Executive Summary

The Housing Needs and Experiences of Project Rebound Students at Fresno State

About this Executive Summary

Students and formerly incarcerated people are both populations associated with increased risk for housing insecurity and homelessness (see for example, The Hope Center, 2021; Couloute, 2018). Formerly incarcerated students fall into both populations. This executive summary summarizes the findings and recommendations of a study conducted for a master's thesis that provides a better understanding of the housing needs of formerly incarcerated students, specifically, the housing needs and experiences of students in Fresno State's Project Rebound, a support program for formerly incarcerated students.

What is the difference between housing insecurity and homelessness?

The term housing insecurity is often used as an umbrella term and describes a broad range of challenges that prevent a person from having "safe, affordable and consistent" housing (The Hope Center, 2021, p. 6). People experiencing homelessness are defined as "individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence" by The McKinney Vento Assistance Act (National Center for Homeless Education, n.d. section A). These two terms differ from each other in that housing insecurity is an inclusive term that accounts for the complex issues people can have when it comes to their housing, whereas the term homelessness focuses more on the absence of having housing.

Introduction

Meeting students' basic needs is fundamental to their wellbeing (Olfert et al., 2021). However, many students struggle with meeting their basic needs while they study to obtain their degrees (Broton & Goldrick-Rab, 2018; Crutchfield & Maguire, 2018). Given that the literature that specifically addresses housing insecurity and homelessness among formerly incarcerated people is limited, discussing housing insecurity and homelessness more broadly among formerly incarcerated people and the general student population provides important context.

A study conducted with CSU students across all 23 campuses revealed that 10.9% of students reported experiencing homelessness one or more times in the past 12 months (Crutchfield & Maguire, 2018). In 2020, the #Real College survey found that 48% of responding students across the United States experienced housing insecurity in the prior 12 months and 14% experienced homelessness (The Hope Center, 2021).

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In his 2018 study, Couloute found that formerly incarcerated people overall are nearly 10 times more likely to be homeless than someone in the general public. Policies often prohibit people that have been convicted for felonies from accessing public housing, this particularly affects people who have been convicted for sex or drug offenses (Roman & Travis, 2006). Many landlords or landladies also conduct criminal background checks on applicants as standard practice (Roman & Travis, 2004). Formerly incarcerated people often face stigma due to their past convictions that contributes to subsequent discrimination in various areas of life, such as for example housing (Wakefield & Uggen, 2010).

Project Rebound

Project Rebound is a state and grant-funded program (Murillo, 2021) that helps formerly incarcerated people in obtaining a higher education in the California State University system and supports their successful reintegration (California State University, n.d.).
Support services are key in helping students to continue enrollment and complete their degrees (Murillo, 2021). Formerly incarcerated people frequently face unstable housing situations due to requirements to access housing, which makes attending or continuing their education difficult (Murillo, 2021). In order to address their students' housing needs, Project Rebound programs at different campuses have created or are in the process of creating housing opportunities for their students. Fresno State's Project Rebound opened the Sierra House for six of their students in 2023. Fresno State's Project Rebound is also in the process of opening a second house for their students.

About the study

So far relatively little attention has been focused on formerly incarcerated students' housing needs. Qualitative in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with a diverse sample of 15 Project Rebound students currently enrolled at Fresno State at the time of the study in Spring of 2023. These one-on-one interviews lasted approximately 30 to 60 minutes and were conducted either in-person or on Zoom. The analysis of the interviews relied on a modified form of the grounded theory approach.

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Key Findings

More than a third define themselves as housing insecure

The most common issues and concerns identified by students were safety, the possibility of losing housing, and affordability. Among the students who do not define themselves as housing insecure, some added that "it can get to there" or that "it is still a possibility."

High and continuously increasing costs of housing affect many students

Of all 15 students, only one student who is still living in the same housing reported living costs not having increased compared to 3 to 5 years ago. A third of the students specifically reported rent increases. Inflation was named as a contributing factor to this increase. Over half of the students have experienced difficulties paying for their housing in the last 12 months. Difficulties paying for utilities and rent or mortgage were identified as the main challenges. More than a third of students specifically identified high utility bills and how much the costs of their utilities have increased. Several students participating in this study have forgone paying for their other basic needs in order to pay for their housing, including utility bills and other costs that arise.

High and continuously increasing costs in other areas also affect many students

The increasing costs go beyond the direct costs of housing as well. A key issue related to costs was the costs associated with transportation. Nearly everyone in the sample commutes by car. Out of the 15 students, 10 students mentioned gas prices and the cost of transportation, and some mentioned that financial assistance for transportation costs would help them or other students. Several students also pointed out that "everything" is increasing, including groceries, home supplies and everyday products, suggesting that it is not only the increases in specific costs, but rather it is the totality of various increasing costs that accumulate to high sums. As several students pointed out, wages have not increased accordingly.

Key Findings

Housing situations fluctuate over time

Six students in the sample, including students who are currently in stable housing and happy with their housing situation, have experienced housing insecurity and homelessness in the past. It is important to note that questions about experiencing housing insecurity and homelessness were focused on the current housing situation of students. Hence, the number of students who have experienced this in the past may be even higher because they did not specifically mention it during the interview. For some, these experiences range back as far as childhood. This highlights how housing situations can fluctuate over time and that students who may have experienced housing insecurity and homelessness in the past may be in stable housing situations today. Housing situations can be influenced positively by various factors such as support from a family member or spouse, encountering a supportive landlord/landlady or can be influenced negatively by, for example, substance use.

Formerly incarcerated students face barriers to finding and applying to housing

Asked about their past experiences in finding and applying to housing, students identified the following main barriers: first, the stigma of having a record and failing background checks, and second, failing credit checks due to inadequate or negative credit. Another major barrier that emerged is the cost of the actual housing applications, including the costs for background and credit checks. These barriers prevent some students from even trying to apply for housing.

The importance of location of housing

Students emphasized the importance of living in a neighborhood where they are safe and in a positive environment that enables them to succeed at reaching their goal of obtaining a higher education. This includes being away from crime and living in an environment where they feel safe.

Housing situations affect a student's academics

A majority of participating students notes that their housing situation had some effect on their academics. One of the main negative factors named was the commute, due to it being time consuming and stressful because of traffic. In addition, not having a quiet study space, concerns associated with the possibility of losing one's housing, and having to juggle working and school in order to be able to pay for housing were named. In addition, some students reported how an improved housing situation positively affected their academics.

Key Recommendations

Informed by the areas highlighted by the students in this study, this section includes steps that could be taken to improve support for both formerly incarcerated students and the general student population at CSU campuses and beyond. For more recommendations on a policy level and for future research, please see the full thesis.

Housing costs

- Students need financial assistance that is specifically aimed at supporting their housing costs.
- Available, affordable, and quality housing should be created near campus that is kept available based on need. This could follow a similar model to that of the Project Rebound houses at Fresno State and other CSU campuses such as CSU Fullerton, including basing rent on a student's income.

Students experiencing homelessness

- Emergency housing should either be created or reserved in the existing living facilities for students who are experiencing homelessness.
- The process to access support and assistance should be swift and immediate, without bureaucratic hurdles.

Targeted Support

- Support should better target specific groups of students, particularly focusing on populations that are at increased risk for housing insecurity and homelessness, like formerly incarcerated students. This includes supporting existing offers like the Project Rebound houses and creating and opening housing for specific groups of people like formerly incarcerated students who face additional barriers to housing, and addressing their specific needs at Fresno State and beyond.

Awareness

- More awareness surrounding the topic of housing insecurity and basic needs insecurity among students is needed. This could be achieved by distributing flyers to students that detail existing support offers by the universities, social media posts, and outreach to specific student populations like Project Rebound students. Further, faculty and staff should be instructed on available offers in order for them to be able to relay that information to students.

Conclusion

In an increasingly more expensive environment, many students are facing challenges and hardships when it comes to their housing situations. These effects are further exacerbated for Project Rebound students, who face additional barriers to obtaining housing and are members of two populations associated with increased risk for housing insecurity.

This study not only documents the experiences of the students who participated, but highlights factors that influence housing and housing insecurity, and presents suggestions for improvement, made by the students themselves. By increasing awareness of housing insecurity among students, and by implementing recommendations made by the students affected by these issues, improvements could lead to long-term positive developments in the future, enabling students to focus on their academics rather than worrying about having somewhere to sleep at night.

Executive Summary

The Housing Needs and Experiences of Project Rebound Students at Fresno State

Thesis

This executive summary includes extracts from the master's thesis "The Housing Needs and Experiences of Project Rebound Students at Fresno State." Please contact Katharina Dreher for the full thesis. The full thesis is also available on ProQuest: https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/housing-needs-experiences-project-rebound/docview/2800073719/se-2

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ABSTRACT

THE HOUSING NEEDS AND EXPERIENCES OF PROJECT REBOUND STUDENTS AT FRESNO STATE

Students and formerly incarcerated people are both populations associated with increased risk for housing insecurity and homelessness (see for example, The Hope Center, 2021; Couloute, 2018). Formerly incarcerated students fall into both populations. This study provides a better understanding of the housing needs of formerly incarcerated students, specifically, the housing needs and experiences of students in Fresno State's Project Rebound, a support program for formerly incarcerated students. Qualitative semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 Project Rebound students enrolled at Fresno State and analyzed using a modified grounded theory approach. The findings highlight the struggles Project Rebound students face in terms of housing, including increasing costs, long commutes, and challenges with the location of their housing. Further, the findings provide insight into the complexity of issues related to housing insecurity, including what factors contribute to it, what factors have a positive influence, and how circumstances can fluctuate over time. Significantly, this study reports on the research participants' own suggestions for improvements in supporting people who experience issues with their housing. Through providing a clearer understanding of the housing needs and experiences of Project Rebound students, this study is positioned to not only inform Fresno State's new housing initiative for Project Rebound students, but also other Project Rebound programs, and other educational programs that support formerly incarcerated people nationwide. Furthermore, the results of this study add to the scarce research literature on the experiences and needs of formerly incarcerated students.

Katharina Dreher
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by

Katharina Dreher

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APPROVED

For the Department of Criminology:

We, the undersigned, certify that the thesis of the following student meets the required standards of scholarship, format, and style of the university and the student's graduate degree program for the awarding of the master's degree.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The United States has the highest incarceration rate in the world (Raphael, 2011; Wakefield & Uggen, 2010; Widra & Herring, 2021). The prison population increased by 700% between 1972 and 2009 (Ghandnoosh, 2019). Altogether, approximately 1.9 million people are incarcerated nationwide (Sawyer & Wagner, 2022). A vast majority, at least 95% of people in prison, will be released at some point (Hughes & Wilson, 2004). For example, nearly 550,000 people were released from state and federal prison in 2020 (Carson, 2021). The release of such high numbers of people has captured the attention of the public, policy makers, and the national government on the issue of reentry (Swanson et al., 2010).

The population released from prison is at high risk of rearrest and reoffending. The National Institute of Justice (n.d.) describes recidivism as being measured by criminal acts that lead to rearrest, reconviction or a return to prison with or without a new sentence during a period of time following a person's release. Of formerly incarcerated people released across 34 states in 2012, 62% were rearrested within three years and 71% were rearrested within five years of their release (Durose & Antenangeli, 2021). Within five years, 46% had returned to prison for a parole or probation violation or a new conviction. That is nearly half of the released population. One of the main policy concerns is identifying strategies that effectively support formerly incarcerated people in their successful reintegration back into society, thereby reducing the likelihood of reoffending (Visher et al., 2005).

One approach that has proven to successfully support formerly incarcerated people is helping them obtain a higher education (see for example, Project Rebound Consortium, 2022). This study focuses on formerly incarcerated students, specifically students in Fresno State's Project Rebound, a support program for formerly incarcerated

students in the California State University (CSU) system, and seeks to gain a better understanding of their housing needs and experiences. Before turning to the topic of housing in more detail, discussing the benefits of education in and after prison and Project Rebound provides important context.

Benefits of Education In and After Prison

One strategy that can effectively help formerly incarcerated people is supporting their education both while still incarcerated and after release. Educational programs in prison reduce recidivism as well as increase the likelihood of employment upon release (Bozick et al., 2018; Gaes, 2008). By aggregating the findings from 57 studies, Bozick et al. (2018) found that incarcerated people participating in educational programs are 32% less likely to recidivate once released. Further, they found that formerly incarcerated people who participate in educational programs in prison have 12% higher odds in obtaining employment after release compared to their counterparts. Employment plays a major role in reducing recidivism (Project Rebound Consortium, 2022). Evidence suggests that educational programs can effectively break the intergenerational cycles of incarceration (Lim, 2020).

While much of the existing research is focused on educational programs within prison, much less is known about the benefits of education post-release. What is known is that accessing and completing a higher education degree, like a bachelor's or master's degree, increases the chances of formerly incarcerated people overcoming post-incarceration barriers (Murillo, 2021). It opens the door to new opportunities in practically all areas of life, including careers, improved economic status, housing, and can, therefore, ultimately lead to the uplifting of entire families and communities (Oakford et al., 2019).

The benefits of having a higher education degree apply to formerly incarcerated people and the general population alike (Oakford et al., 2019). People with higher levels of education tend to have higher wages and tend to fare better on the job market (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022). The unemployment rates for people with college degrees are generally much lower compared to those of people with high school diplomas. Today, a sizeable number of jobs available on the labor market require an education level above high school (Oakford et al., 2019). Providing opportunities for formerly incarcerated people to obtain a degree or further their education leads to higher employment rates and them being eligible for a broader range of jobs, resulting in higher earnings (Oakford et al., 2019). These effects are multi-generational; when parents pursue their education, the likelihood of their children obtaining a higher education increases as well (Smith & Digard, 2020). For example, Marcus Shaw (2019) found that parental incarceration is linked to the educational demobilization of their children as it significantly affects their children's educational performance and limits educational attainment. Therefore, Marcus Shaw (2019) emphasizes that "the mass incarceration of marginalized groups plays a key role in sustaining inequality through limited intergenerational educational success" (p. 286). Given findings that the likelihood of children obtaining a higher education increases when parents pursue their education (Smith & Digard, 2020), expanding access to education may help offset what Marcus Shaw (2019) found. Higher education has also proven effective in connecting formerly incarcerated people with people and places that support their career development (Runell, 2020). Expanding access to higher education is likely to reduce spending on incarceration by reducing recidivism rates (Oakford et al., 2019). Oakford et al. (2019) estimate that expanding access to higher education would decrease states' incarceration costs by $365.8 million per year across the United States.

The benefits of providing formerly incarcerated people with opportunities to obtain a higher education go far beyond money and include personal benefits as well. Incarceration often has a detrimental impact on the self-concepts of the people incarcerated (Evans et al., 2018). Education often leads to increases in self-confidence (Binda et al., 2020; Hughes, 2012). Further, education can aid incarcerated people in developing new identities and new self-perspectives (Hughes, 2012). Many formerly incarcerated people report that education reduces the impact of the criminal label on their self-perspectives and enables them to reorient their identities towards positive social roles. Many characterize it as a turning point in their lives (Evans et al., 2018). Educational programs in prison can give students hope (Hughes, 2012; Lim, 2020). A major reason for incarcerated people to participate in educational programs is to prepare for a better future upon release (Hughes, 2012). Aware of the obstacles they may face upon release, education can provide empowerment and self-determination. Formerly incarcerated people have also reported improvements in their relationships with others and a sense of connectedness as a result of their education (Binda et al., 2020).

Formerly incarcerated people often report an increased sense of leadership as well as a desire to give back and achieve a positive impact as a result of their participation in higher education (Binda et al., 2020). In the course of their education, some formerly incarcerated students are able to give meaning to their criminal pasts and may subsequently also assist others to undergo similar transformations (Runell, 2020). Many formerly incarcerated people want to "give something back to society", a process Maruna (2001) characterizes as "making good" (p. 87). Hughes (2012) found that many people participating in distance learning in prison expressed a desire to use the skills and knowledge gained from their education to give back to their communities once they were released, which frequently involves taking responsibility for past actions. This is precisely what Maruna (2001) describes as "making good" (p.87).

Higher education can also play a role in helping people desist from crime. No clear definition of desistance exists, which continues to impede a clear understanding of what desisting from crime exactly looks like (Maruna, 2001). In criminological literature, for a long time, desistance was described as an event of terminating one's involvement in crime (Maruna, 2001). What this definition is lacking, however, is how long a person must refrain from committing crimes to be defined as desisting from crime. Maruna (2001) therefore offers a more productive definition of desistance and finds "desistance might more productively be defined as the long-term abstinence from crime among individuals who had previously engaged in persistent patterns of criminal offending" (p. 26). Despite this definition not detailing a specific period of time a person must refrain from committing crimes, it nevertheless makes it clear that this is intended to be a sustained process rather than a short-term abstinence.

Education supports individual transformations (Lim, 2020). In a study by Runell (2017), participants characterized the educational program as a medium for inspiration and change. They spoke about higher education post-prison as a "hook for change" (Runell, 2017, p. 904). This term was coined by Giordano et al. (2002) and describes a range of elements in the environment selectively appropriated by the person themselves on the path to a different way of life. These hooks for change serve as motivations for long-term change and support significant shifts in identity and alter the perception of the meaning of deviant and criminal behavior and whether it is desirable. A hook for change can be many things, ranging all the way from the positive influence of a partner or spouse to an educational program. Participants in Runell's (2017) study did not identify education as a turning point in their lives in itself as it did not necessarily precede the decision to desist from committing crimes. Rather, some of the participants reached the decision to lead a crime-free life while incarcerated and planned on adhering to this goal through obtaining a higher education while incarcerated. Runell (2017) also found that

her participants considered enrolling as students after release to be an important step in the direction of desistance.

Project Rebound and its Students

The above section highlights the benefits of providing formerly incarcerated people with opportunities to obtain a higher education. However, it is important to note that support services are key in helping students to continue enrollment and complete their degrees (Murillo, 2021). Yet, as Murillo (2021) notes, such support services are inconsistent across schools, resulting in the responsibility for creating a safe space for formerly incarcerated students often falling on the students themselves. An exception is Project Rebound, discussed in this section.

Project Rebound is a program that helps formerly incarcerated people in obtaining a higher education in the California State University (CSU) system and supports their successful reintegration (California State University, n.d.). The program was founded in 1967 at San Francisco State University by Dr. John Irwin, who himself was a formerly incarcerated person (Murillo, 2021) and a convict criminologist, a criminologist with lived experience in the criminal justice system (Richards et al., 2010). Irwin's influential academic work on incarceration extended over several decades and included six books (Richards et al., 2010). Irwin, who was said to have a "tell it like it is" way, also supported many community programs and supported fellow convict criminologists' education and representation in the field (Richards et al., 2010, p. 5). Project Rebound was created by Irwin to construct an alternative to the revolving door of mass incarceration and to increase community strength and safety (California State University, n.d.).

Today, Project Rebound has been implemented at 15 CSU campuses (Fresno State, 2022b) that together comprise the CSU Project Rebound Consortium. Project

Rebound is a state and grant-funded program (Murillo, 2021). In the recent past, Project Rebound has experienced considerable growth. Specifically, in the fall of 2016, 137 Project Rebound students were enrolled across participating campuses (Project Rebound Consortium, 2022). By the spring semester of 2022, the number of students enrolled had more than quadrupled to 566 students. Since receiving ongoing state support in 2019, Project Rebound has experienced a 94% growth in enrollment. According to the 2022 annual report by the Project Rebound Consortium, nearly 500 bachelor's and master's degrees have been conferred to Project Rebound students between 2016 and the end of the 2021-2022 academic year. The number of degrees conferred has grown by 530% since 2016. Further, during the 2020-2021 academic year, all Project Rebound programs combined received 3,002 letters from people interested in the program, conducted 698 outreach events, and conducted 1,022 reviews of academic transcripts from potential applicants.

Project Rebound students are a highly diverse population that come from a variety of backgrounds (Project Rebound Consortium, 2022). A majority of them are from historically disadvantaged and marginalized communities. Compared to the demographics of all CSU students, Project Rebound students are more racially and ethnically diverse. The number of Project Rebound students that identify as African American or Native American is six times that of the general CSU student body. The average age of Project Rebound students is higher than that of the general student body. Nearly 72% of Project Rebound students are between 25 and 44 years old, whereas in the general CSU student body, 76% of students are 24 years old or younger. Of the state prison population, 96% are male and 4% female. This aids in explaining why males are overrepresented among Project Rebound students who are 64% male and 35% female, with 1% identifying as non-binary, while the general CSU student population is 58% female and 42% male. A majority, 61% of Project Rebound students, are first-generation

college students, compared to 54% of CSU students in general. Almost a third, 74%, are Pell grant recipients, compared to 44% among all CSU students. Additionally, over one third of Project Rebound students (34%) are parents of minor children.

Project Rebound students major in various disciplines, with the most popular being social sciences, and have demonstrated strong academic success (Project Rebound Consortium, 2022). Between spring of 2020 and fall of 2021, 64% of Project Rebound students had a grade point average (GPA) of 3.0 or above. Nearly half, 42% had a GPA of 3.5 or above. While California had a 46% recidivism rate in 2019, the recidivism rate of Project Rebound students between 2016 and 2021 was less than 1%. When comparing these numbers, it must be noted, that the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation bases their recidivism rate on conviction rates during the three years following release from custody, while Project Rebound's recidivism rate is based on the number of actively enrolled students who were returned to incarceration for a new conviction. This makes a comparison difficult as, for example, Project Rebound students may have been released from incarceration for more than three years. Nevertheless, Project Rebound's recidivism rate of less than 1% exemplifies how Project Rebound breaks "intergenerational cycles of poverty, undereducation, homelessness, addiction, and incarceration" by providing equitable access, a culture of belonging and a caring community (Project Rebound Consortium, 2022, p. 6).

Support services are key in helping students to continue enrollment and complete their degrees (Murillo, 2021). Formerly incarcerated people frequently face unstable housing situations due to requirements to access housing, which makes attending or continuing their education difficult (Murillo, 2021). In order to address their students' housing needs, Project Rebound programs at different campuses have created or are in the process of creating housing opportunities for their students. CSU Fullerton's Project Rebound established the John Irwin House in 2018 as the first transformative housing

community for formerly incarcerated students nationwide (California State University, n.d.). In an interview with CSU Fullerton's news site CSUF News (2018) the then executive director of Project Rebound at CSU Fullerton, Dr. Brady Heiner, described the John Irwin House as a place where Project Rebound students can receive comprehensive care and academic support, surrounded by mentors and a strong social network, and live in a safe and substance-free environment. Through providing all-encompassing services, the housing initiative is intended to improve residents' academic, psychosocial and employment outcomes. Thus far, there is no literature available on the effects living in this type of housing may have.

The students who live in the John Irwin House are required to work and pay rent (Márquez Rosales, 2022). Rent depends on the students' income and a part of what they pay for rent is deposited into a savings account. This money is returned to the students when they move out, giving them a financial start and providing them with an ability to pay the security deposit, first and last month's rent for their own apartment. Project Rebound programs at other CSU campuses, like Sacramento State and Fresno State, are now working towards providing their students with similar housing opportunities (Márquez Rosales, 2022).

Despite the success of supporting formerly incarcerated people as they obtain a higher education, there is still much to be learned about the experiences of formerly incarcerated students. For example, practically no literature exists on formerly incarcerated students' housing needs and experiences. Thus, the purpose of this study is to provide a better understanding of the experiences and housing needs of formerly incarcerated students and to add to the scarce existing literature on the topic. This study is specifically focused on the experiences and housing needs of Project Rebound students at Fresno State. This research is guided by the following initial research questions:

1. What are Project Rebound students' experiences with housing?

2. What are Project Rebound students' experiences with housing insecurity and/or homelessness?
3. What effect, if any, do Project Rebound students think their housing situation has on their academic performance?

The results of this study could not only inform Fresno State's program, but may potentially inform other Project Rebound programs or other educational programs that support formerly incarcerated people.

In the following chapters I seek to draw attention to the issue of housing insecurity among Project Rebound students. A summary of the chapters is offered below as a guide. Chapter 2 will first review the existing literature. A discussion of housing insecurity among the general student population and formerly incarcerated people provides context for the understudied topic of formerly incarcerated students' housing needs and experiences. The reviewed literature illustrates that formerly incarcerated students are members of two populations associated with increased risk for housing insecurity and homelessness. Next, Chapter 3 discusses the methods utilized in this research. This study sought to gain a better understanding of the housing needs and experiences of Project Rebound students at Fresno State by taking a grounded theory approach and conducting qualitative semi-structured in-depth interviews with Project Rebound students currently enrolled at Fresno State to learn from their lived experiences. Subsequently, Chapter 4 examines the results of this study, highlighting the key themes that emerged, housing insecurity among Project Rebound students, and the range of factors that affect students' housing situations, whether insecure or not. Through the voices of the students, this chapter highlights the experiences of students and discusses how students could be effectively supported in their housing needs. Finally, Chapter 5 offers a discussion of the results reviewed in the previous chapter and positions the results in a larger context. The chapter also includes suggestions and implications for

policy and future research as guided by the students' own recommendations and ends with a conclusion and the key takeaways from this study.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Given that the literature that specifically addresses housing insecurity and homelessness among formerly incarcerated people is limited, discussing housing insecurity and homelessness more broadly among formerly incarcerated people and the general student population provides important context. This chapter reviews the existing literature on housing insecurity and homelessness among formerly incarcerated people, among the general student population, and among formerly incarcerated students.

Before reviewing the existing literature, the definitions of the terms housing insecurity and homelessness warrant closer attention. The term housing insecurity is often used as an umbrella term and describes a broad range of challenges that prevent a person from having "safe, affordable and consistent" housing (The Hope Center, 2021, p. 6). Examples of these challenges include difficulties or inability to pay for housing or having to move frequently (Goldrick-Rab, Baker-Smith, Coca, Looker & Williams, 2019). The McKinney Vento Assistance Act defines people experiencing homelessness as "individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence" (National Center for Homeless Education, n.d. section A). This includes people who do not have an adequate place to stay, including but not limited to staying in and sharing the housing of others, staying in an emergency shelter, a motel or hotel, a trailer, on campgrounds, or in a place not designed for human habitation like public places, abandoned buildings or substandard housing. These two terms differ from each other in that housing insecurity is an inclusive term that accounts for the complex issues people can have when it comes to their housing, whereas the term homelessness focuses more on the absence of having housing.

Housing Insecurity Among Formerly Incarcerated People

In order to provide context for the housing needs and experiences of Project Rebound students, an important starting point is to review the literature on housing insecurity among formerly incarcerated people overall. This includes a discussion of how many formerly incarcerated people are experiencing housing insecurity, the barriers to housing they encounter, who is housing insecure, the consequences of housing insecurity among formerly incarcerated people, and, finally, a discussion of neighborhood and desistance and how they are related.

Over the past generation, the response to crime has greatly relied on incarceration, leading to an unprecedented number of people spending time incarcerated (Raphael, 2011; Roman & Travis, 2006). People who are reentering their communities after being released face significant barriers to successful reintegration (Fontaine & Biess, 2012; Philips & Spencer, 2013; Rade et al., 2016). These include but are not limited to barriers to "certain types of employment, housing, education, welfare eligibility, parental rights, and protections from deportation (for noncitizens)" (Mele & Miller, 2005, p. 1). The term reentry describes the process of leaving prison and returning back to society (Roman & Travis, 2006). As a result of the high number of people incarcerated, reentry occurs at an alarming rate (Phillips & Spencer, 2013). Many correctional facilities are located far away from where people return to, making it difficult for them to connect to possible housing upon release (Roman & Travis, 2006).

How Many Formerly Incarcerated People are Housing Insecure?

Before discussing the existing barriers to stable housing, this section will first examine what is known about the numbers of formerly incarcerated people who experience housing insecurity and homelessness. As Couloute (2018) points out, discrimination and the barriers faced by formerly incarcerated people "have created a

little-discussed housing crisis" in this country (Couloute, 2018, para. 1). Couloute (2018) found that 203 out of every 10,000 formerly incarcerated people were experiencing homelessness compared to 21 out of every 10,000 people in the general population in the United States. This means that formerly incarcerated people are nearly 10 times more likely to experience homelessness than someone in the general public. Couloute (2018) also found that 570 out of every 10,000 formerly incarcerated people were experiencing housing insecurity. For the general population, no official numbers exist.

