THE UNINTENDED VICTIMS OF MASS INCARCERATION: THE EFFECT OF
PARENTAL INCARCERATION ON CHILDREN

A Thesis
by
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ABSTRACT

THE UNINTENDED VICTIMS OF MASS INCARCERATION: THE EFFECTS OF
PARENTAL INCARCERATION ON CHILDREN. (May 2012)

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Despite a declining economy, one business that continues to grow is the prison industry. The national prison population has increased by eight fold since 1970. Literature shows that it is not only criminals affected by the increasing rates of incarceration but also the children that they leave behind. In this thesis, by compiling a review of the literature, the overall effect of parental incarceration on children will be examined. The social, psychological, and intergenerational challenges that children face as well as the obstacles parents face behind bars will be explored. Furthermore, there will be an examination of whether the effects on a child are different if they have an incarcerated mother, father, or both as well as a comparative analysis of programs for children and their parent(s), in order to determine whether these programs are both accessible and successful. Finally, the societal implications of parental incarceration will be analyzed, and the potential need for changes in the prison system to mitigate the negative effects of incarceration in child-rearing will be discussed.

DEDICATION

To my granddaddy, Herbert B. Reid, who taught me the joy of learning merely for the sake of learning.

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INTRODUCTION

The prison population has nearly tripled since 1987 from 585,084 to 1,612,395 prisoners in 2010 (Guerino, Harrison, & Sabol, 2011). Though men are incarcerated at a much higher rate than women, the female prison population has increased more than 400% since 1986 (Miller, 2006). These increased numbers are the result of stricter crime policies and a get tough on crime attitude. Sentencing reforms, especially those related to the war on drugs, have created harsher and lengthier sentences. However, an unintended consequence of the prison boom that is consistently overlooked is the rising incarceration rates of imprisoned parents.

Researchers have only recently begun to look closer at these numbers. They have found that from 1991 to 2007, the number of incarcerated mothers had increased by 122% and the number of incarcerated fathers had risen by 76% (The Sentencing Project, 2009). As of 2007, there were 809,800 incarcerated parents (The Sentencing Project, 2009). Unfortunately, while 809,800 inmate parents have a minor child, 1.7 million minor children have an incarcerated parent (The Sentencing Project, 2009). These children are experiencing lasting and damaging effects as a result of parental incarceration. Children of incarcerated parents possibly form the largest single-issue group of at-risk children (Patton, 1999). Little is known about these children individually, but collectively they are becoming a focus of research in several disciplines, including criminal justice, sociology, and psychology.

A review of the literature addresses both visible and hidden effects of parental incarceration on children. Very few researchers have studied the impact of incarceration on

the well-being of children and, despite being advocated for years, the spotlight has only recently been placed on this group (Shillingford & Edwards, 2008). However, several researchers agree that a large number of parents being imprisoned means that there is an entire population of young people that are suffering as well.

Children of incarcerated parents are often considered hidden victims as they are often underserved and understudied as a result of stigmatization by society and peers (Seymour, 1998). Social effects can include instability in family relationships and structure, negative school behavior and performance problems, and stigmatizing and secondary labeling as a result of the parent serving time in prison. Psychological effects, also prevalent in the literature, show that parental incarceration can cause mental problems which may manifest as acting-out behaviors, including but not limited to aggressiveness or drug-abuse, or acting-in behaviors, such as poor school performance or nightmares. These effects combine to create an intergenerational challenge as parental incarceration leads to an increased likelihood of children engaging in criminal behavior as an adolescent and adult. Because of these behaviors, children of prisoners are also more likely to be incarcerated. The negative effects for children of the incarcerated seem to vary in their intensity whether the mother or the father is incarcerated.

The research is fairly new as to the differences between the experience of parenting behind bars for mothers and fathers. Research indicates that the experience of parental incarceration is intensified for children experiencing maternal incarceration relative to paternal incarceration for a number of reasons which will be further discussed. Studies indicate that children with incarcerated mothers may face greater stress and more cumulative risks in their environments than children of incarcerated fathers (Poehlmann, Dallaire, Loper,

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& Shear, 2010). Incarcerated mothers are more likely to face multiple threats from substance abuse, sexual abuse, trauma, violence, and mental health disorders and thus may impact their children (Celinska & Siegel, 2010).

Although maternal incarceration may have more severe effects on children, there are special issues for fathers parenting from behind bars. The societal perception is that men are merely the providers for the family and the women are the caretakers of the children. For these reasons, children of single fathers in prison do not receive the same reunification services as mothers and are more likely to have their parental rights terminated (Patton, 1999). Despite the differences, mothers and fathers both face obstacles to parenting behind bars.

The prison system makes it difficult for parents to maintain ties with their children, which preliminary research indicates eases the pains of imprisonment. Prison is a barrier to maintaining parental bonds. Visitation can help a child deal with the adverse effects of parental incarceration including anxiety, anger, and fear over separation (Tebo, 2006). Furthermore, maintaining family ties has been shown to be strongly associated with successful rehabilitation, successful release from prison, and lower recidivism rates (Harrison, 1997).

However, the structure of the criminal justice system makes it difficult for incarcerated individuals to maintain contact with their spouses, their children's caregivers, and their minor children (Seymour, 1998). Children of incarcerated parents are assumed to be badly parented and, as a result, correctional programs often declined to provide regular contact with incarcerated parents (Tebo, 2006). Prisons are not designed with children in mind. In fact, children typically report negative visitation experiences. Successful programs

are needed which help secure bonds between parent and child in order to alleviate some of

these barriers and negate some of the negative effects associated with parental incarceration.

Children of prisoners are one of the most at-risk groups in the United States;

however, they are also the most unrecognized in terms of official programs and policy (Reed

& Reed, 1997). Approximately 10% of children with incarcerated parents live in the foster

care system (Cecil, McHale, Strozier, & Pietsch, 2008). Shockingly, the other 90%, who

primarily reside with grandmothers, are not the responsibility of any government agency

including child welfare, mental health, or juvenile services (Cecil et al., 2008). Despite the

importance of supporting parenting from behind bars, there are very few programs in place to

help strengthen these relationships.

However, research has shown that the programs which are currently in place or have

previously existed have been determinants of success post release. Services that may help

both parents and children include mentoring, participation in peer education programs,

classroom sessions, and job training to help with financial needs upon release (Weissman &

LaRue, 1998). However, programs suffer when Americans' desire for harsher sentences,

especially in the case of drug-related crimes, conflicts with the need to maintain parent-child

bonds and provide services to these children (Tebo, 2006).

The overarching question is why should society care about this group? The answer is

simple. First, the children's lives will be improved with recognition of the problem.

Secondly, supporting relationships between children and their incarcerated parents decreases

recidivism which is good for both the inmates and their communities. It is also good for the

institutions because addressing the problems felt by these groups will lessen the burdens on

social services, create better educational chances, and decrease the numbers of people that are controlled by correctional institutions (Lee, 2005).

Fortunately, the visibility and importance of this issue is increasing and better strategies are being implemented to address the problems (Schwartzman, 2010). The challenge is the lag-time between when these problems are addressed and when solutions are created. For example, the issues that were being proposed by researchers in the early 1990's currently are being addressed as needing improvement. A solid foundation of research on the topic of children with incarcerated parents is necessary to provide government officials, government agencies, social institutions, and the general public with the knowledge describing the importance of the invisible effect of the prison population explosion upon children of the incarcerated.

METHODOLOGY

Whereas collecting primary data and associated analysis would be preferred, given the time structure for a Master's thesis, this study will be conducted by compiling a review of existing literature and related research. Although research has only been conducted on this topic since 1990, I will draw upon any available qualitative and quantitative research. By building upon the existing body of research, the groundwork will be laid for determining suggestions for future research that are absent in the existing literature. I will also present a comparative analysis of program outcomes. Furthermore, I will support my conclusions by employing relevant theoretical perspectives. In utilizing secondary data, I will be able to examine the overall effect of parental incarceration on both parent and child as well as analyze the societal implications.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

Several theoretical approaches have been used to explain why parental incarceration has such a profound impact on children. Labeling theory, or secondary labeling, explains how children suffer from the shame and stigmatization of having an incarcerated parent. Social bond theory addresses attachment to families and institutions and how the absence of such attachments can promote juvenile delinquency. Additionally, attachment theory suggests that disruptions and separations in the mother-child relationship may increase risks to children and negatively affect the child's ability to form secure relationships. Finally, Agnew's strain theory explains how the interchange between positively valued stimuli and negatively valued stimuli and the way in which it hinders one's ability to achieve positively valued goals that may lead to delinquency.

Labeling Theory

Most criminological theories use the offender as the starting point for analysis. These offenders engage in primary deviance as they commit crime as a result of various social, cultural, and psychological factors (Lemert, 1952). Labeling theory, however, suggests that the attention be shifted to "the behavior of those who label, react to, and otherwise seek to control offenders" (Cullen & Agnew, 2003, p. 295). Labeling theory suggests that it is these individuals and their reactions to the offender that lead the offender to engage in criminal behavior (Cullen & Agnew, 2003). This is referred to as secondary deviance.

According to Lemert (1952), secondary deviance occurs "when a person begins to employ his deviant behavior…as a means of defense, attack, or adjustment to the overt and

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covert problems created by the consequent societal reaction to him" (p. 305). For example, reactions may be related to stigmatization that surrounds parental incarceration. However, the reactions of others to the offender are based on a need for social control. The reactions come from parents, friends, neighbors, and other members of society. This produces unanticipated consequences as "it creates the very thing it is intended to stop—it produces a self-fulfilling prophecy" (Cullen & Agnew, 2003, p. 295). Delinquent behavior is intensified once a youth perceives that those whose opinions are significant view him or her as delinquent.

Tannenbaum (1938) provides an accurate example of the self-fulfilling prophecy as it relates to children. Once arrested and labeled criminal, adolescents are forced into relationships with other children similar to themselves. As a result, they are exposed to criminal norms and experiences that lead to a criminal career. This leads to a cyclical process of secondary deviance and repeated negative reactions from others which is only amplified with each new delinquent act (Cullen & Agnew, 2003). The adolescent eventually accepts his or her deviant status and attempts to adjust to this role (Cullen & Agnew, 2003). The reactions of others come to define the adolescent's existence and their conception of self. In this way, Cullen and Agnew (2003) propose that this leads to a deepening of criminality instead of a reduction.

Social disadvantage enhances the labeling process. Deviant labels are more likely to be applied to the powerless and the poor (Cullen & Agnew, 2003). For example, conflict theory suggests that in order to create fear against certain groups, the media portrays criminals as members of the lower class, minorities, and the young (Reiman,1998). These individuals are more likely to be labeled as delinquent than other members of society (Cullen & Agnew, 2003). The criminal justice system tends to aggravate rather than improve these

problems thereby creating a stable criminal class (Hagan & Palloni, 1990). Furthermore, Hagan and Palloni (1990) found that official labeling of parents and children leads to an intergenerational reproduction of a criminal class. In other words, an adolescent does not have to be engaged in delinquent acts in order to be labeled a delinquent. They may be labeled merely as a result of the criminal actions of those that society associates them with such as incarcerated parents.

Labeling transforms an adolescent's social relationships as well as his or her identity (Cullen & Agnew, 2003). In other words, once adolescents are labeled as delinquent, they perceive that others see them this way and act accordingly. Durkheim supports this argument by suggesting that because the bad defines what is good in society those viewed as good are then allowed to determine who is bad (Lanier & Henry, 2004). In other words, stigmatization as a result of criminal behavior increases crime (Cullen & Agnew, 2003). The adolescent is then viewed as a social outcast. As a result, they join criminal subcultures, such as gangs, where criminality is reinforced and opportunities to commit crime are abundant (Cullen & Agnew, 2003). In this way, labeling theory proposes that it is important to consider the ways in which societal reactions push offenders into crime rather than looking solely at the behaviors of the offender.

