

J. Mark Eddy · Julie Poehlmann-Tynan *Editors*

# Handbook on Children with Incarcerated Parents

Research, Policy, and Practice

*Second Edition*

 Springer

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J. Mark Eddy · Julie Poehlmann-Tynan  
Editors

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 Springer

*Editors*

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*To children with incarcerated parents, in awe of your strength,  
resilience, and perseverance.*

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## Foreword

I am honored to pen the foreword to the second edition of *Handbook on Children with Incarcerated Parents: Research, Policy, and Practice*. As a researcher who investigates family stabilization/destabilization as mothers reenter from prison and who writes about children with parents in the criminal justice system, as a professor who teaches a course on children with parents in the criminal justice system, and as a practitioner who works with a local reentry coalition, I find the material covered in this second edition to be tremendously valuable. It is certainly timely given the current political climate and the increase in the number of children with parents involved with the criminal justice system in the USA.

A distinctive aspect of this handbook is that the editors have assembled an interdisciplinary corpus of scholarship from authors who conduct research, design intervention programs, and contribute to social policy initiatives on children with parents in the criminal justice system. Each author does a notable job of addressing the critical clinical and developmental issues that children face when their parents are arrested, convicted, sentenced, incarcerated, and return home; each does an impressive job in identifying gaps in the research, offering suggestions on areas ripe for subsequent research, and pointing us to new directions for research and social policy initiatives. Furthermore, the authors situate their research, their interventions, and their social policy initiative suggestions in a *contextual–environmental–ecological* theoretical framework that considers the profound influence of sociopolitical history, socioeconomic status, race and ethnicity, age, and gender on children’s outcomes when parents are incarcerated. The authors challenge those of us in the field to move beyond utilizing a unidimensional approach to measuring and interpreting the effects of parental incarceration on children’s outcomes and well-being to embracing a multilayered, dynamic, and changing-systems approach.

As a field, we are encouraged by Sykes and Pettit (Chap. 2) that when we measure children’s exposure to parental incarceration to consider “not only point in time estimates, but lifetime risk estimates as well,” as clinical and developmental outcomes may well vary according to time of measurement. We must be mindful, as emphasized by Bruns and Lee (Chap. 4), Siegel and Luther (Chap. 11), Burnson and Weymouth (Chap. 7), and Shlafer, Davis, and Dallaire (Chap. 8), that “not all children experience parental incarceration in the same way.” Clinical and developmental outcomes vary significantly by chronological age and other demographic factors. As we design

research, pose our questions, develop interventions, and craft social policy initiatives, Arditto and McGregor (Chap. 9) remind us that families, including spouses, children, and caregivers, are “arrested, sentenced, and incarcerated” as well. We are encouraged by Goldman, Andersen, Andersen, and Wildeman (Chap. 16) to be cognizant of the ways in which sentencing laws impact children and families, as well as incarcerated men and women. We must turn our focus, as suggested by de Haan, Mienko, and Eddy (Chap. 19), to consider children who enter the foster care system as a result of parental incarceration, as they represent a hidden and growing subpopulation of children with parents in the criminal justice system.

In conclusion, as I read the chapters in this handbook in preparation for writing this foreword, I was reminded of two contemporary issues that have intersected with my life this past summer. One, while home in Alabama this summer, I had the opportunity to visit the *Lynching Memorial* in Montgomery, Alabama, and two, I have watched as the recent crisis of unaccompanied immigrant minors and the imprisonment of their parents and the zero tolerance policy of this current administration has unfolded, as discussed by Poehlmann-Tynan, Sugrue, Duron, Ciro, and Messex (Chap. 23). I am most disturbed by the continuing racial disparities that exist for children of color with parents in the criminal justice system. These disparities have roots in an unequal and overly punitive justice system for men and women of color, as Bruns and Lee (Chap. 4) articulate so well. Children of color and their families experience the “spillover effects” of the incarceration of their loved ones. Unfortunately, for some children of color, parental incarceration becomes a normative developmental experience rather than a non-normative developmental experience.

I am encouraged by the “solutions” that the intervention research chapters (Chaps. 12–16) offer to move us forward as researchers, as practitioners, and as advocates. Collectively, we must take a systems approach to mass incarceration and the resulting inequalities. There are practical and doable solutions that range from focusing on the building of human capital to increasing employment opportunities for those returning home, while simultaneously providing supports for children and families of the incarcerated. I applaud the editors, J. Mark Eddy and Julie Poehlmann-Tynan, for their continued persistence in raising the issues and plight of children with parents in the criminal justice system, both of which are especially well illuminated in this second edition of *Handbook on Children with Incarcerated Parents: Research, Policy, and Practice*.

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**Yvette R. Harris** is Professor in the Department of Psychology at Miami University, Oxford, Ohio. She serves as Director of the Center for the Study of Children and Families of the Incarcerated. She received her doctorate from the University of Florida, with a specialization in cognitive development. Her scholarly work for the past three decades has focused on examining environmental/parenting contributions to preschool and school-age cognitive development with a specific emphasis on African-American children and parents from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. Most recently, she has been exploring how

families adjust, and especially children, when mothers reenter their community from prison or jail. Her research has been published in a variety of national and international journals. She has co-authored three books on African-American children, with the most recent the second edition of *The African American Child: Development and Challenges*. She served as co-editor of the book *Children of Incarcerated Parents: Theoretical Developmental and Clinical Implications*. Her advocacy work for children and families of the incarcerated includes directing a summer camp for children with parents in the criminal justice system and serving as a research consultant to the Butler/Warren County Reentry Coalition.



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## Acknowledgements

It has been over a decade since we worked together on the first edition of this volume. Returning to work on a new draft has provided us the opportunity not only to see how much the field has changed, but also to reflect on how our lives have changed, particularly in terms of our children and our stance toward activism.

Our children who were young the first time around are now either adults or are moving into adulthood. There are new children in both of our lives, including grandchildren for one of us and stepchildren for the other. Our experiences with our own children and families have taken place with each of us having the privilege to be free, where we could see our children each day (when they were young), walk with them to school, play together and watch them play with family and friends, eat dinner together, and read with and tuck them into bed at night. We are deeply appreciative for each of these moments. They have changed our lives for the better.

As these changes in our own families were occurring, each of us continued to work with incarcerated parents and their families in our respective communities. Those experiences strengthened our commitments toward using findings from our research and intervention efforts to promote social justice. As a result, our research has become more policy-relevant and our dissemination efforts have been increasingly focused on attempting to make positive change, not just for individual children and families affected by incarceration, but also for communities and society at large. Mass incarceration is a significant contributor to inequality and instability in the USA and in other countries as well, and there is much work to do to raise awareness about this and to change it. We see the tragic effects on a daily basis, and we hope to inspire others to work toward change, too.

This book is focused on the lives and contexts of children who have at least one parent who—either now or in the past—has involuntarily spent time away from their children and families because of incarceration. Separation between the members of a family, particularly when caused by incarceration, is a public yet a very private affair, and a painful one to consider and discuss. With gratitude, we acknowledge the willingness of incarcerated parents and their children and families who have shared their lives with the members of the research and practice communities, and have allowed each of us in this volume the privilege and honor of sharing their stories with others. Hopefully, the

stories told here will help lead to better outcomes in the future for children with families who include parents with criminal justice involvement.

We are thankful to each of the contributors to this second edition. We appreciate the commitment and dedication of the contributing researchers, each of whom conducts rigorous science under sometimes difficult conditions and actively shares their findings and insights with others. We appreciate the hard work, passion, and commitment of each of the contributing practitioners and advocates; their work with children of incarcerated parents and their families is so important. We are thankful for each other, and for the chance to work together again on a project focused on areas of great importance and significance to both of us. We appreciate the unique perspectives we each bring to understanding and helping the children of incarcerated parents and their families, and the contributions that each made in conceptualizing, writing, and editing this volume. In this regard, we contributed equally to the work, although our contributions were complementary.

Most importantly, we recognize that this book could not have been completed without the patience and warm, generous, and unending support provided by the members of each of our beloved families—for Mark, his best friend and wife Carol, their children, Hannah, Jordan, Becca, Sarah, Emma, and Jacob, their partners and children, and parents, Betty and John and Pat and Al; and for Julie, her best friend and husband Tim, her children, Catherine, D. Michael, and Josh, and parents, Carol and Mike. Both of us are also grateful to our many students, some of whom have experienced incarceration themselves or the incarceration of a loved one or parent, and who are dedicated to improving the lives of children and families and fighting for social justice.

“Each child belongs to all of us and they will bring us a tomorrow in direct relation to the responsibility we have shown to them.”