A study with 751 people experiencing chronic homelessness across 11 cities in the United States showed that 71% reported some history of incarceration in their lifetime (Tsai & Rosenheck, 2012). Incarceration history was related to lower education levels, higher substance abuse, earlier onset of homelessness, more lifetime homelessness, and shorter employment histories. Based on 2017 and 2018 Point-in-Time homelessness survey results from the three largest counties in California, Los Angeles, San Diego and Orange County, Franco et al. (2018) estimate that 70% of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness in California have a history of incarceration, which equates to an estimated 64,149 people. This percentage is strikingly similar to Tsai and Rosenheck's (2012) findings. Of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness, 28% reported only recently having been released from incarceration and 13% reported being presently under community supervision, which equates to 11,913 people who are experiencing unsheltered homelessness and are presently on probation or parole in California (Franco et al., 2018).

The Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness matched data from people who had been incarcerated in Connecticut with data of people who used one of their homeless shelters (Jones, 2021). The results illustrate that half of the people who used their homeless shelters had a history of incarceration. One of the goals of this study was to understand how many people experience homelessness before incarceration compared to

how many experience homelessness only after having been incarcerated. Of formerly incarcerated people experiencing homelessness, 69% had experienced homelessness before their incarceration and 28% reported becoming homeless only after their last release. However, as Herbert et al. (2015) note, one limitation of the current literature of homelessness among formerly incarcerated people is that many studies rely on shelter use as a measure of homelessness. These studies fail to incorporate experiences of unsheltered homelessness or other types of housing insecurity, such as staying with others, living in hotels or motels, staying in places not meant for human habitation, or staying in halfway houses, that may be intertwined with shelter use. Lastly, a study utilizing nationally representative data of people incarcerated in jail found that the proportion of all people in jail who had been homeless in the 12 months prior to incarceration was 15.3% (Greenberg & Rosenheck, 2008). Furthermore, the annual rate of homelessness among people incarcerated in jail was found to be approximately 7.5 to 11.3 times that of the general public.

In short, formerly incarcerated people are 10 times more likely to experience homelessness (Couloute, 2018). Among the population experiencing homelessness across 11 cities, 71% reported having a history of incarceration (Tsai & Rosenheck, 2012). Similarly, Franco et al (2018) estimate that 70% of the population experiencing homelessness in California have a history of incarceration. In Connecticut, 69% of people experiencing sheltered homelessness reported experiencing homelessness before incarceration and 28% reported experiencing homelessness only after release from incarceration (Jones, 2021). Homelessness was experienced by 15% of people incarcerated in jail prior to incarceration (Greenberg & Rosenheck, 2008).

Barriers to Housing Faced by Formerly Incarcerated People

Upon establishing that formerly incarcerated people are an at-risk population for experiencing housing insecurity and homelessness, this section will discuss the existing barriers that contribute to these high numbers. Barriers discussed include systemic barriers, barriers to accessing public housing, stigma and discrimination, as well as barriers to accessing private housing.

Upon release, formerly incarcerated people face many obstacles to finding and obtaining housing (Fontaine & Biess, 2012; Herbert et al., 2015; Lutze et al., 2014; Travis, 2005). Yet, the literature on reentry has placed relatively little emphasis on housing in particular (Herbert et al., 2015). The most immediate need after release is to find housing (Travis, 2005). Many formerly incarcerated people face unstable living situations upon reentry to society (Raphael, 2011). In their comprehensive work specifically focused on housing and homelessness upon release, Roman and Travis (2006) identified the first place most returning people stay after release to be with a family member, a partner or a close friend. A functional family can provide the support, particularly in terms of housing and emotional support, that a formerly incarcerated person needs upon reentry (Maruna & Immarigeon, 2004). However, for some this may not be an option because of interpersonal conflicts or reluctance of family members to welcome back a person with a past conviction, potentially a violent past, or having them reside with them (Roman & Travis, 2006). Others may not have immediate family. Legal restrictions further limit housing options in some cases. Some formerly incarcerated people may be barred from residing with family members or friends if they have a criminal record as a condition of parole. Frankly, even if formerly incarcerated people are able to move in with family or friends upon release, they may not find residential stability. Many end up alternating between staying with family members, friends, in shelters and on the street (Travis, 2005).

Formerly incarcerated people frequently face systemic barriers when trying to find and access housing in the community (Fontaine & Biess, 2012). A number of the overwhelming barriers faced by people who after a period of incarceration are trying to reestablish themselves are a consequence of the many criminal justice and housing policies and practices that are in place (Roman & Travis, 2006). According to Roman and Travis (2006) the barriers created by housing policies and practices generally fit into one of two categories: the scarce available housing and formal and informal rules and prejudices that restrict residency.

Despite significant numbers of the people incarcerated having lived in public housing before their arrest, a substantial number of formerly incarcerated people are effectively barred from public housing (Travis, 2005). In many cases, laws and policies prohibit people convicted for felonies from accessing public housing (Maruna & Immarigeon, 2004; Roman & Travis, 2006). This is particularly the case for people who have been convicted for sex or drug offenses (Curtis et al., 2013; Roman & Travis, 2006). In many states people convicted of sex offenses are banned from residing within 1,000 feet of schools, day care centers, parks, or bus stops (Robbers, 2009). They are also required to register in the sex offender registry and schools and day care centers may request information about people convicted of sex offenses living near their location. In a study by Robbers (2009), 35% of people convicted of sex offenses reported having to move because neighbors or landlords/landladies learned about their prior conviction and 19% reported that the people living with them were threatened or harassed. For people on parole, increased housing mobility increases the likelihood for rearrest (Rydberg et al., 2022). People on parole convicted of sex offenses are more likely to move compared to their counterparts, making them more likely to be rearrested. Other housing laws restrict formerly incarcerated people who have been convicted of certain drug offenses, such as methamphetamine production (McCarty et al., 2016). Depending on the state, some

social assistance programs are completely barred from providing assistance to people convicted of felony drug offenses. Finally, the policies of federal housing assistance programs permit program administrators to refuse or end assistance to people engaged in drug-related or other criminal offenses.

The obstacles faced by formerly incarcerated people in obtaining housing go beyond legislative and policy barriers, communities and their members can act as obstacles as well (Roman & Travis, 2006). Formerly incarcerated people often face stigma due to their past criminal convictions that contributes to subsequent discrimination in various areas of life, including housing (Wakefield & Uggen, 2010). Stigma can be defined as rejection based merely on differences based on one's person or status by others (Goffman, 1963/2009). The stigma associated with a past criminal conviction significantly limits housing options (Berry & Wiener, 2020). Many landlords/landladies conduct criminal background checks on applicants as standard practice and are reluctant to rent to a person with a criminal record, voicing concerns such as community safety (Roman & Travis, 2004). Studies have documented evidence of housing discrimination against formerly incarcerated people and stereotypes about formerly incarcerated people have been found to guide rental decision-making among people in the general public (Berry & Wiener, 2020). Background checks are not the only source revealing a past criminal record leading to discrimination. The names, addresses and pictures of people who are convicted of a crime are often broadcast on the internet, seriously impeding formerly incarcerated people from obtaining housing, residing with family members and finding employment to pay for housing (Maruna & Immarigeon, 2004). Although often justified in the name of public safety, ironically, these practices likely reduce public safety (Maruna & Immarigeon, 2004).

Public opposition to having formerly incarcerated people reside in their neighborhoods also seriously impedes efforts to create housing facilities dedicated to

formerly incarcerated people. Even if the jurisdiction has the necessary budget to build and operate such a facility, community opposition, one example being NIMBY ("not in my backyard"), can stop facilities from opening and/or operating (Roman & Travis, 2006, p. 404). NIMBY is not exclusive to affluent or middle-class communities; it occurs in all types of communities, and disadvantaged communities often voice concerns of concentrating people with criminal records in already distressed areas (Roman & Travis, 2006). The restrictions and barriers to obtaining housing that result from the stigma associated with a criminal record are felt by formerly incarcerated people as exclusion (Mele & Miller, 2005). The continuing stigma of a criminal record creates restrictions for formerly incarcerated people that effectively isolate them from their communities and fellow citizens (Maruna & Immarigeon, 2004). Formerly incarcerated people with nowhere to go often end up in shelters (Roman & Travis, 2006). These short-term facilities are not designed to help clients with their search for permanent housing.

In the United States, incarceration particularly affects the most disadvantaged people in society and thereby reflects existing inequalities in society (Raphael, 2011; Wakefield & Uggen, 2010). There are immense disparities in race and class in the incarcerated population compared to the general population (Wakefied & Uggen, 2010). Therefore, many formerly incarcerated people return to disadvantaged communities (Simes, 2019). Formerly incarcerated people who reside in unstable or temporary housing are more likely to live in disadvantaged areas. In the cases of many formerly incarcerated people, the restrictions imposed on them disconnect already disadvantaged and marginalized people from the resources they need (Comfort, 2016).

Formerly incarcerated people often face insurmountable barriers in accessing housing in the private sector as well (Roman & Travis, 2006). Most states provide people who are being released from prison with a money amount ranging between $25-$200 in order to enable them a start after incarceration (Roman & Travis, 2004; Travis, 2005).

Formerly incarcerated people rarely get the resources they need to meet their needs, such as food, clothing and housing immediately upon release (Raphael, 2011). Much less do they have the means to meet requirements to pay the security deposit and/or first and last months of rent in advance or have the possibility to save up that money in a timely manner (Roman & Travis, 2004). This further hinders them from accessing housing in the private sector.

These barriers are not isolated to the period of time immediately after release. Housing is out of reach for many people, not only formerly incarcerated people (Roman & Travis, 2006). Today, housing is increasingly unaffordable (Broton & Goldrick-Rab, 2018; Olfert et al., 2021). Available housing is scarce, creating barriers for all people with low incomes searching for affordable housing (Roman & Travis, 2006). These issues may particularly affect formerly incarcerated students who may be working reduced hours to allow time for their studies.

Who is Housing Insecure Among Formerly Incarcerated People?

This section highlights that housing insecurity and homelessness is not evenly distributed among formerly incarcerated people. Populations who are at increased risk of experiencing housing insecurity and homelessness are discussed, as well as predictive factors of experiencing homelessness. Housing needs vary considerably depending on individual circumstances (Fontaine & Biess, 2012). Black formerly incarcerated people are significantly more likely to experience homelessness compared to their White counterparts (Couloute, 2018; Jones, 2021; Remster, 2021). Black people are disproportionately impacted by both incarceration and homelessness in this country (Jones, 2021). Formerly incarcerated women are also more likely to experience homelessness compared to men (Couloute, 2018). Yet, men are less likely to experience sheltered homelessness compared to women. Older age is also associated with higher

rates of homelessness (Couloute, 2018; Remster, 2021). Unmarried formerly incarcerated people are at higher risk of housing insecurity as well (Remster, 2021). People suffering from mental health issues are at increased risk for housing insecurity, as well as people who struggle with substance abuse (Herbert et al., 2015; Remster, 2021). Remster (2021) points out that these factors are "consistent with the life course concept of cumulative disadvantage and the idea that incarceration marks a negative turning point, directing people towards unstable housing" (p. 154). Social support and income have been identified as protectors against housing insecurity (Herbert et al., 2015).

People who have been recently released from prison are at greater risk of facing homelessness (Couloute, 2018). In the Connecticut study, one in five formerly incarcerated people experiencing homelessness had been released from prison in the past three years (Jones, 2021). People who have been incarcerated more than once also face especially high rates of homelessness (Couloute, 2018; Herbert et al., 2015; Jones, 2021). People who have been incarcerated more than once have rates of homelessness 13 times higher than the general public, while people who have been incarcerated once have rates seven times higher (Couloute, 2018). In the Connecticut study, over half of formerly incarcerated people experiencing homelessness had been incarcerated six times or more (Jones, 2021). It is noteworthy that as people who have been incarcerated more than once are particularly likely to experience homelessness, the revolving door of incarceration, as it is often called, increases the likelihood of facing homelessness after release (Couloute, 2018).

A strong connection between incarceration and homelessness has consistently been demonstrated by research (Jones, 2021; Travis, 2005). Incarceration and homelessness occur in cycles (Jones, 2021). This cycle starts at an early age and for youth, experiencing homelessness is a major predictor of involvement in the juvenile justice system. Offenses associated with being homeless, such as sleeping in public

places or asking people for money, are often strictly enforced by law enforcement (Couloute, 2018). Of the formerly incarcerated people experiencing homelessness in the Connecticut study who had also experienced homelessness before incarceration, most were found to have been incarcerated for relatively minor offenses (Jones, 2021). Jones (2021) argues that these results highlight the consequences of criminalizing homelessness and demonstrate that people experiencing homelessness are at high risk of arrest and incarceration, even though offenses related to homelessness pose no threat to public safety.

Continuously involving people experiencing homelessness in the criminal justice system makes it even harder for them to secure housing, employment, and public assistance, by adding criminal records to their history and imposing fines on them that they cannot possibly pay (Jones, 2021). This only further powers the revolving door between incarceration and homelessness. Jones (2021) also found that 28% reported experiencing homelessness only after incarceration, indicative of the destabilizing effects of incarceration and poor support for reentry. Most people lose their jobs and housing upon incarceration, and upon release it is extremely difficult for them to reestablish themselves.

Formerly incarcerated people with prior experiences with homelessness are more likely to become housing insecure or homeless again (Herbert et al., 2015). Housing instability also creates more housing instability. Herbert et al. (2015) found that the longer a formerly incarcerated person on parole lived in a residence, the less likely they were to move, meaning that a move puts the person at increased risk of another move. Therefore, the criminal justice system is a key player in generating housing insecurity. Nearly 60% of all moves in Herbert et al.'s (2015) sample of formerly incarcerated people on parole were caused by intermediate sanctions, which are often used as punishment for violations of parole and remove people from their communities for short

periods of time. Herbert et al. (2015) name short-term custody in jails, residential treatment centers, or programs for people with technical violations of parole as examples of intermediate sanctions. This raises some questions about the residential mobility triggered by criminal justice sanctions. Even temporary removal of formerly incarcerated people on parole from their communities for an intermediate sanction can disrupt otherwise stable living conditions, separate them from their social support network, and result in unemployment.

Consequences of Housing Insecurity Among Formerly Incarcerated People

In order to further the discussion on housing insecurity among formerly incarcerated people, this section will discuss the consequences of housing insecurity among formerly incarcerated people, before turning to a discussion of neighborhood and desistance in the next section. Safe and stable housing is an important foundation for successful reentry and is often viewed as central in preparing and proactively engaging in the process of reentry (Lutze et al., 2014). Some scholars have even argued that finding and securing adequate housing is the leading challenge of all the reentry challenges faced by formerly incarcerated people (Fontaine & Biess, 2012). Housing instability puts formerly incarcerated people at increased risk of recidivism (Lutze et al., 2014). Without adequate and stable housing, finding employment, abstaining from alcohol or other substances, or participating in prosocial activities is extremely difficult (Fontaine & Biess, 2012). In many cases, obtaining and retaining housing is also a condition of parole (Phillips & Spencer, 2013).

Stable housing often provides a sense of security, enhances overall well-being, provides a place of consistency and a refuge from the outside world (Lee et al., 2010; Mary Shaw, 2004). Moreover, housing insecurity and homelessness increase the

likelihood of stigma, exposure to antisocial peers, victimization, and of engaging in anti-social behavior and/or criminal activity (Lutze et al., 2014). Housing insecurity and homelessness often contribute to formerly incarcerated people finding themselves in situations that lead to parole violations, treatment failures and recidivism (Lutze et al., 2014; Tsai & Rosenheck, 2012). Therefore, housing interventions combined with support services may reduce high risk behaviors that lead to recidivism (Lutze et al., 2014). Interventions that address a formerly incarcerated person's criminogenic risk and needs have been shown to significantly reduce recidivism (Andrews & Bonta, 2010).

Neighborhood and Desistance

So as to provide additional context on the importance of housing, this last section will discuss desistance and the role that housing and the neighborhood formerly incarcerated people live in may play in that process. For the purposes of this study, only the most relevant aspects of desistance as they relate to housing are discussed. As mentioned in the introduction, Maruna (2001) defines desistance as the "long-term abstinence from crime among individuals who had previously engaged in persistent patterns of criminal offending" (p. 26). He thereby highlights desistance as a process rather than an event. Various factors that vary depending on personal circumstances can both support and impede the desistance process (Copp et al., 2020).

Sampson and Laub (1993) argue that life-course events play a role in the process of desisting from crime. Life events such as employment, marriage, and/or military service affect social bonds and informal social control, resulting in changes which Sampson and Laub (1993) argue influence the desistance process. Certain life events may act as positive turning points and change trajectories, thereby contributing to the desistance process. Another factor in the desistance process important to consider is identity. In their study, Copp et al. (2020) found that distancing from a negative identity

and adopting a positive identity are associated with lower rates of reoffending. These findings highlight how identity plays an important role in the process of desistance. Copp et al. (2020) emphasize that a change in perspective "is a key driver of the desistance process" and that their results suggest that this frequently includes "a desire to distance from negative identities and to move toward a more prosocial lifestyle" (p. 320).

Formerly incarcerated people often return to the same environment they lived in before incarceration (Kirk, 2012). This frequently includes returning to the same criminal opportunities and anti-social peers as before. For some, desistance may require staying away from such factors. This is supported by findings that reduced involvement with delinquent peers is associated with declines in offending (Copp et al., 2020). Kirk (2012) examined these issues among formerly incarcerated people on parole who were forced to move elsewhere as a result of Hurricane Katrina. People on parole who moved to new neighborhoods were substantially less likely to be reincarcerated in the first 3 years compared to formerly incarcerated people that returned to their original neighborhood. Thus, moving away from certain environments can be an important step towards desistance.

Unstable housing can lead to further offending (Bowman & Ely, 2020). Hence, stable housing is associated with the desistance process. In their study with formerly incarcerated people released from jail to a supportive housing program, Bowman and Ely (2020) highlight how for many of their participants, housing served as a turning point that instituted identity transformation and helped them to create a different script to follow. Living in the supportive housing program led participants to feel comfortable, independent, and led to feelings of self-worth. Housing may have been the turning point that instituted the identity transformation but over time participants realized a sense of agency and self-efficacy that accompanied their new social roles. Bowman and Ely (2020) conclude that providing supportive housing to formerly incarcerated people acts

as a turning point, as it provides a chance at stability and a foundation enabling potential changes in social identity and social relationships.

In their book on desistance among formerly incarcerated youth transitioning into adulthood, Abrams and Terry (2017) highlight how the young people they spoke with utilize conscious and unconscious strategies to navigate the dangers in their neighborhood and to address their personal safety. The young people in their study were regularly confronted with everyday dangers and police harassment in their neighborhood. Having to watch their every move not only influenced every move they made, but caused underlying stress. Even years into desisting from being involved in a gang, the young people in their study had to go to great lengths to keep themselves safe. This leads Abrams and Terry (2017) to emphatically point out: "there seems to be a prevailing sense in public discourse that individuals can turn their lives around simply through sheer will." However, they argue that, "the narratives that we captured in this chapter illustrate just how much more layered the desistance process can be" (p. 146). Their findings not only underline the significant role the neighborhood one lives in plays in everyday life, but also show how constant concerns for safety cause significant stress.

Housing Insecurity Among the General Student Population

In order to provide relevant background for the housing needs and experiences of Project Rebound students, this section examines housing insecurity among the general student population before the chapter's final section focuses specifically on housing insecurity among formerly incarcerated students. This current section includes a discussion on how many students are housing insecure in the United States, housing insecurity among the general student population in California, limitations of existing research, why students are housing insecure, who is housing insecure, and, finally, the consequences of housing insecurity among the general student population.

Approximately 19 million students were enrolled in higher education institutions in the United States in 2020, both at the undergraduate and graduate levels (Hanson, 2022). Meeting students' basic needs is fundamental to their wellbeing (Olfert et al., 2021). However, many students struggle with meeting their basic needs while they study to obtain their degrees (Broton & Goldrick-Rab, 2018; Crutchfield & Maguire, 2018).

As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, housing insecurity is often used as an umbrella term and describes a broad range of challenges that prevent a person from having "safe, affordable and consistent" housing (The Hope Center, 2021, p. 6). Existing literature identifies the inability to pay rent, mortgage, or utility costs as the most common challenge among housing insecure students (Broton & Goldrick-Rab, 2018; The Hope Center, 2021). Other common challenges include having to move in with someone due to financial difficulties (Broton & Goldrick-Rab, 2018). These challenges seriously affect students' lives (Goldrick-Rab, Baker-Smith, Coca, Looker & Williams, 2019). Research indicates that students are more likely to experience some form of housing insecurity than having their needs met during their time studying (Goldrick-Rab, Baker-Smith, Coca, Looker & Williams, 2019).

People experiencing homelessness are descried by the McKinney Vento Assistance Act as "individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence" (National Center for Homeless Education, n.d. section A). Most students who face homelessness temporarily stay with family, a friend, or couch surf, meaning they move from one friend's or family member's place to another (Goldrick-Rab, Baker-Smith, Coca, Looker & Williams, 2019).

In addition to the terms housing insecurity and homelessness, one additional term warrants discussion: food insecurity. Food insecurity describes limited or uncertain access to "nutritionally adequate and safe foods" or the ability to acquire them in "socially acceptable ways" due to limited financial means (U.S. Department of

Agriculture, 2022, What Is Food Security? section). In food secure households "all members at all times" have access to "enough food for an active, healthy life" (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2022, What Is Food Security? section). Students experience food insecurity at a higher rate compared to the general public (Crutchfield & Maguire, 2018; Martinez et al., 2020). Although this study is focused on housing needs and experiences and does not incorporate other basic needs insecurity like food insecurity, it is nevertheless salient to include food insecurity in the review of existing literature. It is important to note the overlapping nature of challenges caused by basic needs insecurity (Baker-Smith et al., 2020; Goldrick-Rab, Baker-Smith, Coca, Looker & Williams, 2019; Goldrick-Rab, Baker-Smith, Coca & Looker, 2019). Students who lack the means to secure housing very often also lack the means to buy food (Goldrick-Rab, Baker-Smith, Coca, Looker & Williams, 2019; Goldrick-Rab, Baker-Smith, Coca & Looker, 2019). These challenges may be experienced concurrently or asynchronously over time (Baker-Smith et al., 2020). There may also be variation over time; housing insecurity may affect students in one semester and food insecurity in the next (Goldrick-Rab, Baker-Smith, Coca, Looker & Williams, 2019). Thus, basic needs insecurity is intertwined.

How Many Students are Housing Insecure in the United States?

In this section some of the most comprehensive available studies that focus on basic needs insecurity among the general student population, including housing insecurity and homelessness, are reviewed. A study conducted by Olfert et al. (2021) included data from 22,153 students from 22 higher education institutions spanning across 13 states and United States territories. Since starting college, 52.3% of the students had experienced housing insecurity and 1.8% had experienced homelessness. While the number of students experiencing homelessness may seem low initially, 1.8% of the study's population equates to over 350 students living in an uncertain situation like in a car or a

shelter. Housing insecurity was experienced by more than 11,500 students. Of the students, 44.1% experienced food insecurity since starting college.

Broton and Goldrick-Rab (2018) drew on data from four surveys that represent more than 30,000 students attending 2- and 4-year colleges at 121 universities across 26 states. While the surveys cannot directly be compared to each other, the results consistently indicate that a substantial number of students are struggling to secure adequate food and housing. Some of the shortcomings of this study include that only two of four surveys included students from 4-year colleges and one of the surveys did not include homelessness as a measure. Nevertheless, the results documented that 11% of students at 4-year colleges in one survey and 19% in the other experienced housing insecurity (Broton & Goldrick-Rab, 2018). At least one third of 2-year college students, one half when considering only the three most recent surveys, had experienced some form of housing insecurity in the prior 12 months. Between 6% and 14% of 2-year college students and 2% of 4-year college students experienced homelessness. The most common forms of homelessness included not having a place to sleep, being informally thrown out of a home, staying in abandoned buildings or a car, and being evicted from a home. More than half of the students across the surveys experienced food insecurity.

A study with undergraduate students across all 17 City University of New York (CUNY) schools, found that 41.7% of students experienced housing insecurity in the past 12 months (Tsui et al., 2011). CUNY is the largest urban public university system in the United States (CUNY, n.d.). Based on the enrollment number at the time, approximately 250,000 undergraduate students, this meant that more than 100,000 CUNY students had experienced housing insecurity in the past 12 months (Tsui et al., 2011). In other words, two in five students. The most common issues were not having enough money to pay rent and experiencing a rent increase that made it difficult to pay rent. Noteworthy, Tsui et al.'s (2011) study found that only 22.7% of respondents indicated they knew about other

CUNY students who had or were experiencing housing insecurity. This low number led Tsui et al. (2011) to conclude that many students may be unaware of the extent of the problem of housing instability among peers. Of CUNY students, 24.3% experienced both food insecurity and housing instability. By comparing these findings to the general New York City population, Tsui et al. (2011) found that the percentage of CUNY students living in shelters was almost three times higher and the percentage of students living in public housing was about five times higher than that of the general New York City population. An important factor to consider are differences between schools by their location. CUNY schools are located in an urban environment, namely New York City, while other universities may be located in rural locations. Living costs may be substantially higher in urban environments, further exacerbating housing insecurity and homelessness among students.

Another study on the East Coast was conducted with students at the University of Massachusetts Boston. The results illustrated that 5.4% of students had experienced homelessness since starting college (Silva et al., 2017). Further, 4.3% reported extremely unstable housing situations in that they were unable or uncertain whether in the next 2 weeks they could go on sleeping in the same place they had slept the night before. Nearly a quarter of students also experienced food insecurity. In reviewing these studies, it is important to consider the institutions in which they were conducted. The University of Massachusetts Boston is a private university and therefore costs more to attend compared to, for example, CUNY schools that are public schools. This may play a role in the differences among the results as students attending private universities may have a higher income or come from a higher-class background in order to be able to afford tuition.

The #RealCollege survey is the largest annual assessment of basic needs security among college students in the United States (Goldrick-Rab, Baker-Smith, Coca, Looker & Williams, 2019; Goldrick-Rab, Baker-Smith, Coca & Looker, 2019). The survey began

in 2015 and specifically focuses on evaluating access to affordable food and housing among students (Goldrick-Rab, Baker-Smith, Coca & Looker, 2019). The online survey is sent to all enrolled students at the participating schools (Baker-Smith et al., 2020). The response rates have increased over the years; with the survey administered in the fall semester of 2018 yielding a 5.8% response rate (Goldrick-Rab, Baker-Smith, Coca, Looker & Williams, 2019), the survey in the fall of 2019 generating a response rate of 8.4% (Baker-Smith et al., 2020), and the survey in the fall of 2020 achieving a 11% response rate (The Hope Center, 2021).

The report by Goldrick-Rab, Baker-Smith, Coca, Looker and Williams (2019) on the results of the #RealCollege survey administered in the fall semester of 2018 includes data from nearly 86,000 students at 123 campuses across the United States. Among student respondents, 56% experienced housing insecurity in the prior 12 months and 17% experienced homelessness. In addition, 45% of respondents experienced food insecurity in the prior 30 days. In the prior 12 months, 39% of students attending 2-year colleges and 30% of students attending 4-year colleges experienced both food and housing insecurity.

Nearly 167,000 students from 171 2-year colleges and 56 4-year colleges responded to the #RealCollege survey administered in the fall semester of 2019 (Baker-Smith et al., 2020). Among the participating students, 46% experienced housing insecurity and 17% experienced homelessness in the prior 12 months. Further, 39% of students experienced food insecurity in the 30 days prior to the survey.

The #RealCollege survey administered in the fall semester of 2020 assessed students' basic needs amidst the impact of the global COVID-19 pandemic (The Hope Center, 2021). Over 195,000 students from 130 2-year colleges and 72 4-year colleges across the United States participated in the 2020 survey. Across all respondents, nearly three in five students experienced basic needs insecurity. Among the responding students,

48% experienced housing insecurity and 14% experienced homelessness. Approximately half of students attending 2-year colleges and two in five attending 4-year colleges experienced housing insecurity. In addition, 39% of students at 2-year colleges and 29% of students at 4-year colleges experienced food insecurity. The report also highlights that 8% of students at 2-year colleges and 6% of students at 4-year colleges left their household because they felt unsafe in their living circumstances.

The results of the 2020 #RealCollege survey also illustrated that more than 1 in 10 students attending a 4-year college moved three or more times in the 12 months before the survey (The Hope Center, 2021). In the #RealCollege survey administered during the fall of 2018 only 3% of 4-year college students indicated having moved three or more times (Goldrick-Rab, Baker-Smith, Coca, Looker & Williams, 2019). This disparity is likely reflective of the COVID-19 pandemic reopening plans and therefore may be a direct consequence of the pandemic (The Hope Center, 2021). The report cautions that moving can be emotionally draining and further strain already limited financial means.

