In 2010, the cost to U.S. taxpayers was $39 billion to incarcerate individuals in State and Federal Correctional facilities. A sub-population of these prisoners is those that have served in the U.S. military, or “Justice Involved Veterans” (JIVs). Many are eligible for federal and state funds for Career Tech. Education to assist them with obtaining employment, which research shows often contributes to keeping them from re-offending. However, recent studies of employment after prison have all been quantitative investigations that do not incorporate the voices of JIVs describing their experiences in depth. Bush’s (2011), and Bolman and Deal’s (2008) theories of political leadership, Ebaugh’s (1988) role theory, and Danforth’s (2005) chaos theory ground my study’s framework for the transformational process (Burns, 1978) of prisoner reentry for JIVs.
The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the post-release employment experiences of 10 JIVs released from a Midwest State Department of Correction facility. The participants' reflections of their employment experiences were explored through individual, semi-structured interviews using open-ended questions. The interviews provided sufficient data to address the four research questions developed for the study which focused on the JIVs' lived experiences.

Four major themes emerged from the data: services and programs; successes; barriers and challenges; and military identity experiences of JIVs. Results from the study found most participants were not aware of Veteran specific services and programs available to them; the services JIVs were involved with had positive results on their employment efforts; a few of the participants experienced PTSD and Stigma barriers, and most participants described their enlistment as a positive experience.

Further research should include expanding the study to include prisoners from the MDOC Vocational Village, increasing the sample size to include multiple races and genders, and using a longitudinal study to follow JIVs from their incarceration to community supervision utilizing their Career Technical Education training. The significance of this study provides recommendations to the Department of Veteran Affairs, Department of Corrections, Workforce Development leaders, State Universities, Community Colleges, and Veteran Service Organizations. In addition, it provides recommendations leading to best practices for helping to improve JIV experiences while seeking employment, and adds to the qualitative literature on this topic.