<div align="center">Social Bond Theory</div>

Social bond theory addresses the process by which absence of attachments to families and social institutions promote juvenile delinquency. The research related to bond theory suggests that when an individual's ties to conventional society have been broken they are free to engage in delinquency (Hirschi, 1969). The ties may have been broken through a social breakdown of the institutions they are involved in or the loss of a capable guardian to

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incarceration. A reductionist analysis of social bond theory suggests: (1) delinquency and social bonds are inversely related and (2) the concept of social bond builds upon four elements – attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief (Hirschi, 1969).

The first element of bond theory, and the most relevant as relates to this type of research, is attachment. A lack of attachment to others represents freedom from moral restraints or, in other words, a lack of conscience (Hirschi, 1969). A consequence of a lack moral restraint is the violation of social norms. This may take the form of deviant behavior. Attachment theory suggests that if a person is insensitive to the opinions or wishes of others then they are free to deviate from the normal expectations (Hirschi, 1969). Attachment to others is a form of social control. Clearly, attachment to an incarcerated parent is quite difficult.

Commitment proposes that merely by living in a society individuals acquire goods and prospects that they do not want to risk losing (Hirschi, 1969). By offering these goods and making them available, society can ensure that the individuals who desire these things will want to abide by the rules. Ambition and aspiration can also play a role in commitment (Hirschi, 1969). For example, if a child imagines that he too can someday come to possess these goods and ideals, then he will abide by the rules even though he may not have them at the moment. When youth are committed to certain goals, they are less likely to engage in delinquent acts (Hirschi, 1969). For example, a child that is doing well in school and has a chance for a bright future is less likely to jeopardize all of this through criminal behavior. On the other hand, youths with fewer options have nothing to lose and may feel more inclined to break the law. This notion is complicated for children with parent(s) behind bars.

Involvement suggests that because a person is tied to deadlines and obligations in their daily lives then they do not have the time or opportunity to commit deviant acts (Hirschi, 1969). It is believed that involvement can be a major deterrent to delinquency. In other words, if a person is constantly immersed in the daily activities of conventional life then he may not even have the time to think about deviance let alone act out his thoughts. For example, it is believed that after-school programs reduce juvenile delinquency because they keep children occupied. A strong source of involvement is child/parent interaction which becomes a moot point for children of the incarcerated.

Finally, the belief element proposes that a deviant will violate the rules of a society even if he believes in them because other forms of control are missing (Hirschi, 1969). The deviant rationalizes his behavior, a technique of neutralization, so that he can both retain his beliefs and violate the rule simultaneously (Hirschi, 1969; Sykes & Matza, 1957). Hirschi (1969) argued that "youths who believe that they should obey the rules of society are less likely to violate them" (p. 231). For instance, in the case of delinquents, there may not be a positive role-model or a social institution that is properly controlling the child's deviant thoughts as with children of incarcerated parents.

Ideally, these elements work together to restrain criminal conduct and to exert control over youth. Weak social bonds increase the risk of exhibiting delinquent behavior. Hirschi (1969) argued that youths can be attached to peers, teachers, and other adults. However, attachments to parents, especially mothers, are very important (Hirschi, 1969). Youths are more likely to care about the opinions of those with whom they feel they have an emotional connection. In this way, youths will typically restrain from activities which they feel will disappoint the significant other (Hirschi, 1969). Although parents may not necessarily exert

direct control at all times, they can exert indirect control when youths internalize the norms and values learned before engaging in delinquent acts (Akers, 1994; Hirschi, 1969). However, control mechanisms may be subdued when the norms and values being learned are deviant as with the children of incarcerated individuals.

Strain Theory

Contemporary strain theory addressed the importance of monetary success and the process by which failure to achieve monetary success can lead one to commit crime. Modern strain theory, the one most relevant to this type of research, focuses on the way in which negative relationships with others and the emotions that arise from those relationships can lead to delinquency (Agnew, 1992). Agnew discusses three major types of strain: (1) strain as the failure to achieve positively valued goals; (2) strain as the removal of positively valued stimuli from the individual; and (3) strain as the presentation of negative stimuli (Agnew, 1992). All of these strains link to juvenile delinquency in differing ways and may lead to adult incarceration.

First, strain in failure to achieve positively valued goals. People may be unable to obtain desired goals for any number of reasons. For example, adolescent strain is typically measured in terms of the disjunction between ideal goals and expected levels of goal achievement (Agnew, 1992). In other words, youths desire a variety of immediate goals but are unable to obtain many of these goals for such reasons as social class, intelligence, personality, or physical ability. Essentially, they are unable to legitimately obtain their goals because they lack the necessary skills (Agnew, 1992).

They may also be unable to obtain valued goals due to past experiences or from comparisons with others who are similar to the individual (Agnew, 1992). This may lead to

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emotions typically associated with strain such as anger, resentment, and disappointment (Agnew, 1992). These emotions can be very strong because the expectations are rooted in reality (Agnew, 1992). For example, the adolescent has seen that others are able to achieve their goals or they may have already experienced achieving some of their goals in the past. One way in which adolescents may seek to reduce the gap between their expectations and their achievements is through deviance.

Finally, adolescents may feel that they are suffering from unjust outcomes or unequal relationships (Agnew, 1992). Agnew further finds that adolescents may engage in delinquency in order to increase their outcomes, lower their inputs, lower the outcomes of others, or increase the inputs of others. For example, they can increase their outcomes by theft, lower their inputs by showing poor school performance, lower the outcomes of others through vandalism or assault, and increase the input of others by being disorderly. If adolescents feel that there are any obstacles to achieving their positively valued goals legitimately, they may feel the need to obtain these goals illegally.

The second source of strain that Agnew (1992) addresses is the strain as a result of the removal of positively valued stimuli from the individual. This may be an actual or an anticipated loss. One example could be the loss of a parent to incarceration. Delinquency may be the result of the adolescent trying to prevent this loss, retrieve the lost stimuli or obtain substitute stimuli, seek revenge against those responsible for the loss, or manage the negative affect caused by the loss (Agnew, 1992).

The third source of strain which Agnew (1992) addresses, strain as the presentation of negative stimuli, is directly related to the second. Sources of negative stimuli may include child abuse, criminal victimization, negative relations with parents, negative relations with

peers, or adverse school experiences (Agnew, 1992). The adolescent may engage in delinquency in order to escape or terminate the negative stimuli, seek revenge against the source of the negative stimuli, or manage the negative effects (Agnew, 1992). In other words, the removal of positive stimuli in exchange for the presentation of negative stimuli can lead to an adolescent engaging in delinquency in order to alleviate the stress of such exchanges and to rebalance their lives.

Agnew (1992) stresses that although these different sources of strain are distinct form one another they often overlap. For example,

> The insults of a teacher may be experienced as adverse because they (1) interfere with the adolescent's aspirations for academic success, (2) result in the violation of a distributive justice rule such as equity, and (3) are conditioned negative stimuli and so are experienced as noxious in and of themselves. (Agnew, 1992, p. 214)

Regardless of which type of strain the child experiences, the emotion that most leads to delinquency is anger (Agnew, 1992). Anger is usually the result of the individual blaming their adverse situations on others and can cause the individual to seek revenge. Furthermore, anger energizes the individual and lowers their inhibitions (Agnew, 1992). Delinquency typically occurs when there is no other legitimate way to eliminate the adversity that caused the anger (Agnew, 1992). The likelihood of engaging in delinquency can be lessened by high self-esteem and strong social supports (Agnew, 1992). However, it can be increased by involvement with other delinquent peers or the strong belief that their adversity can be blamed on the actions of someone else, such as a parent (Agnew, 1992; Sykes and Matza, 1957). Most importantly, Agnew stresses that a single situational event, such as parental

incarceration, can ignite a delinquent act especially among those adolescents who are already predisposed to criminal behavior.

All of these theories may work together to increase the likelihood that a child will be constrained to pursue a life of crime (Cullen & Agnew, 2003). The negative outcomes are amplified for children with incarcerated parents. Once an adolescent has been stigmatized or labeled as a criminal, they are forced out of conventional social relationships as delineated by social bond theory. This individual is then forced to primarily associate with other criminals either in prison or on the streets (Cullen & Agnew, 2003). Furthermore, as a result of being labeled as an ex-offender they are strained as a result of being denied opportunities to achieve their positively valued goals. Cullen and Agnew (2003) express that once "engulfed by these criminogenic conditions, the labeled person is constrained to pursue a life in crime" (p. 298). A review of the literature will show that criminal and delinquent involvement and its accompanying adversity may not only be the direct result of actions by the adolescent but by their parents as well, for example, parents behind bars.

CURRENT AND TREND DATA ON INCARCERATION RATES

In 2008, the Pew Center on the States released a study entitled "One in 100: Behind Bars in America" which detailed the numbers of incarcerated individuals in the United States' corrections system. The researchers found that the prison population has nearly tripled since 1987, and that more than one in every one hundred adults in America are in jail or prison (Pew Center on the States, 2008). Subsequently, in 2010, it was reported that there are 1,612,395 state and federal prisoners (Guerino et al., 2011). This number is a three-fold increase from 585,084 prisoners in 1987.
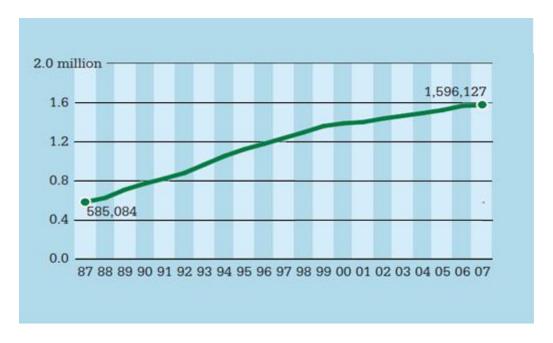

Figure 1. The national prison population tripled from 1987 to 2010. Source: Pew Center on the States (February 2008). *One in 100: Behind bars in America 2008* (Washington, DC: The Pew Charitable Trusts)

These numbers differ as to race and gender. In fact, one in 30 men between the ages of twenty and thirty-four years of age are currently imprisoned (Pew Center on the States,

2008). However, for black men, this number increases to one in every nine. Furthermore, men are ten times more likely to be in prison than women, but, one in every 100 black women is also in prison. Blacks and Hispanics, of both sexes, are incarcerated at much higher rates than whites. In fact, in 2010, there were 3,074 per 100,000 black males incarcerated as compared to 459 per 100,000 white male residents (Guerino et al., 2011). The increased numbers of incarcerated people are the result of stricter crime policies that provide harsher and lengthier sentences, especially stemming from the war on drugs as delineated in the sentencing guidelines

<div align="center">Female Prison Population</div>

Men are incarcerated at a much higher rate than women, though the rates for incarcerated women are increasing substantially. Since 1986, the incarcerated female population has increased 400%, or double the rate of men (Miller, 2006; The Sentencing Project, 2007). More than one million women are currently under the supervision of the criminal justice system and they comprise approximately 7% of the federal and state prison population at 112, 822 prisoners (The Sentencing Project, 2007; Guerino et al., 2011) compared to 93,234 in 2000 (Guerino et al., 2011). The main reason for such rapid increases in the female inmate population is the war on drugs. Mandatory minimums, especially with regard to drug sentencing, have led to explosive prison population growth for females (Hanlon, Carswell, & Rose, 2006) For example, from 1986 to 1999, the number of women incarcerated for drug offenses increased by 888%, compared to a rise of 129% for non-drug related offenses (The Sentencing Project, 2007).
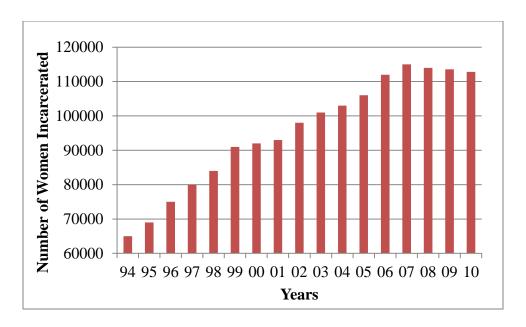
Figure 2. The numbers of women in state and federal prison from 1994 to 2010.
Source: United States Bureau of Justice Statistics. (2012). Available from
http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov

A strong focus on punishment means that these women are placed in prison rather
than being offered community-based alternatives such as probation or house arrest (Dressel,
Porterfield, & Barnhill, 1998).Women are typically arrested and convicted for different
reasons than men and, therefore, may benefit from community sentencing as well as
substance abuse treatment. They are often struggling with poverty and may be any
combination of undereducated, unskilled, and unemployed. These life circumstances lead
them to commit mostly non-violent property and drug offenses.