The number of students participating in the #RealCollege survey has consistently grown over the years. The numbers of students who experienced housing insecurity declined from 56% in 2018 (Goldrick-Rab, Baker-Smith, Coca, Looker & Williams, 2019) to 46% in 2019 (Baker-Smith et al., 2020) and remained similar in 2020 with 48% (The Hope Center, 2021). The number of students reporting experiencing homelessness in 2018 was 17% (Goldrick-Rab, Baker-Smith, Coca, Looker & Williams, 2019), remaining exactly the same with 17% in 2019 (Baker-Smith et al., 2020), and finally declining slightly in in 2020 to 14% (The Hope Center, 2021). Despite the growing sample size of the #RealCollege survey and aside from a 10% drop in housing insecurity between the 2018 and 2019 surveys, the results remain fairly similar, providing an insight into basic needs insecurity among students nationwide.

Despite the value of the #RealCollege survey, there are limitations. The respondents of the #RealCollege survey are currently enrolled students; therefore, the results do not capture the basic needs of students who take an academic leave of absence (The Hope Center, 2021). Arguably, basic needs insecurities may lead to students having to take time off from studying or forgoing their studies altogether. The survey is sent out to students at the participating schools, meaning that it is unable to capture the basic needs insecurities among students who attend schools that do not participate (The Hope Center, 2021). Public schools, particularly community colleges, have been more likely to participate in the #RealCollege survey compared to private schools (Baker-Smith et al., 2020). Participating schools varied over the years, meaning that the results of the different years cannot be interpreted as trends (Baker-Smith et al., 2020).

Schools are not required to participate in the survey and neither are the students at the schools that do send out the survey, leading to consideration regarding a bias due to non-response (Baker-Smith et al., 2020). This leads to the important consideration of whether students experiencing homelessness may be less likely to respond, since they may have very different priorities than to answer a survey. In addition, students who are experiencing homelessness may not have consistent access to the internet, without which the survey cannot be taken. Regardless of these potential limitations, the #RealCollege survey remains the most comprehensive assessment of basic needs insecurity among students nationwide.

A comparison of the discussed literature demonstrates that basic needs insecurity varies across institutions and locations. The percentage of students who had experienced housing insecurity in the 12 months prior to the surveys ranged between 41.7% in New York (Tsui et al., 2011) and 56% in the 2018 #RealCollege survey (Goldrick-Rab, Baker-Smith, Coca, Looker & Williams, 2019) among studies that included housing insecurity as a measure. The only exception to these high numbers were the studies compared by

Broton and Goldrick-Rab (2018), which generally reported lower rates of housing insecurity. The percentage of students who had experienced homelessness ranged from as low as 1.8% (Olfert et al., 2021) and 5.3% (Silva et al., 2017) of students reporting experiencing homelessness since they started college, to up to 17% of students reporting experiencing homelessness in the 12 months prior to the survey (Baker-Smith et al., 2020; Goldrick-Rab, Baker-Smith, Coca, Looker & Williams, 2019). Olfert et al. (2021) and Silva et al. (2017) asked students whether they had experienced basic needs insecurity since the beginning of their studies, making a comparison to the studies that inquired about the 12 months prior to the survey difficult.

Housing Insecurity among the General Student Population in California

Since the population in this study is from California and California may differ from other locations across the United States, housing insecurity among the general student population in California warrants closer attention. Fresno State is part of the CSU. The CSU is the largest 4-year university system in the United States (California State University, 2022). It is also the most ethnically, economically and academically diverse in the United States (Crutchfield & Maguire, 2018). There are approximately 484,000 students and 50,000 faculty and staff across 23 campuses. One in every 20 US Americans holding a college degree is a graduate of the CSU system and the alumni number 3.4 million. In a study of students' basic needs conducted with CSU students across all 23 campuses, 10.9% reported experiencing homelessness one or more times in the prior 12 months (Crutchfield & Maguire, 2018), but the study did not include numbers on housing insecurity. Homelessness was measured via a tool developed by Crutchfield and Maguire (2017) using a combination of the McKinney-Vento Act and the definition by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Additionally, the study found that food insecurity was experienced by 41.6% of students. For comparison

purposes, among households in the United States, 12.3% experienced food insecurity (Coleman-Jensen et al., 2017). This means that the CSU student population is at far greater risk of food insecurity than the general population of the United States (Crutchfield & Maguire, 2018).

Research conducted at CSU Chico illustrated that 43.9% of students had one or more experiences with housing insecurity and 12.4% had three or more experiences with housing insecurity over the prior 12 months (Kornbluh et al., 2022). Housing insecurity was measured with an eight-item set of questions that included questions used by the Hope Lab (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2018), questions previously used in an unpublished survey at Sacramento State, and additional questions developed with campus stakeholders. Homelessness was measured with a standard measure asking whether students had slept in any places that are considered consistent with experiencing homelessness based on the definition of homelessness by the McKinney-Vento Act. Over the prior 12 months, 14.6% of the students indicated having experienced homelessness. Interestingly, only one-third of the participants in this study were aware of services available to them concerning housing.

Kornbluh et al.'s (2022) study emphasizes an additional focus on the implications of wildfires on housing insecurity and homelessness; therefore, it is important to interpret the findings with this context in mind. Nevertheless, wildfires are becoming a yearly phenomenon in California (Kornbluh et al., 2022). Environmental disasters have been associated with unique economic and mental health needs (Kornbluh et al., 2022). Students who are impacted, either directly or indirectly, by a natural disaster are at significantly higher odds for housing insecurity (Wilking et al., 2022). The year before data collection, the area had experienced the deadliest fire in the history of the United States. Of the participating students, 13% indicated that they had to move because of the

wildfire, with some of the students' homes being destroyed by the fire and many reporting rent increasing as a direct result of the wildfires (Kornbluh et al., 2022).

Goldrick-Rab, Baker-Smith, Coca and Looker (2019) published a separate report focused on California, detailing the results of the #RealCollege survey administered at nearly half of the schools in the California Community Colleges (CCC) system in the fall of 2016 and 2018. While this report focused only on 2-year college students, it includes the responses of almost 40,000 students across 57 2-year colleges in California. Of students, 60% experienced housing insecurity in the prior 12 months and 19% experienced homelessness. Half (50%) of students experienced food insecurity over the prior 30 days. Consistent with prior research indicating that students at 2-year colleges are at higher risk for basic needs insecurity (Broton & Goldrick-Rab, 2018; Goldrick-Rab, Baker-Smith, Coca, Looker & Williams, 2019), these numbers are higher than those of the nationwide survey that includes both 2-year and 4-year colleges (Goldrick-Rab, Baker-Smith, Coca, Looker & Williams, 2019). As previously noted, basic needs challenges often overlap. In the prior 12 months, 40% of students experienced both food and housing insecurity and 14% experienced food insecurity and homelessness. Only less than a third (30%) of 2-year college students reported having their needs met and being secure.

Rates of basic needs insecurity were found to vary considerably across location and by institution (Goldrick-Rab, Baker-Smith, Coca & Looker, 2019). The number of housing insecure students ranged from slightly below 50% to slightly below 75% and the number of students experiencing homelessness ranged from approximately 10% to 30%, with most institutions ranging from 15% to 20%, across the 57 participating community colleges. Housing insecurity among CCC students varies between 49% to 70% across regions in California. The highest rates of basic needs insecurity were found to be concentrated in the Northern Coastal, Northern Inland, and Greater Sacramento areas in

California. Despite rates of basic needs insecurity being much lower in the South-Central region of the state, they were still substantial.

Limitations of Existing Research on Housing Insecurity Among Students

Having reviewed the findings from key studies on the incidence of housing insecurity and homelessness among college students, this section provides a necessary assessment of the limitations of this research in order to provide a more qualified understanding of what the findings reveal. One of the major shortcomings of the literature on housing insecurity and homelessness, regardless of the population studied, is that no one definition for housing insecurity or homelessness exists. The term housing insecurity is not well defined and varies across the literature, making it difficult to compare studies and identify a single measure for adequately capturing such a complex phenomenon (Kornbluh et al., 2022; Wilking et al., 2022). Many studies generally rely on the McKinney Vento Act to define homelessness (see for example, Crutchfield & Maquire, 2018; Silva et al., 2017; Wilking et al., 2022). Other studies do not specify what source they rely on (see for example, Olfert et al., 2021).

No one instrument exists that is consistently used to measure housing insecurity among students (Crutchfield & Maguire, 2018). For example, Olfert et al.'s (2021) study measured housing insecurity by utilizing six items from a report of the 2018 #RealCollege survey and students were considered housing insecure if they answered in the affirmative to any of the questions. As the measure for homelessness, one additional question simply asked students whether they were experiencing homelessness. Other studies, like the one by Wilking et al. (2022), based their measures for housing insecurity and homelessness on a combination of questions developed based on feedback from different campus stakeholders and existing instruments, like the ones used by the Hope

Lab (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2018) and the CSU basic needs study (Crutchfield & Maguire, 2017), and included an eight-item scale. Tsui et al. (2011) developed 12 questions to assess housing insecurity among CUNY students and students were considered experiencing housing insecurity if they answered one or more in the affirmative. Silva et al. (2017) created a 32-item survey based on a review of prior studies and campus stakeholders that contained multiple-choice and open-ended questions and was focused on students' general demographics and status information, living situation, food security, academic performance, and access to social services.

An additional point wort noting is that many studies like the #RealCollege survey (Baker-Smith et al., 2020; Goldrick-Rab, Baker-Smith, Coca, Looker & Williams, 2019; Goldrick-Rab, Baker-Smith, Coca & Looker, 2019; The Hope Center, 2021) or Tsui et al. (2011) ask whether students have experienced housing insecurity or homelessness in the 12 months prior to the survey. Other studies ask students whether they have experienced housing insecurity or homelessness since starting college (Olfert et al., 2021; Silva et al., 2017).

In addition, many studies rely on self-reporting to capture the numbers of students experiencing housing insecurity and homelessness. Some students may be reluctant to identify themselves as homeless, which may contribute to findings of low rates of homelessness (Broton, 2020 as cited in Olfert et al., 2021). In addition to asking students whether they were housing insecure or homeless, the #RealCollege survey evaluated housing insecurity with a nine-item set of questions created by the Hope Center (Goldrick-Rab, Baker-Smith, Coca, Looker & Williams, 2019). The questions focus on students' experiences in the prior 12 months and address difficulties with paying for rent, mortgage, or utilities, receiving a summons to appear in housing court, and having an account go into collections. Further, the questions inquire about moving in with other people because of financial problems, living with others beyond the capacity of the house

or apartment, leaving housing because of feeling unsafe, and how often students moved. Students are identified as housing insecure if they answer any of the questions with yes, or reported moving three times or more. Students were identified as homeless if they responded in the affirmative to the question asking if they had been homeless or indicated living in conditions that are considered consistent with homelessness. Homelessness was assessed with the tool developed by Crutchfield and Maguire (2018) for their study of CSU students (Goldrick-Rab, Baker-Smith, Coca, Looker & Williams, 2019). The results of the 2020 #RealCollege survey illustrated that self-reporting as homeless was approximately 10 percentage points less frequent than living in the conditions of homelessness (The Hope Center, 2021). For example, in the 2018 #RealCollege survey, 14% of 4-year college students experienced homelessness. Of those students, 2% self-identify as experiencing homelessness, while 12% experience the conditions of homelessness but do not self-identify as experiencing homelessness (Goldrick-Rab, Baker-Smith, Coca, Looker & Williams, 2019).

Regardless of the differing results within the literature, the number of students affected by housing insecurity and homelessness is very high. In the 2020 #RealCollege survey, the most comprehensive study included in the literature review, of the 195,000 student respondents across the country 48% experienced housing insecurity in the prior 12 months (The Hope Center, 2021). As mentioned at the start of this review of housing insecurity among college students, approximately 19 million students were enrolled in higher education in 2020 (Hanson, 2022). Generalized to the entire student population, potentially more than nine million students experienced some form of housing insecurity in 2020.

Why are Students Among the General Student Population Housing Insecure?

Following a review of the numbers of students who experience housing insecurity and homelessness, some of the contributing factors to these high numbers are now discussed. The cost of obtaining a higher education has increased substantially in the recent past (Broton & Goldrick-Rab, 2018; Martinez et al., 2020; Olfert et al., 2021) and is currently higher than ever before in history (Martinez et al., 2020). Not only has the cost of higher education increased, so has the cost of living (Olfert et al., 2021). Lack of affordable housing is a nationwide problem and to make matters worse for students, certain housing assistance programs specifically limit eligibility for college students (Broton & Goldrick-Rab, 2018). Many college students accumulate debt in order to be able to cover the cost of attending college and living (Olfert et al., 2021). This debt leads to increasing financial strain over time and creates the potential for saving money on basic needs, for example, by eating less or not at all, or living in undesirable circumstances.

Specifically in California, one of the main contributors for the increase in cost is declining state support (Martinez et al., 2020). In 1990, 78% of the total cost of education per student was state-funded, in 2011-2012 it was 39%. Up to the 1990s, Pell Grants covered the majority of the cost of attendance for the recipient on a federal level. Today, Pell Grants only cover about one-third of tuition fees and room and board. In addition, California's housing is becoming increasingly unaffordable (Martinez et al., 2020). Of note, findings by an apartment data and search company based in California identify Fresno, where the participants of this study attend school, as having had the fourth largest month-to-month percentage increase in rent among the 100 largest cities in the United States in February of 2023 (Sheehan, 2023). Fresno is among the cities where the rent increase is above the national average.

Who is Housing Insecure Among the General Student Population?

Similar to the formerly incarcerated population, housing insecurity and homelessness is not evenly distributed among the general student population either. The existing literature identifies various populations within the general student population that have been found to be at higher risk for housing insecurity. These are discussed in further detail in this section.

Housing insecurity among students varies by means and life experiences (Goldrick-Rab, Baker-Smith, Coca & Looker, 2019). Student populations found to be at higher risk for housing insecurity include racial minorities who are at higher risk of housing insecurity compared to White students (Baker-Smith et al., 2020; Goldrick-Rab, Baker-Smith, Coca, Looker & Williams, 2019; Goldrick-Rab, Baker-Smith, Coca & Looker, 2019; Olfert et al., 2021; Wilking et al., 2022). Students of older age have also been found to be at higher risk for housing insecurity (Goldrick-Rab, Baker-Smith, Coca, Looker & Williams, 2019; Goldrick-Rab, Baker-Smith, Coca & Looker, 2019; Tsui et al., 2011). Research indicates that this applies particularly to students over the age of 26 (Goldrick-Rab, Baker-Smith, Coca, Looker & Williams, 2019). In one study, students above the age of 25 were almost twice as likely to experience housing insecurity compared to students under the age of 21 (Tsui et al., 2011). In terms of gender, female students are at higher risk of housing insecurity compared to male students (Baker-Smith et al., 2020; Goldrick-Rab, Baker-Smith, Coca & Looker, 2019; Olfert et al., 2021; Tsui et al., 2011). Students with a non-binary gender identity were also found to be at higher risk for housing insecurity (Baker-Smith et al., 2020; Goldrick-Rab, Baker-Smith, Coca & Looker, 2019; Olfert et al., 2021). Transgender students are at higher risk for housing insecurity as well (Baker-Smith et al., 2020; Goldrick-Rab, Baker-Smith, Coca & Looker, 2019). The results of the 2018 #RealCollege survey among CCCs identified transgender

students as having the highest rates of homelessness, double the rate of students who identified as either female or male (Goldrick-Rab, Baker-Smith, Coca & Looker, 2019).

Rates of housing insecurity are higher among students identifying as LGBTQ+ (Goldrick-Rab, Baker-Smith, Coca, Looker & Williams, 2019; Goldrick-Rab, Baker-Smith, Coca & Looker, 2019; Wilking et al., 2022). Students whose marital status was single were also found to be at a heightened risk of housing insecurity (Goldrick-Rab, Baker-Smith, Coca & Looker, 2019; Olfert et al., 2021) as well as students with dependent children (Baker-Smith et al., 2020; Goldrick-Rab, Baker-Smith, Coca & Looker, 2019; Olfert et al., 2021; Tsui et al., 2011). Students who were convicted of a crime in the past have been found to be at a higher risk for housing insecurity; this will be discussed in more detail later on (Baker-Smith et al., 2020; Goldrick-Rab, Baker-Smith, Coca, Looker & Williams, 2019; Goldrick-Rab, Baker-Smith, Coca & Looker, 2019). Military veterans are at a heightened risk for housing insecurity as well (Baker-Smith et al., 2020; Goldrick-Rab, Baker-Smith, Coca, Looker & Williams, 2019; Goldrick-Rab, Baker-Smith, Coca & Looker, 2019; Olfert et al., 2021).

Non-US citizens have been found to be at greater risk for housing insecurity (Goldrick-Rab, Baker-Smith, Coca, Looker & Williams, 2019). In a university setting this population may be particularly hard to reach since international students do not qualify for federal assistance (Olfert et al., 2021). International students thereby are not eligible for much of the financial assistance and for certain offers aimed at offsetting some of the challenges of basic needs insecurity that are available to domestic students. Therefore, this population is difficult to reach in order to support them. In addition, they may not have family members or social support close by or even in the country. Other student populations at higher risk for housing insecurity include first-generation college students (Olfert et al., 2021). The same applies to students enrolled in an online program

and living off campus. Part-time students are also more likely to be housing insecure compared to students enrolled full-time (Baker-Smith et al., 2020).

In Olfert et al.'s (2021) study, the largest contributing factor to housing insecurity was the number of years a student had spent in school. Among years in a college and university setting, all school years were significantly more likely to be housing insecure compared to first-year students, with each additional year in school showing higher odds for housing insecurity. Sophomores were 122%, juniors were 413%, and seniors were 927% more likely to be housing insecure compared to freshmen. Master's students were 723%, PhD/EdD student were 1,157%, and professional students were 1,118% more likely to be housing insecure compared to freshmen. Housing insecurity was highest among graduate students, a possible reason being that they often hold teaching or research assistant positions that limit their possibilities of working outside of the university to earn additional income (Olfert et al., 2021).

Rates of housing insecurity are higher among students attending 2-year colleges compared to 4-year colleges (Broton & Goldrick-Rab, 2018; Goldrick-Rab, Baker-Smith, Coca, Looker & Williams, 2019). Broton and Goldrick-Rab (2018) estimated that one in two students at 2-year colleges had experienced housing insecurity in the past 12 months compared to at least 1 in 10 and up to one in five of students at 4-year colleges. Compared to students at 4-year colleges, students at 2-year colleges are twice as likely to have an account default or go into collection (The Hope Center, 2021).

Not surprisingly, lower income students are at higher risk for housing insecurity as are students who lack financial support from family members and are supporting themselves (Olfert et al., 2021; Tsui et al., 2011). Former foster youth are also at greater risk for housing insecurity (Baker-Smith et al., 2020; Goldrick-Rab, Baker-Smith, Coca, Looker & Williams, 2019; Goldrick-Rab, Baker-Smith, Coca & Looker, 2019; Olfert et al., 2021). The same applies to Pell grant recipients (Goldrick-Rab, Baker-Smith, Coca,

Looker & Williams, 2019; Goldrick-Rab, Baker-Smith, Coca & Looker, 2019; Wilking et al., 2022).

It is often assumed that when students are struggling to make ends meet, they, theoretically, can rely on strategies such as reducing their budgets and working longer hours (Broton & Goldrick-Rab, 2018). In reality, however, it can be difficult to make these strategies work. Notably, working during college is not associated with a lower risk of basic needs insecurity (Goldrick-Rab, Baker-Smith, Coca, Looker & Williams, 2019; Goldrick-Rab, Baker-Smith, Coca & Looker, 2019). In fact, employed students have been found to be at greater risk for housing insecurity (Goldrick-Rab, Baker-Smith, Coca & Looker, 2019; Olfert et al., 2021). Students who work longer hours are also at greater risk for basic needs insecurity compared to their counterparts (Goldrick-Rab, Baker-Smith, Coca & Looker, 2019; Tsui et al., 2011). This stands in stark contrast to the popular assumption that students facing basic needs insecurity can simply work more to make ends meet (Broton & Goldrick-Rab, 2018). Of the students who experienced basic needs insecurity in the 2019 #RealCollege survey, 70% were employed (Baker-Smith et al., 2020).

Students who reported their health to be fair or poor were more likely to experience housing insecurity compared to their counterparts (Tsui et al., 2011). One study also found students with disabilities to be 35% more likely to experience housing insecurity (Olfert et al., 2021). Lastly, awareness of basic needs services was shown to be a safeguard (Wilkings et al., 2022). Students with less awareness of basic needs services at their educational institutions have been found to have greater odds of experiencing housing insecurity.

It is important to note that basic needs insecurity is multigenerational. Students who came from housing and/or food insecure backgrounds were more likely to experience the same in college (Olfert et al., 2021). Hardships experienced during

childhood often echo into adulthood and adequate support is crucial to prevent intergenerational basic needs insecurity that hinders academic success. Students whose parents have higher levels of education face lower risk of basic needs insecurity (Goldrick-Rab, Baker-Smith, Coca, Looker & Williams, 2019; Goldrick-Rab, Baker-Smith, Coca & Looker, 2019).

Consequences of Housing Insecurity Among the General Student Population

In conclusion to this examination of housing insecurity and homelessness among the general student population, this last section will discuss the consequences of housing insecurity among students. Experiencing basic needs insecurity can negatively influence various aspects of life. Housing insecurity is associated with poorer academic performance (Broton, 2017) and has a negative impact on academic progress (Olfert et al., 2021). A statistically significant predictor of academic achievement, housing insecurity is linked to both a lower cumulative GPA and a lower probability of achieving a GPA of 2.0 (Broton, 2017). In the #RealCollege survey, most students reported receiving good grades in the form of A's and B's (Baker-Smith et al., 2020; Goldrick-Rab, Baker-Smith, Coca & Looker, 2019). Students who were experiencing food and housing insecurity reported grades of C and lower at higher rates compared to their fellow students. Silva et al. (2017) found that students at the University of Massachusetts Boston who had experienced homelessness were at fundamentally greater academic risk than their peers. They were 13 times more likely to have failed a class and 11 times more likely to have dropped out from a class or not registered for future classes. Housing insecurity negatively affected class attendance, academic performance, and the student's ability to continue their studies (Silva et al., 2017).

Housing insecurity among students leads to lower rates of degree attainment through lower academic achievement and reduced credit completion (Broton, 2017). Therefore, addressing student basic needs improves academic performance, increases enrollment by reducing barriers for returning students, and makes the jobs of faculty easier as students can focus on learning (Baker-Smith et al., 2020). Basic needs insecurity goes beyond the classroom as well. Students who were experiencing food insecurity and homelessness shared how this influenced many areas of their lives, including long work hours and negative impacts on their physical and mental health (Crutchfield & Maguire, 2018). Housing insecure students were found to have 25% higher odds of reporting fair or poor health (Olfert et al., 2021).

Housing Insecurity Among Formerly Incarcerated Students

The available literature on housing insecurity among formerly incarcerated students is discussed in the following paragraphs. The literature focusing specifically on housing needs and experiences among formerly incarcerated students is very limited. However, there is evidence that clearly illustrates that students who were convicted of a crime in the past are at a higher risk for housing insecurity (Goldrick-Rab, Baker-Smith, Coca, Looker & Williams, 2019; The Hope Center, 2021). Further, many formerly incarcerated students face unstable living situations, which create an environment unconducive to attending and remaining in college (Murillo, 2021).

The Campaign for College Opportunity hosted virtual focus groups with 29 formerly incarcerated students from CCC, CSU, and University of California (UC) campuses in order to gain a better understanding of the challenges and opportunities they encounter (Murillo, 2021). When discussing housing, many students shared they could not apply for affordable housing because they were subjected to ankle bracelets, meaning location monitoring by a probation or parole officer, and/or felony convictions. In

addition, many students voiced that transitional housing conditions require that a resident is not a full-time student, which led one student to have to pause his plans to pursue higher education and another to lose his housing. Transitional housing can be described as a temporary place for people leaving incarceration to stay before going on to live in their own housing (Reentry and Housing Coalition, n.d.). Murillo (2021) further emphasizes that many students in the focus groups also reported having lived in vehicles and had frequently experienced homelessness during their pursuit of higher education. Conditions of parole may also limit a student's possibilities to live on campus (Murillo, 2021).

In a study conducted by Anderson et al. (2019) with Project Rebound students at CSU San Bernadino, most interviewed students (38.9%) indicated living with a family member. Further, 27.8% of respondents stated they rented their housing, 16.7% indicated owning their housing and 11.1% stated they lived in communal living. Finally, 5.6% of respondents indicated that they were experiencing homelessness. In light of this current study's focus, these numbers are particularly relevant as there is only little available information specifically on the housing experiences of Project Rebound students.

Given the exacerbating effects the COVID-19 pandemic was having on housing and food insecurities of Project Rebound students, the Project Rebound Consortium conducted a Basic Needs Assessment in the spring semester of 2021 (Project Rebound Consortium, 2022). The survey was distributed to Project Rebound students across 14 campuses and 71% of the students enrolled at the time responded to the survey. This means that the survey did not capture the basic needs of students who were not currently enrolled, for example, because of academic leave of absence. The results illustrate the impacts the COVID-19 pandemic had on project Rebound students. Of Project Rebound student respondents, 65% reported having experienced difficulty or extreme difficulty with paying for basic needs during the COVID-19 pandemic. Regarding housing

insecurity, 27% of Project Rebound student respondents reported that they or a member of their household needed to apply for housing subsidies, allowances, or register for eviction protection due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It is also worth considering that students experiencing homelessness may have been less likely to answer the survey.

In terms of food insecurity, 66% reported having often or sometimes been unable to afford balanced meals in the prior 30 days (Project Rebound Consortium, 2022). Over half (58%) of Project Rebound student respondents reported that they did not have stable employment during the prior 12 months. Further, 41% became unemployed; of those, 61% were unable to access unemployment benefits. During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, 60% reported being employed or volunteering as essential workers. The survey also highlighted family obligations; 38% reported being a parent of dependent children and 28% reported attending to family obligations for more than 40 hours a week on average while enrolled in school. The report emphasizes that these impacts affected one of the CSU's most marginalized student populations.

As a follow-up to the Basic Needs Assessment conducted by the Project Rebound Consortium across all campuses, Fresno State's Project Rebound conducted an internal survey among their students in the fall semester of 2022. The preliminary findings of the survey document that of the 74 responding students, 24 students indicated considering themselves as housing insecure and 10 students responded with "maybe" (J. Leahy, personal communication, December 22, 2022). This means that 46.6% of students either answered "yes" or "maybe" to whether they consider themselves housing insecure. In addition, four students indicated experiencing homelessness at the time of the survey and three students responded with "maybe" to the question. It is important to note that the survey question asked "Are you currently experiencing homelessness?", meaning that the number of students who have experienced homelessness in the past 12 months may be even higher. Regardless, the survey highlights that almost 10% of the students answered

"yes" or "maybe" to being asked whether they were currently experiencing homelessness in the fall semester of 2022.

In the #RealCollege survey, students are asked if they have ever been convicted of a crime (Goldrick-Rab, Baker-Smith, Coca, Looker & Williams, 2019; Goldrick-Rab, Baker-Smith, Coca & Looker, 2019; The Hope Center, 2021). Has everyone who has been convicted of a crime been incarcerated? No. Nevertheless, and especially due to the lack of literature on the topic, the results are revealing. Many students who reported having been convicted of a crime in the past face basic needs insecurities during their studies (Goldrick-Rab, Baker-Smith, Coca, Looker & Williams, 2019). In 2018, 81% reported experiencing housing insecurity, 40% reported experiencing homelessness, and 64% reported experiencing food insecurity (Goldrick-Rab, Baker-Smith, Coca, Looker & Williams, 2019). These numbers stand in stark contrast to the ones among all nationwide student respondents, where 56% reported experiencing housing insecurity, 17% reported experiencing homelessness, and 45% reported food insecurity. The rate of students experiencing homelessness who have been convicted of a crime in the past is more than twice as high than among students overall.

Comparing the numbers specific to CCCs paints a similar picture. Of students who reported having been convicted of a crime in the past, 83% reported experiencing housing insecurity, 44% reported experiencing homelessness, and 66% reported experiencing food insecurity (Goldrick-Rab, Baker-Smith, Coca & Looker, 2019). Among the general student population at CCCs, 60% experienced housing insecurity, 19% experienced homelessness, and 50% experienced food insecurity among all student respondents. These results indicate that the number of students who have been convicted of a crime in the past are experiencing basic needs insecurity at significantly higher rates than their counterparts. Particularly notable, the number of students experiencing

homelessness who have been convicted of a crime in the past at CCCs is 44%, the highest among any study or population reviewed in this literature review.