—Maya Angelou

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## Editors and Contributors

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### About the Editors

**J. Mark Eddy, Ph.D.** is a senior research scientist, licensed psychologist, and Director of Community-based Research with the Family Translational Research Group in the College of Dentistry at New York University. His work focuses on the development and testing of research-informed interventions designed to improve psychosocial outcomes in vulnerable populations. Prior to his current position, he was on the faculty of the School of Social Work and the director of research at Partners for Our Children at the University of Washington in Seattle for five years, and before that worked as a research scientist at the non-profit Oregon Social Learning Center for over two decades. His work crosses several fields of study, including the development and prevention of antisocial behavior, impacts of parenting and parenting interventions, school-based and community interventions, mentoring, Latino families, and incarcerated parents and their children. He has navigated being a researcher within challenging systems, including child welfare, corrections, juvenile justice, the military, and schools, and has worked to bring diverse stakeholders together to conduct meaningful and rigorous work intended to improve child and family well-being. Over the past decade, he has been working internationally, including a long-term project focused on the prevention of youth violence in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras.

He has more than 100 publications to date, including 75 peer-reviewed articles and chapters, 10 white papers, and numerous books and monographs, including a monograph of the Society for Research in Child Development. He has served on the editorial boards of several journals in psychology and public health, and was an associate editor of the journal *Prevention Science* from 2011 to 2016. As an international leader in the field of prevention science, he has had continuous extramural research funding throughout his career, primarily from federal and state governments but also from non-profits and family foundations. Funding sources include the National Institutes of Health, US Department of Justice, US Department of Education, US Department of Defense, Administration for Children and Families, the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, David and Lucille Packard Foundation, the Giddens Foundation, the Ballmer Family, and Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit. He

has served as PI or Co-I on 45 grants involving tens of millions of dollars. Over the past two decades, he has worked with the Oregon Department of Corrections, the Washington State Department of Corrections, and related non-profit service delivery agencies on the development of multimodal interventions for incarcerated parents and their children and families.

He has also led the development of a variety of curricula and training materials, including several versions of *Parenting Inside Out: Parent Management Training for Incarcerated Parents*. He has served on numerous advisory boards including serving as a member of the Board of Directors for the Society for Prevention Research from 1997 to 2002 and as the Board's secretary from 1999 to 2001. He has served on task forces in the government and the community, including the Task Force on Children of Incarcerated Parents through the Oregon Department of Corrections from 2000 to 2008, and the Advisory Committee of the Children's Initiative Allocation Committee in Portland, Oregon, from 2003 to 2005. He was appointed by the governor of Oregon to serve on the Juvenile Correction Population Forecasting Advisory Committee from 2008 to 2015 and to be a Commissioner on the Criminal Justice Commission for State of Oregon from 2008 to 2016. He was an invited participant at the White House listening session on Mentoring Children of Incarcerated Parents in 2013.

**Julie Poehlmann-Tynan, Ph.D.** is the Dorothy A. O'Brien Professor of Human Ecology and has been a professor in the Department of Human Development and Family Studies (HDFS) at the University of Wisconsin-Madison for the past 20 years. She is an affiliate of the Institute for Research on Poverty and the Center for Healthy Minds. She served as HDFS department chair for four years and as the director of the Center for Child and Family Well-being at the University of Wisconsin for six years. She has mentored many professors, postdoctoral fellows, and graduate students in research over the years in addition to hundreds of undergraduate students. She has also chaired 17 HDFS graduate student committees and served on the committees of 26 doctoral students from numerous departments and universities.

Through her publications and outreach efforts during the past 20 years, she has brought the issue of incarcerated parents and their children to the attention of the child development and family studies communities. She has more than 80 publications to date, including 70 peer-reviewed articles and chapters and 10 outreach publications. She is also the editor of several books and monographs focusing on children with incarcerated parents, including a Monograph of the Society for Research in Child Development. She developed and maintains a blog, [www.kidswithincarceratedparents.com](http://www.kidswithincarceratedparents.com), that translates research into understandable language for families and those who work with them. She has helped plan several conferences, including one focusing on children with incarcerated parents at the Bronfenbrenner Center for Translational Research.

She has had nearly continuous extramural research funding throughout her career, primarily from the federal government but also from non-profit organizations and family foundations, in addition to intramural support. She has served as PI on 18 research grants totaling about \$5 million and consultant

or co-I on 7 additional research and training grants totaling about \$70 million. Funding sources include the National Institutes of Health, the US Department of Health and Human Services, US Department of Justice, the Institute for Clinical and Translational Research, the Wisconsin Alumni Research Foundation, the Mind and Life Institute, the Mai Family Foundation, and private donors.

She has evaluated several interventions for young children and their parents and is currently leading an interdisciplinary team to develop an innovative intervention to improve parent–child visits during parental incarceration. She has served as a reviewer for 30 journals across numerous disciplines, including family science, child development, pediatrics, psychology, public health, social work, and criminology journals. She also served as an advisor to *Sesame Street* to help develop and evaluate their Emmy-nominated initiative for young children with incarcerated parents and their families called *Little Children, Big Challenges: Incarceration*. She has been an invited participant at several White House listening sessions on topics related to children with incarcerated parents and women in the criminal justice system. She is an elected board member of the International Coalition for Children with Incarcerated Parents, and she has served on the editorial boards of several journals, including *Family Relations: Interdisciplinary Journal of Applied Family Science*.

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## About the Contributors

**Lars H. Andersen** is Senior Researcher at the Rockwool Foundation Research Unit in Copenhagen, Denmark. He applies advanced quantitative methods to Danish administrative data and has published research on a wide variety of topics, including the effects of non-custodial alternatives to imprisonment on offenders and their families, the role of probation and parole officers for their clients, the well-being of children who experience parental incarceration, and the associations between family formation, assortative mating, and crime. His current research focuses on the effects of conditions of confinement and on the links between immigration, social policy, and crime. He also teaches courses on causal research design. His recent publications appear in journals such as *Criminology*, the *Journal of Marriage and Family*, and *Social Forces*.

**Signe H. Andersen** is Deputy Head at the Rockwool Foundation Research Unit in Copenhagen, Denmark. She studies vulnerable groups, such as children of the incarcerated, children placed in out-of-home care, and disconnected youth using advanced quantitative methods. Much of her work employs Danish administrative data. She has recently become interested in the mechanisms of the intergenerational transmission of risk and now works on a project funded by the Danish Council for Independent Research (Social Sciences) that focuses on how sensitive periods in brain development and epigenetic processes matter when a child or a young person is particularly vulnerable or resistant to negative influences from the environment.



Her recent publications appear in a variety of multidisciplinary journals, including *Child Abuse & Neglect*, the *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*, *Criminology*, the *Journal of Marriage and Family*, and *Social Forces*.

**Joyce A. Arditti** is Professor of Human Development and Family Science at Virginia Tech. Her research interests include family disruption, parent–child relationships in vulnerable families, and public policy. During her three-decade long career, she has published numerous empirical and review articles in therapy, human services, family studies, and criminal justice journals. She is the author of the book *Parental Incarceration and the Family: Psychological and Social Effects of Imprisonment on Children, Parents, and Caregivers* for which she was the 2014 recipient of the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences Outstanding Book Award. In August of 2016, she was awarded the Alumni Award for Research Excellence by Virginia Tech for her research achievements of significance in the area of parental incarceration. She is a fellow of the National Council on Family Relations and recently was a visiting fellow at the Griffith Criminology Institute in Brisbane, Australia. She serves on various editorial boards and is actively involved in national and international research projects dealing with families involved in the criminal justice system.

**Paul Bellatty** is Director of Reporting, Research, Analytics, and Implementation at the state of Oregon’s Department of Human Services. Previously, he led the research and evaluation units at the Oregon Youth Authority and the Oregon Department of Corrections, and served as a researcher at Portland State University. Paul’s recent work is focused on estimating risk, recognizing flow through the social service system using longitudinal databases, matching clients to services, and reducing disproportionality. Results from this work are handed to an implementation team which then operationalizes the findings into practice, allowing knowledge gained through analytics to help caseworkers make data-informed decisions in their day-to-day work. He earned his doctorate at Oregon State University.

**Kirsten L. Besemer** is Lecturer in the School of Criminology and Criminal Justice at Griffith University in Brisbane, Australia. Her research examines through what mechanisms incarceration may impact prisoners’ families and communities. She previously worked at the Institute for Social Policy, Housing, and Equality Research. In this role, she conducted research on poverty and social exclusion in the UK.

**Catrien C. J. H. Bijleveld** is Professor of Research Methods in Criminology at the Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam, Netherlands, and Director of the Netherlands Institute for the Study of Crime and Law Enforcement. Her wide-ranging research focuses on topics such as criminal careers and experimental research into the effectiveness of interventions, juvenile sex offenders, historical trends in crime, and the intergenerational transmission of delinquent behavior. She is a member of the Royal Dutch Academy of Sciences.