Incarcerated Parents

One consistently overlooked aspect of rising incarceration rates is the numbers of
those being imprisoned who are parents. The actual numbers of parents and children affected
by incarceration were overlooked in the research for many years. However, researchers have
begun to look more closely at these numbers in order to assess their importance for policy
and reentry initiatives. The Sentencing Project first attempted to compile this data, releasing

their study entitled "Incarcerated Parents and Their Children: Trends 1991-2007" in 2009.

This study gathered data from the Bureau of Justice Statistics thus illustrating the numbers of

parents and children being affected by incarceration. The study highlighted several key

constructs as relates to incarcerated parents. For instance, in 2007, there were 809,800

parents incarcerated which represents an increase of 79% since 1991 (The Sentencing

Project, 2009). In fact, half of all incarcerated men and women were parents (The Sentencing

Project, 2009). From 1991 to 2007, the number of incarcerated mothers had increased by

122% and the numbers of incarcerated fathers had risen by 76% (The Sentencing Project,

2009). Two-thirds of all female state prisoners are mothers of minor children (The

Sentencing Project, 2009). However, fathers account for 93% of all incarcerated parents

(Turner & Peck, 2002). Unfortunately, while 809,800 inmates have minor children, 1.7

million minor children have an incarcerated parent.

	1991	1997	2007	Change 1991-2007	% Change 1991-2007
Fathers	423,000	667,900	744,200	321,200	76%
Mothers	29,500	53,600	65,600	36,100	122%
Children with Incarcerated Parents	936,500	1,498,800	1,706,600	770,100	82.20%

Table 1: This table shows the numbers of incarcerated fathers and mothers from 1991-2007
as well as the numbers of children with incarcerated parents from 1991-2007.
Source: The Sentencing Project (February 2009). *Incarcerated Parents and their
Children: Trends 1991-2007* (Washington, DC).

Children of Incarcerated Parents

The statistics are less descriptive as to the number of children who have incarcerated

parents. In fact, prior to 2000, estimates of the number of children that had incarcerated

parents were made by counting the number of incarcerated women, estimating the percentage

that were mothers based on national averages, and multiplying by the average number of

children that women had based on large-scale self-report data (Myers, Smarsh, Amlund-Hagen, & Kennon, 1999). This method was problematic as research has shown that impoverished mothers, those most likely to be imprisoned, tend to have more children (Cannon, 2006). The first statistics describing the number of children affected by parental incarceration appear in a 2000 Bureau of Justice Statistics Report (Mumola, 2000). This report was subsequently updated by The Sentencing Project in 2009. In 1991, an estimated half-million children had a parent in prison (Mumola, 2000). However, by 2000, that number had increased to an estimated 1.5 million (Mumola, 2000). The most recent data shows that 1.7 million children have a parent in prison (The Sentencing Project, 2009). More than one in five of these children are under the age of five (The Sentencing Project, 2009).

As with the adult population, race affects how children are affected by incarceration. In 1999, one in 14 black children, one in 28 Hispanic children, and one in 125 white children had a parent in prison (Miller, 2006; The Sentencing Project, 2007; The Sentencing Project, 2009). Thus, black children are almost nine times more likely, and Hispanic children are three times more likely, than white children to have a parent in prison. When looking at all forms of criminal sanctions, Crain (2008) found that about 7.3 million children have a parent in the correctional system and that one in 33 children had a parent in prison or jail. This number represents 10% of all minor children in the United States.

The numbers of children impacted by parental incarceration is steadily increasing and will continue to do so as society gets tougher on crime (Springer, Lynch, & Rubin, 2000). Having a parent in prison can have lasting and damaging effects on a child which will be discussed later in this thesis. However, the problem is that these children, aside from the numbers, are an invisible population (Krupat, 2007; Lavan, 2007). This means that they are

not tracked, monitored, or acknowledged by any specific government agency. Law enforcement does not gather information on the children of arrested adults and correctional institutions do not ask prisoners for specific information about their children (Seymour, 1998). The government does not keep track of these children and few social service systems identify or collect information about children with incarcerated parents (Krupat, 2007). Furthermore, the stigmatization of parental incarceration makes it difficult to identify these children (Weissman & LaRue, 1998). For example, mothers or caregivers left to raise the children may not want to admit to others that their loved one is imprisoned. As a result, they do not or cannot seek out help from social services. However, the results found by Mumola (2000) and The Sentencing Project (2009) confirm that the real numbers are staggering (Cannon, 2006).

If prison rates continue to rise, although we have seen a slight leveling effect, then the effects being felt by the children of incarceration will become a larger social problem (Pew Center on the States, 2008). This problem is exacerbated by rising female inmate populations. It is, thereby, necessary to understand the impact that parental incarceration has on children as well as the parents. Furthermore, it is imperative that policies and programs are analyzed and implemented that alleviate the occurrence of recidivism, assist with successful reentry, and eliminate the intergenerational aspects of crime.

EFFECTS OF PARENTAL INCARCERATION ON CHILDREN

Parental incarceration has both visible and hidden effects on children. Children whose parents are in prison are more likely than children whose parents are not incarcerated to exhibit signs of delinquency at a young age, which greatly increases the likelihood of their own imprisonment later in life. Parental incarceration is associated with criminal behavior and mental health problems for children (Rodriquez, Smith, & Zatz, 2009). The familiar strain of poverty for many families may lead multiple family members to engage in illegitimate means in order to provide for their families. As a result, in severe cases both parents may be engaged in criminal behavior and subsequently imprisoned.

While there are few empirical studies that analyze the adverse consequences of parental incarceration, what research that has been done indicates that children of prisoners experience negative consequences (Shillingford & Edwards, 2008). The research is clear as to the types of effects parental incarceration has on children. Lowenstein (2001) summarizes by stating that "in America's war on crime and drugs, children of inmates are the walking wounded" (p. 33). The arrest and imprisonment of a parent creates a chain reaction of bad situations and outcomes for the children of the incarcerated.

Shame and Stigmatization

Many children will suffer from the shame and stigmatization of having a parent in prison. Not surprisingly, they may be teased and taunted by their peers, and may find it difficult to seek help because of the stigma (Lowenstein, 2001). Research has shown that the female partners of incarcerated men feel shame and will try to keep the male's imprisonment

a secret in order to avoid the stigma that follows (Wildeman & Western, 2010). Krupat (2007) refers to this as the "conspiracy of silence" (p. 41). Many mothers or caregivers deceive the child as to their parent's incarceration (Hagan, 1998; Weissman & LaRue, 1998). Subsequently, children may feel distrust for their caregivers when the truth comes out that their parents have really been imprisoned (Krupat, 2007).

There are instances when a child is informed that parental incarceration needs to remain a secret because of fears of social isolation and stigmatization, as suggested by labeling theory (Krupat, 2007). Children are not provided important information such as how long the parent will be away, where the parent is located, and what kind of contact they will have with them (Krupat, 2007). Deception as a result of shame and stigmatization can lead to confusion and distrust (Miller, 2006). Children may imagine that their parents are in horrible danger and may fear that they too may disappear into the darkness of prison.

When one becomes aware of a parent's incarceration, Krupat (2007) finds that they tend to have one of two responses. One is assuming that the child is better off because the parent is clearly a bad influence and the second is that the child will likely follow in his or her parent's footsteps. Mothers also suffer from this silence and secrecy. These women will often withdraw from social networks leading to social isolation. Having their partners in prison increases instances of depression and poverty, thereby, affecting the women's overall well-being. Mothers are often left to care for the children that the men leave behind when they go to prison, and the children often suffer as a result of the mother's isolation. Because of stigmatization, this group of children is not provided adequate services and is thus inaccessible for assessment and analysis (Seymour, 1998; Shillingford & Edwards, 2008).

Additionally, a parent's incarceration secret results in caregivers not seeking support or services for themselves or their children (Krupat, 2007).

Children of inmates can also suffer from indirect labeling. Stigma still remains within mainstream society and the institutions that children participate in such as schools, hospitals, and child welfare services (Krupat, 2007). Krupat (2007) expresses,

> Headlines in television news coverage and newspaper articles refer to people who commit crimes, or who are even accused of committing crimes, as thugs, super-predators, terrors, terrorists, convicts, and offenders. Even well-intentioned media coverage can miss how language impacts the children for whom these very same people are mommy and daddy. (p. 40)

Most difficult in feeling shamed and stigmatized by a community is the fact that it is the result of something they, the child, had no control over (Lee, 2005).

The families of inmates experience many of the same emotions as does the inmate. Schools, employers, and fellow citizens are constantly punishing young people for the actions of their parents which creates a large group of angry young people wanting to punish their naysayers (Hagan, 1998). Breen (1995) concludes that, due to incarceration, friends drift away and children are rejected by their immediate family. Breen (1995) also finds that,

> Friends and schoolmates tend to snub the children, some parents pull their children away from children of inmates with little or no explanation, and in many cases, the child retreats into a primitive survival mode and creates fictional stories that explain the parent's absence in a positive way. (p. 98)

For example, the child may explain their parent's absence as military service or their parent is sick and went to live with someone else.

Children have reported that they feel stigmatized by teachers and fellow students and that they are more likely to be accused of bad things that happen in the classroom such as when things go missing (Krupat, 2007). The most negative result of a child withdrawing from other children in an attempt to avoid rejection is that research suggests that some of them tend to join social groups that are part of the deviant and criminally inclined subculture, such as gangs, who may be less likely to judge (Breen, 1995; Miller, 2006). Seeking acceptance by gangs can lead to involvement in the juvenile justice system and perhaps incarceration in adulthood (Miller, 2006).

<div align="center">Relationship Difficulties</div>

As attachment theory suggests, children who experience an abrupt disruption in their relationship with their parent may develop insecure connections and destructive relationship patterns (Shillingford & Edwards, 2008). Such patterns can resonate in their adult relationships as it will decrease satisfaction in relationships and create a prolonged sense of disconnectedness (Shillingford & Edwards, 2008). Children of incarcerated parents may exhibit precocious sexuality, become runaways, or experience early childbearing and marriage (Hagan, 1998). Older children are more likely to experience repeated bouts of separation due to arrest and incarceration (Myers et al., 1999). Attachment theory suggests that secure attachments to parents during childhood promote healthy relationships which, in turn, reduce the risk of juvenile behavior (Cecil et al., 2008).

A difference between sexes as related to deviant behavior is that adolescent boys tend to seek out accepting peers and engage in diverse forms of deviancy from minor offenses to severe violent offenses and girls do not (Thombre, Montague, Maher, & Zohra, 2009). Some theory suggests that children are in a constant struggle of allegiance between their family and

their peers and the loss of a parent shifts the balance towards peers (Hagan, 1998). As children of incarcerated parents get older and experience prolonged or repeated separation, they must develop mechanisms to cope with their situations. These mechanisms may include gang activity, drug use, or sexual promiscuity (Rodriquez et al., 2009).

<div align="center">Financial Difficulties</div>

Most children who have parents in prison are already disadvantaged or from poor communities (Lowenstein, 2001; Wildeman & Western, 2010). Several inmates expressed that their low economic status was a factor in their poor decision making and that, as a result of their incarceration, their family only experiences greater financial strain (Thombre et al., 2009). In fact, research has found that children of incarcerated parents face more economic and residential instability than their counterparts (Geller, Garfinkel, Cooper, & Mincy, 2009). Family instability is the result of children losing contact with their incarcerated parents once they enter the prison gates. Breen (1995) found that, in California alone, more than 75% of families who visit imprisoned parents have an income level below the federal poverty level.