The 2020 #RealCollege survey combined housing insecurity, homelessness, and food insecurity into one percentage of basic needs insecurity and compared basic needs insecurity of students who indicated having been convicted of a crime in the past to that of all student respondents (The Hope Center, 2021). The results show that 75% of students who indicated having been convicted of a crime in the past experienced basic needs insecurity compared to 57% of all student respondents.

There is no evidence that basic needs insecurity among students has improved in the recent past (Broton & Goldrick-Rab, 2018). Arguably, this makes housing insecurity a more current topic than ever before. Overall, housing and the thereby related issues seem to consistently fall short in the literature. Only a limited amount of the literature on housing insecurity specifically focuses on students (Broton & Goldrick-Rab, 2018; Silva et al., 2017). In the reentry literature, likewise, only little attention is devoted to housing (Herbert et al., 2015). Yet, based on the reviewed literature both the general student population and formerly incarcerated people are at-risk populations for housing insecurity. While some research exists on housing insecurity among formerly incarcerated people and among students in higher education settings, practically no literature exists on housing insecurity among formerly incarcerated students who are members of two populations associated with increased risk for housing insecurity. With the hope to respond to this research gap, even if it is only on a micro level, this study focuses on the housing needs and experiences of Project Rebound students at Fresno State.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Qualitative interviews, rather than a survey, were chosen as the means of data collection for this study to gain a more in-depth understanding of the housing needs and experiences of the participating students. Many of the studies discussed in the literature review utilize surveys to capture data on housing insecurity. Collecting data through qualitative interviews allows for capturing richer data on complex themes that could not be captured by other methods, thereby contributing to a greater understanding of how housing insecurity and homelessness are experienced. While surveys are helpful in providing a comprehensive understanding of the numbers of people experiencing housing insecurity, interviews provide a more nuanced understanding of the contributing factors and issues behind it.

The analysis in this study relied on a modified form of the grounded theory approach, discussed in more detail in the data analysis section. As Strauss and Corbin (1994) emphasize, grounded theorizing requires remaining open to a range of different questions in order to enable the discovery of important aspects of the data. This research was guided by the following initial research questions:

1. What are Project Rebound students' experiences with housing?
2. What are Project Rebound students' experiences with housing insecurity and/or homelessness?
3. What effect, if any, do Project Rebound students think their housing situation has on their academic performance?

Given the qualitative nature and grounded theorizing approach of this study, there are no predicted findings. Rather, patterns and themes emerged during the analysis of the data.

Operationalization of Key Terms

The description for housing insecurity was derived from an article by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) Office of Policy Development and Research (PD&R), where housing insecurity is described as often being used as "an umbrella term" that includes various issues with housing "people may experience, including affordability, safety, quality, insecurity, and loss of housing" (PD&R, 2018, para. 2). There is no one definition of housing insecurity that is consistently used across prior studies. The aforementioned description was included in the interview guide because it is short and concise, more so than other available explanations, and serves the purpose of providing a simple explanation of the term during an interview.

Homelessness is described by using a combination of the McKinney-Vento Act and the definition by the U.S. Housing and Urban Development used by Crutchfield & Maquire (2018). The McKinney-Vento Act defines people experiencing homelessness as "individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence" (National Center for Homeless Education, n.d. section A). HUD defines homelessness as "sheltered (in a HUD funded emergency shelter, transitional housing, and supportive housing) and unsheltered (on the streets, in abandoned buildings, or other places not meant for human habitation)" (Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing Act of 2009 as cited in Crutchfield & Maguire, 2017, p. 31).

This study relied on self-reporting of experiences of housing insecurity and/or homelessness and did not include other measures, such as the nine-item set of questions used by the #RealCollege survey, to identify conditions of housing insecurity and homelessness as some of the existing studies on basic needs insecurity do. The interview guide (Appendix A) contains descriptions of both housing insecurity and homelessness that were provided to participants for clarification or more information.

It is important to note that for the purposes of this study, housing insecurity and homelessness differ from each other. A person who is housing insecure is not necessarily homeless, while a person experiencing homelessness is by definition housing insecure. Housing insecurity is an inclusive term that accounts for the complex issues people can have when it comes to their housing, whereas the term homelessness focuses more on the absence of having housing. For example, a person who consistently struggles to pay rent or utilities is not experiencing homelessness but they are experiencing housing insecurity. Further, for the purposes of this study, homelessness includes both sheltered and unsheltered experiences. A person who is sleeping on the couch of friends or family members is considered to be experiencing homelessness as they lack a "fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence" (National Center for Homeless Education, n.d. section A).

One additional term warrants explanation. Describing someone or a group of people as formerly incarcerated people "refers to anyone who has been in a carceral setting and is now released" (Cerda-Jara et al., 2019). This "umbrella term" includes a broad range of correctional institutions: "prison, immigration detention centers, local jails, juvenile detention centers, etc." (Cerda-Jara et al., 2019, Terminology Guide section).

Design

In this qualitative study, data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews. Qualitative interviews are suited for capturing the complexities of topics involving human perspectives, emotions, and/or decisions (Maxfield & Babbie, 2018). Conducting interviews enables researchers to learn from firsthand accounts about peoples' lived experience. People's narratives are powerful tools and the goal is to learn about a topic from the people who know it best: those experiencing it (Rudes et al.,

2022). Therefore, utilizing qualitative interviews to collect data provides a more in-depth understanding of the issues related to the topic and enables the capture of the experiences of people who may be housing secure but inherently unhappy with their current situation. Further, interviews may capture some of the factors that have contributed to participants' current housing situation.

Despite questions being asked following a developed plan, qualitative interviews offer inherent flexibility; this is particularly the case for semi-structured interviews (Maxfield & Babbie, 2018). Semi-structured interviews provide some structure to the interview through pre-determined questions, while also allowing for themes that emerge during the interview to be explored (Maxfield & Babbie, 2018). Utilizing this structure allows for probing and spontaneous questions in the course of the interview. One of the strengths of choosing semi-structured interviews is to allow for emerging themes that the researcher may not have considered prior to the interviews, but can be captured in the data (Maxfield & Babbie, 2018). This particularly applies to a topic like housing where experiences may vary considerably and be influenced by a range of factors researchers may not have initially considered.

The questions in the interview guide (see Appendix A for more details) were designed to assess participants' needs and experiences with housing. The interview guide contains questions about the participants' current and past housing situations in order to gain an understanding of the experiences of participants. This includes a question about how participants feel about their current housing situation, which is intended to capture a richer understanding of their current housing situation. Housing insecurity is far more complex than just a yes or no answer. On one end of the spectrum, a person may be completely content with their housing situation. On the other end of the spectrum, a person may clearly self-identify as experiencing homelessness because they are sleeping in a car. However, not everyone who is experiencing a form of housing insecurity may

self-identify as such or necessarily identify with the definition of housing insecurity. For example, a person may be able to pay rent and utilities and yet be fundamentally unhappy with their living situation and have a strong desire to move. As researchers, it is important to consider how this can be captured in research results. Therefore, these questions were designed to capture all housing issues, including what lies between housing secure and experiencing homelessness.

Other questions were geared towards the amount of time the participants have been living in their current situation, how often they have moved in the past 12 months, and if they plan to move in the coming 12 months. Participants were also asked questions regarding whether they have experienced housing insecurity, homelessness and/or difficulties to pay utilities in the past 12 months. An additional question asked participants about their experiences with applying to housing. Questions regarding how long participants have been released from incarceration and how long they have spent incarcerated during their lifetime were also included in the interview guide as this may be informative when it comes to their current or past housing situations (i.e., whether this has ever had or has any influence).

Further, the interview guide contains questions regarding the changes of living costs and whether the COVID-19 pandemic has had any influence on their housing situation. Given the unprecedented magnitude of the COVID-19 pandemic, it would be remiss to not address possible effects, or the lack thereof, it may have had on housing. Several questions were also targeted at the nexus between housing and education, asking participants whether they believe housing has any effect on their academics, how and how long participants commute to campus, and whether this has any effect on their choice to enroll in-person or online. Several questions were also geared towards what characteristics participants find most and least important in housing, aimed at gaining an

understanding of what constitutes quality housing for participants and what they are looking for in housing.

Lastly, some questions pertain to how Project Rebound students' housing needs could be effectively supported and whether they are aware of and are thinking of applying to the new housing offered to Project Rebound students at Fresno State. Demographic information was collected by asking participants about their age, gender, race, ethnicity, and whether they have dependent children.

Participants

The sample for this study consisted of Project Rebound students currently enrolled at Fresno State. As of the spring semester of 2023, there are 108 matriculated Project Rebound students at Fresno State (J. Leahy, personal communication, March 21, 2023). Qualitative interviews were conducted with 15 Project Rebound students. This study captured the needs and experiences of a diverse sample of Project Rebound students. Both undergraduate and graduate students participated in this study. According to the report by the Project Rebound Consortium (2022), 35% of Project Rebound students across all campuses are female, 64% are male, and 1% identifies as other. The sample of this study is 40% female (6 participants), and 60% male (9 participants). Participants' ages range from 25 years old to 60 years old, with the average age being 40.73 years. A majority of the sample of this study, nine students, identify their ethnicity as Hispanic or Latino/Latina/Latinx. Three participants identify their race as White, one student identifies as African American, one student as Asian, and one participant identifies their race as two or more categories. Notably, 10 participants of this study indicated having dependent children, which constitutes 75% of the sample. Among Project Rebound students on all campuses, 34% are parents of minor children (Project Rebound Consortium, 2022).

The sample in this study is a purposive sample. Purposive samples are selected based on knowledge of the population and the purpose of the study (Maxfield & Babbie, 2018). In a purposive sample, researchers deliberately select participants that are able to answer the research questions (Tie et al., 2019). This study seeks to gain a better understanding of housing needs and experiences of formerly incarcerated students, hence, Project Rebound students were selected for a specific reason, as it is a support program for formerly incarcerated students.

Currently enrolled Project Rebound students received the invitation letter (Appendix B) detailing the nature and purpose of this study through an email sent out by the Program Director of Fresno State's Project Rebound, Professor Jennifer Leahy. The letter was prepared in order to provide possible participants with the necessary information to make an informed decision about participation. In addition, I volunteered as a student assistant for Project Rebound in the fall of 2022 and helped the program with conducting a directive survey designed to inform Project Rebound on their students' housing needs. This may have further facilitated access as Project Rebound students may have already heard of me. Due to organizational factors like time restrictions, this study was limited to 15 interviews. Eighteen emails by possible participants responding to the interview invitation were answered in chronological order and the first 15 interviews to be scheduled took place accordingly.

The institutional review board at Fresno State approved this study. All participants were at least 18 years old and although some students were under probation or parole supervision, no participants were incarcerated. A consent form (Appendix C) detailing the goals and methods of this study was prepared and all participants were asked to read and sign the consent form prior to the interviews. The consent form outlines the purpose of this study and includes a reminder that their participation has no effect on involvement with Project Rebound or Fresno State, and that they may end the interview

or decline to answer any question at any time without any consequences. In addition, the consent form included a separate part asking whether participants were willing to have the interviews audio recorded, and if so, asked for an additional signature.

Data Collection

Fifteen in-depth semi-structured interviews, lasting approximately 30 to 60 minutes each were conducted at the beginning of the spring semester of 2023. Interviews were conducted either in-person or via Zoom. The reasons for allowing in-person and virtual interviews were twofold: (1) although many COVID-19 restrictions have been lifted, some students may be more comfortable meeting via Zoom due to health concerns, and (2) given the busy schedules of many students it may be more convenient to meet via Zoom. Offering both possibilities allowed for accommodation of their wishes and preference. In addition, it reduced the possibility that some students who would be otherwise interested in being interviewed would choose not to respond to the invitation for the aforementioned reasons. Ultimately, three of the interviews were in-person and 12 on Zoom. If a participant chose to be interviewed in-person, the interview was conducted in a partner or group study room located in the Fresno State library. The choice of location for interviews is important (Barbour, 2010). While there may not be a perfect location, researchers should consider factors such as the impact of the setting, the nature of the discussion, accessibility, traveling distance and related expenses, and whether the location is quiet and private (Barbour, 2010). The study pods in the library were chosen as a suitable location for the interviews, as conducting the interviews there brings the benefits of a convenient on-campus location, neutral unaffiliated ground, and provides a private place to speak. In order to compensate participants for their time, they were given a $15 Walmart e-gift card.

At the beginning of the interview, each participant was reminded verbally that they may decline any question at any time, end the interview at any time, and that they would receive the gift card regardless of whether they chose to complete the interview. Numerous steps were taken in order to ensure confidentiality to participants. The audio recordings were stored safely on my personal password protected laptop. All names were removed in the transcripts of the interviews. Zoom automatically creates a transcript of a meeting that was audio recorded. Therefore, interviews conducted by Zoom were transcribed through using this transcription as the basis and then correcting and editing that transcript. In-person interviews were transcribed without any type of software, by typing what was said in the audio recording. Transcribing the transcripts myself proved very valuable and important, as it gave me a chance to spend time immersed in the data. For the one interview where the participant did not provide consent for an audio recording, notes were taken throughout the interview, which were then reviewed and further added to after the interview. In addition, immediately after the interview, I audio recorded myself going through all of the questions with my notes, explaining everything I had written down, and adding anything else I remembered. I was then able to refer to the audio recording of myself later on, when "transcribing" the notes.

The participants, referred to as students in the following chapters, have all been given pseudonyms. At the end of the interviews, participants were offered the chance to choose their own pseudonym; those who did not were assigned a pseudonym. After conducting research on pseudonyms, the decision was made to choose names that were culturally common while also reflective of the background of the participants. For example, not naming a participant identifying as Hispanic "Bob," but rather choosing a name that is multi-cultural while also reflective of the participant's background. Choosing culturally common names is consistent with research that found that many studies rely on the use of culturally common names as pseudonyms (Heaton, 2022).

Rather than using a random name generator, I spent time brainstorming names, then reviewing the names with self-reflexivity in mind, followed by more research into names, and finally discussing them with Dr. Emma Hughes, the principal investigator of this study. In this regard, it was important to me as a researcher that the names used to refer to participants are not simply randomly generated but reflect the fact that this thesis tells the stories of real people through their own voices, sharing their thoughts and experiences.

Data Analysis

This study utilized the qualitative approach of grounded theorizing. Grounded theory, a methodology for developing theory, is rooted in systematically collected and analyzed data (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). One of the major differences between this qualitative research methodology and other approaches is the emphasis upon theory development (Strauss & Corbin, 1994; Urquhart et al., 2010). Through continuous interaction between analysis and data collection, theory develops during research (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). Grounded theory develops from an analysis of patterns, themes, and categories in the data (Maxfield & Babbie, 2018). In the constant comparison, the researcher is looking for similarities and differences to establish themes that may ultimately produce theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1994).

Grounded theory is a type of inductive theory often developed based on qualitative interviews (Maxfield & Babbie, 2018). Deriving theory through grounded theorizing is interpretive work (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). Interpretations are needed in order to gain an understanding of the actions of people or groups of people being studied. These interpretations must include the voices and perspectives of the people who are being studied (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). This is particularly important in research with formerly incarcerated people, where including the perspectives of participants may inform to create better pathways back into society (Andersen et al., 2020). Convict

criminologists have long advocated for mainstream criminologists and policy makers to include and value the voices of incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people (Leyva & Bickel, 2010).

In grounded theory, constant comparative methods are central to coding (Belgrave & Seide, 2020). Instead of attempting to ensure total accuracy of the data, grounded theorists strive to code for possibilities presented by the data (Charmaz, 2014). In a grounded theory approach, codes emerge and connections between codes develop while researchers study their data (Charmaz, 2014). This study followed the three stages of analysis described by Strauss (1987/2003): open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. The first stage, open coding, serves the goal of opening up the inquiry (Strauss, 1987/2003). The aim of the initial coding was to scrutinize the interview and produce provisional categories that appear to fit the data. Axial coding involves analysis done around one category at a time (Strauss, 1987/2003). As the name suggest, coding revolves around the axis of one category at a time. This stage highlights relationships between the category in question to others, and also aids in determining the categories that eventually became the core categories. Selective coding involves systematic coding for the core categories (Strauss, 1987/2003). The core categories become a guide for coding, leading to a focus on coding for conditions and consequences related to the core category. In this stage other categories become linked with the core categories.

Researcher Positionality

In utilizing a grounded theory approach the researcher has a distinctive position in common with many other qualitative researchers, a position where researchers must accept responsibility for their interpretative roles (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). Self-reflexivity is an important component of any empirical research (Mruck & Mey, 2020). The time, place, and the context a researcher belongs to, all affect research and,

consequently, its findings (Kuhn, 1970). As researchers we cannot claim scientific neutrality (Charmaz, 2014). It is important to acknowledge that we are shaped by our values and our lived experience (Charmaz, 2014; Rudes et al., 2022). Both "researchers and research participants make assumptions about what is real, possess stocks of knowledge, occupy social statuses, and pursue purposes that influence their respective view and actions in the presence of each other" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 27).

Given that a researcher's own biographical, academic, cultural background, and involvement in doing research affects the research and its findings, I recognize my positionality and describe my background to provide context and transparency to the reader. Age, race, class, and gender all influence the experience and views of people. Accordingly, my experiences and views are shaped by being a 23-year-old White middle-class woman. As a graduate student in criminology, with an interest in the sub-field of corrections, I have a particular interest in educational programs both for people in prison and for formerly incarcerated people and, therefore, am interested in learning from the experiences of formerly incarcerated students. In fall of 2022, I volunteered for Project Rebound, assisting with an internal survey on housing needs. Therefore, some participants may recognize my name. It may also show common ground as volunteering for Project Rebound is reflective of my commitment to and belief in the program. Rudes et al (2022) point out that research should always be a collaboration. Therefore, my volunteering is reflective of the fact that the topic of housing needs and experiences of Project Rebound students is important to me, and my commitment goes beyond simply wanting to collect data for a study. Of note, my cultural background differs from most as I am an international student from Switzerland, have lived in New York for several years, and only recently moved to California. Lastly, it is important to note that I have no lived experience with involvement in the criminal justice system and have never been incarcerated.

All of these aforementioned factors likely had an effect on this research. Social, historical and cultural positionality and belonging are important factors to consider as being a member of a certain "class, gender, race, or nationality means different access to resources; different ways to act, feel, and behave in different lifeworlds; and different concepts and experiences while conducting research" (Mruck & Mey, 2020, p. 7). It is not only important to acknowledge the effects on the analysis of data, factors such as my relatively young age, likely differences in my background, and having no lived experience of incarceration likely contributed to an 'outsider' status to the participants that as 'insiders' share experiences of their lives. Who asks the questions in qualitative research interviews has an effect on the interviews and their results. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge that I conducted this research as an outsider which may have an effect on interviews and factors such as comfortableness of participants to share their lived experiences.

One strategy that can effectively scrutinize the influence of the researcher's background in research is reflective writing. Reflective writing is a key component of self-reflexivity (Jasper, 2005; Mruck & Mey, 2020). It is central to the concept of gaining knowledge from experience (Jasper, 2005). Reflective writing is written in the first person, is therefore subjective, and describes the experiences and perceptions of the author (Jasper, 2005). This supports the researcher with reflecting on their own involvement and the role they played, and aids in making connections between that and the experience. By reflecting on the issues that may challenge the credibility of the research, reflective writing can provide a safeguard against inklings of bias, over-involvement, and invested interests. In the case of this study, a memo was written after each interview to reflect on the process as a component of self-reflexivity. In addition, several participants of this study generously agreed to read and provide feedback on

essential parts of this thesis. The purpose of this was to gain participants' perspective on whether their stories are properly represented and reflected in this thesis.

Limitations

A number of limitations of this study must be noted. The sample of this study consisted of a relatively small number of students who are all members of the same program, at the same school. Therefore, the results of this study cannot be generalized to other Project Rebound students at Fresno State, to students at other Project Rebound programs, or the larger population of formerly incarcerated students nationwide. In this regard, Rudes et al. (2022) argue that in qualitative work, generalizability is not the goal, rather "the goal is trustworthiness–or the degree to which the data is believable, authentic, and realistic" (p. 214).

The results of this study were provided from first-hand accounts from qualitative interviews. Limitations with self-report accounts, such as recall error, must be kept in mind and the results viewed accordingly. In addition, as, for example, the results of the 2020 #RealCollege survey demonstrate, less students self-report as experiencing homelessness than are reporting living in conditions included in the definition of homelessness (The Hope Center, 2021). Again, Rudes et al. (2022) argue that in this type of study, whether events occurred exactly the way participants remember them is not the point. The stories, perceptions, and experiences are those of the participants, and they represent their truth.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

This chapter will discuss current housing experiences of participating students, including how many students are experiencing housing insecurity and difficulties paying for their housing, as well as the factor of high and increasing costs. Further attention is devoted to students' past housing experiences, the existing barriers to finding and applying for housing upon release and beyond, and the importance of location of housing. In addition, students' housing goals for the future, factors that contribute positively and negatively to housing situations, and the effects of housing on a students' academics, are discussed. Finally, this chapter concludes with a discussion of how students could be effectively supported with their housing needs, based on suggestions by the students themselves.

Overview of Students' Housing Experiences

All students were in housing at the time of the interviews; none of the students were experiencing homelessness. Possible reasons for this are discussed later on in Chapter 5. Nevertheless, this study captured a multitude of current housing situations and experiences with housing. Current housing experiences of students ranged from positive to negative. Sara's current housing situation provides an example of a positive situation. She explains: "the house is nice" and that it is "in a really nice neighborhood." She also mentions how "rent is so expensive anywhere you look right now" and that especially in light of the size of the house she lives in, her rent is "not bad." She concludes: "I feel really good about it, actually. But it wasn't always that way. But now I'm actually really comfortable." Sara speaks very positively about her current housing situation and highlights some of the important factors that contribute to it being a positive situation, such as neighborhood and the housing itself. Another student who feels positively about her housing situation is Vanessa. She describes how she feels about her current housing

situation by saying: “I feel that, that it’s comfortable, and it’s meeting my needs.” Both Sara and Vanessa state that they feel “comfortable” in their current housing situation.

Jessica, who lives with her children, noted both positive and negative aspects of her current housing situation and describes her current housing situation as “okay” and being “in a decent area,” adding that it is in proximity to amenities and that her son “has a good school.” However, Jessica also notes some of the limitations of her current housing situation and explains that they have “outgrown it” in terms of space and that she is staying in her current housing situation because it is affordable. She concludes by saying: “I want a home, you know, for my son especially.” More than half of the students indicated that they currently live with children. The role children play in housing considerations is therefore highlighted by several students and discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

Feelings toward a housing situation can also change over time. When asked how she felt about her current housing situation, Monica explained: “at the beginning I felt great because it was the first time that I was able to provide stable housing for my children.” She adds: “is it the best neighborhood? Probably not. Would I feel comfortable, my kids outside playing around there? Probably not.” Later on, Monica noted in regards to housing: “I feel like that part of my life is okay.” Comparable to Jessica, Monica also highlights some of the shortcomings of her current housing situation. Yet, both these quotes illustrate that a housing situation can also just be “okay” and thereby lie somewhere in the middle of the spectrum between positive and negative, in addition to changing over time.

By contrast, Jacob is living in a negative housing situation. He describes his housing situation as “stressful” and emphasizes that it affects him “very negatively.” Jacob is living in a transitional house where he has his own room, but there are “bedbugs and cockroaches” and some people he is living with “have control issues.” He further

describes having trouble with the house manager and that “he just keeps saying ‘well if you don’t like it, move out.’” He stresses that “unfortunately, they sort of abuse their position.” Asked about moving later on in the interview, Jacob simply said: “yeah, I need to get out of that toxic environment.” Jacob’s housing situation illustrates a combination of negative factors, including the quality of his housing, affected by bedbugs and cockroaches, the effects of the people he is living with, and the management. These factors cumulate to a very negative housing situation and “toxic environment,” and Jacob stresses the far-reaching negative effects such a living situation can have on a person.

The quotes above illustrate how students’ experiences with their current housing situation vary. This is further underlined by some of the more general aspects of their housing situations. Of all students, two indicated that they currently live alone, two live in transitional housing, three live together with family members (e.g., siblings, parents, or grandparents), six students live with their partner or spouse, and more than half of the students live with children. Although not specifically asked whether they pay rent for or own their housing, students’ housing situations differ in this respect as well. Most students indicated paying rent for their housing, but a few students indicated owning a house and making mortgage payments. This is a factor to consider as a student owning a house and making mortgage payments may be further along in the process of paying off and owning their own house, which may be indicative of housing stability. However, owning a house and repaying a mortgage also brings a unique set of challenges with it.

One aspect of housing insecurity includes the broad range of challenges that may prevent people from, among other things, having consistent housing. Frequently moving is a form of housing insecurity (Goldrick-Rab, Baker-Smith, Coca, Looker & Williams, 2019). Therefore, students were asked how long they have lived in their current housing. The results, again, highlight the many different experiences of students in this study. More than a third of students have lived in their current housing for 5 years or more, with

several students having lived in their current housing for over a decade. One third has lived in their current housing between 1 and 4 years and four students have lived in their current housing for less than a year.

Housing Insecurity

In the course of the interview all students were given the definition for housing insecurity used in this study, which is: housing insecurity, often used as "an umbrella term" that includes various issues with housing "people may experience, including affordability, safety, quality, insecurity, and loss of housing" (PD&R, 2018, para. 2). Students were subsequently asked whether they would define themselves as housing insecure. More than a third, six students, define themselves as housing insecure. Among the nine students who do not define themselves as housing insecure, some added that "it can get to there" or that "it is still a possibility." Others noted that they were not currently experiencing housing insecurity but had in the past; this is discussed further later on.

The most common issues and concerns of housing insecurity named by students who defined themselves as housing insecure were concern for personal safety, the possibility of losing housing, and affordability. After hearing the definition, Monica, for example explained that she felt housing insecure "with the feeling safe part of it," thereby highlighting concerns for her personal safety.

"I'm like 'crap, are they going to tell me I have to move?"

The possibility of losing housing was mentioned by several students. When asked whether Frank, who lives by himself, would define himself as housing insecure, he answered "of course" and explained: "I would say it's very insecure in that it can be taken away. Yeah, I am at the mercy of the state or, you know, the school." His statement that his housing "can be taken away" highlights the constant possibility of losing one's

housing, dependent on outside factors. Jacob, who, as discussed earlier, is living in a "stressful" housing situation, explains: "Yeah, I mean the house manager, he wants me to move and he is gonna, he has threatened to give me an eviction notice." Similar to Frank, Jacob also highlights the possibility of losing his housing. His housing situation is directly threatened by possible eviction.

Several students indicated that they currently live in Section 8 or in low-income housing. Some of the students who live in Section 8 housing touched on the role of housing inspections. Asked whether her housing situation has any effect on her academics, Monica answered: "of course I feel like it, it'll affect your academic[s]." She further explains:

> Because I'm on Section 8, every time I do an inspection, I'm like 'crap, are they going to tell me I have to move?' You know. How is that going to affect me? Am I going to be able to concentrate? Am I going to be able to, you know, it's just, all those different things you have to think about.

Monica points out how inspections can cause stress. Moreover, her experience highlights yet another aspect of the possibility of losing housing, and effects it can have on a students' academics. The possibility of losing one's housing is also directly related to financial considerations and affordability of housing. Frank, who mentioned that his housing "can be taken away," addresses the affordability aspect by explaining: "it's always an issue, thinking about costs; financially, that's my biggest responsibility, at the beginning of the semester, making sure I have enough money to pay for rent; before anything else it's rent." By stating that "it's always an issue" he highlights how these concerns are a constant. His statement also illustrates how rent is one of the main financial concerns.

Notably, during the interview, Eric, who lives with his wife and two children in a duplex, shared that he has a back-up plan should he ever become homeless. In the context

of discussing what could effectively support Project Rebound students with their housing needs, he mentioned his back-up plan. He shares:

> I have a backup plan that if I should ever become homeless, I will sleep at the Walmart parking lot for three days at a time, which I'm allowed to without getting any violations in my car, and after those three days I'll leave to the next Walmart, and stay at that parking lot for three days until I'm able to afford my own housing.

His statement highlights several aspects related to this section. He concludes by saying that he would follow this plan until being able to afford his own housing again. This ties into the affordability aspect and the cost of housing. In addition, although this is merely speculation, one could argue that the fact that he has a back-up plan highlights that he may be conscious of the possibility of losing housing; this possibility may be a constant for many students. Significantly, Eric was not the only student who referred to the Walmart parking lot as a space where one can sleep in one's car. The awareness of this suggests that many students may be familiar with the topic of homelessness, whether from personal experience or from others, highlighting the awareness of vulnerability to these issues, and how many students may plan for the possibility of experiencing homelessness.