**Angela Bruns** is a sociologist and Postdoctoral Fellow the University of Michigan Population Studies Center. Her research examines how structural

inequalities impact the health and economic well-being of low-income women and their families. She has conducted a number of quantitative and qualitative studies on the consequences of incarceration for families. Currently, she is co-principal investigator of a large-scale qualitative study of women in three US cities who have family members in state and federal prisons. This project aims to better understand the pathways through which family member incarceration is linked to deleterious health outcomes. Her other projects examine how women manage the financial hardships associated with the imprisonment of their romantic partners and how paternal incarceration influences the quality of the neighborhoods in which mothers and their children live.

**Cynthia Burnson** is a Researcher at the National Council on Crime and Delinquency where she provides evaluation, technical assistance, analytics, and consulting services to social services agencies including child welfare, juvenile justice, and adult protective services. Prior to joining the Council, she worked in the Department of Psychiatry at the University of Wisconsin, where she studied postpartum depression treatment in home visiting programs, infant and family mental health, and the assessment of parent-child relationships and infant development. She received her doctorate in Human Development and Family Studies from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where she studied resilience processes in young children of incarcerated parents using quantitative methods. She has worked on a wide range of research and outreach projects involving vulnerable children and families, including observational, developmental research with the children of incarcerated parents.

**Bert O. Burraston** is Assistant Professor in the Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice at the University of Memphis. He completed his bachelor's and master's degrees in sociology at the Brigham Young University, and his doctorate in sociology at the University of Oregon. He worked as a methodologist at the non-profit Oregon Social Learning Center, where he was involved with a wide variety of longitudinal and experimental investigations. His research focuses on program evaluation, offender reentry, child and adolescent development, poverty, and neighborhood influences on violent crime.

**Mary W. Byrne** is the Stone Foundation and Elise D. Fish Professor of Health Care for the Underserved at Columbia University. Her program of research focuses on family-centered assessment and intervention for young children at risk. The National Institutes of Health and other funding sources have supported her research with children with HIV seroreversion, infants raised in prison, children receiving primary care in low-income neighborhoods, and seriously ill children. She has received a variety of honors recognizing her lifetime of work in academics and in the community, including charter membership in the Columbia University Medical Center Garvey Teaching Academy, a Fellow in the American Academy of Nursing, the inaugural Emily Fenichel Zero-to-Three Leadership Award, the New York State Distinguished Nurse Researcher Award, and the Audrey Hepburn Award for Contributions to the Health and Welfare of Children.

**Dianne Ciro** is Assistant Professor at the San Diego State University School of Social Work and is an alumna of the Silberman School of Social Work at Hunter College, City University of New York and Columbia University. She is a clinical researcher with over 15 years of practice experience. Her research interests are in the areas of trauma, Hispanic mental health, and health disparities. Currently, she is building a research portfolio that supports resilience in Hispanic families separated at the US southern border. She hopes to use findings from this work to support her long-term goal, which is to design and implement interventions for Hispanic families affected by the traumatic events of family separation.

**Caitlin Novero Clarke** is in practice as a psychologist in Vermont. She received her doctorate in clinical psychology from the Curry School of Education and Human Development at the University of Virginia. She has worked with forensic populations in prison rehabilitation programs in Boston and in Virginia.

**Lindsey Cramer** is a Research Associate in the Urban Institute's Justice Policy Center, where her research focuses the impact of the justice system on fathers, children, and families, as well as the correctional and community-based interventions designed to mitigate the effects of parental justice involvement. Specifically, her work has focused on the evaluation of responsible fatherhood programs and the development of model practices that correctional facilities can implement to support and facilitate more frequent contact and communication between incarcerated parents and their children. She has contributed to practitioner-focused toolkits on family impact statements, parental arrest policies, and family focused jail programs, as well as a webinar to disseminate information about innovative strategies for children of justice-involved parents. She is skilled in qualitative data collection efforts, including conducting site visits, observing program activities, leading stakeholder interviews, facilitating focus groups, and analyzing and writing qualitative research findings. Prior to joining the Urban Institute, she worked as a research and technical analyst at Optimal Solutions Group, LLC. While there, she managed social policy and workforce development projects pertaining to responsible fatherhood and healthy marriage research. She graduated from the College of Wooster with a bachelor's degree in economics.

**Danielle H. Dallaire** is Associate Professor in the Department of Psychological Sciences at The College of William & Mary. She earned a doctorate in developmental psychology from Temple University. She researches the multifaceted risks of parental incarceration, including the impacts of incarceration on young children's social and emotional development. She is the founder of the William & Mary Healthy Beginnings Project, a program that works with women incarcerated in local jails to provide nutritional education and support during pregnancy. Her research has been supported by grants from the National Institutes of Health, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, the Anthem Foundation and the March of Dimes.

**Laurel Davis** is a Research Scientist in the Department of Pediatrics at the University of Minnesota Twin Cities. Her research examines risk and protective factors that affect children's development in families experiencing adversity. She has conducted research with children and families across a variety of high-risk settings including families interacting with the criminal justice system, families experiencing homelessness, and parents returning from combat. She is committed to conducting research that aims to better understand the processes by which stressful conditions contribute to poorer health and compromised well-being in marginalized individuals and families. She also participates in direct service delivery for incarcerated people and advocacy efforts to improve the experiences of incarcerated people and their families.

**Benjamin de Haan** is Associate Dean for Social Service Innovation and Partnerships in the School of Social Work of the University of Washington. For over 30 years, he has been bringing together leaders and policymakers in academia, child welfare, justice systems, and related fields to make change and improve the lives of vulnerable children, adults, and families. He began his career in child welfare services for the state of Oregon, and served there in a variety of leadership positions for nearly 20 years, including serving as director. He served as the deputy director and the interim director of the Oregon Department of Corrections from 1995 to 2003. He has led two university-based research centers—the Criminal Justice Policy Research Institute at Portland State University and Partners for Our Children at the University of Washington. He also served as the managing director of Casey Family Programs' State Strategy Division. Along the way, he was the founding president of the Children's Justice Alliance and served as president of the Oregon Children's Trust Fund Foundation, a private endowment focused on preventing child maltreatment. He holds a master's degree in public administration from Lewis and Clark College and a doctorate in social work and social research from Portland State University.

**Susan M. Dennison** is Professor and Deputy Head of Research in the School of Criminology and Criminal Justice at Griffith University. She also serves as Deputy Director of the Griffith Criminology Institute. She is a former Australian Research Council Future Fellow, examining the impact of parental incarceration on the development and well-being of incarcerated parents, their children, and their children's caregivers. With an Australian Research Council grant, she currently is investigating the ways that maternal criminal justice system involvement shapes developmental outcomes for children. More broadly, her research focuses on the contexts affecting children's developmental systems and life outcomes as well as using evidence-based research to inform policies and prevention efforts focused on at-risk children.

**Jacquelynn Duron** is Assistant Professor in the School of Social Work at Rutgers University. Her research focuses on improving the well-being of children and adolescents exposed to adversity and trauma, particularly those involved in child welfare and juvenile justice. She served as a co-investigator on a project funded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention to investigate the cognitive, environmental, and personal factors

associated with recidivism among justice-involved youth participating in a community-based mentoring program. She is currently working on research to identify risks and protective factors among justice-involved youth in the Northwestern Juvenile Project. She is a licensed clinical social worker. She has provided therapeutic interventions to justice-involved youth in residential facilities and community supervision, and clinical supervision to social workers providing case management services for incarcerated mothers. For the last year, she has served as a member of the Protection Committee for the New Jersey Task Force on Child Abuse and Neglect and a governor-appointed member of the Child Advocacy Center Multidisciplinary Team Advisory Board.

**Jocelyn Fontaine** is Senior Research Fellow in the Justice Policy Center at the Urban Institute. She is an expert on the impact of incarceration on families and children and has directed several evaluations of family focused programs using quantitative and qualitative research methods. She has extensive experience developing survey instruments, facilitating focus groups, managing fieldwork in diverse settings, conducting stakeholder interviews, interfacing with public officials and program administrators, and translating evidence-based and promising practices into program implementation. Before joining the Urban Institute, she worked on corrections issues for the Pew Charitable Trusts' Public Safety Performance Project and on violence and victimization issues as a research assistant in the Office of Research and Evaluation at the National Institute of Justice. She received her doctorate in justice and public policy from the School of Public Affairs at the American University. She periodically serves as an adjunct professor in Georgetown University's McCourt School of Public Policy and American University's School of Public Affairs. She is committed to using rigorous social science methods to change policy and practice for vulnerable populations and to contribute to the national discourse on criminal justice system reforms.