Low family income as a result of incarceration will negatively affect those children who already live in unsafe neighborhoods, attend ineffective schools, have poor diets, or receive little healthcare (Foster & Hagan, 2007; Geller et al., 2009). Financial strain as a result of parental incarceration increases the likelihood of a child experiencing foster care placement and homelessness, and for those who experience maternal incarceration, the likelihood is even greater. The issue of foster care will be addressed in a later section. Strain theory suggests that it also increases the likelihood of the child engaging in delinquent acts in order to support their families.

Educational Problems

Adequate and fulfilling social and educational functioning, especially in school years, has been found to correlate with positive life outcomes and an increased likelihood of adult success (Shillingford & Edwards, 2008). Like many researchers, Lowenstein (2001) found that children of inmates are at an increased risk for doing badly in school or dropping out. He details a study which found that, in a sample of the children of 70 women in jail awaiting trial, 33% had already repeated a grade and 35% were involved in special education (Lowenstein, 2001). This finding is confirmed by Bilchik (2001) who also asserts that children of incarcerated prisoners are at a greater risk for poor academic performance.

Children of incarcerated parents are more likely to experience suspension, mandated school visits by a guardian, failing grades, and extensive absence from school (Myers et al., 1999). Older children may be required to take on parental roles with younger siblings and, as a result, may be forced to leave school in order to find jobs to support their families (Thombre et al., 2009). This helps explain the 34% drop-out rate for children of incarcerated parents compared to a 10% drop-out rate for their peers (Myers et al., 1999). In fact, for incarcerated mothers who had dropped out of high school prior to their incarceration, 52% of their children had also dropped out (Crain, 2008). This is compared to 15% of children whose incarcerated mothers had finished high school prior to their incarceration (Crain, 2008).

A discouraging fact is that much of the increase in school problems may be the result of teachers' expectations for students with incarcerated parents. One study of teacher's perceptions found that teachers believed other teachers were the source of stigmatization more so than students (Dallaire, Ciccone, & Wilson, 2010). Stigmas and reputations such as

these affect students by determining others' perceptions and expectations of them (Dallaire et al., 2010). Dallaire and her colleagues (2010) found that teachers who were given a scenario in which a child's parent was absent due to incarceration, as opposed to other reasons, such as military leave or even death, were more likely to respond with negative assumptions about a child's educational abilities predicated upon parental incarceration. These types of assumptions can lead to self-fulfilling prophecies for the children, in which the teacher's expectations are so powerful and pervasive that the child begins to believe that they cannot succeed in school.

<div align="center">Psychological Effects</div>

Parental incarceration can also affect the mind or mental health of a child. This can often be severe enough to cause mental problems, or even actual physical disease. Children of incarcerated prisoners "experience a range of difficult emotions – fear, anxiety, abandonment, shame, worry that they will never see their parent again, sadness, loneliness, and guilt" (Lowenstein, 2001, p. 34). According to Lowenstein (2001), arrested mothers stated that 41% of their children had been neglected, 21% had been physically abused, and 14% had been sexually abused. These women also reported that, of their children, 31% had problems with anxiety, 21% had problems with depression, and 6% had suicidal thoughts (Lowenstein, 2001). Breen (1995) concludes that children's reaction to parental incarceration will manifest itself in two possible ways: Acting-out behavior that manifests itself in truancy, aggressiveness, running away, and drug or alcohol abuse, and acting-in behavior, which shows itself in more subtle ways, such as the tendency to daydream, poor school performance, nightmares, and lack of interest in playing after school (Breen, 1995; Kleiner, 2002).

Psychological effects seem to vary as to age and gender. Research shows that acting-out behavior is seen more with paternal incarceration and acting-in behavior is associated more with maternal incarceration (Weissman & LaRue, 1998). Interestingly, studies have found that paternal incarceration is associated with substantial increases in physical aggression for boys, but not girls (Wildeman & Western, 2010). Research scantly analyzed gender specific reactions to parental incarceration yet limited studies often suggested that boys are more likely to exhibit outward expressions of emotion in the form of aggressive behavior, whereas girls are more likely to exhibit inward emotional problems (Rodriquez et al., 2009).

A child's ability to cope with the loss of a parent is affected by the child's age and developmental stage at the time of separation (Crain, 2008). Children's sense of emotional security is established by the end of the infant and toddler years (Cecil et al., 2008). If this development is disrupted by instability and chaos, these may become the child's lifelong response to situations (Cecil et al., 2008). In other words, it becomes engrained in them to always expect these sorts of problems.

Research has found that children younger than eight years old will exhibit forms of externalizing behavioral problems as a result of parental incarceration (Wildeman & Western, 2010), such as having temper-tantrums or acting-out. However, older children are more likely to exhibit signs of internalizing behavior, such as being anxious, depressed, or withdrawn (Wildeman & Western, 2010). Early onset of delinquency is highly likely without proper emotional development at an early age (Cecil et al., 2008). As children reach adolescence, they exhibit more acting-out behaviors such as delinquency, drug addiction, and

gang involvement in order to seek out attention (Hagan, 1998). This is further exaggerated when the child's family and community are steeped in instability and chaos.

For children who exhibit many of these symptoms before having a parent in prison, research has found that parental incarceration exacerbates pre-existing psychological problems in children (Wildeman & Western, 2010). Children from violent homes display greater levels of externalizing behaviors such as aggression and delinquency, internalizing behaviors such as depression and anxiety, cognitive difficulties such as trouble concentrating and lower test scores, and social competence difficulties including a lack of empathy and impaired problem solving (DeHart & Altshuler, 2009). Children's exposure to violence can range from being a witness to experiencing direct physical, sexual, or psychological abuse not only in their homes but in their communities.

Of course, not every child with an incarcerated parent experiences problems. Research has found that children's ability to positively manage their emotions is important to how they feel about themselves and how they get along with others (Lotze, Ravindran, & Myers, 2010). One of the most immediate issues is the terror and confusion that children feel when they witness or learn about the arrest of a parent (Bilchik, 2001). Many children are present when parents are arrested, especially in the case of mothers, and they are simply not at an age of maturity to be able to understand and cope with the emotions that come from witnessing this type of traumatic event. Young children are the least apt to have the developmental skills necessary to cope with this type of trauma and are the most in need of explanation (Bilchik, 2001). Many of these children may begin to believe that they are in some way responsible for their parent's imprisonment. Children who feel shame feel worthless and powerless which can lead them to become more aggressive, have a lack of

guilt or empathy for others, and express less fear (Lotze et al., 2010). This also elucidates how children can benefit from programs that allow them to express their anxieties and share their situations with others so that they are not restrained by the shame of parental incarceration.

Intergenerational Crime

Arguably, the most damaging effect of parental incarceration on a child is that all of the previous factors combine to increase the likelihood of a child of an inmate actually becoming an inmate in the future. Some studies have shown a significant, although difficult to measure, correlation between parental incarceration and future criminal participation by the child. Cannon (2006) stresses that "the significance of that correlation is that the next generation of prisoners is going to come from the current generation of prisoners" (p. 28). The research varies, yet consistently, children of incarcerated parents are 5% to 8% more likely to go to prison than children who do not have incarcerated parents (Bilchik, 2001; Crain, 2008; Dallaire, 2007; Fiorica, 2007; Kleiner, 2002; Lowenstein, 2001; Vacca, 2008). Within the juvenile justice system, more than half of the individuals have at least one parent in prison (Crain, 2008).

The child's experience prior to a parent's incarceration is crucial. However, it is the case that some children have dealt with negative issues such as poverty, poor nutrition, neighborhood violence, or a family history of drug and/or alcohol abuse which may have led to their parent's incarceration (DeHart & Altshuler, 2009; Tebo, 2006). These issues have also been found to be high predictors of future criminal behavior. Therefore, it is difficult to determine which problem may have caused the increased likelihood of delinquent behavior or incarceration for the child (DeHart & Altshuler, 2009; Tebo, 2006).

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Research has confirmed that incarceration affects the poor more than other social classes. However, parental incarceration is only further escalating the class divisions. Incarceration diminishes men's earning by up to 30% after leaving prison (Wildeman & Western, 2010). A strong determinant of this is the fact that many employers simply do not want to hire someone who has been recently released from prison (Murphy, Fuleihan, Richards, & Jones, 2011). This disruption in the economic well-being of children can lead to a further need to commit crime or engage in illegitimate means as a form of survival. By not providing proper training and vocational programs, prison is increasing the likelihood of parents and their children returning to prison. Frye and Dawe (2008) concur that for many children, the very risk factors that contributed to their own parent's incarceration are present in their lives, creating the intergenerational vulnerability for negative outcomes.

Wildeman and Western (2010) argue that "having a parent go to prison is now so common for poor, minority children and so negatively affects them [that] mass imprisonment may even lead to more crime in the long term" (p. 170). Studies have found that the prison incarceration boom has a vastly disproportionate effect on low-income black and Hispanic families (Wildeman, 2009). These families are already fragile before criminality becomes involved that sending the heads of these families to prison without regard for reintegration or support for families further increases long-term damage on the children (Wildeman & Western, 2010). This group of children is more likely to engage in criminal behavior themselves when parental incarceration is paired with poverty, substance abuse, neglect, and instability (Fiorica, 2007).

However, no section of society is immune. In fact, Wildeman and Western (2010) argue that United States' crime policy and law, in and of itself, has reduced the life chances

of children affected by parental incarceration. Similar to the way in which research shows that sentencing judges use racial cues to determine the severity of sentences for adult offenders, juvenile court officials also rely on attributions to make decisions (Rodriquez et al., 2009). Their decisions are affected by the juvenile's family and the level of parental cooperation. One of the main determinants for removing a juvenile from their home is the amount of family dysfunction and one of the main indicators of family dysfunction for juvenile court officials is the criminal involvement or imprisonment of a parent (Rodriquez et al., 2009). In fact, Murray and Farrington (2006) suggest that juvenile judges treat children of incarcerated persons more harshly and that they have a higher likelihood of formal juvenile court processing.

Lavan (2007), the child of an inmate, provides a first-hand account of how secondary labeling based on the actions of the parent affects a child. "Imagine walking through life striving to excel while people are continuously judging and labeling you. Now imagine that they are judging you based on something you did not even do" (Lavan, 2007, p. 46). She stresses that being the child of an incarcerated parent is not their identity; yet, others assume that it is their destiny to turn into their mothers and fathers. Lavan (2007) questions,

> When did society become so negative that we build prisons in anticipation of
> incarcerating children instead of building schools so we can teach them and nurture
> them, so they can grow up into the children of promise that they really are? (p. 47)

Normalization of Prison

Reed and Reed (1997) concluded that "the growing prison culture observed in many low-income, inner-city neighborhoods plays a big part in assimilating children into what is becoming an intergenerational norm" (p. 159). Unfortunately, for many children crime has

become normalized in their families and their communities (Miller, 2006; Seymour, 1998). Individuals that live in poor and crime-ridden communities may find criminal involvement to be more of a community norm than a stigma (Miller, 2006). In fact, a recent *New York Times* article highlighted the controversy surrounding a playground built in a public housing area that was built to resemble a jailhouse (Buckley & Meenan, 2010). The children commonly made a game of going to jail. Surprisingly, the playground was in place for six years before anyone noted that it was a problem. These types of attitudes can lead to desensitization of the severity of criminality and incarceration (Miller, 2006).

Inmates expressed how their children believed that their options in life as result of a parent being imprisoned were limited and many saw incarceration as the only viable destiny (Thombre et al., 2009). Children of incarcerated parents may assume that prison life is not difficult but, rather, they see life inside prison as advantageous and, in some cases, a badge of honor (Thombre et al., 2009). One inmate stated that,

> It has been normalized for them that living in prison is much like living anywhere. Most of the influence is by watching television. My children are not scared when they talk about prison and that makes me worry. Their attitude towards prison might mean that they will end up here someday. (Thombre et al., 2009, p. 82)

This normalization of crime leads to a disrespect for law enforcement that promotes delinquent behavior.