This section established that many students are experiencing housing insecurity and even among the students who do not identify as housing insecure, some still view it as a possibility. Students identified some of their key concerns associated with housing insecurity, namely safety, the possibility of losing housing, and affordability.

High and Increasing Costs

A key theme that consistently emerged throughout the interviews with students were high and increasing costs. This is consistent with existing literature that finds that today, housing is increasingly unaffordable (Broton & Goldrick-Rab, 2018; Olfert et al.,

2021). In the course of the interviews, students were asked whether their living costs had increased compared to what they were paying 3 to 5 years ago. The time frame of 3 to 5 years ago was chosen to be able to capture living costs before the COVID-19 pandemic, which may have potentially impacted living costs. More than half, eight students, indicated that their living costs have increased compared to what they were paying 3 to 5 years ago. Four students indicated that they had been incarcerated at that time, which of course means their living costs have increased. Two students reported that their situation had changed, including paying for themselves or other changes. One of those students indicated that he had lived in a more expensive area at the time, so in that respect he was paying less than he was in the past but that now, he was living off his savings because he is a full-time student. Of all 15 students, only one student who is still living in the same housing as 3 to 5 years ago reported living costs not having increased compared to 3 to 5 years ago. Daniel's account provides context to the topic of living costs. Daniel first explained how much he and his girlfriend are paying for rent, which he identifies as being "high," and added:

> I really don't have a lot of extra money, you know, discretionary income to work with. We have to pay the water bill, that's another expense. My girlfriend, she's on a program with PG&E and so I think we have a set rate for $170. And yeah, that is really about it. Though, then we kind of go half with the food stuff like that, too. So, it's kind of a struggle, it is, it is. But that's what I go to school, for so (laughter).

Aside from highlighting living costs, Daniel also notes that paying for these costs can be a "struggle."

“I paid my rent late”

A substantial number, over half of the students in this study, have experienced difficulties paying for their housing in the last 12 months. Existing literature identifies the inability to pay rent, mortgage or utility costs as the most common challenge among housing insecure students (Broton & Goldrick-Rab, 2018; The Hope Center, 2021). Consistent with these findings, students in this study identified difficulties paying for their utilities and rent or mortgage as their main challenges. Jessica mentions both these challenges. Asked whether she had experienced difficulties paying for her housing, including utilities in the past 12 months, she explained:

> My utilities, yeah, I have. Especially like, during Covid and summer, when we’re home more of the time, the bills are usually like pretty high. But other than that, there’s a time in between our semesters, like when my semester ends, so with my financial aid, I have to make it stretch out. And so that last month, before schools ending like in between that little period like this January, I paid my rent late, because I had to wait ‘till I got my financial aid. So that does happen like twice a year. But other than that, I’m always usually okay.

Jessica mentions several factors. First, she notes the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and how her bills are higher in the summer. In addition, her financial aid is directly tied to her ability to pay all her bills and is, therefore, also tied to difficulties paying the bills. These difficulties with paying for utilities and rent or mortgage often result in students partially paying the bills; this was mentioned by several students. Elena explained: “I had to work out something with my mortgage company” and continued that “they’re willing to kind of work with me on that versus like not paying at all becoming, you know, more housing insecure.” She adds that she had to spread out a mortgage company and that she is behind on paying for her utilities as well. Elena concludes: “I feel like if there was no communication with these companies, I probably would have lost my house.” Elena’s

statement highlights her efforts to not become “more housing insecure” while trying to pay her bills.

Jacob referenced another important aspect of difficulties paying for housing. When asked whether he had experienced any difficulties paying for his housing in the last 12 months, he answered: “in a way” and explained that he has “to do with less,” that he relies “on EBT, which is like a food stamp thing,” and that “I have to rely on, so I volunteer at different food banks so sometimes I take stuff home. And, of course I get the grant to stay here, to [go to] college.” Jacob’s statement draws a connection between paying for housing and other basic needs such as food. Regarding whether he had forgone paying for other basic needs like food in order to be able to pay for housing, he points out: “if I did not have these supports, I wouldn’t be able to, because I have no income, it’s just eating up my savings.” He adds what this means in light of the future and says: “in the future, yeah, I won’t, I would need to have to get a part-time job and not be a full-time student to have housing.” He concludes by explaining that his curriculum for his major “is pretty intense” and, therefore, having a part-time job “would mean I would have to reduce my course load…and extend my graduation date.” He notes that this may in turn also affect his grants because as a part-time student he would not receive the same amount as he does now as a full-time student. Jacob’s account highlights how receiving support is crucial and that if this support were to end, he would need to obtain a part-time job, which then in turn would jeopardize the grants he is receiving. This highlights how these considerations can be complex and aid, school, employment, and housing ultimately all tie together.

“Me going without a lot”

As detailed previously, basic needs insecurity is intertwined and it is important to note the overlapping nature of challenges caused by basic needs insecurity (Baker-Smith

et al., 2020; Goldrick-Rab, Baker-Smith, Coca, Looker & Williams, 2019; Goldrick-Rab, Baker-Smith, Coca & Looker, 2019). Several students participating in this study have forgone paying for their other basic needs in order to pay for their housing, including utility bills and other costs that arise. Asked whether she had forgone paying for her basic needs in order to pay the bills, Monica, who lives with her children, pointed out: "well, yeah, I mean, we can't keep the food cold if the lights are off." She explains: "so yeah, you have to make sacrifices. Maybe not paying it completely, but maybe just by paying partial to make sure that [the power] stays on, you know." She concludes: "so just making sacrifices, here and there, just to make sure that I can continue to provide them what they need. Their basic needs. Me going without a lot." As discussed in the previous section, several students indicated paying bills in parts. Monica's statement also highlights how her children are central in her considerations and that she goes "without a lot" in order to provide for them.

Several students mentioned that they would rather forego paying for their utilities than for other basic needs such as groceries or food. Elena, who is "paying a mortgage" on her "own home," explains: "I'd rather do it the other way around and work out something with the utility company versus going without food for my family." Correspondingly, Eric noted: "we chose instead to forego paying the PG&E, so that we can make sure we have adequate funds for more important needs, like…for food and clothing." Both Elena's and Eric's statements further highlight how basic needs like housing and food are closely related to each other.

Other students, who did not forego paying for basic needs in order to be able to pay the bills, indicated that they still had to save on other things. Marcus, who stated that he had "definitely" experienced difficulties paying for his housing in the past 12 months, replied that he did not forego paying for basic needs like food or groceries but remarked: "I did have to really, really consider what I really need and what I don't. So, I did limit

myself on, okay, maybe I just won't buy this, but I'll buy this." His statement highlights that even if paying for housing does not directly impact paying for other basic needs, they can still impact students' ability to pay for other things.

"Our bills skyrocketed"

Following the discussion of the effects of experiencing difficulties paying for housing, the contributing factors, or more specifically the high costs themselves, warrant closer attention. A third of the students specifically reported rent increases. Monica reported that she feels like her landlord increases rent yearly in order to keep up with the current state of the housing market and that for the area she is living in the rent is "a little unreasonable." Relatedly, Gino, who describes his housing situation as "good" and has lived there for over 5 years, reported that his monthly rent had "jumped" by about $150 in the past 2 years and Jessica reported that in addition to her monthly rent already increasing by $50 the first year of living there, and almost $100 last year, the rent is "supposed to go up again." By how much rent has increased in the recent past and how these costs accumulate is illustrated by Frank's statement:

> I mean, just in the last year it's gone up $100 [a month]. And you know, as a college student 100 bucks is a, you know, $1,200 a year. But I have certainly seen a growth exponentially as far as rent, yeah. I mean now to rent an apartment is what it would have cost to rent a house six years ago.

Not only do these statements underline by how much rent has increased, and what a substantial financial burden this can amount to, but as Jessica mentioned, this trend is ongoing. Inflation was named as a contributing factor to this increase by more than one student. As Michael points out: "but as we've seen, the cost of living itself increases with inflation and, you know, just all this other stuff that's going on." These high and increasing costs go far beyond just paying for housing through rent or a mortgage but at

the same time still directly affect the ability to pay for housing. It quickly became apparent that the core of the problem is not as simple as increasing rent but rather it is the totality of various increasing costs that accumulate. Two key issues emerged: increases in utility costs and transportation costs through high gas prices.

Many students throughout the interviews remarked that "everything" is more expensive today, but more than a third of students specifically identified high utility bills and how much the costs of their utilities have increased. This is exemplified by Elena who points out: "like the taxes went up, the insurance went up, and the utilities went way, way up." She describes her utilities as having gone "way, way up." The sheer amount utilities have increased is illustrated by Eric's statement. Asked whether he had experienced any difficulties with paying for his housing in the prior 12 months, Eric answered:

> Yes. More so because of the PG&E, I guess they were raising our payments, and our bills skyrocketed from a $100 a month to $400/$500 a month. And they justified it by, according to their memo, the fires in the hills, and other unforeseen events. That kind of had to pass on the increased rates to me, which was a hard pill to swallow. When, you know, how can you justify a 400% increase in, in payments?

For Eric, his "bills skyrocketed" and the increase in his utility costs adds $300 to $400 of additional costs, per month. This amounts to $3,600 to $4,800 of additional costs per year. Utilities are one of the constant costs of housing. As underlined by Monica's statement that "we can't keep the food cold if the lights are off," discussed earlier, students cannot simply choose to not use utilities in light of these significantly increasing costs.

The increasing costs go beyond the direct costs of housing as well. Several students pointed out that "everything" is increasing, including groceries, home supplies

and everyday products, thereby highlighting the resulting cumulative nature of these costs. Elena, who as mentioned earlier is paying a mortgage on her own house, notes how the cost of home supplies has increased:

> And then, of course, just the household items, like you know, toiletries, shampoos, stuff around the house all that's gone up, stuff to take care of the yard all that is also gone up. So, products are all going up. And for whatever reason my income didn't go up (laughter). So, I'm still on the same income, you know, and it's just not stretching as far as it used to. So that kind of prompted me to go back to school and get my degree, so that I can get a better job hopefully. And so here I am.

She underlines how all of these products have increased in price but at the same time people's wages are not keeping pace in order to balance out these increases. In addition, Elena points out how these increasing costs play a significant role in her choice to go back to school in order to obtain a job with higher income. Comparable to Elena, when asked if his living costs had increased in the past 3 to 5 years, Marcus pointed to increasing costs. He replied: "I would say yes, definitely. With everything else increasing, I mean, the most common things were like essentials, like Lysol and all that, everything increases, you know, but people are still forced to pay."

Another contributing factor noted by several students is the costs associated with technology and school expenses outside of tuition. As Elena noted; "going to school it's like I feel like that's an extra expense, all the way around, buying printer ink, everything adds up." This further ties into her statement discussed above and highlights the additional costs of being a student. That these costs can impact a student's consideration regarding their housing situation is highlighted by Marcus. When asked how he felt about his current housing situation, Marcus replied: "I would prefer to live in Fresno" and added "but at the moment, it's not the best decision for like covering costs of school and

anything that you might need. Like, I just recently bought this iPad." His statement highlights how going to school can add additional costs because students need additional supplies, most expensive of which, perhaps, is technology. This directly affects a student's ability to study, as Jacob points out: "if you are just getting out of prison [and] you have no computer, it's almost impossible to be a student, because of the Canvas and so forth." This suggests that students who have just recently been released may be particularly affected by these costs, potentially even hindering them from pursuing their higher education.

As has been demonstrated in this section, the increases in various costs accumulate to high sums. Yet, as Elena points out, despite all the increasing costs, wages have not increased accordingly, and people do not suddenly have more money available to them. As Marcus pointed out in his statement discussed above; "people are still forced to pay." Michael emphasizes this point by pointing to the rising costs of housing and education, stating: "but yet the rate of employment or unemployment is not keeping up, you know, with any of that." In the course of the interviews several students pointed out that their earnings simply do not go as far as what they used to or how far one would think they would go. This inevitably raises the question of where all of this additional money to pay for these increases and high costs is supposed to come from.

Research has established that working during college is not associated with a lower risk of basic needs insecurity (Goldrick-Rab, Baker-Smith, Coca, Looker & Williams, 2019; Goldrick-Rab, Baker-Smith, Coca & Looker, 2019). This contradicts the popular assumption that students experiencing basic needs insecurity can simply work more to meet their needs (Broton & Goldrick-Rab, 2018). Yet, high costs can mean that students have to work even more than what they already do. Eric's statement below provides further perspective. When asked whether going to school has hindered his ability to pay for housing in any way, he explained:

> Yes, it has, to the extent that I'm unable to maybe get two full-time jobs. I'm attempting to work two part-time jobs just on the condition that I'm allowed to do those part-time jobs online through Zoom and through, you know, other minimal means that aren't going to require my physical presence at the location. I haven't yet started, but it got to a point where I had to come up with other sources of income, and through another job, and I'm hoping that I'm able to juggle family, my education, my full-time job, and these two part-time jobs, just so that I can live in a way where I'm not worried about if I have money to pay bills or not. So had I not been going to school finding a second job would be no problem. But now that I am school, I can't, I have to be choosy about my jobs that may be offered or available, based off my schedule.

Eric's statement highlights that he is trying to work one full-time and two part-time jobs, meaning three jobs, just to be able to not worry about having enough money to pay his bills. He would be working three jobs while also going to school and having family responsibilities.

Notably, a negative influence of working even more emerged in the interviews, namely that certain vital resources are based on income. Eric explains that "thankfully there's other programs that help with the resources we need." However, he adds that "these resources are based off your income," which in his case means "with me working my full-time job, and possibly these two part-time jobs, they're going to disqualify me from resources that are affording me to kind of not worry about the totality of my responsibility to myself and my family." He points out that "it's like a Catch-22" because "these resources that help you kind of live a stable means of provision and security, housing security, they're based off you being limited in your income." Therefore, he concludes:

> So, it's like the government's only going to help you if you're poor. But if you're hard working, and you're spending 100 hours a week working to have a stable income for your family, we are going to punish you by taking away the help that we previously afforded you.

Eric was not the only student who highlighted this paradox. Correspondingly, Jessica explained: "So like I'm bettering my life, but then, as soon as you start to better your life, they want to take things from you…" This illustrates that simply working more is not necessarily the solution to difficulties paying for housing.

"I was paying $600 a month for gas"

Aside from the high utility costs, the other key issue related to costs that very quickly emerged was the costs associated with transportation. Nearly everyone in the sample commutes by car. Out of the 15 students, 10 students mentioned gas prices and the cost of transportation, and some mentioned that financial assistance for transportation costs would help them or other students. Emily, who lives outside of Fresno, points out: "I mean, even just commuting to work" became expensive. She notes that "gas has gone down a lot" which is good, but underlines what it costs by saying: "when it was at like $6, I was spending like over $200 to $300 a month on just gas. So yeah, it was, it's been not great (laughter)." While she notes that gas prices have decreased, she highlights that the increase significantly impacted her cost of commuting.

In order to provide context to the burden that these costs can amount to, first the commute to campus itself needs to be considered. The commutes of the students in this study ranged from a couple of minutes' drive to 58 minutes without traffic, and up to 1 hour and 45 minutes with traffic, one way. Two students commute nearly an hour one way, which amounts to two hours to go back and forth to campus. Conditions such as traffic and weather can also make that commute unpredictable.

For more than half of the students, their commute influences their decision to choose in-person or online classes. Regarding the high gas costs and when asked whether the commute had any influence on choosing in-person or online classes, Jessica explained:

> So, after my experience last semester with having to be out there so much, and just the cost of gas, I mean when the gas was really high, I was paying $600 a month for gas. Yeah. And you know, because that's just work and school, work and school all week. But that's not it. I still have things I have to do when I'm here and doctors appointments and you know, all these other things that come up. So yeah, [I] was spending about $600. So look, this semester, I was like it's just way too much for me. I'm gonna try, and it's my last undergrad semester, I'm gonna try and get all my courses online, and then when I have to work it'll only be a couple of times a week out there. So yes, it, it did. After experiencing that, and actually getting through, you know, I think it was more than a semester, it was just so much on my car, my tires, I mean everything, you know. So yeah, it did.

As can be seen, the increased cost of gas clearly influenced Jessica's choice in courses this semester. Again, these are increases in costs of several hundred dollars that add on to the other costs discussed. Transportation costs go beyond gas as well. Several students mentioned unexpected expenses or the unreliability of their transportation. Jessica points out that "luckily" she has "so many resources" and specifically mentions "emergency assistance through Project Rebound" because these resources helped her offset some of the unexpected costs that arose. She explains: "my brakes went out, or one time my window got broken on the way commuting, a rock shattered my window, and so you know, different things like that." She concludes: "and then I'll apply for a grant, and it kind of offsets those things, and gives me that little, you know that room, to make it

through the semester for my other costs." Her statement highlights some additional costs a long commute can cause and emphasizes how important it was for her to receive support for those unexpected costs in order for her to "make it through the semester" with her other costs.

Even if no unexpected expenses occur, driving long distances impacts the car itself. Gino explained that his car has "302,000 miles on it (laughter) and it's 22 years old." He highlights how his commute added to this by saying: "I've had that car for the last 3 years, and so I've put a little over 120,000 miles on it in 3 years. So, it's a considerable amount of time driving." This can be another potential source of costs. Relatedly, Jessica explains that just "the changing the oil on my car [is] a $100 every 3,000 miles, which comes pretty quickly when you're driving so much every day." In conclusion, commuting can be very expensive, especially in light of high gas prices. This is further exacerbated for students who live farther away and drive to campus to attend classes.

Commuting remained an issue throughout the study. Another point in that regard is that concerns regarding the commute itself can further increase the burden of commuting. Jessica, who spends 2 hours on the freeway when commuting back and forth from Fresno State, emphasized that "a lot of people die in car accidents, and when you're on the freeway a lot, then your chances obviously are higher." Similarly, Emily explained that commuting to campus for 4 days a week in the previous semester "was like not fun" and explained: "it's the drive, the freeway is not, the 99 is not great, you know? So yeah, it was not fun commuting." This highlights that commuting can be a real burden for many students for various reasons.

A consistent wish among students was to live closer to Fresno or campus than they currently do. More than half of the students in this study would prefer to live closer. When asked about his goals and hopes for the future in terms of housing, Daniel

explained that because he will not graduate for another couple of years, he "of course" would "much rather be closer to the campus." He also points out that if he was closer to campus he would have more time on campus, and he would be able to "utilize some of the resources there, tutoring, little bit of everything." In that regard he concludes that being away from campus has "an impact."

A majority of students in this study, nine students, report having both in-person and online classes. Of the remaining six students, four students have all in-person classes and two students have all online classes. This means that a majority of students commute to campus every week. Commuting to campus for in-person classes can also add to an already very full schedule. Eric explains that it is not so much the length of his commute that has an influence on his choice to choose in-person or online classes, but rather his work schedule. He points out: "I need time to study; for every hour of class they want you to study two hours at home" and explains "so, any time on the road and any time in class takes away from time, of my study time, takes away time for me to prepare to get ready for work." Eric, who as discussed previously is trying to work even more, says: "I'm really on a tight schedule, and so online classes are more beneficial for my schedule." He describes the difficulty of "trying to juggle school, work, and personal responsibilities" and concludes "had I not had personal responsibilities or occupational responsibilities, the traveling distance to work wouldn't be an issue at all." The choice whether to choose in-person or online classes can, therefore, also be influenced by other aspects. Commuting can also add to an already full schedule. Other students note that they prefer either in-person or online classes for other reasons than housing or their commute. For example, Monica, who explained "I prefer in-person because I'm more of a hands-on learner" or Daniel, who replied: "no. But what influences me, I am not that computer literate, so I would prefer person-to-person, just because I've been incarcerated,

I'm still learning new technology in the internet." In that regard, despite long commutes and high gas costs, many students seem to not have diverted away from in-person classes.

Housing Experiences in the Past

Having established some of the students' current housing situations and having provided context on the difficulties and costs students are currently facing, this section will discuss their past housing situations. A key theme that emerged was that several students, including students who are currently in stable housing and happy with their housing situation, have experienced housing insecurity and homelessness in the past. It is important to note that the students in this study were only asked how they would describe their past housing situations and what their past experience had been like in finding and applying to housing. No questions specifically asked whether they had experienced housing insecurity or homelessness in the past. Questions about experiencing housing insecurity and homelessness were focused on the current housing situations of students. Hence, the number of students who have experienced housing insecurity in the past could potentially be even higher than detailed in this section because they did not specifically mention it during the interviews.

"Way back, I was actually homeless at one point"

More than a third of students specifically mentioned having experienced housing insecurity in the past. For some, these experiences ranged back as far as childhood. Jessica described her past housing situations by saying: "as a child it was a very unstable." Four students specifically mentioned having experienced homelessness in the past. David, who now lives in a house and is paying off his mortgage, mentioned that he initially was living with his parents after being released from prison but that he felt

ashamed for living with his parents at his age and did not want to live with his parents. David subsequently spent "a long time" living in his car.

Sara, who today has a very positive housing situation as mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, indicated that she had "moved a lot" in the past and added that "way back, I was actually homeless at one point." She adds: "but since I got clean and sober and kind of got my act together, I've been a little more stable, but still a lot of moving." As documented in the literature review, moving frequently is a form of housing insecurity (Goldrick-Rab, Baker-Smith, Coca, Looker & Williams, 2019). In the report of the #RealCollege survey, the Hope Center (2021) cautions that moving can be emotionally draining and significantly impact already strained financial means.

Other students reported fluctuating housing situations over time. When asked about his past housing situations, Frank described them as having been "all over the place" and concluded: "I'd say I have had just about every kind of situation." The literature identified basic needs insecurity as multigenerational; hardships experienced during childhood often echo into adulthood and students who come from a background with basic needs insecurity are more likely to experience the same later on during their studies (Olfert et al., 2021). Jessica, who experienced unstable housing in her childhood, explains that she "was able to manage some stability like maybe in my late twenties" but after that period she explains that for several years she "was very unstable" and "would stay with family." Her accounts of her past experiences with housing further highlight how a situation can fluctuate. She explains:

> And then I did have a little place, it was like a studio, but I was by myself, I didn't have my son yet, and my daughter was with her dad. And then, I was able to, after my incarceration, I was homeless with my son, with the baby. And I was able to find us a low-income apartment, and that was horrible, but because it was stable,

> it kind of made it okay. And then, when I got into Fresno State, I moved from that town and that location, and I've been here since.

Jessica's past experiences highlight that housing situations can fluctuate over years, including experiencing periods of homelessness. Her past experiences also influence her choices today. She explains that she has "thought about moving" and "getting a house and stuff" but given her history with unstable housing situations she "really" wants to make sure her next move is going to be to a "permanent place, at least for a good 5 to 10 years" because "I know how much it affected me, and so I'm afraid that it'll have that same effect on my children." She adds that this has "kind of made me like, stay." Jessica's experiences show the importance of including past experiences in this type of study as well because they provide context.

Jessica was not the only student who had moved in with family in the past. In fact, several students indicated moving in with family at some point. Another student who moved in with family is Elena. She describes that for her, the "opportunity kind of popped up where I could purchase a home" and in order to be able to purchase the house, she explains that "I went ahead and stayed with my mom." She notes that "even though I didn't want to, I kinda had to in order to do like a permanent situation instead of, you know, renting here, renting there. I needed to have my own home." In order to work towards a more stable and long-term housing situation Elena moved in with her mother.

Asked about her past experiences in finding and applying to housing, Monica named several barriers to obtaining housing. Barriers to obtaining housing are discussed in the next section titled "Barriers Related to Prior Incarceration & Reentry Aspects." She also describes her past housing situations and explains that she had always lived in "poverty-stricken areas" or "underserved areas" and shares some of her past housing situations as "grouping up with family just to make sure that we're able to have stable housing" and having been in a "program for 3 years, and my kids stood there with me for

2 of those years. So, smaller than what we needed, but a roof over our head, I guess." Similar to Jessica, Monica experienced fluctuating housing situations, lived with family at times, and described eventually being able to find and obtain housing, even if the housing itself had limitations.

Many people released from prison face unstable living situations upon reentry to society (Raphael, 2011). This finding from existing literature and the notion that housing situations can fluctuate over time and be impacted by various factors is underlined by Eric's past experiences with housing. He says: "my past experience has been, upon my release from prison I had nowhere to go." He explains that "through the mercy of other people, they kind of put money aside for me to help me get on my feet" and states that the money "was supposed to be used to help me, you know, get a used car or get other needs besides housing to get me on my feet until I find a job." However, for Eric, the COVID-19 pandemic directly impacted his plans. He explains: "because Covid took away some of the housing plans that I had, I was forced to live in a hotel" which resulted in him having to use "some of the resources that were supposed to be used for something else to provide housing for me." He adds: "I spent approximately, I think, $700, just to live in a hotel for one week, not knowing where I was going to live the following week. But at least I had a week of secured housing." This led Eric to be "forced to ask my dad to live with him. He initially said no, but after a couple of days reluctance, reluctantly said yes." Upon meeting his future wife, Eric was able to stay with her. However, this housing was negatively impacted when "shortly after that her landlord gave her an eviction notice because he wanted to sell his property. So, we were forced to find another house." Eric stresses how difficult it is to find other housing. He emphasizes how "that was kind of a stressful moment for us, a time period for us," but adds that "thankfully we found somebody who was willing to work with us, and she has been working with us as far as our housing." He concludes by saying: "but I would say that on a scale from 1 to 10, 10

being the hardest, as for secured housing, I say the stress level was 6/7." Eric's housing situation was negatively impacted by several factors, including the COVID-19 pandemic and receiving an eviction notice. He also stresses how difficult it is to find other housing; the topic of finding and applying to housing is discussed in the next section.

"It was damn near impossible to find anything in the area"

Several students noted how difficult it is to find suitable housing that is in a good environment and condition, while also affordable. An example of this is provided by Frank. Asked about his past experiences in finding and applying to housing, Frank exclaimed: "oh my goodness" and went on to explain that when he moved to Fresno "securing an apartment, I mean it came down to last minute, like I got an apartment a week or two before school started because it was damn near impossible to find anything in the area." He also points to a significant contributing factor and says: "I mean, all around here it's student housing but it's priced the same as it would be in any other part of the city; it's not really cost effective for students." Frank was one of many students who pointed out how unaffordable students housing on and near campus is. As Frank's experiences highlight, this can lead to significant difficulties finding housing in time before the semester starts.

A theme that emerged during the interviews concerns the barriers that exist even just to apply to obtain housing. Major barriers include the cost of the applications, background checks, credit checks, and the overall complexity of the process. When asked about her past experience in finding and applying to housing, Emily pointed out that "in the past it was like easier. I feel like it was cheaper, and the processes were different, and now it's like they want like half of your income." Regarding some of the differences in the process now compared to the past, she explains that "they want different documents" and that in the low-income housing she has been living in, "it's like usually just your

checking account" but that "now they want like utility bills". She also highlights another point that directly ties into the theme of cost; she points out that today there are significantly fewer private owners, leading to application fees becoming more prevalent than they were in the past. She says: "so most of them is like you have to pay just to put in an application, like you have to pay $30 to $70, depending on where you want to go." She notes that "that's always been around," but emphasizes that today it seems to be more prevalent compared to the past, and that more properties are now owned by companies than private owners. These aspects and the process of applying to housing directly contributes to her not wanting to move. She explains that she is "afraid to go, like I probably won't move out of here until like I have a full-time, full paying job, you know, like secure, because it's so expensive, and it's risky, and it's gonna be easier just to stay here and pay less." Emily identifies the complex process of applying, including the need for various documents, and the costs associated with applications as developments that make obtaining new housing difficult. These factors may prevent someone from moving even if they are experiencing issues in their current housing.

Elena specifically named income as a barrier to finding and applying to housing and pointed out: "as far as like the income, a lot of these places they want three times the amount of income [as the amount of rent]." She explains that, "at that time when I was searching for an apartment, that was not enough income that I was getting." This led to her having "to look for lower income housing." She adds that: "sometimes it's just not the safest" and that "of course there's waiting lists, so it's just not very easy, or it wasn't very easy for me to find some things." Requirements to prove three times the income effectively barred Elena from certain apartments when she was trying to find housing. This is something that may affect other students as well, especially students who may be working part-time in order to go to school, resulting in them having a lower income.