**Alyssa W. Goldman** is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Sociology at Cornell University. Her research examines the role of incarceration and other forms of criminal justice system contact in shaping racial and socioeconomic disparities in health and well-being. Currently, she is focusing on the health consequences of family member incarceration, and particularly the implications of a child's incarceration for aging parents. Prior to pursuing her doctoral studies, she earned a master's degree in social science from the University of Chicago.

**Matthew A. Hagler** is a doctoral candidate in clinical psychology at the University of Massachusetts Boston. His research focuses on mentoring interventions for marginalized and at-risk youth populations. This work has examined the intersection between psychological and ecological processes of mentoring, highlighting social class-based disparities in access, quality, and diversity of mentoring experiences. He has authored or co-authored over 15 academic journal articles and chapters and is supported by a Graduate Research Fellowship from the National Science Foundation.

**Creasie Finney Hairston** is Professor and Dean of the Jane Addams College of Social Work and Director of the Jane Addams Center for Social Policy and Research at the University of Illinois at Chicago. Previously, she served as Associate Dean for Academic Affairs and Research at the Indiana University School of Social Work and held faculty appointments at the University of Tennessee, West Virginia University, and the State University of New York at Albany. Creasie received her bachelor's degree with highest honors from Bluefield State College and her master's and doctoral degrees from Case Western Reserve University. She is one of the pioneers in the development of family programs for correctional populations, and throughout her career she has conducted research and written extensively on the impact of incarceration on families and communities. Her publications on social policies and services affecting poor children and families appear in leading academic and professional journals and texts and in the popular press. She is the editor of the *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation*, a past president of the Illinois Academy of Criminology, and a former member of the Administration in Social Work Journal Editorial Board. Her work has been acknowledged through multiple awards, including the West Virginia All Black Schools Lifetime Achievement Award, the International Community Corrections Association's E.B. Henderson III Presidential Award, the National Network for Social Work Managers Distinguished Leader Award, and the National Council of Negro Women (Midwest Section) Women Making History Award. Her current research examines the social conditions and needs of individuals transitioning from prisons and nursing homes to community living and the services that are provided to them.

**Anna R. Haskins** is Assistant Professor of Sociology at Cornell University. She is an affiliate of the Center for the Study of Inequality, the Institute for the Social Sciences, the Cornell Prison Education Program, the Cornell Population Center and the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research. Her research examines how three of America's most powerful social institutions—the education system, the family, and the criminal justice system—connect and interact in ways that both preserve and mitigate social inequality. She is particularly interested in early educational outcomes, intergenerational impacts, and disparities by race/ethnicity. Her work has been published in the *American Sociological Review*, *Social Forces*, *Sociology of Education*, and *Social Science Research*, among other scholarly outlets, and she is co-editor of the recent book *When Parents are Incarcerated: Interdisciplinary Research and Interventions to Support Children*. Her current projects explore the meso-level processes through which schools inhibit or promote institutional engagement among criminal justice-involved families. In particular, she is studying the complicated intersections between schooling and punishment, such as public attitudes around college-in-prison programs.

**Giselle A. Hendy** is a doctoral candidate in developmental psychology at Howard University. She is an educator with over a decade of experience working in underserved minority communities, from elementary to post-secondary settings. Examining education from a psychological lens led to her current research focus on psychosocial and cognitive orientations that build

resilience and how such can be utilized to improve academic and life outcomes. Currently, she serves as a special projects coordinator for the Office of Ethnic Minority Affairs at the American Psychological Association.

**Danita Herrera** is Judicial Director for the Klamath Tribes Tribal Court. Prior to this position, she worked as a project coordinator on multiple federally funded research and intervention projects with the non-profit Oregon Social Learning Center for fifteen years. Three of these projects included a significant number of incarcerated parents and their families. Her work on the Parent Child Study, for example, included the tracking and interviewing of incarcerated parents involved in parenting programs within the Oregon Department of Corrections, as well as the tracking and interviewing of their families and their children within a variety of community settings. Her work on The Child Study involved tracking and interviewing parents, youth, and professional mentors in Boston, New York City, Portland, and Seattle across multiple years. She has direct experience of parenting a child with incarcerated parents through the foster care system. In this regard, she opened her life up to an eight-month-old, who continues to live with her today, turning 17 years old this past July. In her current position, she is working to implement a juvenile court-based healing-to-wellness model for tribal youth involved in the judicial system.

**Whitney Q. Hollins** is an advocate for children who have a parent involved in the justice system. As the daughter of a formerly incarcerated parent, her direct experiences have led her to explore the ways these children navigate and negotiate with the unique set of circumstances that incarceration presents. As a researcher and educator, she believes that teachers play a vital role in supporting children with a justice-involved parent. She currently works as a research assistant at We Got Us Now, as an elementary school special education teacher, and as an adjunct instructor at various CUNY colleges, where she instructs graduate-level students who plan to work with children. She is a doctoral candidate in the Urban Education program at the CUNY Graduate Center.

**Jean M. Kjellstrand** is Assistant Professor in the Department of Counseling Psychology and Human Services within the College of Education at the University of Oregon. Her research and teaching interests focus on positive youth development and interventions to prevent problematic behavior among children in vulnerable situations. Her most recent research examines the impact of parental incarceration on children and the specific mechanisms through which risk is transmitted, and interventions to support incarcerated parents and their children during both the parents' incarceration and after release. As a prevention scientist, she uses quantitative methodology to examine the role of malleable individual, family, and community factors on the development of children of incarcerated parents. Then, working closely with organizations and communities within a community-based participatory research framework, she uses this information to guide the development and testing of interventions to strengthen and support families involved in the criminal justice system. Her

work is informed by her previous career as a social worker, where she developed and coordinated a variety of individual, group, and community interventions for children and families living in high-risk circumstances.

**Katie Kramer** is the co-founder and CEO of Corrections, Communities and Families for The Bridging Group, based in Oakland, CA. For the past 25 years, she has focused on the development, implementation, and evaluation of social service and health programs that serve individuals, families, and communities affected by the criminal justice system. In this capacity, she develops and conducts evaluation studies, and provides training, technical assistance, and capacity building services for governmental, non-governmental organizations and research/academic institutions working in correctional facilities or in community reentry throughout the USA and globally. She is the statewide director for the California Reentry Council Network and serves on the Steering Committee for the Alameda County Children of Incarcerated Parents Partnership. She is a founding member and previous steering committee member for the San Francisco Children of Incarcerated Parents Partnership. She also currently serves on the Executive Editorial Board as a criminal justice expert for the *Journal of Clinical Research in HIV/AIDS and Prevention*. Previously, she served as an appointed member on the subcommittee on assessment and connections for the San Francisco County Reentry Council and as a criminal justice expert for the National Working Group and Planning Committee for the US Women and Girls Gender Forum on HIV Prevention for the Office of Women's Health, US Department of Health and Human Services.

**Tanya Krupat** is Director of the Osborne Center for Justice Across Generations, which focuses on the multigenerational effects of mass incarceration with two specific areas of focus: children and families affected by incarceration and aging in prison/elder reentry. Osborne's solutions are grounded in the dignity and humanity of all, the belief that individuals and systems can change, and our decades of practitioner experience, as well as on research and data, including the insights and expertise of those directly affected by incarceration. Through public speaking, advocacy, and education, Tanya supports incarcerated individuals and their loved ones.

**Hedwig Lee** is Professor of Sociology at Washington University in St. Louis. She also holds a courtesy joint appointment at the George Warren Brown School of Social Work at Washington University in St. Louis, and is Affiliate Professor at the University of Washington Department of Sociology in Seattle. She is interested in the social determinants and consequences of population health and health disparities. She has published more than 50 peer-reviewed articles in leading journals within a variety of disciplines, including sociology, demography, interdisciplinary, and public health. She has served on numerous expertise panels on population health and criminal justice issues. She currently serves on the research advisory board for the Vera Institute of Justice and the Board of Directors for the Interdisciplinary Association for Population Health Science. Her recent work examines the impact of structurally rooted chronic stressors, such as mass incarceration, on health and health disparities.



**Ann Booker Loper** is Professor Emeritus at the University of Virginia Curry School of Education and Human Development. Prior to her retirement, she conducted research on the mental health and adjustment patterns of prisoners, with a particular emphasis on parent–child relationships in justice-involved families. Ann collaborated with prison, jail, and community partners in the development of parenting programs for incarcerated mothers.