Juvenile Delinquency

The children of incarcerated parents become all too familiar with the criminal justice system themselves. Kleiner (2002) argues that the children of incarcerated parents end up being major consumers of social services systems and are likely to be involved in the

juvenile justice system, subsequently entering the adult justice system. These children are disproportionately prone to become delinquent as adolescents (Hanlon et al., 2006). In fact, the American Correctional Association estimates that half of those in juvenile detention centers have parents who have been incarcerated or are currently imprisoned (Dressel et al., 1998). The child's experience instills negative attitudes toward law enforcement and the criminal justice system (Reed & Reed, 1997). In fact, Zealand (1998) found that fathers typically assume the disciplinarian duties within a family and, therefore, without a father present to discipline a child, it may be more likely to find them exhibiting or mimicking behaviors of the incarcerated parent.

Studies suggest that these children are three to six times more likely to exhibit serious delinquent behavior (Lee, 2005). This is devastating considering that 40% to 75% of youths who are arrested for delinquency are later arrested in adulthood (Lee, 2005). Younger children are more likely to witness their parent's arrest as they are more likely to be present in the home at the time. Additionally, young children do not see themselves as separate from their parents and presume threats against their parents as threats against themselves (Myers et al., 1999). However, older children who witness the arrest may come to distrust law enforcement and view them as a threat rather than as protectors (Miller, 2006). Many children blame and feel resentment towards the criminal justice system for taking their parents away (Thombre et al., 2009). In fact, they see the cops as the enemy. This distrust towards law enforcement and the criminal justice system can lead to delinquency problems.

The problem with incarceration is that "there is no natural end to the grieving process, as there is with death. It is indeterminate, unrelenting, unexplainable, and it offers the child no honorable way out" (Breen, 1995, p. 99). In fact, news that a family member has become

incarcerated is not met with the same response that a death in the family would draw (Krupat, 2007). There is not an abundance of social support such as condolences, food baskets, or offers of support. Instead, these children receive judgment and guilt (Krupat, 2007). Children of incarcerated parents sometimes exhibit signs of post-traumatic stress similar to those who have lost a parent to death (Miller, 2006). However, some would argue that death is easier to cope with because it is naturally occurring and final (Miller, 2006). Incarceration, on the other hand, leads to confusion as to how to grieve the loss of a parent who is alive yet absent both emotionally and physically. Reed and Reed (1997) may provide us with one of the most profound statements regarding the incarcerated and their children: "Like the canaries that served as an early warning about poisoned air, the children of incarcerated parents alert us to the grave consequences resulting from a polluted environment that sustains these larger trends" (Reed & Reed, 1997, p. 167).

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN MOTHERS AND FATHERS

Researchers have only recently begun looking at the differences between the experience of parenting behind bars for mothers and fathers. This late start is mainly due to the increasing numbers of women entering prison providing sufficient sample sizes for this type of research to take place. The research, however, is clear that there are significant differences between how mothers and fathers face parenting challenges behind bars. Murray and Farrington (2006) suggest that the only way to make reasonable conclusions about the best programs for children of incarcerated parents is by finding "evidence on how the effects of parental imprisonment differ according to whether mothers or fathers are imprisoned" (p. 730). It is also possible that males and females react differently to parenting programs, and in turn, achieve different results. Most research indicates that the experience of parental incarceration is intensified for children experiencing maternal incarceration relative to paternal incarceration for a number of reasons.

Maternal Incarceration

Women are traditionally viewed as the primary caregivers of children. Therefore, as the number of incarcerated women continues to rise, more children are becoming detached from their parents (Fiorica, 2007). Social bond theory suggests that this means that levels of crime will continue to rise as well. Women are disproportionately affected by mandatory minimum laws, especially with regards to drug sentencing considering that the majority of women in prison are serving time for drug-related crimes (Fiorica, 2007). However, empirical research on the effects of maternal incarceration is limited (Hanlon et al., 2006).

Relatively few studies focus on female inmates' experiences as mothers. Celinska and Siegel (2010) were the first researchers to qualitatively study and examine how mothers cope with separation from their children by interviewing 37 incarcerated mothers. They found that, with striking consistency, the mothers disassociated themselves from the other inmates and presented themselves as good and capable mothers (Celinska & Siegel, 2010). Most of them had positive views of their relationships with their children and expressed the importance of maintaining contact with their children. In interviews with 25 incarcerated mothers, Enos (2001) also found that imprisoned mothers developed different ways to present themselves as mothers. One way was to disassociate themselves from the other mothers in prison who they viewed as unfit (Enos, 2001).

Incarcerated mothers differ from incarcerated fathers in that they are more likely to face multiple threats from substance abuse, trauma due to sexual abuse, violence, and mental health disorders (Celinska & Siegel, 2010). Glaze and Maruschak (2008) found that between 60% and 73% of incarcerated mothers reported prior physical and sexual abuse. The fact that two-thirds of incarcerated mothers lived with their children prior to incarceration means that many of the children may have been victim or witness to these same acts of abuse. Ninety percent of female inmates interviewed by DeHart and Altshuler (2009) had children of their own or had cared for a partner's children. Over three-quarters of these women mentioned the impact of abuse on their children prior to their incarceration. This would suggest that inmate mothers, and female inmates in general, need a gender-specific model of prison which focuses on the treatment and care of these issues.

The evidence suggests that children of incarcerated mothers are at a much higher risk for criminal behavior themselves. Dallaire's (2007) study found that:

- Adult children of incarcerated mothers were two and a half times more likely to be incarcerated than adult children of incarcerated fathers.

- Adult children of women who regularly used drugs were at especially high risk for incarceration.

- As risks accumulate, parents, especially mothers, were more likely to report that their adult children were incarcerated.

- Incarcerated mothers of adult and minor children were significantly more likely to report higher rates of familial incarceration than their male counterparts.

- Incarcerated mothers of minor children were significantly more likely than incarcerated fathers of minor children to report that their children were in non-familial care situations such as foster care or orphanages.

Huebner and Gustafson (2007) also studied the effect of maternal incarceration on adult children's involvement in the criminal justice system and confirmed these findings.

There is agreement in the existing literature, supported by attachment theory, that a child's sense of security is disrupted more dramatically by maternal incarceration. This is due to the fact that mothers are more likely to be the caregivers of their children whereas fathers usually have a partner that can continue to provide childcare during their incarceration (Hanlon et al., 2006). Children with incarcerated mothers are more likely to experience displacement from their homes and separation problems (Myers et al., 1999). Even upon release, many women do not immediately begin living with their children and those who do face problematic relationships (Cecil et al., 2008). In fact, imprisoned mothers claim that isolation and separation from their children is the hardest aspect of incarceration to deal with (Celinska & Siegel, 2010). Mothers in prison view reuniting with their children on the outside as their motivation to succeed but feel concerned about their ability to continue relationships with their children (Celinska & Siegel, 2010). For this reason, mothers seem to benefit the most from parenting programs.

In 2000, the first national study of residential mother and child correctional programs in the United States was conducted (Temin, 2001). This study was implemented in order to discover the most pressing issues to be addressed in light of the fact that the majority of incarcerated women are mothers. The children of male inmates typically continue to be cared for by their mothers. However, while in prison, a female inmate is less likely than a male inmate to have an intact support system outside of the prison for her children and very often loses her family as a result (Temin, 2001). Due to the fact that women represent the smallest number of prisoners within the criminal justice system, they often are given inadequate programs for parenting. Temin (2001) argues that "it is very important that the existence of a relatively small number not be determinant of lack of need for service" (p. 67).

Studies indicate that children with incarcerated mothers may face greater stress and more cumulative risks in their environments than children of incarcerated fathers (Poehlmann et al., 2010). As will be discussed, this is typically due to the fact that children who have incarcerated mothers will be forced into foster care or to reside with grandmothers who may not have the necessary means to provide for them. It has also been shown that children with incarcerated mothers may be more likely to have witnessed their parent's sentencing or arrest (Dallaire et al., 2010). This type of traumatic experience can be damaging for a child who may not understand why their parent is being arrested. Many of these children will go through their childhood believing that they are to blame and feeling guilty for their parent's arrest. Attachment theory suggests that,

> Disruptions and separations in the mother-child relationship increases risks to
> children and may negatively effect and disrupt the child's ability to form and

maintain a secure attachment relationship with the parent or another family member.

(Dallaire, 2007, p. 443)

This issue is further exacerbated by the problems that children face when being raised by someone other than their parent.

<center>Caregivers for Children of Incarcerated Mothers</center>

When a father is imprisoned, the mother is typically left to handle the children. In fact, 75% of children with incarcerated mothers also have criminally involved fathers, so fathers are not typically parenting while mothers are incarcerated (Cecil et al., 2008). Thus, when a mother enters prison, it is other family members, grandmothers, and foster care systems that are burdened. The degree of stress on a child resulting from a parent's arrest and incarceration will largely depend on where they go and who takes care of them (Myers et al., 1999).

However, the literature is mixed with regards to whether parental incarceration itself or a difficult family lifestyle affects the rate at which children go into foster care (Rodriquez et al., 2009). For example, a study in Illinois found that most female inmates lost custody of their children before they were incarcerated (Rodriquez et al., 2009). Furthermore, a longitudinal study conducted in North Carolina found that parental incarceration affected family instability but not family structure or the quality of care of the children (Rodriquez et al., 2009). Most of these children were already being cared for by other family members prior to the mother's incarceration. These types of findings may be detrimental to the efforts to create programs for this group of youths who are still in need of services.

Although foster care issues are important to address, grandmothers often function as the primary caregiver during a mother's incarceration (Hanlon et al., 2006). In fact,

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approximately half of the minor children of incarcerated women are being raised by grandmothers (Hanlon et al., 2006). While kinship care can ease the burdens of separation for a child, research indicates that grandmothers have lower education and lower income levels as well as no preparation for their role other than their own experience as parents (Hanlon et al., 2006).

Grandmothers are often reluctant to provide childcare because they are already living on meager resources. Little or no financial assistance is available to family members who agree to take on the responsibilities of an incarcerated parent (Myers et al., 1999). Government policies do not provide easy access to public assistance, such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, for grandmothers or relative caregivers (Miller, 2006). Furthermore, assuming custody would also mean that they are admitting that their child is an unfit parent which could lead to further family disruption (Hanlon et al., 2006).

For these reasons, grandmothers are often raising the children of incarcerated parents unofficially and informally. This means that they are not able to seek out services and resources to help them provide for the children. Grandparents become financially vulnerable when they become caregivers for grandchildren. The issue is that intervention and reentry techniques will be unsuccessful if they do not operate with a complete understanding of the relationship that exists between incarcerated mothers and the grandmothers who are left to care for their children (Cecil et al., 2008). The fact is that criminal justice and social service systems are not prepared to deal with this unique group of at-risk children.

The majority of children of incarcerated mothers will experience at least one change in placement during maternal incarceration (Myers et al., 1999). Dressel and colleagues (1998) showed that 11% of children with incarcerated mothers experience at least two

changes in their caregiver and housing situations during the period of incarceration.

However, children who are shuffled from one home to another will suffer much worse effects

than those who have stability in their daily life (Crain, 2008). Children in foster-care as a

result of parental imprisonment have unique needs because the length of separation time

cannot be shortened by the parent's demonstrated ability to care for their children (Seymour,

1998). This group of at-risk children also has unique therapeutic needs resulting from having

witnessed their parent's criminal behavior, the trauma of the separation, and the stigma

associated with parental incarceration (Seymour, 1998).

However, social service programs are not designed to address these needs. In a survey

of a sampling of child protective service agencies across the country, in which only 38 states

responded, Seymour (1998) found that:

- More than half reported increased requests for help in placing children of incarcerated parents.

- Eighty percent stated that there were no specific policies in place for responding to these requests.

- Ninety-seven percent reported that their agencies had no specific policies in place to guide their work with these children.

- Only six of the 38 states reported having policies that focus specifically on children with incarcerated parents.

- Twenty-eight states provided information about programs and services available to children with parents in prison.

- Only two of the 38 states provided their staff with specific training regarding the needs of children with incarcerated parents and only one of these has developed a formal training curriculum.

Hairston (1998) considers child welfare agencies as unresponsive and ineffective as to the

services they provide for children of incarcerated parents. Based on this information, social

services and the criminal justice system should work together to develop an accurate and

readily accessible database of families directly impacted by parental incarceration in order to address their needs.

