or all of the above questions, please contact Katina Thompson at (561) 843-6458 or khillthomps2018@fau.edu.

Participants must meet the following criteria:

- Male
- 14 to 17 years old.
- Diagnosed with Conduct Disorder

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