**Michael F. Lorber** is a senior research scientist, clinical psychologist, and Director of Developmental Research with the Family Translational Research Group at New York University. His primary research interests are centered on externalizing behaviors—their form, development, etiology, and consequences—from infancy through adulthood, and primarily within relational contexts. Specifically, his work focuses on: child externalizing behaviors, their early development, and the roles that family (e.g., parenting) and child (e.g., temperament) factors play in them; aggression in adolescent and adult couples, their longitudinal patterns, and related relationship dynamics; cognitive, affective, and psychophysiological mechanisms of dysfunctional discipline strategies in parents of toddlers; family environment–biology transactions in the development of psychopathology and physical health; the prevention of early externalizing problems; and research methodology.

**Kate Luther** is Associate Professor of sociology at Pacific Lutheran University in Tacoma, WA. Her research focuses on resilience among children of incarcerated parents. She has published articles on prison nursery programs, the role of social support for children of incarcerated parents, and stigma management among children of incarcerated parents.

**Charles R. Martinez Jr.** is Dean of the College of Education at the University of Texas at Austin. He holds the Lee Hage Jamail Regents Chair in Education and the Sid W. Richardson Regents Chair. Prior to serving in these roles, Charles, a clinical psychologist and prevention scientist, was the Knight Professor in the Department of Educational Methodology, Policy, and Leadership in the College of Education at the University of Oregon and was the founding director of the Center for Equity Promotion. He was the vice president for Institutional Equity and Diversity at the University of Oregon for seven years. His substantive interests center on identifying factors that promote healthy adjustment for families and children following stressful life events, taking into consideration the cultural contexts in which families operate. He has led numerous research projects, funded by the federal government as well as international funders, designed to examine risk and protective factors involved in linking acculturation to behavioral health outcomes for Latino families and to develop and test culturally specific interventions for Latino families at risk of behavioral health problems in the USA and in Latin America. He worked for many years as a research scientist at the non-profit Oregon Social Learning Center and founded and directed the Latino Research Team there. He has served as a publicly elected member of the Eugene, District 4J School Board, and just completed a term as a governor-appointed member of the Oregon State Board of Education representing Oregon's 4th congressional district.

**Casey M. McGregor** is a doctoral student in the Department of Human Development and Family Science at Virginia Tech. Her research interests include family relationships, parent–child relationships in vulnerable families, role identity development, and resilience processes. Casey’s current research involves young mothers and their families in rural Appalachia.

**Amy Messex** is a licensed clinical social worker and Professor in the Facundo Valdez School of Social Work at New Mexico Highlands University, where she is currently lead faculty member for the clinical practice sequence in the graduate social work program. In addition, she has served as clinical lead for courses related to clinical mindfulness interventions, advanced multicultural practice, and use of the DSM-V for clinicians. Prior to this position, she spent more than two decades engaged in direct practice with children, youth and families, specializing in adolescent trauma, transitions to independence from the child welfare system, and culturally competent work with deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals. She has previously held positions as supervisor, program director, juvenile justice specialist, and emergency placement coordinator in various community-based, hospital-based outpatient settings in New Mexico, Michigan, and Ohio. In these professional capacities, she has served as an expert witness in child welfare cases across multiple court jurisdictions. Her research experience includes work on a National Institutes of Health-funded study related to the utilization of cognitive-behavioral interventions after an initial psychotic episode. Her current clinical interests focus on the implementation of trauma-informed, culturally relevant interventions with adolescents in New Mexico.

**Joseph A. Mienko** is Director of Data Science for Partners for Our Children, a research, practice, and policy center focused on the child welfare system that is a part of the School of Social Work at the University of Washington. He is a social welfare scholar with expertise in the demographic analysis of social service administrative data. He worked as a social worker in the child welfare systems in Michigan and in Washington State. He served as an intelligence analyst in the US Army in Afghanistan, Iraq, and the Pacific Theater. He is interested in social service information technology, the application of statistical models to social service problems, and organizational management.

**Chase Montagnet** is a doctoral student and graduate assistant at the School of Criminal Justice at Rutgers University—Newark. She graduated summa cum laude from the College of Charleston with a bachelor’s degree in psychology and received her master’s degree with honors in criminal justice policy from the London School of Economics and Political Science. Her research interests include life-course criminology and community reentry, with a specific focus on how social supports and social institutions aid in desistance. As a graduate assistant on the Women’s Prison Inmate Networks Study, she conducts intensive interviews with incarcerated women and their children to better understand how children cope with having a parent incarcerated. Prior to her work at Rutgers, she worked as a research analyst for criminal and juvenile justice evidence-based repositories. In this capacity, she synthesized information from evaluations and meta-analyses to produce

program profiles for publication and led interviews and focus groups related to the implementation of juvenile justice interventions.

**Joseph Murray** is Professor at the Federal University of Pelotas, Brazil. Prior to this position, he worked at the University of Cambridge in the Department of Psychiatry and the Institute of Criminology on a Wellcome Trust Research Fellowship, studying risk factors for and protective factors against conduct problems and violence in the UK, Brazil, Sweden, Switzerland, Holland, and the USA. His current research focus is on the effect of parental imprisonment on children's antisocial behavior and mental health through the life-course. More broadly, his work examines social and economic problems of crime and violence from the perspective of child development and early life influences. He is the recipient of numerous awards for his work, including a British Academy Post-doctoral Fellowship, the Nigel Walker Prize, and a Distinguished Young Scholar Award from the American Society of Criminology.

**Rex Newton** worked as a psychologist for four decades with the Oregon Department of Corrections. His sessions with individual inmates and groups fostered a strong commitment to understand and confront the generation to generation cycle of criminality. He participated in curriculum development throughout his career and played a key role in the creation and introduction of the *Parenting Inside Out* parent management training program within the Oregon state prison system. He served as Director of Prison Parenting Programs for Pathfinders Inc., a non-profit organization that offers psychosocial interventions in prisons and assists men and women and their families during the reentry period. He served as a program director for the Cornerstone Alcohol and Drug Residential Treatment Program, treating inmates with addictions prior to their release. In terms of community service, he was an active member on three non-profit boards of directors: Sponsor's Inc., a highly successful program providing transitional housing and employment for Oregon inmates returning to the community; the Children's Relief Nursery, whose purpose is to keep Oregon's children safe, families strong, and promote early intervention for the prevention of child abuse and neglect; and Phoenix Rising Transitions, a grassroots, community-based organization providing transition services, including education, housing, and mentoring, for inmates upon release and their families, where he also served as President. He is currently an adjunct instructor in psychology at Portland Community College.

**Fariborz Pakseresht** became Director of the Oregon Department of Human Services after serving for 19 years in a variety of leadership roles with Oregon state government, including as Director of the Oregon Youth Authority. Over the course of the past decade, he has focused on the enhanced use of research, data, and analytics to inform decision making in both the juvenile justice and human services fields. He was honored with the Outstanding Administrator Award in 2013 and the Juvenile Justice Leadership Award in 2017 from the Council of Juvenile Corrections Administrators for his leadership and contributions to the field of juvenile justice. He earned his undergraduate degree in political science from Willamette University and

holds a certificate in public management from Willamette's Atkinson Graduate School of Management.

**Bryce Peterson** is Senior Research Associate in the Justice Policy Center at the Urban Institute. His research focuses on criminal justice policy, and he has directed several projects focused on the impact of parental incarceration on children and families. His work has involved creating toolkits and other resources on policies and programs for parents involved in the criminal justice system. He has presented on parental incarceration to numerous policymaker and researcher audiences. He works with prisons and jails across the country to implement and evaluate practices aimed at improving connections between incarcerated parents and their children. His professional expertise is in evaluation and quantitative data analysis. Before joining Urban, he was a research fellow at the Research and Evaluation Center in New York City, and an adjunct lecturer at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice, where he taught criminology, criminal justice, and statistics. He received his doctorate in criminal justice from John Jay College/The Graduate Center, City University of New York.

**Becky Pettit** is Barbara Pierce Bush Regents Professor of Liberal Arts in Sociology at the University of Texas at Austin. She is the author of *Invisible Men: Mass Incarceration and the Myth of Black Progress* which investigates how decades of growth in America's prisons and jails obscure accounts of racial inequality. Her past and present research estimates the demographic contours of exposure to the criminal justice system as well as the consequences of criminal justice contact for social and economic inequality. She received her doctorate in sociology from Princeton University and bachelor's degree in sociology from University of California at Berkeley.

**Kaitlyn Pritzl** is Behavioral Treatment Technician at FamilyPath Autism Services, where she implements intervention programs for children who have autism to encourage their social, verbal, and play skills development. She also serves as a research assistant at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, where she focuses on children's development and the influence of parental incarceration. She has worked on a variety of projects examining children's contact with their incarcerated parent while they are separated, and how contact relates to children's behavior. She earned a bachelor's degree in human development and family studies, psychology, and criminal justice from the University of Wisconsin–Madison. She completed an internship at Canopy Center's Parent to Child program, supervising visits of families currently separated by Child Protective Services. From this, she gained a hands-on understanding of the complexity of parent–child separation and the positive benefits of maintaining the parent–child relationship.