<div align="center">Paternal Incarceration</div>

Although maternal incarceration may have more severe effects on children, there are special issues with regards to parenting behind bars for fathers. Despite the fact that women are provided inadequate programs and services, men are often provided no programs at all. The societal perception is that men are merely the providers for the family and the women are the caretakers of the children. In fact, Zealand (1998) argues that "because the plight of the incarcerated father has not been recognized, his plight is worse than that of the incarcerated mother and her children" (p. 266).

Surveys of men in prison found that they are less likely to be married than men who are not in prison but just as likely to have children (Wildeman & Western, 2010). In fact, Patton (1999) suggests that the prison system shows absolute neglect for single inmate fathers. He stresses that, of more than nine million people, single father homes are the fastest growing group in the United States (Patton, 1999). This neglect is typically the result of generalized views of the father being outside of the home and the public's view of males being more blameworthy and in need of punishment than females. For these reasons, children of single fathers in prison do not receive the same reunification services as mothers and fathers are more likely to have their parental rights terminated (Patton, 1999).

Patton also suggests that the argument is a monetary one in that there are more single mothers in prison, and, therefore, building female facilities to care for children will reach more children. Patton (1999) argues that,

Politics can no longer justify treating children different based solely upon the sex of

their single parent, it is one thing to recognize that the public perceives male and

female felons different, it is another to look into a child's eyes and explain that the

reason he or she cannot gain the advantage of a community release program is solely

because his or her only remaining parent is male. (p. 204)

Researchers argue that incarcerated fathers must have the same opportunities incarcerated

mothers have to maintain the parent-child bond during their incarceration.

Many have tried to argue that the lives of children of incarcerated mothers are much

more disrupted because they will have to reside in foster care or with relatives, while the

children of incarcerated fathers will simply remain with the mothers. On the contrary,

Zealand (1998) asserts that because there are many more children of incarcerated fathers than

of incarcerated mothers, there are actually more than twice as many children of incarcerated

fathers in foster care than of incarcerated mothers. This means that the needs of these fathers

and their children must also become a priority for corrections officials. Children of inmate

fathers also face challenges during incarceration.

In fact, some have argued that economic strain as a result of incarceration is worse

with regards to paternal incarceration (Rodriquez et al., 2009). Women often face financial

challenges raising the children as single parents if the father was the sole source of income

for the family. Women must rely on relatives, welfare, or seek low-paying jobs to care for

their children (Rodriquez et al., 2009). This can have a negative impact on the children if the

mother's struggle results in constant relocation. This disrupts the child with family, school,

and social networks. Furthermore, children may not remain in programs long enough to

receive the services that they need (Weissman & LaRue, 1998). Due to financial instability as

a result of paternal incarceration, mothers may have to move several times. As a result of this process, Rodriquez and his colleagues (2009) suggest that children of incarcerated fathers may be at a heightened risk for foster-care placement. In fact, children may be shuffled between multiple caregivers or foster care programs.

The problem is that a random sample of prison programs across the country found that most prison officials believed that "providing parenting programs for male prisoners is just not an issue" (Zealand, 1998, p. 256). The implementation of large numbers of prison programs for men is unlikely because advocates fear that this would take resources away from or cut the programs of women rather than add new programs or spaces for men and, therefore, no one wants to challenge the exclusion of men (Hairston, 1998; Zealand, 1998). In more recent years, however, this has changed as many more programs are being added to assist men in developing proper parenting skills. All of these factors are heightened when the occurrence of both parents in prison is present. However, for now, this is not as common of an occurrence in modern society but this will likely change as tough on crime politics and laws persist. Regardless of which parent is incarcerated, intervention programs need to be put into place to stabilize the environment of these children and lessen the risks associated with having a parent in prison.

OBSTACLES TO PARENTING BEHIND BARS

Research has consistently found that allowing parents to maintain close relationships with their children is sure to ease the pains of imprisonment and to improve the overall mood of parents serving time. Maintaining close relationships is also beneficial for the child as it improves their emotional well-being and supports their relationships with their parents to subdue many of the negative effects of parental incarceration. However, the greatest and most evident effect of maintaining strong bonds between parent and child while in prison is the lowered likelihood of recidivism.

Benefits of Maintaining Contact

One simple way to ensure that the parent-child bond is maintained is through routine visitation. Researchers have found that visitation is extremely important for maintaining family ties (Lavan, 2007). Social bond theory suggests that broken homes and a lack of parent-child communication are related to a child's inclination towards delinquent behavior. Visitation can help a child deal with the adverse effects of parental incarceration including anxiety, anger, and fear over the separation (Tebo, 2006). Physical and emotional separation can affect the reunification process. Maintaining family ties has been significantly, positively, associated with successful rehabilitation, successful release from prison, and lower recidivism rates (Harrison, 1997). For incarcerated individuals, increased contact with their families can lead to a smoother reunification process upon release and greater success at reintegration back into their communities (Fiorica, 2007).

Although facilitating visits can be difficult, it is imperative because visitation has been found to decrease the stress of separation and increase the likelihood of successful reunification (Seymour, 1998). It is important to ensure that inmate parents who will return to their roles as guardians are suitable to take on that role (Fiorica, 2007). Visitation is necessary for all of those involved. Visitation keeps fathers from seeming like strangers that suddenly come to live in their child's home and also is necessary to meet the needs of mothers to have satisfying relationships (Lavan, 2007). The child also benefits emotionally as long as there is no history of violence against the child (Tebo, 2006).

Face-to-face contact is encouraged because it allows children to express their emotions as well as to relieve any irrational fantasies or fears about how their parent is being treated (Myers et al., 1999). Additionally, Harrison (1997) found that inmates in one program designed to assist in the maintenance of family relationships only had a 2% to 4% recidivism rate and exhibited fewer disciplinary problems while incarcerated. Fiorica (2007) addresses the real problem with maintaining contact by stating that,

> When mothers are sent back into society and given custody of their children, we trust them with the skills and responsibility to make decisions regarding the care and well-being of other human beings. If we are willing to do so after a woman has completed a five-year sentence, why make it almost impossible for some of these families to maintain any level of substantial connection during the sentencing? (p. 61)

Although there is vast evidence that visitation and maintaining contact is essential for successful reintegration back into free society, institutional barriers make regular contact difficult.

Barriers to Maintaining Contact

The structure of the criminal justice system makes maintaining contact difficult for incarcerated individuals and their children. In fact, Seymour (1998) found that inadequate information regarding visiting procedures and difficulty in scheduling visits due to a lack of cooperation from the departments of corrections leads to a lack of visitation between inmate parents and their children. Approximately one-half of parents report not having visits from their children and the other half report infrequent visits (Miller, 2006). Hairston (1998) found that 63% of the mothers in her sample did not want to be visited by their children. However, this could be related to the fact that these same women had never been visited by family members in the first place. Additionally, in their interviews with inmate mothers, Celinska and Siegel (2010) found that 41% had never received visits from their children and that either phone calls or letters were the primary means of communication.

The Sentencing Project (2007) also found that more than half of all parents in both state and federal correctional facilities had never had a personal visit from their children. The data shows that since 1997 monthly contacts had decreased by 28% and that the number of those reporting that they have never had contact with their children while in prison had increased to 17% (The Sentencing Project, 2007). In 2001, only 20 states correction agencies stated that they provided assistance with familial visitation in one or more of their state prisons (Fiorica, 2007). Visitation is contingent upon the type of parent-child relationship there was pre-incarceration, the immediate goals of the visit, and the support that is available for parents, children, and caregivers before, during, and after the visit (Celinska & Siegel, 2010). Although visitation is beneficial for both parents and children, there are institutional barriers that make parenting behind bars difficult.

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Correctional programs are hesitant to provide programs for children of incarcerated parents because they are believed to be badly parented (Tebo, 2006). However, it is not necessarily the case that they are bad parents, but, rather, that there are obstacles to parenting behind bars beyond the parent's control. One of the biggest obstacles to parenting behind bars is the high cost of transportation and contact as a result of the geographic location of prisons. Most prisoners come from urban areas; however, prisons are usually located in very rural areas far from the inmate's original home (Poehlmann et al., 2010; Reed & Reed, 1997; Seymour, 1998; Temin, 2001). In fact, 50% of state inmates and 40% of federal inmates live between 100 and 500 miles from their children (Mumola, 2000).

Twenty-four state departments of corrections indicated that their state facilities do not assign inmates based on the facility's proximity to the inmate's family (Fiorica, 2007). This means that children can rarely be brought to visit their parents because of the high costs and inconvenience of travel. Bilchik (2001) asserts that some of the clients she interviewed admitted that they had to drive up to six hours for a visit with their incarcerated family members. Many caregivers cannot, or will not, make the effort to ensure visitation (Tebo, 2006). Moreover, most prisons only allow collect calls from incarcerated individuals and the family members are often charged extraordinarily high rates for such calls (Poehlmann et al., 2010). This is unfortunate considering that researchers have clearly shown that many of these individuals come from poverty and cannot afford to keep in contact with their families or children.

Another obvious obstacle to parenting behind bars is that prisons are not designed with children in mind. The visiting rooms are not family-friendly and this can add to an already traumatic experience for children. In fact, one study found that children who

discussed their experiences visiting their incarcerated parent did not report positive visitation experiences (Poehlmann et al., 2010). Visits may be time-consuming as well as humiliating and uncomfortable for both the parent and child (Seymour, 1998). Prison visits are usually held in large noisy settings with several other people around (Dressel et al., 1998).

The frequency of the visitation experience also depends on the child's age. For example, for young children, the caretakers control the likelihood of visitation and may often feel that it is not a positive experience for the child and may limit contact (Poehlmann et al., 2010). Older children are able to better clearly express their opinions and may or may not benefit from these experiences. For example, some older children exhibit increased signs of behavioral problems immediately after visiting a parent in prison, whereas some children show a decreased likelihood of school or behavioral problems when they visit with a parent regularly (Poehlmann et al., 2010).

There are also concerns from both inmate parents and caregivers about the children's reactions to visits (Seymour, 1998). For example, women who most effectively mothered from prison were those whose children's guardians allowed them to be the most involved in decisions about the child and ensured communication between mother and child (Celinska & Siegel, 2010). On the other hand, some parents feel that their actions created guilt and depression in their children and that these negative emotions are only strengthened with each visit (Harrison, 1997).

Prison officials also use family visits as a control mechanism (Dressel et al., 1998). In other words, permission may not be granted if an inmate misbehaves. Prison visitations are further hindered by requiring custodial parents to accompany the children, limiting child visitors to only those who list the inmate parent on a birth certificate, body searches, and

inappropriate behavior by other inmates and guards (Thombre et al., 2009). Furthermore, there are instances where visitation may not be suitable. In some instances, separation may be in the best interest of the child. This is especially true when the parent is abusive (Rodriquez et al., 2009). Incarcerated parents may not be aware of the situations that their children are becoming involved in which can lead to stressful visitations. Myers and colleagues (1999) found that incarcerated parents failed to acknowledge problems with their children since their incarceration while their at-home partners or caregivers cited numerous difficulties. Institutional change with regard to the nature of prison visitation is necessary when considering the benefits of maintaining familial bonds.

<div align="center">Adoption and Safe Families Act</div>

Another significant obstacle to parenting behind bars was the implementation of the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) in 1997. The ASFA requires that states begin termination proceedings when a child resides in foster care for 15 out of the last 22 months (Sherry, 2010; The Sentencing Project, 2007). The problem is that there was no provision placed into this act to accommodate for children who go into foster care as a result of a parent's imprisonment. More than 60% of mothers are expected to serve more than 24 months due to harsher drug sentences and mandatory minimum laws (Hanlon et al., 2006; The Sentencing Project, 2007). The use of longer sentences for drug offenses means that most female prisoners cannot meet the federal mandated time frames for showing that they have a permanent plan for their children (Dressel et al., 1998).