Eric, who was "forced to find another house" after his housing situation was impacted by an eviction notice due to the landlord's decision to sell his property, similarly points out that "it's not easy to find housing, because you need referrals, you need first and last deposits, there's a bunch of things that you need to find the other housing." Eric also points out that despite people not quite agreeing on whether the COVID-19 pandemic is still ongoing or not, "they are passing laws to help people remain in their housing, not get evicted due to their lack of ability to pay." Therefore, he explains that: "if you needed housing…the difficulty…wasn't whether you can afford it or not, it was could you find it or not." He adds that during that time "a lot of people weren't even trying to rent new homes" and that due to the COVID-19 pandemic, "they were closed," were not accepting applications at the time, and that "you'd have to make appointments, it was hard to even get in line just to see if you're qualified to get in a place." His statement highlights that there are obstacles to even just finding housing and then, a process to see whether one qualifies for certain housing. Similar to Emily, Eric also emphasizes the cost aspect of applications and explains:

> And not only that, they run credit checks, and you have to pay for them to run a credit check on your name that doesn't even guarantee you housing in that apartment complex. And so, you're just kind of spending money just to see if you qualify and, I mean, every time you get a credit check you take a hit on your credit. And so, you know, unless we're going to do all the housing hunting within the next three days, most people can't afford to take a credit hit just to see if they can't qualify to move into housing. And so those were the hard parts about finding housing, and how hard it [is] for an individual.

Eric's accounts highlight that finding and obtaining housing is a complex and potentially long process, that is costly, and negatively impacts the credit score that is an important part of the application. Particularly if one is in immediate need of housing, like Eric was

after receiving an eviction notice, this could potentially seriously impact someone's housing situation.

The impact that these extra expenses for applications can have and how costly they are is highlighted by Daniel who emphasizes: "you know, there are credit checks, which is probably $100 every time you do a credit check for any type of housing in Fresno." Later on in the interview, he highlights how financial assistance could support students trying to find housing and elaborated that a family member had recently gone "through" the costly application process in order to find a house. He adds that paying for credit and background checks related to housing applications still does not guarantee housing and says: "I'm pretty sure every apartment or house…want[s] $100, on average, just for the background check, and if you don't pass the background check…they won't rent to you." He thereby highlights that even if one chooses to go through this complicated and expensive process, one still may not obtain housing.

The quotes emphasize that even applying to housing can be a financial burden. Arguably, people who have only recently been released may be particularly affected by this. Existing literature has well documented that formerly incarcerated people rarely get the resources they need to meet their basic needs immediately upon release (Raphael, 2011). This of course also means that they do not have the financial means to meet requirements to pay the security deposit and/or first and last months of rent in advance, which further hinders them from obtaining housing (Roman & Travis, 2004). The discussed statements extend these considerations to include the application process as well.

Barriers Related to Incarceration History

Some scholars have identified finding and securing adequate housing as the leading reentry challenge (Fontaine & Biess, 2012). The stigma formerly incarcerated

people often face due to their past criminal convictions leads to discrimination in various areas of life, such as housing (Wakefield & Uggen, 2010). The impact of incarceration and having a record on obtaining housing is illustrated in this section. The two main barriers to housing named by students were the stigma of having a record that may be identified through background checks, and inadequate credit that may be identified through credit checks.

"Because I have a felony, they did deny me"

The stigma associated with a past criminal conviction significantly limits housing options (Berry & Wiener, 2020). This is underlined by David. When asked about his past experience in finding and applying to housing, David remarked: "no one wants someone out of prison." Many landlords/landladies conduct criminal background checks on applicants as standard practice (Roman & Travis, 2004). Jessica describes her experiences:

> I did try and apply for like Section 8 housing, that was an apartment a little bit closer to school, so I thought that that would work better for me, but because I have a felony, they did deny me, and that has happened to me like three times that I have applied, and I can't get it because of my background.

For Jessica, her record coming up in the application process is restricting her ability to move. Not only that, her record is also preventing her from living closer to school. Another barrier mentioned by students was the issue of not having a rental history long enough to provide a reference. Daniel pointed out that if he had to apply for housing on his own, he is "pretty sure" that he would have "difficulty." He offers some contributing factors and explains: "I don't have a lot of rental history and I've been incarcerated a very, very long time." His statement highlights that having spent more time incarcerated

intensified these barriers; such students cannot show rental history for that time and their credit score may be accordingly impacted.

Similar to Jessica and Daniel, when asked what her past experience in finding and applying to housing has been like, Sara explains that in the past, “it was always a stressor knowing that I have a criminal background, knowing that because a lot of times the applications ask for that.” She further adds that “not having like a rental history” and “not having good credit” also contributed to this. Notably, she also points out that these factors have “all changed now” but that in the past “it was definitely a lot harder” and that she “definitely struggled, because the only places that will really take somebody with like a criminal background are the places you don’t want to live, you know (laughter).” Her statement highlights how background checks can relegate certain applicants to undesirable housing. Further, Sara’s statement also underlines another important factor, namely that these barriers, like credit checks, can decrease over time. This is discussed in more detail later on.

Students also pointed out the challenges of obtaining a well-paying job with a record. For Monica this significantly contributed to her going back to school. She explains that “at the beginning, I feel like it was my only option, because I was formerly incarcerated.” She shares her experiences upon release:

> I was just out. I was being denied left and right for employment, and so I was in the process of trying to get my kids back and try to re-establish myself in society. And, I didn’t see any other option other than going back to school and trying to, you know, get enough time under my belt that I felt you know people wouldn’t judge me.

Monica’s statement illustrates how she faced significant barriers to employment and how going back to school was her “only option” in light of these barriers. Similar to how a lack of rental history can act as a barrier to obtaining housing, a lack of employment

history can further hinder a person from obtaining and subsequently paying for their housing. This and other barriers are further underlined by Luis, who explains some of the barriers experienced by people upon release. He stresses that for "people that [are] just barely getting out of prison, it's very challenging" because "a lot of us don't have employment history, a lot of us don't have any credit history." Luis highlights what these barriers lead to: "you definitely can't purchase anything unless you have like a co-signer and somebody who gives you a lot of money." He adds: "and then, secondly, even renting something, 'cause you know, a landlord is gonna want to see your credit history, they're gonna wanna see that you have a stable employment." Luis stresses that "it's very challenging" and adds "they even do background checks, right?" He concludes that he thinks "it's very challenging for folks who don't have, like the right socioeconomic support, to get on their feet through housing, like post release." Luis summarizes the many barriers to housing faced by formerly incarcerated people upon release and at the same time also points out the importance of having a co-signer and/or socioeconomic support that may be able to alleviate some of these barriers.

The experiences and statements discussed in this section are consistent with reentry literature that highlights the significant barriers to housing faced by formerly incarcerated people. However, beyond that, this study also highlights another factor that occurs earlier in the process of finding and obtaining housing and is important to consider: the existing barriers may lead to fear of even applying. Monica explains that before her current housing situation she "was scared to look for a place." Gino's past experience with finding and applying to housing underlines some of the factors discussed above and further provides context on the concerns this can cause. He explains:

> Well upon being released, obviously with addiction, and everything, credit was horrible. So, it had to be like, take what you could get, and not what you want. And just navigating that process with the, you know, you have the fear of (pause)

> your formally incarcerated past coming up, your credit, you know, the lack of high paying jobs with the criminal background.

Related to other students' statements, Gino highlights the difficulties of navigating the process of applying to housing with these barriers in place. In addition, his statement underlines that the barriers to obtaining housing lead to limited housing options, that is, having to "take what you could get."

"When you get down to the fine print, most people are actually excluded from it"

Despite these barriers to obtaining housing, obtaining and maintaining housing is often a condition of parole (Phillips & Spencer, 2013). Monica underlines this by explaining that this is especially for people "who are just getting out of prison, and you have to have an address, so, it's just hard." Frank also touches on housing as a condition to parole and emphasizes the important role the new Project Rebound house could play in this. He points out that "if Project Rebound has its own housing" then "you're better able to help those people just coming out of prison or jail; I mean, your options are limited" and adds that "a lot of them are having difficulties finding a place to parole because they don't have housing." He concludes: "so being able to do that and take away that hurdle for those guys or ladies could be really huge." Project Rebound's new housing at Fresno State is discussed in further detail at the end of this chapter. Frank's statements highlight the need for support regarding housing in the period of time after release, especially in light of housing often being a condition of parole.

Conditions of parole can also restrict people's housing options even further, thereby limiting their options. Speaking generally to potential improvements in the future, Michael discusses how "marginalization" occurs in light of some of the support programs for housing. He points out that "when you actually look at it in terms of the

amount of individuals that could really benefit from Section 8 compared to those that actually qualify" many limitations of access are highlighted. He explains:

> If you have, like a drug offense, or whatever they won't rent to you. You don't qualify, you're banned from Section 8. If you have any type of like a sexual offense or anything you're banned from Section 8 housing. So, if you have any type of violent crime, for the most part you're banned from Section 8. But the problem with the violent crime terminology, is that an umbrella in that definition is so wide that just about everybody falls under that violent crime, only because of that broad definition. But if you actually look at the case factors and what that individual was actually convicted of, your definition of violence and what is and what isn't violence might change. You know, because they use that term very broadly, and because of that you have a very large group of individuals that is now banned from having access to those resources like Section-8…

Restrictions in accessing housing are also highlighted in the existing literature that documents that laws and policies prohibit people convicted for certain felonies, particularly people who have been convicted for sex or drug offenses, from accessing public housing (Roman & Travis, 2006). While the literature focuses on public housing, this also renders true for Federal Government rental assistance programs like Section 8 housing.

Michael concludes: "so yes, they say there's housing available, there's Section 8, you can do this, and you can do that" but adds that "but really, when you get down to the fine print, most people are actually excluded from it. And those are the conversations that aren't being had." Michael's accounts draw attention to the issue of access and how parole conditions and having been convicted of certain offenses can further exacerbate the already existing barriers to housing and further restrict options. His explanations also suggest that many formerly incarcerated people may be disconnected from assistance

they require due to having been convicted of certain crimes. The importance of housing and living in a conducive environment for a positive trajectory is highlighted next.

Environment, Crime, and Housing

Housing insecurity and homelessness often contribute to formerly incarcerated people finding themselves in situations that lead to parole violations, treatment failures and recidivism (Lutze et al., 2014; Tsai & Rosenheck, 2012). Without adequate and stable housing, finding employment, abstaining from alcohol or other substances, or participating in prosocial activities is extremely difficult (Fontaine & Biess, 2012). Jacob, while not speaking from first-hand experience, underlines this by explaining:

> I mean, I have never really been homeless, but I would imagine that you can spiral down even further, and then revert back to what you had, the maladaptive behaviors like the self-medication, addictions, and all kinds of things that, being formerly incarcerated, that you may revert to, you know? Just like I said, maladaptive behavior, and bad coping skills, because you are stressed.

Jacob highlights that homelessness may cause people to "revert back to" past ways; he thereby highlights the significant impact homelessness can have on a person's life and how it can impede positive trajectories. The likelihood of engaging in criminal activity is increased by experiencing housing insecurity and homelessness as well (Lutze et al., 2014).

"Being away from an environment where there is crime"

Existing literature documents how interventions that address a formerly incarcerated person's criminogenic risk and needs can significantly reduce recidivism (Andrews & Bonta, 2010). The important role that one's neighborhood plays in this is highlighted in this section. A key theme throughout this study was the importance of

location. Students consistently pointed out the importance of the neighborhood and environment one lives in. In David's words: "that's everything." Several students stressed the importance of living in a positive environment. When asked what the most important characteristic in terms of housing was, Daniel explains:

> The most important characteristic, I would say, being away from an environment where there is crime. I don't want to be in that environment, just because, just the history of me, you know, me getting in trouble and stuff. I don't think I get in trouble now, because it's different, I'm a little bit more educated than I was in the past. However, I think the environment is like, that's the number one contributing factor for me to feel like I'm safe. I need to feel like I'm safe, and nobody won't try to victimize me.

Daniel's statement underlines several factors related to the neighborhood one lives in. Not only does he want to stay away from an environment that could lead him to get "in trouble" but he also highlights safety as an important factor and underlines that "I need to feel like I'm safe." However, living in a positive environment is also frequently associated with higher living costs, as Daniel points out: "well, I feel [rent is] a little bit too high, but I live in a very good neighborhood" and adds "I am on parole so I don't want to be in certain environments, so it is costing me to be in a good environment where there's not a lot of crime and stuff like that." Incarceration particularly affects the most disadvantaged people in society (Raphael, 2011; Wakefield & Uggen, 2010). This includes the aspect of economic disadvantage (Wakefield & Uggen, 2010). Therefore, despite the important role the neighborhood one lives in may have, for many it may not be financially possible to live in a good neighborhood or move to a positive environment if it is attached to a significant increase in living costs.

The importance of the neighborhood one lives in is similarly emphasized by David, who reported living in his car for a "long time" in the past. He explains that he

would have had to live in a bad neighborhood upon release, which he chose not to do. He stresses that in light of his past, this would have made everything worse because he would have been living in an environment that is close to gangs and crime. This further underlines that for some, staying away from certain neighborhoods and environments may be a crucial component to a positive trajectory and their desistance from crime. The statements by Daniel and David emphasize the important role the neighborhood one lives in plays in a positive trajectory upon reentry and suggest that further attention should be devoted to address housing needs upon release.

The importance of location and living in a positive environment also applies to transitional housing. Regarding the most important characteristic in terms of housing, Michael points out: "there's kind of a lot I think that goes into that, because sometimes when we think of housing, we're just thinking of a roof over our head, right?" He emphasizes that one of "the biggest issues that needs to be taken into consideration in housing, is making sure that it's in a conducive environment." Michael thereby echoes the statements of other students in emphasizing the importance of living in a positive environment. However, he also points out that "most of the low-income housing or the transitional housing, they're located in neighborhoods that aren't conducive to a positive trajectory." He goes on to explain that it might be a neighborhood that "experiences higher crime rates" and emphasizes that "there's going to be certain zip codes that most of the transitional housings are, you know, relegated to." Those areas, he points out, "make it too easy for somebody to get involved back in that lifestyle." Hence, despite the neighborhood and living in a positive environment playing an important role for a successful trajectory, many are "relegated" to environments that may lead to people getting involved "back in that lifestyle."

Michael concludes that a significant aspect of housing is to ensure that the housing that is available "is conducive to the needs of the individual," which goes beyond

simply having “somewhere where you can stay, but what they’re not telling you about is that there’s a drive by shooting there every day, or every other day.” He stresses the consequences of this by explaining:

> You know, that’s not a safe environment for a house and if you’re taking an individual who is in need of that type of assistance, it’s almost like you’re putting them right back in the situation that they’re trying to get out of. It’s almost like you’re putting them right back in that situation to set them up for failure to go right back into prison or criminality, or whatever it was, only because you have a political climate that doesn’t want to allow transitional housing in certain neighborhoods.

Michael’s statement highlights another aspect, namely that public opposition to having formerly incarcerated people reside in their neighborhoods also seriously impedes efforts to create housing facilities dedicated to formerly incarcerated people (Roman & Travis, 2006). At the same time Michael highlights the important role neighborhood plays in preventing recidivism and suggests that transitional houses could benefit from being located in a positive environment.

Consequences of Housing Insecurity and Release Without Support

Although efforts have been made to provide reentry services to people released form incarceration (California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, 2023), evidence shows formerly incarcerated people still face difficulties. A relative of Marcus was just recently released from prison. Marcus’s statement below provides further perspective:

> …they’re kinda just thrown out there. You’re supposed to (pause) after spending a specific, I guess an amount of years away from home, and from socializing, you know, you kinda are expected to reintegrate to your society. It might be very

> difficult for a lot of people. I guess this would tie into with like income and working, like you only know one thing, for them it might be selling drugs, or you know. And you come out and you are supposed to be a member of society. But if they only know this and they are not taught something, which that might be something inside of prison that they might emphasize like, let's teach these people, educate them in a sense, that would help them come out and not experience much homelessness. Cause, I mean, for myself if I were be in a situation where I am homeless and it comes on to it like, I know it would cross my mind, well if I sell drugs, like that might help me. It's not accepted and I may get into legal trouble but for some other people that is what they have in front of them and they have to work with what they got.

This statement underlines that simply providing resources or better support to prepare to find and obtain housing is important but additional factors, like employment, must be taken into consideration to create long-term support solutions. This lends support to Lutze et al.'s (2014) argument that housing interventions combined with support services may reduce high risk behaviors that lead to recidivism.

Macro-Level Benefits of Supporting Housing Needs

Several students pointed out that addressing housing needs ultimately brings benefits to society. This section discusses these macro-level benefits brought forth by students. Michael points out: "being able to provide access to adequate housing, we're going to see a lot more success rates with our students through Project Rebound because it goes back to meeting that basic need, right?" Michael was one of several students that emphasized throughout the interview that housing is a basic need. He further adds:

> If we can create a program to where those needs are met, then that will completely change the trajectory, you know, of their lives and where they're headed, because

> all these needs are met, so okay, well, now, you can focus on you, and your goals and your aspirations, and what drives you as an individual, what are you passionate about? Because until you have those needs met, you're never going to figure out the rest of that other equation, you know?

He emphasizes that such a program would be "an astronomical resource." Michael points out that not only is supporting Project Rebound students' basic needs vital for their success, but supporting all students' basic needs will benefit society in the long term. He explains that among all students, Project Rebound and beyond, there are students who are experiencing housing insecurity and food insecurity and, therefore, "if we can create more programs that meet those needs, then the students themselves are going to be better off and then that success that they have is going to translate right back into their communities." He concludes by pointing out macro-level benefits and states:

> …so yes, it starts with that individual, but we need to look at the big picture and be like, how much more beneficial is this going to be for society because we're able to help these individuals, one person at a time.

He emphasizes that "when you look at the totality of those individuals and the impacts that they're gonna have, I think it behooves us not just as Project Rebound, but as a society, to make those investments in those individuals." Michael underlines the importance of addressing basic needs insecurity among the student population and illustrates that this will not only benefit the students and their own success but that success can ultimately uplift entire communities.

Characteristics of Good Housing

In order to gain a better sense of what constitutes good housing, students were asked what they felt was the most important characteristic in terms of housing. This section further adds to the previous discussion regarding the importance of neighborhood

and location. In addition, students were also asked about their hopes and goals for the future.

“I want to be safe”

When asked what the most important characteristics of housing are, students had a very clear answer: safety. Jessica said: “I want to be safe.” Safety was by far the most common answer and location emerged as the overwhelming theme. Tying directly into location, students emphasized the importance of the environment they are living in, as discussed in the previous section, “Environment, Crime & Housing.” In addition, closeness, proximity, or accessibility to either campus or other amenities were mentioned as well as the condition of the housing. Elena emphasized the importance that it is “safe and not in a bad neighborhood,” but also added that it is important that it “doesn’t have any like underlining conditions like mold or something hidden.” This further highlights the priorities of students in terms of housing: living in stable and quality housing, somewhere safe, and preferably close to campus.

A key issue that emerged was that in many instances, the cost of housing dictates where one can live, and where one cannot. Several students mentioned that they are staying at their current location due to reasons of affordability. Asked what the most important characteristic in terms of housing is, Emily named the environment and neighborhood one lives in. She adds: “and definitely cost, I mean because that kind of dictates where you can live, like you don’t really have a choice in some situations.” Her statement highlights that cost can dictate where one can live and, in many cases, does not really leave a choice. She emphasizes that: “you’re kind of just stuck with whatever you can afford.” She further adds: “so yeah, cost. And then, the actual neighborhood, because there’s a lot cheaper places to live. But I mean, you sacrifice the neighborhood and the safety.” Her statement provides additional perspective to the discussion about the

importance of living in a positive environment and that this may not always be an option. She concludes: “that’s definitely a concern which also kind of sucks that you have to sacrifice that to live somewhere cheaper.”

Like Emily, Marcus also highlights how affordability impacts where one can live. Marcus who lives outside of Fresno explains:

> If I do make the decision to move out here, housing wise you might, because of what you can, I guess afford and not afford, you have to decide well do you want to live in a decent neighborhood, unstable neighborhood, as in like you are exposed to drugs, you know, daily criminal activity.

His statement highlights some of the factors that students have to consider when deciding where to live. Further, Marcus addresses the effects this choice has by saying: “I think mentally or emotionally it affects you, as your surroundings like ‘oh, I don’t want to go outside’, or I guess in a sense you might be influenced like, you know, let’s not focus on school.” In addition to highlighting how surroundings impact a person mentally and emotionally, he draws attention to the role surroundings play on focusing on school. For many students, living closer to campus or Fresno may be beneficial for them attending school, but at the same time cost can dictate where they can live and where not, which in turn can negatively impact a student’s ability to focus on school.

Goals for Future Housing

The existing issues experienced by students are exemplified by students’ goals and hopes for the future. Overwhelmingly, students’ goals and hopes for the future are to buy their own housing or house. Eric’s goal and hope for the future is “to own my own home” in order to “not having to worry about eviction notices because the landlord has decided to sell the property.” Further, he explains: “I want to live in a location where I’m not worried about eminent domain” and adds “I am trying to just make sure I pick a

housing that whatever happens in the economy, it's not going to affect my ability to pay." Monica describes her goal as "definitely buying a house" and adds: "buying a home that my kids could always know that they can come home to…that's the goal." She further notes, "that's my whole purpose of going into the master's program and attaining a degree that I know would give me the opportunity to have, you know, a good income. Because my goal is to buy a home." Aside from owning one's own house, these three statements highlight the wish for long-term housing stability that may be less susceptible to factors like the economy or the decision of a landlord/landlady to sell the property. Consistent with the previous discussion regarding the burden of a long commute in the section "High and Increasing Costs," several students mentioned moving closer to Fresno or the campus itself as their future goal or hope. Additional factors mentioned included paying off their mortgage, living in a good environment, and helping other people with their housing.

Factors that Contribute Positively or Negatively to Housing

Factors that can contribute either positively or negatively to a housing situation are noted throughout the chapter. However, some factors warrant additional mention. This section touches on a wide range of factors that can influence someone's housing situation, including the role other people play, struggles with substance use, going to school, financial support, and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Consistent with findings by Roman and Travis (2006), who found that the first place most people stay after release is with a family member, a partner, or a close friend, several students reported staying with family or friends after release. Gino describes his experience with housing after release and explains that because of substance use in the past, "family members were like not interested in taking us in" and that "with the no job and the other options available, my wife and I ended up sleeping in the storage for the

first 4 days." He continues that "then a friend kind of took us in" and adds "he got me a part time job". Gino describes his housing situations leading up to his current one and explains: "when we left my friend's house we moved into a little itty, bitty apartment that was kinda like in the horrible side of town off of an alley." He adds that "we were fortunate enough within the first couple of months to be reunified with our kids, and then we got Section 8, and then we moved into the house we are in now." He concludes: "And, the rest is kinda history. I guess."

Gino's experiences since release highlight how his situation has steadily progressed. Staying with a friend could be described as a turning point for Gino. However, he was also unable to stay with family upon release. As noted previously, the option of staying with family members may also be complicated by reluctance of family members to welcome back and have the person reside with them (Roman & Travis, 2006). This was also experienced by Eric. He describes his past housing situations by explaining that "prior to meeting my wife, I lived with my father and stepmother." He describes staying with his father and stepmother as "reluctant housing" and explains: "I was paroled during the middle of the pandemic, so my dad had issues with me coming over there because of worries about Covid." He adds that "at the same time, he was worried about what kind of person I was gonna be" and explains: "you know he was worried about me going back to my past deviant behaviors. And so, he was trying not to mess up the peace that he established in his home prior to me getting there." Aside from concerns of family members, Eric's housing situation was clearly further complicated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

In addition to the impact that other people can have on students' experiences with housing right after being released, several students also reported that their ability to obtain housing at several stages was dependent on having a cosigner for their lease. Monica mentions that she "always had to have somebody else, you know, because I

obviously I have a record" and further explains that "I've always had to have like a cosigner, or I didn't have credit, you know. So, those issues were always the issues that would arise." This illustrates how a student's housing situation can be dependent on others in light of all the barriers they encounter in obtaining housing on their own.

"The landlord, she was real cool"

The role others can play in facilitating access to housing emerged as a contributing factor to obtaining housing. This section will discuss the role of family members, spouses or partners, and the role landlords/landladies can play in obtaining and maintaining housing. Of note, for the purposes of this study, the term family member may refer to family members who do or do not live with the student.

Social support has been identified as a protector against housing insecurity (Herbert et al., 2015). That financial assistance, whether from family members or other sources, can be crucial for housing is illustrated by Frank's statement. Regarding paying for his housing, Frank explains: "all the financial assistance that I get from, you know, whether it be the school or family, a majority of everything goes to that." When asked whether he experienced any difficulties paying for his housing, Frank answered: "of course" and specified that "it's the months where we are on break; yeah, I have family that I can count on, so I am fortunate in that sense." He further adds: "I know a lot of people have to choose whether they want to eat or not, and I don't have to do that, thank God." He thereby highlights that aid that is based on going to school is missing during the months between semesters, but at the same time also highlights the fact that he can rely on family, which acts as a buffer against basic needs insecurity.

A significant role in the support in obtaining housing is often taken by a spouse or partner. How a partner can play a crucial role in obtaining housing is exemplified by the past experience of obtaining housing of Daniel, who reports only having one apartment

before his current housing situation, but explains: “we got in because my girlfriend used to stay in them. So, she kind of knew the managers and the landlords and stuff like that.” He emphasizes that his girlfriend “was like a segue for us to get housing” and also notes that on his own he is “pretty sure I have difficulty” because, as noted among the barriers to obtaining housing in an earlier section, he does not have much rental history and has spent a “very, very long time” incarcerated. He shares: “I ran into barriers just trying to get a car, with a car loan and stuff, because I don’t have no credit.” This suggests that the barriers in place affect far more than obtaining housing. Daniel also notes: “I think I have established credit now within the last 6 months” through paying his credit card balance on time. Nevertheless, he stresses, “I’m almost certain, because I hear stories from people that’s been out here that haven’t been incarcerated that have problems. So, with me having that stigma on top of me, no credit,” he points out that he needs assistance, and that he is getting assistance through his girlfriend and her rental history among other factors. He concludes: “but if I was on my own, yeah, I would probably, it would be hard. It would be extremely hard.” Daniel’s comment about hearing stories from people who have not been system impacted and are struggling with their housing highlights how housing is out of reach for many people, not only formerly incarcerated people (Roman & Travis, 2006). However, having a record can exacerbate this burden further, or in Emily’s words: “having been formerly incarcerated, I mean, that gives you like two notches down.”

Similar to Daniel, whose girlfriend acted as a “segue” for his housing, when asked about his past experience in finding and applying to housing, Luis said: “I had the benefit of being married.” He adds: “my credit was decent enough and with my wife’s income we were able to buy a property jointly.” Luis describes his situation as “unique” and that being married “definitely helped me position myself to build a credit” but also notes that “now, 2 years later, I could apply like, like the place I got right here, I applied to it, just

regular, no issues." He concludes with saying: "but had this been me just getting out of prison, it would have been challenging because I wouldn't have had no employment history. I would have no credit history." This ties directly into existing research that identifies unmarried formerly incarcerated people to be at higher risk of housing insecurity compared to their counterparts (Remster, 2021), and highlights how in some cases being married can act as a buffer against housing insecurity. Both Daniel and Luis also mentioned that their credit scores have since improved, something that was mentioned by other students as well. This indicates another important factor, namely that these barriers, like credit checks, can improve over time. Therefore, housing situations could potentially change with improving credit and a longer time passing after release. This also lends support to the idea that in the period immediately after release, it may be particularly challenging to obtain housing.

For students living with their spouses or partners, a factor that can contribute to someone losing their current stable housing situation is difficulties in their relationship. One student shared that he had almost become homeless because of difficulties in his relationship. Another student likewise shared that when he had difficulties in his relationship, he almost got to the point where he would have been in a situation where he did not have anywhere to go. This highlights that these factors, like having a spouse or partner to rely on for support in obtaining and maintaining housing, can be both positive and negative and may be nuanced.

Several students reported having obtained housing because of a landlord/landlady or person that was willing to rent to them. Monica, who has been living in her current housing for 5 years, explains that "I was just lucky to have made a connection" and having found an "individual willing to give me a chance." However, Monica also notes that "it took me going to meeting him face to face" and added "I feel like, prior to that, I was scared to look for a place." Daniel, who lives "in a very good neighborhood," points

out that “we got lucky here” and explains how after difficulties searching for housing his girlfriend happened to see a place for rent, and that “the landlord, she was real cool.” These experiences suggest that while undoubtedly property owners unwilling to rent to formerly incarcerated people present a significant barrier to housing, a landlord/landlady providing the opportunity to rent can be a significant factor contributing to housing. Multiple students noted receiving support from someone else at some point in time regarding housing. As this section has demonstrated this can take multiple forms, from a landlord/landlady willing to rent to them to family members and spouses supporting their housing.