**Catherine Dun Rappaport** is Vice President of Learning and Impact Measurement at BlueHub Capital, a national, mission-driven non-profit organization dedicated to building healthy communities where low-income people live and work. She is BlueHub's expert in applied research. She leads performance measurement projects and oversees evaluations of lending and initiatives. She collaborates with leaders across BlueHub to share insights and

to develop strategies for applying lessons learned. She has a 20-year track record conducting action-oriented evaluations, helping practitioners apply findings, and assuming leadership roles at mission-driven organizations. She has spent her career supporting positive social change. Prior to BlueHub, she served as Vice President of Analytics at the United Way of Mass Bay and as a consultant at Abt Associates. She also has five years of experience working in community-based organizations that support low-income children, including founding a chapter of Read to a Child. She graduated with honors from Amherst College and received a master's degree in public policy from the Harvard Kennedy School.

**Jean E. Rhodes** is Frank L. Boyden Professor of Psychology and Director of the Center for Evidence-Based Mentoring at the University of Massachusetts Boston (UMB). She has devoted her career to understanding and advancing the role of intergenerational relationships in the intellectual, social, educational, and career development of youth. She has published three books, four edited volumes, and over 100 chapters and peer-reviewed articles on topics related to positive youth development, the transition to adulthood, and mentoring. She is a fellow in the American Psychological Association and the Society for Research and Community Action, and was a Distinguished Fellow of the William T. Grant Foundation. She has been awarded many campus-wide teaching awards for her advances in pedagogy and scholarship, including the Vice Chancellor's Teaching Scholar Award, the Student Government Outstanding Teacher Award, and the Chancellor's Outstanding Scholar award at UMB. She is currently the principal investigator on a grant from the Department of Justice examining risk and protective factors and mentoring interventions for children of incarcerated parents.

**Jean E. Schumer** is a mental health clinician in the co-occurring disorders track with the Benton County Drug Court, a diversion program that serves non-violent offenders. She also has a private counseling and therapy practice and serves as an interim instructor at Oregon State University. Her three-decade-long social work career started in the child welfare and mental health system in New Mexico, and her experiences there shaped her interest in advocacy for children in foster care and with incarcerated parents. She subsequently pursued a doctoral degree in public health at Oregon State University, where she was the principal investigator for a maternal-child nutrition project in Nepal. Her dissertation research utilized data from a large-scale randomized controlled trial of a parenting intervention for incarcerated parents. She is a trained Inside-Out Prison Exchange instructor and is working to bring this program to a local community college. Her clinical interests focus on the development and testing of evidence-based interventions for families involved in the child welfare and criminal justice systems.

**Rebecca J. Shlafer** is Assistant Professor in the Department of Pediatrics at the University of Minnesota Twin Cities. She holds a doctorate in developmental child psychology and a master's degree in public health from the University of Minnesota. Her research focuses on the health and well-being of children and families involved in the criminal justice system. She teaches

graduate and undergraduate courses related to parental incarceration, child welfare, and incarceration and health. She also serves as a volunteer guardian ad litem in juvenile court, where she advocates for children who have been victims of abuse or neglect.

**Joann Wu Shortt** received her doctorate from the University of Washington and is a Senior Scientist at the non-profit Oregon Social Learning Center. She researches how relationships and emotions shape our development across the life span with particular interest in identifying risk factors that impact the lives of families and children. She utilizes observational and physiological methodology to understand interactional processes and mechanisms at work in shaping child, adolescent, and adult adjustment and family violence. She also has expertise in longitudinal design and multivariate analysis. Her research has included developing and piloting an emotion-focusing parenting intervention, the Emotions Program, to support the reunification of incarcerated mothers and their children upon release from prison. The Emotions Program targets both parent emotion regulation as a pivotal capacity for effective parenting and positive emotion socialization behavior which is important for child adjustment. Currently, she is the principal investigator of a National Institute of Justice-funded study to examine prospectively the intergenerational transmission of child exposure to family violence.

**Jane A. Siegel** is Professor of Criminal Justice and Chair of the Department of Sociology, Anthropology and Criminal Justice at Rutgers University in Camden, New Jersey. She is the author of the book *Disrupted Childhoods: Children of Women in Prison*, an in-depth qualitative investigation of children and their families before and during their mother's incarceration. Her research has focused on the impacts of incarceration and reentry on children, families, and incarcerated individuals. She is currently principal investigator for an evaluation of a reentry program for individuals with substance abuse disorders and mental illness diagnoses at a local jail. She is also principal investigator of a mixed methods study of child and family visitation experiences and policies at a large urban jail system, which includes surveys of visitors and incarcerated individuals as well as qualitative interviews with children who have visited their parent in jail.

**Peter Scharff Smith** is Professor in the Sociology of Law at The Department of Criminology and Sociology of Law, Oslo University. During his career, he has conducted research at the Danish Institute for Human Rights, the University of Copenhagen, Cambridge University, and the Royal Danish Defense College. He has published books and articles in English, Danish, Norwegian, and German on prisons, punishment, and human rights, including works on prison history, prisoners' children, and the use and effects of solitary confinement in prisons. He has also written books and articles on the Waffen-SS and the Nazi war of extermination on the Eastern Front. His publications include more than 10 research monographs and edited collections and more than 70 articles and chapters. His latest book, co-edited with Rachel Condry, is *Prisons, Punishment, and the Family: Towards a New Sociology of Punishment?* He has also instigated and worked with numerous

different prison reform projects concerning, for example, solitary confinement and the children of imprisoned parents.

**Erin Sugrue** is Assistant Professor in the Department of Social Work at Augsburg University in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Erin's research focuses on identifying and understanding issues of social, racial, and economic injustice within the public education and child welfare systems, with the goal of developing policy and practice changes that lead to system-level transformation. Prior to her career in academia, she worked for over a decade as a licensed school social worker in the Twin Cities metro area.

**Bryan L. Sykes** is Assistant Professor of Criminology, Law and Society at the University of California, Irvine. His research focuses on demography, mass incarceration, criminology/deviance, population health, and research methodology. His research has appeared in a wide variety of professional journals, including *The Lancet*, *JAMA*, *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, *Ethnography*, *Crime & Delinquency*, and the *Annual Review of Criminology*. He is currently collaborating on a multi-state, mixed-method data collection effort to assess the legal history and social consequences of monetary sanctions across different jurisdictions within the USA. He received a joint doctorate in sociology and demography from the University of California, Berkeley, and a bachelor's degree in sociology from the University of Wisconsin–Madison.

**Tiffany G. Townsend** is a licensed clinical psychologist and Senior Director of the Office of Ethnic Minority Affairs (OEMA) for the American Psychological Association (APA). OEMA works to increase/enhance the delivery of appropriate psychological services to ethnic minority communities and facilitate the development of public policies that support the concerns of communities of color. Before joining APA, Tiffany served as a full-time faculty member in the Department of Psychiatry at Georgetown University Medical Center. As a researcher, her work involves the implementation of community participatory research and community-based prevention programs to decrease health and mental health disparities among ethnic minority women, children, and families. Most of her research funding has supported work on risk prevention research among youth populations of color. She served as the principal investigator on four large-scale federally funded grants.

**Kristin Turney** is Associate Professor in the Department of Sociology at the University of California, Irvine. Her research investigates the complex and dynamic role of families in creating and exacerbating social inequalities. Currently, she is focused on examining the consequences of criminal justice contact for individuals, families, and children. For example, in the ongoing Jail & Family Life Study, she is interviewing jailed fathers and their family members—including current and former romantic partners, children, and mothers—during incarceration and after release. Her substantive interests are accompanied by a methodological interest in causal inference. She received her doctorate in sociology from the University of Pennsylvania and

completed a Robert Wood Johnson Health and Society Scholars postdoctoral fellowship at the University of Michigan.

**Ebony Underwood** founder and CEO of *We Got Us Now*, is a social entrepreneur, content creator, activist, and Soros Justice fellow at the forefront of reform initiatives supporting the children of incarcerated parents. Her interest in advocacy is both personal and pivotal. As a daughter of an incarcerated parent, she was traumatized and emotionally devastated by her father's incarceration, silently suffering for years. In 2014, she began to speak publicly and share her story through film, television, and social media advocacy. She produced and created a campaign and documentary short, #HopeForFathersDay, about her family's ordeal and published op-ed articles in the *Huffington Post* and *Vibe & Mic*. Since 2016, she has spearheaded and produced the Google-initiated digital campaign #LoveLetters to demonstrate the unbreakable bond between a child and their incarcerated parent on Mothers and Fathers Day. She has spoken at numerous national-level criminal justice reform summits and conferences, including at Yale Law School, Columbia Law School, NYU Law School, American Law School, John Jay School of Criminal Justice, Sing Sing State Prison, and Google. She recently joined the Board of Directors of the Sentencing Project.