Sherry (2010) finds that the law "creates a 'commit a crime and lose your child' policy with long sentences, drug laws, and current federal and state laws serving to expedite termination proceedings" (p. 381). In the years immediately following the enactment of the

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ASFA, there was a significant increase in the number of terminations of parental rights involving incarcerated parents (Hanlon et al., 2006). In fact, a study by the Child Welfare League of America found that parental rights were terminated 91.4% of the time if they involved incarcerated fathers, 92.9% of the time for incarcerated mothers, 100% of the time if both parents were incarcerated, and 81.5% of the time if the parents had been incarcerated for drug-related offenses (Hanlon et al., 2006).

The Act was created as a result of the assumption that terminating parental rights would help ensure that the affected child had a stable home life. Fortunately, following a law passed in 2004, a parent's incarceration can no longer be the sole evidence required to prove abandonment in order to terminate parental rights (Tebo, 2006). In fact, state courts have ruled that "the fact that a parent is a prisoner…is not sufficient grounds to terminate parental rights" (Sherry, 2010, p.384). However, the ASFA places a greater burden on incarcerated parents as they are more likely than parents who are not incarcerated to lose their children in these proceedings.

Sherry (2010) finds that incarcerated parents cannot meet the demands necessary to show parental rights should not be terminated for a number of reasons:

- Incarceration makes it difficult to complete the case plan created to help families reunify since they cannot participate in many of the services required.

- States do not consider the insurmountable challenges incarcerated parents face to maintain contact with their children

- Incarcerated parents face the inability to participate in permanency conferences with child welfare agencies and difficulty in contacting case workers.

- When courts file an order requesting the prisoner for court, the order may not make it to the prison on time or the inmate may have transferred to another prison.

It is obvious that not all incarcerated parents should be allowed to be reunified with their children, but, courts should look at factors other than merely incarceration when deciding whether to terminate a parent's rights. Fortunately, states are beginning to realize the importance of maintaining parent-child relationships. Each case should be investigated individually in order to determine which decision is in the best interest of the child.

<div align="center">Post-Release Problems</div>

Given the barriers that they face while imprisoned, parents will face more challenges with parenting upon release. Several government policies directly hinder a released inmate's ability to make a better live for themselves and their families. The Anti-Drug Abuse Act was strengthened in 1996 by adding the one strike initiative which allows public housing authorities to evict tenants for drug-related activity that takes place on or off the residence grounds (The Sentencing Project, 2007). Additionally, the Housing Opportunity Program Extension Act allows public housing authorities to request criminal conviction information from law enforcement to screen applicants for housing or tenants for eviction (The Sentencing Project, 2007). Furthermore, Section 115 of the federal 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act imposes a lifetime ban on receiving welfare and food stamps for people convicted of a drug-related offense. This is especially devastating for the 42% of women who were receiving this type of assistance prior to their incarceration (The Sentencing Project, 2007).

Criminal records significantly affect a released offender's ability to gain employment (The Sentencing Project, 2007). Not only do employers refuse to hire ex-convicts but inmates are also barred from thousands of jobs (Murphy et al., 2011). In the case of inmate mothers, although 60% of women in state prison have a history of drug dependence, only one in five

women are receiving treatment for substance abuse (The Sentencing Project, 2007). Furthermore, although 44% of women in state prison have never graduated from high school, only one in five women take advantage of high school or GED classes while they are incarcerated (The Sentencing Project, 2007). The fact that these women are not being provided or taking advantage of educational and treatment programs means that they are less likely to successfully reintegrate back into society.

SUCCESSFUL AND NEEDED PROGRAMS

Children of prisoners are one of the most at-risk groups in the United States; however, they are also the most unrecognized in terms of official programs and policy (Reed & Reed, 1997). Lowenstein (2001) argues that "when people look around for a population to target for preventive money, this is the population" (p. 36). These services should include support groups, academic help, mental health services for dealing with trauma, and preventive services that build on the kid's strength so they can make good choices for themselves.

Despite the importance of supporting parenting from behind bars, there are very few programs in place to help strengthen these relationships. A 1999 study found that of 38 states which responded to a survey, only six reported that they had specific policies covering children of inmates and just four said they provided support groups for these children (Lowenstein, 2001). However, research has shown that the programs which are currently in place or have previously existed have been great determinants of success after one leaves prison. In fact, research has found that recidivism rates are as low as 2% to 4% for inmates who have completed parenting skills programs (Harrison, 1997; Rudel & Hayes, 1990).

Many of the programs which have been implemented are innovative and original and should be studied to determine which of the aspects were the most successful for both the prisoners involved and the children. One thing that all the studies agree on is that the most important factor to reduce recidivism is education and strong ties with family and community. It is also extremely important that children be able to see their incarcerated

parents outside of the prison environment in order to increase understanding (Breen, 1995; Lowenstein, 2001). Services that may help both parents and children include mentoring, participation in peer education programs classroom sessions, and job training to help with financial needs post-release (Weissman & LaRue, 1998).

<div align="center">Program Successes</div>

There are several examples in the literature delineating programs that have been successful at improving parenting behind bars and upon release. One such program is Head Start's Behind No Bars program in Pennsylvania (Rudel & Hayes, 1990). This program is an innovative approach to teaching parenting skills (Rudel & Hayes, 1990). The program has created a child-friendly atmosphere, separate from prison visiting rooms, where young children can visit with an incarcerated parent. Aside from these visits, the prisoners also receive counseling on separation issues and how to react appropriately to different behaviors of the children. The greatest factor of this program is that it is not set up for absolute failure like many aspects of the prison system. For example, the handouts provided to the prison parents are written at a fourth-grade reading level in order to match the literacy level of many of the prisoners. In turn, prisoners respond much more positively to the experience as whole because it is adjusted to fit them. Parenting training classes lead to improved attitudes from the parents regarding their ability to raise their children (Harrison, 1997). This program, like many others, is based on the idea that one of the most basic and important aspects of an inmate's successful reintegration back into society is a sound and supportive family unit.

Another innovative program was started by the Family Connections Centers (FCC) in New Hampshire (Kazura & Toth, 2004). Their argument was that one of the most important needed and appreciated programs for incarcerated parents is the use of supervised one-on-one

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visits with their children. They work jointly with the correctional facility to provide programs consisting of parenting classes, parenting support groups, education seminars, and supervised visitations (Kazura & Toth, 2004). They save money by getting activities to do with the children from other community programs already in place, like the local 4-H club. The use of community programs is also utilized in the Save Kids of Incarcerated Parents (SKIP) organization. This organization lines up churches, school organizations, and community service organizations to work with children of inmates (Lowenstein, 2001).

The FCC approach not only helps the prisoners learn appropriate parenting skills but teaches the children life skills as well. The program supports children's development and addresses life-long issues of abandonment and loss. One of the most innovative aspects of this program, which should be considered in future programs, is that the prisoners are responsible for many parts of the program. They built shelving units to house toys and painted murals for the playroom walls. The inmates must clean up the playroom and sanitize the toys after all visits to demonstrate respect for the next parent-child visit. This type of program gives the prisoners a sense of purpose and makes them appreciate what they are learning as well as creates respect amongst the inmate parents (Kazura & Toth, 2004).

The Texas Department of Corrections implemented the GO KIDS (Giving Offenders Kids Incentive and Direction to Succeed) program in 2004. This program serves the caregivers of children by providing information on services within their communities (Crain, 2008). Services are geared toward creating a sense of personal safety, self-worth, and responsibility in order to alleviate the effects of parental incarceration and decrease the likelihood of intergenerational criminal involvement (Crain, 2008). This program also offers support and guidance from caring adult mentors.

Peer education programs have also been found successful. In these programs, trained inmates lead classes for other inmates. Long-Distance Dads is one example of a peer education program (Turner & Peck, 2002). This group believes that empowering fathers to assume emotional, psychological, and financial responsibility for their children may be the greatest step to stopping the cycle of crime as father absence is driving social breakdown (Turner & Peck, 2002). Social breakdown has been helped by the vast influx of fathers entering prisons. In fact, a 1999 study by Princeton University found that father absence is linked to high rates of youth suicide, homelessness, behavioral disorders, high school dropouts, delinquency, and substance abuse (Turner & Peck, 2002). In this program, small groups are facilitated by trained peer leaders in a relatively short twelve week session in which fathers are free to open up about their parenting struggles. In 1999, Long-Distance Dads actually joined forces with the National Fatherhood Initiative. This resulted in programs being started in 145 institutions in 26 states, as well as the addition of a Spanish version being made available (Turner & Peck, 2002).

There are several more types of these programs outlined in the literature which show successful aspects that need to be implemented. Bilchik (2001) outlines several of these in her article. The Sesame Street program operates a walk-in center adjacent to the visiting rooms in two Connecticut state prisons. This provides a non-threatening environment where the children can participate in therapeutic or educational sessions near their incarcerated parents. The Youth Enrichment Services (YES) program offers after-school enrichment programs for up to 26 children and their families. The YES program picks up the children from after school and brings them to a center where they receive counseling, educational support, recreational opportunities, and therapy. YES also works with the incarcerated

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parents, as well as caregivers, to provide parenting education and support services in the communities and correctional facilities.

Fathers and Children Together (FACT) serves young fathers, age 18 to 21, who will soon be released from Connecticut's Manson Youth Institute, and encourages these young men to become supportive fathers. In addition, FACT crafts an individualized service plan for each young father which can include anything from counseling to mentor programs. They also provide family members with transportation to prison and aftercare services for inmates three to six months following discharge from prison. Bilchik (2001) interviewed many of the people involved with these programs as well as correctional administrators and found that most of them agreed that parents who are visited and who participate in the programs are much less likely to be discipline problems.

One program that seems to have worked especially well for female prisoners is the Girl Scouts Beyond Bars (GSBB) programs (Block, 1999). While many children are unable to maintain contact and communication with their mothers behind bars, research shows that visitation is essential for maintaining bonds, allowing the mother to continue to feel like a parent, to assist with a more successful reintegration, and to provide comfort for the child who may have anxiety about their mother's situation. The GSBB program is referred to as an enhanced child visitation program (Block, 1999). The program provides transportation for the daughters as well as allows for private time and structured troop activities.

While it appears to be successful, this program faces a very common challenge - fundraising (Block, 1999). It costs between $15,000 and $30,000 a year and the majority of funding comes from local and regional foundations. Very little assistance has been received from government agencies, private individuals, or businesses. While the literature seems to

show that enhanced child visitation strengthens mother-child relationships, no further studies have been conducted on the effects of the GSBB program outside of the initial Maryland study with regards to parallel or longitudinal studies.

The most recent research shows that that use of mentoring programs is currently in practice. Many groups strongly advocate for a mentor approach to helping children of incarcerated parents (Cannon, 2006; Hanlon et al., 2006). In fact, President Bush himself put the spotlight on this group by calling for volunteers to mentor (Lee, 2005). In 2003, the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) began funding mentoring projects, granting $8.9 million to 52 programs countrywide, with an initiative from President George W. Bush (United States Department of Health and Human Services, n.d.). As recent as 2008, the ACF awarded $45.6 million in funding to support 219 mentoring programs.

Studies show that group treatment is not only beneficial to incarcerated parents but to children as well, especially when these programs are performed in clinical settings as opposed to school settings (Springer et al., 2000). Group programs address the need for social support whereas children can interact with those who have similar experiences. This offers confirmation, affirmation, and acceptance (Springer et al., 2000). Substance-abuse and mental health treatment as well as parenting classes are needed pre-release but it is necessary to ensure that adequate community services are also being provided post-release (American Bar Association, 2010).

The main focus of programs should be to educate inmate parents and their children about the realities of prison. In open-ended interviews with inmate parents, Thombre and colleagues (2009) found that inmates revealed that they knew little about the consequences of their illegal actions and that their wish is for their children to be educated as to the realities of

prison. The problem is that "influential political figures question any attempt to educate youth as a means of deterrence" (Thombre et al., 2009, p. 67). The possible future incarceration of these youth may be reduced with proper communication and education. However, as with parenting behind bars, there are also barriers to successful programming.