“Obviously with addiction, and everything, credit was horrible”

Another issue to consider when looking at housing insecurity is substance use. The existing literature has identified formerly incarcerated people who struggle with substance abuse as being at an increased risk for housing insecurity (Herbert et al., 2015; Remster, 2021). Some students mentioned improvements in their housing situation once they became sober or clean. Sara, who described moving “a lot” in the past and who shares that “way back, I was actually homeless at one point,” also explained that “but since I got clean and sober and kind of got my act together, I’ve been a little more stable, but still a lot of moving.” She thereby underlines that becoming clean and sober can improve a person’s housing situation. Others, like Gino, noted the negative effects substance use can have on housing and describes how family members were “not interested in taking us in” because of their past substance use and describes the negative effects it had on his credit: “Well, upon being released, obviously with addiction, and everything, credit was horrible, you know.” The findings suggest substance abuse plays a role in housing insecurity.

“It's my last semester and my financial aid ran out”

Going to school may hinder a students’ ability to pay for their housing, either through not being able to work full-time or other reasons. When asked whether school has hindered their ability to pay for housing in any way, very different answers emerged. For some students going to school has helped them with their ability to pay for housing, either through financial assistance or for other reasons. Emily points out that “no, I think that going to school, I mean it’s helping me financially, because they’re basically helping me pay to go to school and, you know, live.” She concludes: “so this is probably, you know…it’s better for me to be in school right now.” Notably, in several interviews students mentioned how going to school was a pathway to long-term sustainability. When asked whether her education had hindered her ability to pay for her housing, Monica replied: “I try not to see it that way, because I believe that my education is important, and in the long run it’s going to be something that sustains us.” Like Monica, Daniel also mentions positive long-term effects of his education. In conclusion to summarizing his living costs and pointing out that “it’s kind of a struggle,” Daniel remarked: “but that’s what I go to school for so (laughter).” He thereby touches on the fact that there is a nexus between his living costs and his decision to go to school. This underlines that obtaining a higher education can also be viewed as a positive contributing factor for long-term sustainability, for example, through a higher paying job. For others, going to school hinders their ability to pay for housing due to having to juggle financial responsibilities, work, and school, or other reasons. The factors discussed above illustrate that positive and negative contributors to housing can also be very specific to a person and their circumstances. This further lends support to the idea that housing insecurity is complex and can at times be nuanced.

Many students also note receiving financial assistance that contributes to or is even crucial for them to pay for their housing. This is also underlined by the fact that

many students indicated living in Section 8 or low-income apartments. However, financial aid that is based on going to school may also be missing during the months between semesters, thereby causing difficulties during those times. This is underlined by Jessica's experiences. As mentioned previously, she highlights the effects of financial aid not running consistently throughout the year but rather being based on school semesters. She points out that there is a time period between semesters when she does not receive financial aid, which has led to her paying her rent late in the past.

For many students, receiving financial assistance is crucial. Several students mentioned that they would not be able to pay for housing without this financial assistance. Jacob explains: "if I did not have this support, I wouldn't be able to, because I have no income, it's just eating up my savings…" Therefore, financial assistance undoubtedly contributes to students being able to retain housing. At the same time, losing this financial aid can also negatively affect the housing situation of a student. For Elena, not receiving financial aid directly contributed to housing insecurity. She explains that last semester, she "didn't qualify for any type of financial aid assistance, and it was really difficult to figure out how it was going to pay my tuition and all that, because it's my last semester and my financial aid ran out." Financial assistance can be a key factor in retaining housing, but at the same time, the amount of assistance or periods in between semesters without assistance can lead to difficulties paying for that housing. Elena's situation demonstrates that financial aid ending can also play a direct role in causing housing insecurity.

"Worries about Covid"

Lastly, when examining factors that may have had an influence on housing in recent years, it would be remiss to leave out considerations regarding the COVID-19 pandemic. In light of the significant impact the COVID-19 pandemic has had on many

aspects of life in the last couple of years, students were asked whether their housing situation was impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic in any way. A majority of students indicated that the COVID-19 pandemic did not have any effect on their housing situation. However, almost a third of students reported that it affected their housing situation, through among other things, rent increases, both positive and negative effects on their wages, having to move home, and increased utility costs because of staying inside. Some students pointed out that the COVID-19 pandemic had an effect on their wages. For one student, the COVID-19 pandemic had a positive effect on his wage in the sense that his wage increased during the pandemic because of "COVID pay," meaning that he was paid the overtime hourly rate in light of the pandemic instead of the regular hourly wage. For another student, his work hours and thereby income varied because hours were getting cut, highlighting the negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Eric's housing situation upon release discussed at the beginning of this section provides further context to how the COVID-19 pandemic impacted some students' housing situations. Eric, who moved in with his father and stepmother, shared how one of the concerns of his father having him living with them was "worries about Covid." This further complicated his housing situation. Several students also reported being incarcerated during the height of the pandemic, and hence, the pandemic seriously affected them in their situation, which is a topic that requires further research but is beyond the scope of this study.

The Effects of Students' Housing Situations on their Academics

In general, the students in this study overwhelmingly agreed that a student's housing situation can have an effect on their academics. In contrast, asked whether their housing situation had any effect on their own academics, students provided mixed answers but a majority still noted that their housing situation had some effect on their

academics. One of the main factors named by students who indicated that their housing situation has an effect on their academics was their commute. In addition, not having a quiet study space, concerns associated with the possibility of losing one's housing, and having to juggle working and school in order to be able to pay for housing were named by students. This section also highlights how an improved housing situation can positively affect a student's academics.

"I end up walking in about 5 minutes late"

For a majority of students, their housing has an effect on their academics. Students named various factors, the most prominent being the commute. Daniel states that his housing has an effect on his academics "'cause I have to travel, drive a while, 20 minutes is like, yeah, it has an impact, because I actually wish I was real, real closer." Likewise, Elena highlights how her commute has a direct effect on her learning experience:

> I think my current housing has an impact because of the distance. Sometimes there's unpredictable situations in traffic and I'm late. I end up walking in about 5 minutes late. I feel when I miss that first 5 minutes I'm wondering 'what did I miss, what did I miss?' I'm too busy wondering what I missed, and I'm not getting what's being, you know, given right then, and it just kind of throws me off, and I don't absorb what I should have absorbed. Just because I live so far away.

Elena's statement highlights the stress a commute can add and how it can directly affect a student's ability to "absorb" what is being discussed in the classroom.

"Sometimes it can be a little bit hard to find quiet space"

In addition to the commute, not having a quiet study space and concerns associated with possibly losing one's housing were also identified as having an effect on students' academics. Vanessa shares that for her, "sometimes it can be a little bit hard to find quiet space" meaning that "sometimes it could be a little bit hard to like do studying." She ties this aspect to commuting as well and explains: "or also I have to go to campus or go somewhere far like, which is kind of, I wouldn't want to drive that far, just to go to campus like ideally." Vanessa concludes that: "so I mean it does make it kind of difficult sometimes to study in quiet areas and impacts me not wanting to drive to campus, either. So, it's like, that could be a little bit of struggle sometimes." Her statement calls attention to the importance of having a quiet space to study, while also drawing a connection to the issue of commuting. Although there are quiet study spaces available on campus, long commutes may restrict students from using them.

For Jacob, who lives in a very negative housing situation, his housing situation naturally also affects his academics. He emphasizes that his "housing situation is stressful" and it thereby also contributes to "depression"; he explains that "it affects [me] very negatively." As mentioned previously, Jacob is living with others who "have control issues." He adds that in his current housing situation he is unable to avoid people when they are bothering him. Therefore, regarding his academics, he points out: "it suffers, yeah, from situational stuff and depression." Throughout the interview, Jacob highlighted the importance of living in a positive and stable environment. His statements emphasize the negative impact a housing situation can have on a person, including their mental health, and especially on a student trying to focus on their academics. His experiences lend further context to findings that many formerly incarcerated students face unstable living situations, which create an environment unconducive to attending and remaining in college (Murillo, 2021).

Concerns associated with the possibility of losing one's housing appear several times in this study. These concerns can also have an impact on a student's academics. When asked if his housing had any effect on his academics, Gino shared that "other than transportation time and kind of limited options" he has lived in the same house since the beginning of his studies. He concludes: "so, yeah, housing, other than the fear of losing this and it being complicated to get somewhere else, has been good." Despite his housing having been "good" throughout his time studying, Gino still notes the fear of losing his current housing and the complexity of moving somewhere else.

The effects housing can have on academics can also include employment and having to juggle working and going to school at the same time, because employment and the ability to pay for housing is directly related to housing. Therefore, these factors are all interrelated. Busy schedules and working in addition to going to school in order to be able to pay for housing is another factor that several students noted. Michael notes that: "the biggest issue that I've had is, the struggle like I think most people have, is attending class, but also being able to work and be able to provide for housing." Relatedly, David notes that having stability in terms of housing has helped him but that working full-time has had an impact on his grades. Michael and David were not alone in describing the impact their busy schedules have on their academics. Yet, it is important to keep in mind that other students noted that their housing situation does not have much of an effect on their academics, like Luis, who said "probably not much." As in other sections, this section highlights that students are experiencing different kinds of issues and that experiences vary.

Students also named positive aspects of their current housing situation regarding academics and noted how they contribute to their academic success. Although Jessica notes that it is "hard living so far away" and highlights the costs incurred by a long commute, she also notes positive effects of her current housing situation on her

academics. She states: “I think I’m in a much better space and environment now. I’m able to focus and not worry about like where I’m at, or if I’m safe and stuff like that.” As with findings in previous sections, her statements again highlight the importance of the environment a student lives in and stress the need for students to be able to focus on academics and not having to worry about other factors.

“I was able to keep my high GPA”

Housing insecurity is associated with achieving lower grades (Baker-Smith et al., 2020; Goldrick-Rab, Baker-Smith, Coca & Looker, 2019; Broton, 2017). In turn, an improved housing situation can also have a positive effect on grades. Sara underlines this by describing the effects that her housing situation had on her academics in the past:

> In the past, like when I first came back to college I went to community college, and I wasn’t able to get straight A’s I got a couple, I think I got like two B’s my first semester, because I was living with family, and it was crowded, but that’s the only place I really had to go. But as I became more stable all that changed, and I was able to keep my high GPA. I know that it really does affect academic success for sure, because if you don’t have safe and stable housing, how are you going to be able to focus? You’re going to be so concerned about your physical safety and comfort that you’re not going to be able to focus on academics at all.

Sara’s statements provide further evidence of housing and academics being closely related, and highlights that a stable and positive housing situation can positively support academic success. Similarly, Frank states that having “those needs met” has “allowed me to focus on my studies” and emphasizes that: “I am carrying a 4.0 because I have those opportunities. I don’t think I could do it otherwise.” He thereby identifies having his needs met as a key contributing factor to a perfect GPA.

When asked whether they thought that in general a student's housing situation has an effect on their academics, Marcus answered: "I would say yes" and continued to say "fortunately I'm, I guess housing isn't a big factor as it might be for others that have been incarcerated." Marcus's relative was just recently released from prison after spending 4 years incarcerated. In regards to his relative's situation, Marcus explains that: "he doesn't know where he can live, he has limitations to how far he can live. What he can and can't." Marcus adds that: "so, I feel for him in that aspect, education might be like the least of his priorities, which is unfortunate, due to the fact that he has such restraints because of his criminal record." This highlights that housing insecurity can act as a barrier for formerly incarcerated people to pursue a higher education because they are struggling with their basic needs first and foremost.

Students' Recommendations on Providing Support

An important aspect of the interviews was to determine how students, members of Project Rebound and beyond, could be effectively supported with their housing needs. Two key recommendations emerged: financial support and creating affordable housing near campus. A consistent issue within this section was the lack of availability of affordable housing close to campus. As Monica remarked: "on campus living, not everybody can afford it." Relatedly, Michael states: "I think a good area for improvement would be just more university investment, or like even the CSU system in general, in student housing." He adds that this applies "especially for Fresno State, because our campus is pretty much just boxed in" resulting in only limited "room for expansion." He concludes that "they can kind of maybe start making more of an effort to expand the housing options." Michael was not alone in emphasizing availability as an issue regarding living close to campus.

Emily emphasizes that a temporary housing option near Fresno State could be helpful to students who commute far to attend classes on campus. Asked about how she feels about her current housing situation, Emily, who lives outside of Fresno, pointed out: "if there was something available in Fresno, like that would have been much more helpful." Later in the interview she added: "I know they have on campus like dorms and stuff, but those are like super expensive. So, if they had like temporary housing, I probably would have considered like renting an apartment." She describes what this housing could look like and describes it as "low-cost student housing" and that "you don't have to sign a huge lease, or you can do month to month, or something like that." She emphasizes that if that were available, it "would be super beneficial" and explains "because, I mean, I don't necessarily want to live there forever, but I would like it to be more convenient while I'm going to school." This suggestion could also address some of the issues associated with commuting that were mentioned by students in this study.

"Housing is one of those urgent needs"

Several students also noted housing should be based off of the needs of students. Eric emphasizes the importance of "having more housing needs, availability and opportunities." He notes: "I know we can't build enough homes and have enough homes available for the entire student body of the university" but stresses, "however, you know, if there would be certain places that, were again earmarked or reserved for people who are in need of housing" rather than on a first come first serve basis, then "both places would be utilized by a greater amount of [the] student body that would be a lot more grateful for that housing support." He notes that "through personal experience," these students would in turn "try to pay it forward and, and help others, and not take up unnecessary things that kind of, I feel that the society that hasn't gone through what previously incarcerated students have, would take for granted." He references formerly

incarcerated students specifically and thereby not only highlights the need for housing support of this student population but also points out that if supported in their housing needs, they would "try to pay if forward," and that students who have not been system impacted and who might be occupying that housing currently may be taking it "for granted."

Several students remarked that existing offers for students by the university provide support and help. Regarding existing offers, Michael emphasizes that: "I think that's great, that the University is actually recognizing that, it shows how well in tune they are with the needs of their students." Some limitations of existing offers emerged as well. For example, Frank finds that existing offers "still falls short" and that "they do a lot but they need to do a lot more." Luis notes that "any assistance is welcome for folks" but that at the same time "there's always an application process. And I mean, housing is one of those urgent needs." Luis thereby highlights that in an emergency situation, the immediate availability of support is of the essence and that application processes can seriously impede that. Relatedly, but specifically referring to emergency funding, Monica points out: "I think the emergency funding is great" but adds that "all the crap that they ask for is a little outrageous sometimes, especially when you're in a crisis situation." She stresses that "that's the last thing that's on your mind, is having to look for documentation, you just need help" and suggests: "maybe if they would just help them first and then ask for the documentation (laughter) like I think it would be a different outcome." Monica thereby further calls attention to the application process as a barrier to immediate help in an emergency situation. Vanessa highlights that although emergency funding is helpful, "it's based off needs, so like if they don't feel like you need it, then they won't give you a lot of it." Vanessa's statements suggest that depending on their individual situation, students may not have access to emergency funding.

Many students stressed the importance of awareness of existing offers. When asked what he thought about the existing offers, Jacob named several grants and scholarships and exclaimed “make us aware!” He shares that he “only found this by just going to student finances, I mean, it should be something everybody should know.” Jacob adds another example of assistance many are unaware of and explains: “and also, they told me they have, they give us $800 for a computer, (laughter) which I didn’t know” he emphasizes that “the student advisor didn’t know when she was going to college.” This may also be an issue for the broader student population, as many students may be unaware of these offers.

Another aspect of awareness includes creating an environment where students feel comfortable reaching out for assistance Elena highlights the importance of students experiencing housing insecurity and homelessness feeling comfortable in reaching out for help and says: “but another thing is, how do you get those people to reach out for help without feeling embarrassed or judged, or something like that.” She adds “I think they should go about doing some kind of anonymous questionnaire, or some kind of assistance, or just put it out there” in order to “truly help someone who is in need, at least for while they’re at school.” Elena highlights how important it is for students to feel comfortable to reach out in order for them to receive vital support. Marcus highlights how this may not currently be the case for formerly incarcerated students by saying:

> But I would (pause), well kinda like with stereotypes, I feel like even though those programs are there, the services are there, some individuals might not feel welcomed or might feel a little conservative, I guess, as to going out there and getting the services because of the stigma.

This statement highlights how some formerly incarcerated students may feel hesitant to reach out or utilize support services that could provide crucial support.

In the course of the interviews, each student was asked how they thought students' housing needs could be supported in light of Crutchfield and Maguire's (2018) findings of 10.9% of students across all CSU campuses having experienced homelessness in the 12 months prior to their study. A vast majority of students emphasized the need for available housing near campus. Elena suggests one possible solution as making the dorm available and possibly "creating some kind of housing apartment or something nearby to assist with students who are suffering homelessness." She also stresses that that is "something that would really affect your study" and aside from the impact of not having a home, notes not having internet access as a factor.

Like Elena, Jacob, who was not aware of and was surprised by the number of students indicating having experienced homelessness in Crutchfield and Maguire's (2018) study, also suggests the need to "provide emergency housing" and adds: "or provide information about shelters that will take you in, you know, people that are homeless." He emphasizes: "whatever information you can provide to a homeless person, that you know, I mean they just, they feel helpless, it's hard for them to concentrate on school, they don't have the resources to find housing." Both Elena and Jacob emphasize the impact of experiencing homelessness on a student's academics. Arguably, this illustrates the importance of addressing homelessness among students in order to support them and their ability to succeed academically.

Monica's statement provides further perspective on the suggestion of emergency housing by identifying specific aspects of such an option. She notes that "not necessarily" like the dormitory but rather creating "more like an actual building where there's just like bunk beds." She explains what this could look like and describes that students could go there and be "like, 'hey, I don't have nowhere to sleep tonight, can I sleep here?'" and adds "even if you know, like they check in and check out daily. But just until they figure out a different opportunity, different situation." Monica describes temporary emergency

housing in her answer and her suggestion also ties into issues with existing offers, such as the time-consuming and complex process to obtain support.

Frank draws a connection to the new Project Rebound house opening at Fresno State and suggests that: “I think like what Project Rebound is doing, with that model, getting housing and making it available to the students” could effectively support students. Students’ specific thoughts on the new Project Rebound house are discussed at the end of this chapter. Frank adds an additional suggestion by stating that: “I mean like what you’re doing, researching it, making more of an effort to understand those students who are underserved” is important to do as well.

Other suggestions made included financial help, vouchers for a hotel or motel as an emergency solution, and a designated safe space for people experiencing homelessness. Similar to the students’ statements discussed above, Daniel also mentions “maybe emergency shelter I think, that would be cool. Just for students, that would be tight.” In addition, he later adds another suggestion and points out: “I would say a voucher for maybe a hotel room, motel room, or something. That can at least lift the burden up until we can find something stable, so some type of emergency voucher or something.” Gino describes what a designated safe space could specifically look like and describes:

> …even just an area on campus where you could park your car and not be harassed, which allegedly you can sort of do that on campus, but it’s not like a designated area, you know? Even just being able to put up a tent if you had to, in a secured area on campus.

He points out that parking on campus overnight is not allowed, even with a parking pass. Therefore, he highlights the need for a safe space and further explains “an area where you could have that option if needed” and adds “because like you can do that at Walmart, but Walmart’s like 10 minutes down the road. And so then leaving it there and having to get

back and forth." He also points to an example on campus and states: "or I don't know something, I mean, they have that big dirt parking lot right across the street, from the Save Mart Center." This suggests that a safe space could be created fairly easily with spaces already available on campus.

Asked what could be done to support students experiencing homelessness, Luis highlights some of the limitations of simply providing financial assistance. He explains: "that's a good question, because you can get people money, but then handling money is another thing." He adds that for Project Rebound students specifically, some of them may not have the credit history or "the steady income to go get them a rental." Luis thereby highlights that simply providing financial assistance does not automatically guarantee a student housing. While Luis states: "I think giving the money is good" he also provides further examples of shortcomings, as an example he says: "give me 500 bucks, and then even $500 isn't really enough to sustain a lot of stuff" because with the $500 dollars the students would need to find a place to stay and this is also dependent on the amount of money. He adds that it is also about knowing what to do with it and explains: "okay, like, where do I go use this money for housing specifically, right?" and emphasizes that "just because you can help somebody out for the month, man, I mean it doesn't, you know a lot of places don't just do monthly deals, you know they do leases." He concludes that: "it's just very challenging, like I think people need to be informed about where possibilities are at." This statement highlights how simply providing financial assistance may not lead to long-term stability and lends further support to the importance of available emergency housing that addresses housing needs of students.

Students were also asked who should provide the necessary support. Students were provided with the following examples: Cal Grant, meaning California financial aid, Federal aid, for example through Pell Grants, or through the CSU, the state, or communities. A majority of students stated that all of the named entities should provide

the support necessary. For example, Michael points out that “it takes all of us” to address students’ housing needs and that he does not think “the responsibility falls on any one entity” but that rather, “it’s a team effort.” Aside from the majority who named all entities as responsible to provide the support necessary, most students named Pell grants, Cal grants, and/or the state as responsible entities.

Recommendations for Supporting Project Rebound Students

The unique set of challenges that Project Rebound students face are highlighted throughout this study. Therefore, in determining how to best support students facing housing insecurity and homelessness, a focus must be placed on the unique needs of specific student populations. Students in this study were asked how Project Rebound students in particular could be effectively supported in their housing needs. Two key recommendations emerged during the interviews: providing financial assistance and having available, quality, and affordable housing.

Asked how Project Rebound students’ housing needs could be effectively supported, Jessica referenced other existing financial support with books and parking passes, suggested “maybe helping us with, even if it’s not a whole lot, something for our housing situations.” She stated that the support provided should be based on the person’s needs, but also emphasized that “even if it was like 60 bucks, or you know just something, that would help.” The idea that even lower amounts of assistance would significantly support Project Rebound students and help alleviate some of the burden caused by housing costs was mentioned by Daniel as well, who similarly remarked: “oh, I would probably say, if they did have any type of house, and I think it may be some type of rental assistance, because, maybe a $100 or $200, that goes a long way.” Daniel also points out that “we can probably use that for, you know, other materials, maybe gas for our vehicles” and adds “or you know, for the guys and girls who don’t have a vehicle or a

bus pass, so a little bit of assistance will be good." These statements illustrate that any extra help is welcome. Given the discussion above regarding the various costs that are a constant for many students and can influence the ability to pay for housing, any financial assistance, even if only lower amounts were available, could alleviate the burden caused by high costs.

In addition to financial assistance for existing housing or to help out with other costs, providing housing to Project Rebound students was named as an approach to effectively support them. Here, students specifically mentioned the proposed housing for Project Rebound students that is opening at Fresno State. Students emphasized this approach as a strong support for Project Rebound students struggling with their housing. Luis describes that: "just like being able to provide students who are struggling with housing, somewhere to live and at a discounted rate" is going to be "very helpful." Many students referred to the new Project Rebound housing that is opening at Fresno State throughout their interview. Asked what they thought about the new proposed housing, students shared their very positive thoughts. Among the 14 students who were aware of the new housing the most common words used to describe the housing were "amazing," "great," "excellent," "awesome," "fantastic," and "groundbreaking." Students described being "thrilled" when hearing about the proposed housing and that it "could be, you know, a lifesaver" or a "life net" for someone in need. Further, one student said that "it's gonna be a place that you can feel like you sort of belong." Describing his thoughts when hearing about the new housing, one student said the idea "blew my brain." I conclude this section with a statement by Daniel, who said:

> I would just like to add that the housing, the house that they have for Project Rebound that's like the best idea, because I'm pretty sure we have guys and girls that actually need it. I know right now it's just for the men. But yes…that lifts a huge burden for somebody that's trying to pursue a further education. That's the

least of their worries they have somewhere to sleep, they have shelter, they have food. And, like I say, it's a struggle when you're getting out of prison. It's always going to be a struggle for us, especially when we try to do the right thing, and we're all students. So, I think that's like the best idea I ever heard come from, out of Project Rebound, besides actually getting the formerly incarcerated into the CSU system. So, that's a 'yes'(laughter), that's a good idea.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

This chapter offers a discussion of the results, divided into sections discussing housing insecurity both today and in the past, high and increasing costs, barriers to housing and the importance of location, effects on academics and factors that contribute positively or negatively to housing, existing offers by Fresno State and student awareness of offers, and students' recommendations on how housing issues could be addressed. The chapter ends with policy recommendations and recommendations for future research, as well as concluding remarks.

Housing Insecurity

As discussed in the literature review, existing literature on basic needs among students consistently finds high rates of homelessness. None of the students in this study were experiencing homelessness at the time of the interview. Several factors may have contributed to this. For a student who is experiencing homelessness and struggling with their basic needs, participating in a research study is likely the furthest thing from their mind. It is also possible that the e-mail invitation did not reach them or that they chose not to participate for another reason. Lastly, and significant to note, several students who participated in this study mentioned that they know other Project Rebound students who are currently experiencing homelessness. The internal survey conducted by Fresno State's Project Rebound in the fall semester of 2022 further underlines this. Of the 74 respondents, four students indicated experiencing homelessness at the time, three additional students responded with "maybe" (J. Leahy, personal communication, December 22, 2022). This means that almost 10% of Project Rebound students at Fresno State answered "yes" or "maybe" to being asked whether they were currently experiencing homelessness. Therefore, it is important to note that there are Project

Rebound students at Fresno State who are experiencing homelessness; their experiences were simply outside of the reach of this study.

This study captures a wide range of experiences with housing. Despite this study not including current experiences of homelessness, six students identified themselves as housing insecure and several others noted the possibility of them becoming housing insecure in the future. That is more than a third of the sample of this study. The internal survey conducted by Project Rebound highlights that at the time of responding to the survey in the fall semester of 2022, 24 students indicated considering themselves as housing insecure and 10 students responded with "maybe" (J. Leahy, personal communication, December 22, 2022). Out of the total 74 responding students, those numbers cumulate to 46.6% either answering "yes" or "maybe" to whether they consider themselves housing insecure. Although the results are not directly comparable, in this study 40% of the participating students defined themselves as housing insecure.

Others, some of whom did not self-identify as housing insecure, identified issues with their housing that align with the broad definition of housing insecurity used in this study: housing insecurity, often used as "an umbrella term" that includes various issues with housing "people may experience, including affordability, safety, quality, insecurity, and loss of housing" (PD&R, 2018, para. 2). A broad definition for the term housing insecurity was deliberately chosen because the goal of the study was to capture a broad range of issues related to housing experiences and housing insecurity. This exemplifies the importance of conducting in-depth qualitative interviews to capture the more nuanced factors of housing insecurity. A student may answer with "no" to certain direct questions, like whether the COVID-19 pandemic impacted their housing situation, but then remember or add other relevant details in that regard later on during the interview that may have indirectly influenced their housing.

Notably, the past experiences of students highlighted that several of them have experienced housing insecurity and homelessness at some point in the past. Despite not being included as a question in the study, over a third specifically mentioned experiencing housing insecurity in the past, and four students specifically mentioned experiencing homelessness in the past. The number of students who experienced housing insecurity and homelessness in the past could potentially be even higher, since students were not specifically asked about past experiences with housing insecurity and homelessness. The past experiences of students add perspective to how housing situations can change over time and inform the understanding of housing insecurity at different points in time. Further, they provide a longer timeline to determine factors that may have positively or negatively contributed to improving or worsening housing situations.

A benefit of having a diverse sample of Project Rebound students includes capturing a range of different experiences. Some students were released over 5 years ago; others have been released fairly recently. Therefore, it can be argued that this study captures the full spectrum since release by capturing housing situations at different points in time after release, shortly after release, as well as several years or even over a decade down the line. People recently released from prison are at greater risk of facing homelessness (Couloute, 2018). More time having passed since release, may mean more time for students to improve and develop better credit scores and rental histories. In addition, this provides more time to find and maintain employment.

When asked whether the COVID-19 pandemic affected their housing situation in any way, a majority of students indicated that it had not. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic's effects on housing not emerging as a theme, it was still mentioned throughout the interviews with some more subtle effects such as increases in utility costs because of the lockdown. Yet, at the same time, "COVID pay," meaning increased wages in light of the pandemic, was reported to have a positive effect on finances. The COVID-19

pandemic may not have directly affected the housing situations of most students in this study to the extent that they lost their housing, but nevertheless it is important to note how many of the experiences, costs, and other factors that affected their housing were influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic in some ways. This again highlights some of the more subtle effects outside factors can have on a housing situation.

In this study, two thirds of the students have dependent children. Over half of the sample, eight students, live with children in the same household. Therefore, in some cases this study was able to capture how considerations for the children influence decisions made in regards to housing. Arguably, influencing factors may be different for a person who lives alone and has different needs. Some examples of the influence children can have on considerations regarding housing that were voiced in this study include concerns about living in certain neighborhoods when the children grow up to be a certain age, a strong wish to provide children housing stability, and/or considerations of space. Because a student who lives with children may also require a bigger apartment or house than someone living without children, this brings with it additional financial considerations. Students with dependent children have been identified as being at increased risk for housing insecurity (Baker-Smith et al., 2020; Goldrick-Rab, Baker-Smith, Coca & Looker, 2019; Olfert et al., 2021; Tsui et al., 2011). Therefore, the topic of housing insecurity among students who live with children warrants closer attention in future. Consideration should also be given to how the needs of students who live with children could be specifically addressed.