**Sara Wakefield** received her doctorate from the Department of Sociology at the University of Minnesota, and is Associate Professor in the School of Criminal Justice at Rutgers University—Newark. Her research interests focus on the consequences of mass imprisonment for the family, with an emphasis on childhood well-being and racial inequality, culminating in a series of articles and a book, with Chris Wildeman, entitled *Children of the Prison Boom: Mass Incarceration and the Future of American Inequality*. Currently, she is working on several original data collection projects funded by the National Science Foundation and the National Institute of Justice. The Prison Inmate Networks Studies leverage a variety of methods and data sources (surveys, intensive interviews, administrative data, and social network analysis) to more fully understand how social ties influence the conditions of confinement, community reintegration, and social inequality.

**Lindsay Weymouth** is Assistant Scientist at the Population Health Institute at the University of Wisconsin—Madison. She provides programmatic and evaluative services for public health programs that serve children, youth, and families throughout Wisconsin. Previously, she conducted applied developmental research with young children with incarcerated parents, including intervention studies within local jails and observational research in the home. Before arriving in Wisconsin, she engaged in a variety of research-related roles with vulnerable families at the University of Michigan's Center for Human Growth and Development, at Humboldt State University, and with the California Center for Rural Policy.

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**Part I**

**Current Trends and New Findings**

# Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Research and Intervention with Children of Incarcerated Parents

# 1

J. Mark Eddy and Julie Poehlmann-Tynan

## Abstract

Children of incarcerated parents are an increasing and significant population, not only in the USA but around the world. An expanding body of rigorous research, particularly over the past decade, has found that children of incarcerated parents are at increased risk for a variety of negative outcomes compared to their peers, including infant mortality, externalizing behavior problems, mental health concerns, educational and developmental challenges, and relationship problems. Moreover, children with incarcerated parents are exposed to more risk factors and adverse childhood experiences than their peers. In this volume, we bring representatives of multiple academic and practice disciplines together to summarize the state of scientific knowledge about the children of incarcerated parents, discuss policies and practices grounded in that knowledge, and offer a

blueprint for future research and intervention efforts with this population. The large number of children who have been affected by parental incarceration makes it untenable for policy-makers, practitioners, and researchers to ignore these children and their families. This book is our collective attempt to continue to bridge the communication gaps between and among research, practice, and policymaking relevant to children of incarcerated parents, and to encourage the further conduct of high-quality research so that sufficient knowledge will be available for evidence-based practice and policymaking that makes a positive and enduring difference in the lives of children and their families.

Recent estimates indicate more than 5 million children under the age of 14, or 7% of all children in the USA, have experienced a coresident parent leaving to go to jail or prison (Murphey & Cooper, 2015). This is surely an underestimate, as it does not include children with nonresident parents who are incarcerated. The staggering numbers are even more concerning because we now know that parental incarceration is harmful to children, on average, and it has significantly contributed to growing racial and economic disparities that profoundly affect child's well-being in the USA (Wakefield & Wildeman, 2013, 2018). A growing body of rigorous research has found that children of incarcerated parents are at increased risk for a variety of negative outcomes

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compared to their peers, including infant mortality, externalizing behavior problems, mental health concerns, educational and developmental challenges, and relationship problems (e.g., Murray & Farrington, 2005; Murray, Farrington, Sekol, & Olsen, 2009; Wakefield & Wildeman, 2013). Children with incarcerated parents are also exposed to more risk factors and adverse childhood experiences than their peers (Murphey & Cooper, 2015).

Although pioneering advocates, practitioners, and researchers have called attention time and again to the families of incarcerated individuals, often referring to affected children and their caregivers as “invisible victims” and “collateral damage” (e.g., Travis & Waul, 2003), it has taken more than two decades to accumulate a substantial body of scientific knowledge about children of incarcerated parents, with much of the research occurring just in the last ten years. As Scharff Smith in Chap. 18 of this volume points out, a recent search for literature revealed that more than 260 new publications on parental incarceration and children of incarcerated parents appeared just in the years between 2012 and 2016.

Despite the large numbers of children and families affected, and the increase in the scientific knowledge base, information about children’s well-being when parents are incarcerated has been slow to enter the public consciousness at large. Even today, a frequent (and erroneous) statistic that appears in the media about these children is that they are five to seven times more likely to be incarcerated as adults than their peers (e.g., Adams-Ockrassa, 2018). While this statement may make a compelling introduction to a news story or a speech, the original source is unknown and no known data verify this claim. For many years, much of what we knew about the children of incarcerated parents came from anecdotes and stories such as this, a few small convenience samples, and a large sample survey of adults incarcerated in prison.

Fortunately, over the past decade this situation has changed rapidly, and the second edition of this book is a testament to the various lines of rigorous inquiry in which numerous scientists and interventionists are now actively engaged.

The majority of this work, however, has been conducted within the USA, which has experienced growth in incarcerated populations over successive decades, and currently has the highest incarceration rate in the world (Pew Center on the States, 2009), even though there has been a plateau in growth in recent years (Gramlich, 2018). There is also quite a range in the incarceration rates across states, with Oklahoma now having the highest incarceration rate in the USA, unseating Louisiana from its long-held position as “the world’s prison capital” (Wagner & Sawyer, 2018). In contrast, Connecticut, Michigan, Mississippi, Rhode Island, and South Carolina reduced their prison populations between 14 and 25% over the past decade (Schrantz, DeBor, & Mauer, 2018). Given these facts, the historical, cultural, and political contexts within the USA are important to keep in mind when considering the contemporary findings summarized in this volume.

Although most incarceration in the USA occurs in jails—which are locally run facilities that house individuals detained following arrest, prior to charging or sentencing, and those sentenced for a year or less and typically for misdemeanors (Zeng, 2018)—studies have traditionally focused on children of parents in state or federal prison or made no distinction among types of corrections facilities. Thus, in the previous edition of our book, much of the work summarized pertained to children with imprisoned parents. In the recent past, we have seen changes in this approach, with more attention being given to jailed parents and their children in addition to variables such as the length of the parent’s incarceration, the nature of the parent’s criminal activity, and the effects of parental recidivism on children, especially when multiple incarcerations occur in a relatively short amount of time, which is common for jail incarcerations. It should be noted, however, that several states in the USA do not make a distinction between jail and prison, nor do many other countries.

Despite increases in research quantity and quality, most studies of children with incarcerated parents still focus on contrasting children who have ever experienced parental incarceration

with those who have never experienced it. However, parents are involved in the criminal justice system in many ways that may affect children, from their arrest to community supervision (Chap. 3, this volume). The approach of combining children who have ever experienced parental incarceration, despite differences in the length, timing, and number of incarcerations, has helped garner adequate sample sizes to advance what we know about effects of parental incarceration on children, which is a critical step. Unfortunately, this approach also masks nuances in children's experiences and does not allow detailed examination of effects during different developmental periods or of mechanisms of these effects. Yet this, too, is beginning to change.

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### **Research that Crosses Disciplinary Boundaries**

The lives of children affected by parental incarceration may intersect with a variety of social service systems, such as public health and medicine, child welfare, education, mental health, and juvenile and criminal justice. Researchers and practitioners from academic disciplines that, by tradition, are attached to these systems have studied the children of incarcerated parents, but they have usually worked in isolation. In our original 2010 volume (Eddy & Poehlmann, 2010), we argued that this situation must change. Since then, it has changed, albeit quite slowly (cf., Wildeman, Haskins, & Poehlmann-Tynan, 2017). To adequately understand the needs and developmental trajectories of the children of incarcerated parents, research knowledge and practices need to be integrated across each of the relevant academic fields (Wildeman et al., 2017). Thus, a primary goal of this volume is to further stimulate and encourage collaborative, interdisciplinary multimethod research, including basic, intervention, and prevention research focused on the children of incarcerated parents and their families, schools, and communities.

In service of this goal, on these pages, a cross-sectoral approach to understanding the children of incarcerated parents is presented. Representatives from the fields of demography, sociology, anthropology, criminology, family studies, law, public health, social work, nursing, psychiatry, developmental and clinical psychology, prevention science, education and public policy and management contributed chapters, as did corrections, child welfare, and juvenile justice administrators and representatives from various nonprofit organizations serving children and families through direct service, research, and/or advocacy. Further contributions were made by individuals who have personal experiences highly relevant to understanding children with incarcerated parents. Most authors are active researchers residing and conducting studies in the USA. They hail from 17 states and the District of Columbia, representing every major region of the country. International perspectives are provided by researchers from five countries who have been involved in studies throughout the world (Chaps. 6 and 18). By viewing the children of incarcerated parents through a diverse set of lenses, it is our hope that this volume will not only consolidate an interdisciplinary perspective regarding children's outcomes within the context of parental incarceration, but also foster new collaborative approaches that generate advances in research, practice, and social policy.