Program Barriers

The reasons for not implementing or continuing these types of programs are obvious. Programs suffer when Americans' desire for harsher sentences, especially in the case of drug-related crimes, conflicts with the need to maintain parent-child bonds and provide services to these children (Tebo, 2006). The tough-on-crime mindset that the United States is exhibiting is leading to mass imprisonment, for many who are first-time non-violent offenders. This sustains the cyclical nature of life that involves prisoners and their children (Reed & Reed, 1997). Successful interventions into the home lives of these children are necessary to prevent the cause of intergenerational crime (DeHart & Altshuler, 2009). Policies are needed to reduce the costs that already fragile families face due to high rates of incarceration (Wildeman & Western, 2010).

For example, in the Behind No Bars program, the penitentiary pays all program costs (Rudel & Hayes, 1990). This is not feasible for many prisons with the poor economy. However, innovations are still being designed and tested which will save money but still serve children of prisoners. For example, New York implemented the very first summer camp for children with an incarcerated parent (Williams, 2010). This camp is completely free of charge and provides children from the age of six to thirteen a place to express themselves through art and recreation and share their secret of incarcerated parents with others in a safe environment. In New York alone, it is estimated that 85,000 children have a parent in prison

(Williams, 2010). Imagine the numbers this type of program could prevent from going to prison at no cost to the participants and relatively little cost to the community.

One barrier to programming is the fact that they are not widely implemented even when their successes are realized. Citing a 2002 Department of Justice survey of state departments of corrections, Fiorica (2007) found that: (1) only half reported having programming for inmate's families; (2) half reported that initiatives were available in all their institutions; (3) 35% reported that their programming was focused on aiding the children of incarcerated inmates; and (4) only seven agencies had developed family-oriented initiatives to satisfy state requirements. The same applies to programming within the communities for children as well. A 1997 survey found that only six of 38 responding state child welfare agencies had enacted policies or created programs to address the needs of children with incarcerated parents (The Sentencing Project, 2007). There has been no new survey and this information has not been updated.

There are several other barriers to successful programming mentioned in the literature. Fiorica (2007) lists several of these. For example, inmates can refuse service. Service providers sometimes put profit margins ahead of the interests of the inmates and their families. Some programs do not consider different cultural views of inmates and their families. Furthermore, the final barrier is supported by the principle of least eligibility doctrine which purports that prisoners should not receive more services than those who have abided by the law (Clear, Cole, & Reisig, 2011). In other words, resentment may occur when inmates receive services not available to the general public. The main problem with programs, especially with parenting classes, is that the parents have to have the opportunities to use the programs and not just be taught how to parent (Harrison, 1997). While parenting

classes have been shown to create more positive attitudes as to inmate parenting abilities,

visitation barriers hindered them from applying the knowledge that they gained (Harrison,

1997). In order for programs to work successfully inmates must be able to utilize the

techniques that they learn, preferably with their children, while they are incarcerated.

Alternatives to Sentencing

It has been stated that "the children of prisoners become the orphans of society's rush

to punish" (Zealand, 1998, p. 250). Kauffman (2001) agrees that as the numbers of prison

orphans have soared, many correctional administrators and legislators have been rethinking

the problem of mothers in prison. However, the same applies for all parents in prison.

Policies, as well as programs, need to be put into place to determine the number of children

affected by rising prison rates and this should be considered when offenders are being

sentenced to prison. Temin (2001) outlines some of these necessary policies:

- Pre-sentence reports should contain specific information about children and their placement and plans for placement should be finalized prior to incarceration.

- The status of offenders as parents, particularly when the offenders have been good parents, should be taken into account during sentencing and should be a reason for departure from the guidelines.

- A women's status as a mother should be taken into account when deciding which correctional facility to place her in and the correctional system should provide transportation to ensure prison visits.

- All incarcerated women should be able to participate in parenting skills programs and appropriate drug and/or mental health treatment programs when necessary.

In addition to these policy changes, Congress should mandate program creation to serve

inmates and their children (Fiorica, 2007). Furthermore, in the case of inmate mothers, they

should ensure that drug and alcohol treatment is being provided. They should also consider

alternative sentencing methods to maintain familial bonds (Fiorica, 2007). Alternative

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sanctions may include house arrest, half-way houses where mother and child can stay together, day-reporting programs, or prison-based nurseries (Myers et al., 1999). Community-based sentencing reduces recidivism, is cost-effective, and is better at strengthening families.

<center>Children's Bill of Rights</center>

The problem is that very little is known about who these children are and these children have no voice because they are invisible to society. Vacca (2008) finds several limitations to implementing these types of policies:

- The children of incarcerated parents are not considered the responsibility of any traditional governmental body, such as child welfare, mental health, family court, juvenile court, or school.

- Very little is known about what becomes of children when their parents are imprisoned, institutions that monitor adult offenders like the police, courts, jails, prisons, and probation departments are not required to inquire whether or not the incarcerated adult has any children, much less concern themselves with children's care.

- There is no requirement that institutions that serve vulnerable children like schools, child welfare, and juvenile justice offer specialized services to any children who may have parents are incarcerated.

Until these children are officially recognized as an at-risk group and services are being regularly provided to them, the prison population will continue to be increased by intergenerational criminal behavior.

One way that has been suggested to officially recognize these children is through the Children's Bill of Rights (Mason & Williams-Mbengue, 2008; Patton, 1999; Schwartzman, 2010). The Supreme Court has never found the right to rear one's children or to associate with a parent to be a fundamental right and there are no due process protections against separation from a child (Patton, 1999). This initiative launched legislation to determine the

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impact of parental incarceration on children and provide recommendations for interventions (Schwartzman, 2010). Those in charge of this initiative realized that there was no data on these children, their needs, and the scope of the issue and, as a result, they were often overlapping services to the children and their caregivers without realizing it (Schwartzman, 2010). Furthermore, the services that they were providing were not addressing the real problems.

The Children's Bill of Rights has identified several issues (Mason & Williams-Mbengue, 2008):

- Children's safety, care, and well-being should be top priority.

- Children have the right to see, touch, and talk to their parents while they are in prison if possible.

- Children have the right to emotional support during their parent's imprisonment.

- Children should be kept safe and informed at the time of the parent's arrest.

- Children's wishes should be taken into account about where they will live, go to school, and other issues, and when decisions are made about their parents.

- They should not face judgment, blame, or labeling.

- Children have a right to a lifelong relationship with their parents.

The Bill of Rights is meant to guide policy making and to offer guidance on how to handle kids before, during, and after parental incarceration (Mason & Williams-Mbengue, 2008). However, it has not received much attention from government officials. Furthermore, the Bill of Rights is not just about helping these children but about recognizing that they exist and that they are in need of services. Officials and administrators must be certain that prisoners are actually understanding and implementing the techniques and behaviors that they are being taught in these programs in order to assure successful release. As the economy

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continues to deteriorate, future research will need to be done to see whether the government

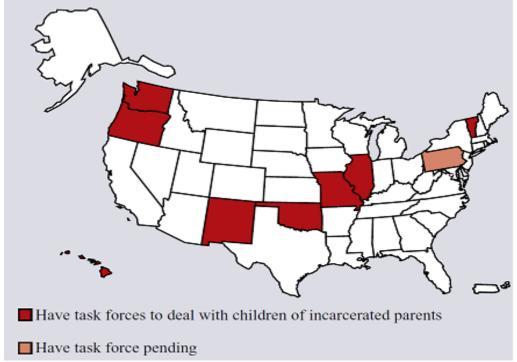continues to provide large sums of money to assist children of prisoners.

Figure 3: Task forces available to deal with children of incarcerated parents. : Mason, K., & Williams-Mbengue, N. (2008). A different kind of jail. *State Legislatures, 34(10)*, 30-32.

CONCLUSIONS

Although new research seems to indicate that incarceration rates are slightly declining, more studies are needed to determine if this will have a lasting effect (Guerino et al., 2011; Oppel, 2011). In spite of this slight drop in recent years, increasing rates of incarceration are alarming and are in need of further exploration. One of the aspects that need to be better explored is the hidden effect that it has on the children of incarcerated parents. However, research indicates that neither law enforcement agencies nor corrections agencies collect information about the children of the individuals that they arrest or incarcerate nor do child welfare agencies collect detailed information about the incarcerated parents of the children they serve (American Bar Association, 2010).

In 2005, the United States Department of Corrections and the Department of Social and Health Services established a committee in charge of developing a comprehensive interagency plan to ensure that necessary services and support are being provided for children affected by parental incarceration (American Bar Association, 2010). This committee found that many children appear in multiple systems such as foster care and juvenile detention centers (American Bar Association, 2010). Further improvements are needed as this is still a serious issue with regards to children of incarcerated parents. There is still so little known about these children and so few services offered for the special needs of this group of at-risk youth.

Parental incarceration negatively affects children as well as the incarcerated parents. These children suffer from personal, financial, and familial instability and hardship.

Furthermore, imprisonment disproportionately affects those families who are already vulnerable to poverty or family breakdown. Children of prisoners will suffer from stigmatization or indirect labeling from both peers and adults in their lives. These constant negative associations can lead to disrespect for social institutions and the criminal justice system as a whole. Furthermore, this type of disrespect will increase a child's likelihood of becoming criminally involved and possibly incarcerated. Recognizing and alleviating these effects is necessary.

Maintaining the parent-child relationship while a parent is imprisoned can lower the parent's likelihood of recidivism after release as well as decrease the likelihood of the child's future criminal involvement. Aside from this, maintaining strong bonds between parent and child can improve a child's social, emotional, and physical well-being. Despite institutional barriers, programs have been implemented that attempt to address these special needs. Further study is needed to discover whether these programs have any significant long-term impact on the child's well-being or future odds of incarceration.

Parents are not asked as they enter the prison gates exactly who their children are and what plans have been put into place to support their children now that they are going to prison. The failure of institutions such as schools, corrections, and social services to address the unique needs of these children gives the impression that they do not matter. This is surprising considering that the research clearly shows that the children of prisoners are likely the next generation of prisoners themselves. Criminal justice professionals must remember that an offender's family is significantly affected by their incarceration. Prisoners leave loved ones behind who also become the victims of rising incarceration rates. Krupat (2007) sums it

up best when he argues that "children should not become the unavoidable collateral damage

of our criminal justice policies" (p. 43).

FUTURE RESEARCH

There are several limitations to studying incarcerated parents and their children. The first is the obvious problem with self-reporting data of inmates. It is difficult to conduct surveys within prisons and even those that occur are usually difficult to generalize because they are based on the opinions of those prisoners which were able to be surveyed and not a random sampling of the entire prison population. Many of the studies regarding parental incarceration only study the effects on the child immediately before and during the parent's imprisonment. There is little to no post-release follow-up. More longitudinal studies are needed that measure the effect of parental incarceration over lengthier periods of time. These studies should determine whether the effects persist through adulthood. It would also be helpful to analyze the distinction between committing intergenerational crime merely as a result of parental imprisonment as opposed to related negative life circumstances such as poverty or substance abuse issues.

Given that this type of research is relatively new, there is an abundance of further research advocated for by the existing literature. There is a need for studies that directly sample youth with incarcerated parents in order to better assess the conditions under which these children are more likely to become criminally involved themselves. Most research is based on reports of inmate parents and not the children. More studies are needed to measure the effects of maternal versus paternal incarceration. The literature on children of incarcerated parents rarely addresses differences with regard to race and gender. Studies are

needed that measure how parental incarceration effects different racial populations and that better determines whether there are gender specific reactions to parental incarceration.

Future research should be conducted based on the successes and failures of programs. Programs should provide resources and education appropriate to the type of parent incarcerated. Programs should work towards improving reentry options for mothers and fathers and preventive techniques for the children. Furthermore, future research should promote the need for gender-specific models of prison systems. As previously shown, preliminary research has indicated that children adjust better when mothers serve their sentences in the community rather than in prison.

In order to help stabilize the prison population, this group of at-risk youth must be formally recognized and more attention must be given to the aspects of programs aimed at incarcerated parents and their children which have proven to be successful. Providing adequate resources to this group will lessen the damaging effects of parental incarceration. It will take some of the pressure off of police, courts, and corrections as a whole when fewer children are entering the criminal justice system as a result of the mere recognition of their status as children of incarcerated parents and the negative effects that result.

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