High and Increasing Costs

One of the key themes in this study is the high and increasing living costs for students. As affordability is an issue directly related to housing insecurity and included under the umbrella term of housing insecurity, this is particularly noteworthy. Students

identified a broad range of increasing and high costs, including utilities, rent, gas and transportation costs, home supplies, groceries, taxes, insurances, technology, and school supplies. These costs have the potential to threaten a student's housing situation, including students who are in a stable housing situation. The cumulative effect of these costs must be noted. If a student is paying several hundreds of dollars to commute, exacerbated by high gas prices, experiencing increases in their utility bills of up to 400%, and every year their monthly rent is increased by $100, this leads to an increase of several hundred dollars of extra costs per month. These costs add up to several thousand dollars a year, thousands of dollars that students may not have. This does not even include other rising costs, like those of groceries or home supplies. In addition, high gas prices directly affect a student's ability to attend class and impact their finances, which may have far-reaching effects on their ability to pay for other needs. Although gas prices may no longer be as high as they were during the summer and fall of 2022, gas still represents a significant expense. When thinking about housing insecurity, we may think about difficulties paying for housing or other specific aspects directly related to housing. However, what if gas prices cause difficulties with paying for housing? These considerations may open up a discussion regarding whether the term housing insecure is too focused on housing and needs to be expanded to include broader cost of living measures.

A majority of students indicated that their living costs have increased. None of the students indicated suddenly having a higher wage that keeps pace with these increases. Some serious consideration should be given to what these high costs mean in the long term if costs do not decrease significantly. Additional exploration is needed of how this burden could be alleviated. The cumulative effect of the high costs leads directly to struggles with providing for basic needs. Over half of the students in this study have experienced difficulty paying for their housing with several students indicating having

forgone paying for basic needs such as food in order to be able to pay their housing bills. These results further lend support to findings of the overlapping nature of challenges caused by basic needs insecurity (Baker-Smith et al., 2020; Goldrick-Rab, Baker-Smith, Coca, Looker & Williams, 2019; Goldrick-Rab, Baker-Smith, Coca & Looker, 2019). Basic needs insecurity is intertwined and the struggles associated with it can influence each other. This is particularly the case with the costs of "everything" seemingly increasing as reported by the students, while also going to school and having additional costs associated with school supplies.

The solution to these issues cannot simply be to work more. Consistent with the results of other studies (Broton & Goldrick-Rab, 2018), this study's findings stand in sharp contrast to the popular assumption that students facing basic needs insecurity can simply work more to make ends meet. In this regard, the statement by Eric discussed in Chapter 4 provides perspective. When asked whether his studies have hindered his ability to pay for his housing in any way, Eric noted they had, because he is unable to get two full-time jobs in addition to having other responsibilities and going to school. Instead, he is now trying to work one full-time job, two part-time jobs, juggle family responsibilities, and go to school, just so he can "live in a way where I'm not worried about if I have money to pay the bills or not."

Barriers to Housing and the Importance of Location

High and increasing costs can impact anyone's housing situation. Project Rebound students face additional barriers and struggles that further compound these issues. Students named their limited or problematic credit history, their conviction history, a lack of rental history, and difficulties obtaining employment, as barriers to finding and obtaining housing. These are consistent with some of the barriers named in the existing literature (see for example, Roman & Travis, 2004). However, the results

highlighted an additional factor; namely, that these barriers can prevent people from even trying to apply to housing. Students identified costly applications, including fees for expensive credit and background checks, and the impact a credit check has on someone's credit score, as barriers to applying to housing. Repeated credit checks negatively affect a person's credit score, thereby further negatively affecting the success of future applications. This may further complicate the process of finding and obtaining housing, particularly for people more likely to be denied because of a background check or inadequate credit.

Students identified being in an environment conducive to law-abiding behavior as important factors for a positive trajectory. Sampson and Laub (1993) argue that certain life events may act as positive turning points and change trajectories and, thereby, play a role in the process of desistance. While they do not specifically identify moving to a new neighborhood as a life event that may have such an effect, the results of this study lend support to the idea that moving to an environment conducive to law-abiding behavior may act as a turning point and play an important role in the process of desistance. Returning to the same environment after incarceration frequently includes returning to the same criminal opportunities and anti-social peers (Kirk, 2012). Therefore, for some, moving away from certain environment may be an important step in the desistance process.

Living in a nice neighborhood may also tie into the identity of a person and play a role in developing a positive sense of self. Copp et al. (2020) found that distancing from a negative identity and adopting a positive identity play an important role in desistance. Living in a nice neighborhood may both distance a person from a negative identity from the past and support the adoption of a positive identity, and help create a different script to follow. This may occur not only through being away from crime and an environment

unconducive to a positive trajectory, but also by having a different social life, social interactions, and self-perception.

The environment a student lives in takes a central role in everyday life. Therefore, living in a positive environment, where one does not have to worry about violence right outside one's door on a daily basis, may also contribute to a positive identity. The effects the neighborhood one lives in may have on everyday life is highlighted by Abrams and Terry (2017), who found that the constant concern for safety associated with living in a certain neighborhood influenced the daily activity and caused underlying stress among the young people they spoke with. Given the pervasive effect of the neighborhood, living in a positive environment without constant concern for safety likely also enables students to focus on their academics.

Students in this Project Rebound study highlighted how vital it is for individuals to be away from unsafe and negative environments upon release. Yet, as demonstrated by the students' accounts, cost often dictates where one can live and several students are staying in their current housing situation due to issues of affordability. Regarding reentry more generally, many people to whom living in a positive environment may be crucial for a successful trajectory may in a sense be relegated to environments unconducive for a successful trajectory because they may not be able to afford to move and live in a positive environment. As demonstrated in this study, issues of affordability can also lead to students not being able to live close to campus or even in Fresno, which in turn leads to long and pricey commutes. This then ties right back into cost; one could argue it is like a cycle.

Overall, location very clearly emerged as the most important characteristic of housing for the students in this study. First and foremost, students want to be safe. In addition, several students voiced that they would like to live closer to campus. If there would be more opportunities for students to live closer to campus, this could not only

reduce the commute but also support students. This is underlined by Daniel who would "much rather be closer to the campus" and pointed out that would enable him to "have more time on campus to utilize some of the resources there, tutoring, little bit of everything." He thereby highlights how living closer to campus further allows students to benefit from on-campus resources that support student success.

Effects on Academics and Factors that Contribute Positively or Negatively to Housing

Students in this study overwhelmingly agreed that a student's housing situation can have an effect on their academics. Asked whether their current housing situation has an effect on their own academics, students provided mixed answers but a majority still noted that their housing situation had some effect on their academics. The main factors were the commute, the possibility of losing housing, not having a quiet place to study, and, of course, working to pay for housing. These results highlight that it is not just housing insecurity or homelessness per se that affects a student's academics, but other more nuanced factors play a role as well. Even factors like a commute or gas costs, that at first may seem unrelated, tie back to being able to afford housing. In addition, if these increasing costs lead to students having to work more, this may also directly affect their academics.

Various other factors contribute positively or negatively to a housing situation. Notably, although landlords/landladies often represent a barrier for formerly incarcerated people to obtain housing (Roman & Travis, 2004), several students reported positive experiences and the significant role this played in them obtaining housing. Arguably, this shows that even on the individual level, people can contribute to improved housing situations for students. Landlords/landladies who give students a chance despite factors like not having preferable credit or having a record, can thereby make a significant

difference. As noted by students, improvements in addressing housing needs of students could also lead to macro level changes that ultimately could benefit society as a whole.

It is important to note that the students in this study are members of a support program, Project Rebound, that has various wraparound services such as financial assistance through the basic needs grant awarded to the program by the state legislature in the budget for 2021-2022 (Budget Act of 2021). These are services not available to most students, especially formerly incarcerated students across the country who may not have access to such services but likewise experience challenges with their housing or other basic needs. Jessica who, as discussed in Chapter 4, experienced unexpected costs when her "brakes went out" and "a rock shattered" her windshield, underlines the importance of these services. She received "emergency assistance through Project Rebound," which helped her offset some of these unexpected costs. She adds that it gives her the "room to make it through the semester for my other costs." This highlights that support services are vital in assisting students. For students who are not members of support programs like Project Rebound, this may further exacerbate challenges.

Existing Offers and Students' Awareness of Offers

Before discussing students' recommendations on how to address housing needs among students, some existing options and offers available to Fresno State students should be mentioned. Fresno State offers various resources to their students, including resources specifically targeted at students' basic needs. Among those resources is the Amendola Family Student Cupboard, a pantry where students can get free food and hygiene products (Fresno State, 2022a). There is also Project HOPE, that supports students experiencing challenges that affect their academics and has a case management team that supports students in navigating the available resources to them (Fresno State, 2022c). These resources include Fresno State's Homeless Student Program that offers

short-term emergency housing solutions to students “who are in an unsafe situation, are “couch surfing,” have been evicted or kicked out of their residence, and do not have a consistent, safe and affordable housing option” (Fresno State, 2021a, para. 2). Lastly, the Good Samaritan Grant assists students who experience unexpected challenges and are in need of short-term assistance for basic needs such as food (Fresno State, 2021b). This grant does not need to be repaid and serves as a resource for students who are in need of emergency assistance and have no other possibility for assistance. Some of the recommendations made by students in this study align with existing offers by Fresno State. However, their responses suggest that they may not be aware these offers exist.

Research has demonstrated that awareness of available basic needs services acts as a safeguard for basic needs insecurity (Wilkings et al., 2022). Therefore, awareness among all students is an important measure to address basic needs insecurity. However, previous studies among the general student population have demonstrated low awareness of available housing services (Kornbluh et al., 2022). In the course of the interviews, the students participating in this study were asked what they thought about some of the existing offers by the university. Notably, several students indicated that they did not know a lot about existing offers. This suggests there is room for improvement in raising awareness of basic needs services, as this is an important safeguard and measure to address basic needs insecurity.

Awareness also includes creating an environment where people feel comfortable reaching out for assistance. As noted in the literature review, a limitation of studies that use a self-reporting measure to capture housing insecurity and homelessness is that some students may be reluctant to identify themselves as homeless, which may contribute to findings of low rates of homelessness (Broton, 2020 as cited in Olfert et al., 2021). It is, therefore, plausible that some students experiencing housing insecurity and homelessness may not feel comfortable seeking assistance.

Concerning awareness, another important point must be noted. As supported by the results of this study, the stigma associated with a past criminal conviction significantly limits housing options (Berry & Wiener, 2020). This goes beyond background checks and property owners who are reluctant to rent to a formerly incarcerated person. An important aspect in making existing support offers inclusive to all of Fresno State's student populations is to work towards creating an environment where all students experiencing hardships feel comfortable seeking assistance. Given that formerly incarcerated students face additional barriers to obtaining housing and are members of two populations associated with increased risk for housing insecurity, creating an environment where they are comfortable to reach out for assistance is crucial in supporting their housing needs and success. These considerations should naturally also include eligibility.

Students' Recommendations

This study offers suggestions on how to address the housing needs of students, members of Project Rebound and beyond, based on the accounts of students. An important aspect of building on existing offers is to foster access to resources and make them all-inclusive, and to create an environment where all students feel comfortable to reach out for assistance. This includes awareness of housing insecurity among students, creating emergency housing options for students experiencing homelessness that can be accessed swiftly without having to provide a range of documents, and providing other emergency solutions like hotel or motel vouchers, or a safe space where students experiencing homelessness can sleep. Further, financial aid specifically for housing should be provided to students, and more student housing should be created near campus, affordably priced, and based on needs. Beyond simply creating or expanding the support available, students need to be made aware of these opportunities as well. These efforts

start at the very beginning of a student's time at Fresno State with informational sessions during orientation and include reminders of existing offers distributed multiple times a year through flyers available at locations frequented by students, social media posts, and emails. After all, students cannot utilize what they are not aware of. If any changes occur to existing offers, students need to be made aware of them as well. Offers and assistance need to be all-inclusive and target all student populations; this includes not having restrictions for people with a record, and emphasizing targeting specific populations that are at risk for housing insecurity with offers that are tailored to their circumstances. The goal should be to ensure that Project Rebound students can access this assistance, just like other students can, too. As a marginalized population, and facing all these additional barriers, Project Rebound students may well be among the students who need it the most.

Students highlighted two key points in regards to how Project Rebound students could be effectively supported in their housing needs: financial support for their housing costs and housing for Project Rebound students. Financially supporting students who are housed could not only aid in alleviating the burden of high costs but potentially enable students who are experiencing housing insecurity to remain in their housing, thereby preventing them from becoming more housing insecure or even homeless. Students with very unstable housing situations or who are experiencing homelessness could be assisted with emergency housing, living in the new Project Rebound house, or newly developed similar housing. Students in this study spoke very positively about Project Rebound and especially the new housing that Project Rebound is opening at Fresno State. While it is too early to speak to its success, their words lend strong support to the idea of creating these types of housing opportunities for students and suggest that such houses could be a key component in addressing housing insecurity and enabling students to focus on their studies.

This study leaves no doubt that Project Rebound students experience difficulties with their housing needs. The results of this study underline the importance of devoting more attention to the topic of housing insecurity among students, including creating awareness about basic needs insecurity, and the importance of finding ways to address the hardships and struggles associated with the housing of students. Throughout the interviews, students emphasized an appreciation for the topic and research. Nearly half of the students specifically emphasized that research on basic needs insecurity, especially how it affects Project Rebound students, is very important. They expressed gratitude for what I was doing, and/or stated that more research on housing needs could contribute to better being able to address these issues.

Recommendations for Policy and Future Research

Informed by the areas highlighted by the students in this study, recommendations for policies include providing financial assistance to students that is specifically aimed at supporting their housing costs. In addition, there is a need to create available, affordable, and quality housing near campus that is kept available based on need. This could follow a similar model to that of the new Project Rebound house that is opening at Fresno State, including basing rent on a student's income, and creating opportunities to save money in order to support long-term stable housing. For students who are experiencing homelessness, emergency housing should either be created or reserved in the existing living facilities. The process to access support and assistance should be swift and immediate, without bureaucratic hurdles in order to provide students in need with timely support.

Support should also better target specific groups of students, particularly focusing on populations that are at increased risk for housing insecurity and homelessness, like Project Rebound students. This includes supporting existing offers like the new Project

Rebound house and creating and opening housing for specific groups of people like formerly incarcerated students, whether members of support programs like Project Rebound or not, who face additional barriers to housing, and addressing their specific needs at Fresno State and beyond.

An additional recommendation, informed by students who mentioned the impact that working more hours has on their existing assistance, includes that these resources should not be cut based on increases in income. Increases in income, in addition to ongoing assistance, may lead to a financial cushion, financial independence, and long-term sustainability. Reducing assistance as a response to even slight increases in income impedes efforts to work toward financial stability.

The barriers faced by students in applying to, and obtaining, housing also highlight serious room for improvement. This includes adjusting current policies relating to credit and background checks, as they represent barriers for many people, including formerly incarcerated people and students in general that may not have a credit history. Charging up to $100 for an application that does not guarantee housing further impedes efforts of people finding and applying to housing and improving their housing situations, and should therefore be addressed as well.

There is also a need for better support programs before and after release that specifically target housing issues as this aspect of reentry should be better addressed. When people are just “thrown out there” as Marcus described it, along with all the barriers to housing faced by formerly incarcerated people, it seriously impedes their chances of a positive trajectory and prevents them from focusing on other aspects like their higher education.

More awareness surrounding the topic of housing insecurity and basic needs insecurity among students is needed. This could be achieved through fairly simple efforts by the university, including distributing flyers to students that detail existing support

offers by the universities, social media posts, and outreach to specific student populations like Project Rebound students. Further, faculty and staff should be instructed on available offers in order for them to be able to relay that information to students. Universities must actively work towards creating an inclusive environment where all groups of students have access to and feel comfortable seeking help. This includes a higher focus on specifically targeting at-risk populations.

Awareness also includes further research into the housing needs of students across the country and at individual universities that are all shaped by factors specific to them, like location, in order to identify the number of students affected, at-risk populations, and how to best address the challenges faced by students. Further research on the topic of housing needs and experiences of Project Rebound students could address one of the limitations of this study and include a larger sample size. A future study could also examine how providing housing to students, such as the new housing for Project Rebound students opening at Fresno State, impacts academic performance. In addition, future research should focus on formerly incarcerated students who are not members of support programs like Project Rebound. These students may receive less assistance as they are not members of a support program. Lastly, further research should include in-depth studies with qualitative interviews to gain a better understanding of different forms of housing insecurity, factors that contribute to it, and perhaps most importantly, how it can be addressed.

Conclusion

This in-depth study provides insight into the housing needs and experiences of Project Rebound students at Fresno State and, thereby, a population thus far understudied in the literature. The key themes that emerged throughout this study included the challenges of high and increasing costs, in particular utility and gas costs, the barriers to

applying to and obtaining housing that prevent some students from even trying to apply, how these factors affect students' academics, and the importance of location and safety for students' housing.

The aim of this study was to gain a better understanding of Project Rebound students' experiences with housing. The results captured various experiences with housing, including positive, negative, and the in-between. Further, this study highlights how housing situations can fluctuate over time and that students who may have experienced housing insecurity and homelessness in the past may be in stable housing situations today.

Another aim of this study was to learn specifically about housing insecurity and homelessness among Project Rebound students. Over a third of the sample identified themselves as housing insecure, and they and other students who do not identify as housing insecure are impacted by a range of aspects that directly or indirectly affect their housing situation. Several students are experiencing difficulties with paying for their housing, to the point where some are forced to forego paying for basic needs such as food in order to pay the bills. This study's findings further emphasize how housing insecurity can be complex and at times nuanced. Another important aspect to consider is that even something that initially seems unrelated to housing, like gas costs, can be ultimately connected to one's ability to pay for housing itself.

Housing is a basic need that can significantly affect a student's academics. Although answers were mixed, students identified several ways in which their housing situation or related factors affected their academics. Students in this study emphasized the importance of living in a neighborhood where they are safe and in a positive environment that enables them to succeed at reaching their goal of obtaining a higher education. Housing insecurity and issues related to housing affects millions of students across the country, and these rates of occurrence are likely higher for formerly incarcerated students

than for the general student population. This study not only documents the experiences of the students who participated, but highlights factors that influence housing and housing insecurity, and presents suggestions for improvement, made by the students themselves. By increasing awareness of housing insecurity among students, and by implementing recommendations made by the students affected by these issues, improvements could lead to long-term positive developments in the future, enabling students to focus on their academics rather than worrying about having somewhere to sleep at night.

Crutchfield and Maguire (2018) found that 10.9% of CSU students indicated having experienced homelessness in the prior 12 months. In a classroom of 20 students, that number equates to two students who do not have an adequate place to sleep at night. Project Rebound students face additional barriers to obtaining housing and are members of two populations associated with increased risk for housing insecurity. This thesis aspires to draw attention to these issues through the voices of the students who are directly affected. Housing insecurity is oftentimes not visible from the outside and a topic that does not receive the crucially important attention and priority it should. It is my hope that the students who participated in this study find their stories well represented in this thesis, and that we are only at the beginning of much attention devoted to housing needs and experiences of Project Rebound students.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Interview Guide

"The housing needs and experiences of Project Rebound students at Fresno State"

Katharina Dreher

What is your housing situation like right now?

If not already answered (and in housing): (if not in housing, ask the housing insecurity questions next)

Do you live alone?

If not, with whom do you live?

Are any dependent children under the age of 18 living with you?

If not already answered

How do you feel about your current housing situation?

Why do you feel this way?

What, if anything, could be improved?

If not already answered

How long have you lived there?

If less than 12 months:

How often have you moved in the past 12 months?

What were the reasons for the move(s)?

How would you describe your past housing situations?

What are some of the factors that contributed to this?

Has the COVID-19 pandemic affected your housing situation?

If yes, in what ways?

If yes, how have these changes since developed?

Have your living costs increased compared to what you were paying 3-5 years ago?

Have you experienced any difficulties with paying for your housing (including utilities) in the past 12 months?

If yes, have you forgone paying for basic needs (such as paying for food/groceries) in order to pay the bills?

If yes, do you believe your studies have hindered your ability to pay for your housing (either through not being able to work full time or any other reasons)?

If not already answered:

Have you experienced housing insecurity in the past 12 months? *If respondent wants more explanation: (housing insecurity, often used as an umbrella term that includes various issues with housing people may experience, including affordability, safety, quality, insecurity, and loss of housing).

If yes, have you experienced homelessness (sheltered or unsheltered) in the past 12 months? *If respondent wants more explanation: *(The McKinney-Vento Act defines homeless children and youth as individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. The U.S. Housing and Urban Development (HUD) defines homelessness as sheltered (emergency shelter, transitional housing, and supportive housing) and unsheltered (on the streets, in abandoned buildings, or other places not meant for human habitation).*

If yes, where have you been staying?

How long have you been housing insecure?

Are there other people with you in the same situation?

Could you please tell me about the circumstances that led to you being housing insecure?

[Then go back to earlier questions as relevant]

What has your past experience been like in finding and applying to housing?

If positive, what are some of the factors that contributed to this?

If negative, what are some of the factors that contributed to this?

If negative, do you believe the current state of the housing market had any effect on it?

If negative, have you ever experienced stigma?

How long has it been since you were released?

How long do you estimate that you have spent incarcerated in total in your life?

Was that in one sentence? Or multiple sentences?

Based on your current housing situation, how long is your current average commute to campus in minutes?

Do you have in-person or online classes, or both?

Does the length of your commute influence your decision to choose in-person or online classes?

If you do not already live close to campus, would you prefer to live closer to campus?

How do you commute to campus?

Car? Bus? Bike/Scooter? Walk? Carpool?

In what ways, if any, do you think your past and current housing situation has had any effect on your academics?

Follow-up:

Do you think that in general a student's housing situation has an impact on their academics?

If yes, please explain.

Future

Do you plan to move in the next 12 months? * *(moving: defined as relocating; the process of leaving one's residence and settling in another)*

If yes, what are some of the reasons for this?

What are your goals/hopes for the future in terms of housing?

If not already answered

What is the most important characteristic to you in terms of housing?

If not already answered

What is the least important characteristic to you in terms of housing?

How important are the following characteristics to you in terms of housing?

Size?
Cost?
Family friendly/close to schools?
Closeness to public transportation?
Closeness to campus?
Close to family members/friends?
Closeness to stores?

Safe?
Low crime rates?
Appliances?
Modern/Recent renovations?
Maintenance on-site?
Parking?

What do you think would effectively support Project Rebound students with their housing needs?

What could be offered for Project Rebound students?

What do you think about existing offers (for example by the university) to all students?

Where do you see room for improvements?

Given that research among CSU students shows that 10.9% of students reported experiencing homelessness one or more times in the past 12 months (Crutchfield & Maguire, 2018), what if anything do you think could be done to support students' housing needs?

Who do you think should provide the support necessary? Cal Grant (California financial aid)? Federal aid for example through Pell grants? The CSU? The State? Or communities?

Project Rebound at Fresno State is intending to open a small housing project for some of its students. Have you heard of this?

If yes, how did you hear about this proposed housing?

What do you think about this?

Are you interested in applying or planning to apply to this proposed housing for Project Rebound students?

If yes, what are some of the reasons you are interested in applying?

Is there anything else you would like to add?

Do you have any questions for me?

Do you have a preferred pseudonym (a false or fictitious name) to be used to refer to you in the research findings?

General Demographics:

What age range are you in?

18-24

25-29

30-34

35-39

40-49

50-59

Over 60

Prefer not to answer

What gender do you identify as:

Male

Female

Other

Prefer not to answer

What race/ethnicity do you identify as:

African-American

American Indian

Asian

Hispanic or Latino/Latina/Latinx

Pacific Islander

White

Two or more

Other

Prefer not to answer

Do you have dependent children?

Yes

No

APPENDIX B: INVITATION LETTER

Dear Project Rebound Student,

My name is Katharina Dreher and I am a graduate student in the Department of Criminology, here at Fresno State. As a part of the degree requirements, I am writing a thesis. My thesis Chair is Dr. Emma Hughes who may be familiar to you as the Executive Director of Project Rebound at Fresno State. This study seeks to gain a better understanding of the housing needs and experiences of Project Rebound students at Fresno State and hopes to add to the scarce existing literature about the housing needs of formerly incarcerated students. I am writing to you to invite you to participate in this study.

I want to emphasize that participation in this study is completely voluntary and your choice of whether or not to participate has no impact on your involvement with Project Rebound or Fresno State. If you wish to participate, I will conduct interviews early on in the Spring 2023 semester, at a time that is convenient to you. The interviews can be in-person or on Zoom, whichever is more convenient to you, and will last approximately between 30 and 60 minutes. Participants will receive a $15 Walmart gift card as a compensation for their time. If you wish to participate, your participation and identity will be kept confidential. Should you choose to participate, you can withdraw your consent and end the interview at any time without any consequences.

If you would like to be considered for participation or would like more information about this study, please email me at katharina.dreher@mail.fresnostate.edu. In case of participation, you will be provided with a consent form with additional information about this study and your rights as a research participant.

All the best,

Katharina Dreher

katharina.dreher@mail.fresnostate.edu

APPENDIX C: RESEARCH CONSENT FORM

RESEARCH CONSENT FORM

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Dr. Emma Hughes, who is the principal investigator, and Katharina Dreher, a graduate student in criminology. The goal of this study is to provide a better understanding of housing needs and experiences of Project Rebound students here at Fresno State. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because of your membership in Project Rebound at Fresno State.

If you wish to participate, Katharina Dreher will conduct interviews with you asking about your past and current housing situation and experiences, what is important to you in terms of housing, and whether your housing situation affects your academics. The interview will consist of a series of open-ended questions and will last approximately 30-60 minutes. The interview will take place at a time that is convenient to you, either on Zoom or in-person, whichever you prefer. We cannot guarantee that you will receive any direct benefits from this study, although we hope that this research will lead to a better understanding of the housing needs and experiences of Project Rebound students, will inform Project Rebound at Fresno State and other campuses, and ultimately will add to the existing knowledge of housing needs.

We do not anticipate that this research will pose any risk to you greater than that ordinarily encountered in everyday life. However, if any aspect of the interview cause any distress or negative emotions and you wish to speak to a counselor, free counseling services are available at the Student Health and Counseling Center on campus at Fresno State. It is located at 5044 N. Barton Avenue M/S HC 81. In order to reach the Student Health and Counseling Center please call 559-278-2734.

This research is conducted as a part of the thesis requirement of the master's program of the Department of Criminology. As such, the results will be discussed in an oral defense presentation on campus and upon the thesis being accepted by the University the thesis will be published. In addition, we anticipate to publish the results of this research in an academic journal. However, any information that can be identified with you that was obtained as a part of this research will remain confidential, will be kept securely and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. No other Project Rebound staff or students will be informed about your participation in this study.

If you give permission to audio record the interview, the recording will be stored securely and not be labeled with personal identifiers. The audio files will be transcribed, containing no personal identifiers. The audio files will be destroyed once the study concludes. The transcripts, as well as handwritten and digital notes and written documents, will be kept securely without personal identifiers.

You decision whether or not to participate in this study is completely voluntary. You will suffer no consequences or lose any benefits from Fresno State or Project Rebound if you

choose not to participate. If you decide to participate you may withdraw your consent or decline to answer any question at any time without consequences.

The Committee of Human Subjects at the California State University, Fresno has reviewed and approved this study. If you have any questions, now or at a later time, please contact the principal investigator Dr. Emma Hughes at emhughes@mail.fresnostate.edu or 559-278-2370 or Katharina Dreher at katharina.dreher@mail.fresnostate.edu or 347-515-3772. We are happy to answer any questions you have. Questions regarding the rights of research subjects may be directed to the Chair of the Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects (CPHS), Dr. Jennifer Randles, at jrandles@csufresno.edu or 559-278-5146.

Participants in this study will receive a $15 Walmart gift card, regardless of whether the interview is completed.*

You will be given a copy of this two-paged form for you to keep.

Your signature below indicates that you have decided to participate in an interview, having read the information provided above.

Full Name: .....

Signature: .....

Date: .....

Signature of Researcher: .....

AUDIO-RECORDING RESEARCH CONSENT FORM

If you wish to give permission for the interview to be audio-recorded, please sign below.

Your signature below indicates that you consent to the interview being audio recorded.

Full Name: .....

Signature: .....

Date: .....

Signature of Researcher: .....