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### **Book Themes**

Each of the chapters in our 2010 volume was grounded in one or more of five central themes: a developmental perspective, risk and resilience processes, multiple contexts that affect children's development, implications for policy and practice, and directions for future research. In our new volume, we have retained some of these foci, changed others, and deepened our inclusion of: (a) broader contexts in which children's development occurs, including additional perspectives from criminal justice, sociology, demography, and policy; (b) key proximal processes that make a difference in the lives of



children with incarcerated parents, such as caregiving, parent–child contact, and parent–child separation resulting not only from parental incarceration but also from immigration detention; and (c) personal experiences of those working with and for children with incarcerated parents and their families.

Some children of incarcerated parents are born while their parent(s) are in prison or jail; most affected minor children are less than 10 years of age (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008; Mumola, 2000). However, many adolescents and adult children have experienced their parents' arrest or incarceration at various points during their lives, and perhaps experienced parental incarceration during more than one developmental period. Because of the dramatically different needs of children of incarcerated parents throughout the life span, a developmental perspective is essential for an adequate understanding of this population. Some of the chapters in this volume emphasize the importance of developmental theory and research as it applies to children whose parents are incarcerated, a focus that has been lacking in much of the previous literature.

Because many children of incarcerated parents experience multiple risks, including separation from parents, poverty, parental substance abuse, and shifts in caregivers, much of the literature focusing on this population has focused on risk and negative outcomes. However, there is much variability in the outcomes of children with incarcerated parents. Many children of incarcerated parents show resilience, defined as the process of successful adaptation in the face of significant adversity (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000). Masten (2001, 2014) has argued that resilience is an ordinary process as long as a sufficient array of normative human adaptational systems remains intact, such as positive parent–child relationships and extended family networks. The adequate maintenance of protective systems can be extremely challenging for children and families impacted by parental criminality and incarceration, and thus fostering resilience processes is a primary goal of many intervention efforts. Some chapters highlight protective factors that can help

promote resilience processes in children of incarcerated parents and offer new ideas for intervention and policies that may better assist children and their families.

Like all children, the day-to-day lives of the children of incarcerated parents are imbedded in family, school, and community contexts. Unlike other children, however, the lives of children of incarcerated parents are heavily influenced by a powerful “fourth” context, the criminal justice system (and its ties to the immigration system), which encompasses a wide variety of subcontexts with distinct subcultures, including the police, the courts, jails, prisons, and probation and parole. Of particular importance to consider when interpreting findings about the children of incarcerated parents is the type of setting within which a parent is incarcerated. In this volume, we consider children whose parents are in prison or in jail. Compared to prisons, jails are often located closer to the incarcerated individual's family members, possibly affecting visitation frequency. Compared to state prisons, there are fewer federal prisons; federal prisoners are under the legal authority of the US federal government (US Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2010), and they are often located far from the incarcerated individual's family. Policies and procedures regarding visitation and other forms of contact between family members may vary dramatically depending on the type of facility in which the parent is housed. Various chapters highlight specific contexts such as these that may directly or indirectly affect children's adaptation and development over time, including what is known about how these factors influence the effectiveness of interventions and policies.

Although significant progress has been made in research and intervention over the past decade, there is still much to learn about children affected by parental incarceration and their families. By taking an inventory of current research findings, integrating these findings into a coherent framework, and highlighting knowledge gaps in the literature, this volume offers new directions for research focusing both on child and family development and on interventions designed to ameliorate the negative effects of parental

incarceration. Each chapter provides suggestions for areas where further research and applications are needed, and these suggestions are tied together in the final chapter.

Accessing the emerging literature on the children of incarcerated parents can be difficult for policymakers and practitioners. The integrated and rigorous scholarship presented in this volume provides a springboard not only for increased communication among professionals who are interested in the children of incarcerated parents, but also for the generation of new directions in research that can better inform social policies. To this end, many chapters highlight recent research findings and then discuss the potential implications of these findings for public policy and for practice. In the final section of the volume, future directions are discussed, and findings and discussions from throughout the book are tied together in the final chapter.

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## Book Sections

### Current Trends and New Findings

Over the past several decades, fundamental changes have taken place in criminal justice policies in the USA, leading to exponential growth in the number of incarcerated adults in state and federal prisons and jails, with only a recent leveling off (Harrison & Karberg, 2004; Mumola, 2000; Zeng, 2018). Because the majority of incarcerated adults are parents, this phenomenon has led to significant increases in the number of children affected by parental incarceration during the past several decades (e.g., Glaze & Maruschak, 2008; this volume, Chap. 2). In addition to the millions of children and adolescents impacted by the current incarceration of a parent, millions more have parents on probation and parole, many of whom were recently incarcerated (US Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2007). Many additional children have parents in jail, as most incarceration in the USA occurs at the jail level (Wagner & Rabuy, 2017; Wagner & Sawyer, 2018). Indeed, 10.6 million

people were admitted to local jails across the USA in 2016, with an average of 731,300 people in jail per day (Zeng, 2018). In addition, although the vast majority of incarcerated parents are fathers, the number of women behind bars continues to grow, with women reaching nearly 15% of the jail population in 2016 (Zeng, 2018). As a result of these combined trends, professionals from all walks of life—whether they be health-care providers, day care workers, teachers, coaches, or mentors—are more likely to encounter children who have or have had fathers, mothers, and other family members in jail or prison or under correctional supervision than in any prior generation.

The *Current Trends and New Findings* section of this volume, which includes five chapters, four of which are completely new, provides an important context for the chapters that follow. The chapters are written by sociologists, demographers, and criminologists who have been instrumental in furthering our understanding of parental incarceration and its potential causal role in diminished child well-being and growing social inequality. The authors of Chaps. 2 through 4 discuss a range of current issues, including estimates of children's and parents' exposure to incarceration in the USA, stark racial disparities that exist in such exposures, and the wider range of parental criminal justice involvement that potentially affects children, including but not limited to incarceration in jails and prisons. Because African American, Latinx, Native American, and many other children of color are disproportionately affected by parental incarceration, race and ethnicity are presented as key contexts for understanding risk and resilience processes in this population. The section also includes a chapter that summarizes findings from the seminal Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing study, a study of vulnerable families in US cities that has contributed an enormous amount to our knowledge about children and families with incarcerated parents, even though it was not originally designed as a study of such children. The section concludes with a chapter focusing on international research on children with incarcerated parents, which has been

instrumental in helping focus and guide research agendas across multiple countries, including in the USA.

## Developmental and Family Research

In the second section of the volume, we highlight developmental and family research through five chapters, three of which are completely new. The two revised chapters, which summarize what we know about the development of infants through adolescents when parents are incarcerated, ground the volume in a developmental perspective. Two of the new chapters emphasize family experiences that are particularly important for children with incarcerated parents: caregiving contexts and parent–child visits during parental incarceration. The final chapter in the section highlights the value of the use of qualitative approaches to improving our understanding of the lived experiences and perspectives of children, parents, families, and communities when parents are incarcerated.

Although we have grounded our interdisciplinary perspective in developmental theory and research, the best academic developmental journals still have accepted few articles focusing on children with incarcerated parents (e.g., a 2005 paper in *Child Development*, and a 2018 paper in *Developmental Psychology*). Chapters in the *Developmental Research* section review what is known about the effects and correlates of parental incarceration for children of different ages, focusing on results from recent cross-sectional and longitudinal studies. Because most incarcerated mothers and many incarcerated fathers lived with their children before their incarceration (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008) and plan to reunify with their families and children following their release, parental incarceration often results in transitory living arrangements for children. Whereas many children and families strive to maintain contact with the incarcerated parent despite the challenges posed by disrupted living situations, additional stressors, such as financial

strain, geographic distance from home to prison, and the ambivalence of family members toward the inmate and visitation, compound the difficulties that families face in remaining connected. Children’s caregivers play a vital role in helping maintain ties between the incarcerated parent and child, and the quality of environments that caregivers provide is critical for children’s cognitive, academic, and social development during the parental incarceration period. Chapters in this section explore these issues in the context of children’s attachment relationships and home environments, interactions with schools and communities, and children’s friendships and peer relations.

## Intervention Research

A growing number of interventions have been implemented with incarcerated individuals and their children and families. This body of intervention research is explored in the *Intervention Research* section of this volume, including a review of findings from studies conducted in prison nursery programs available for women who are pregnant when they enter jail or prison, a review of findings from studies of interventions focusing on improving the communication and parenting skills of incarcerated parents, and a review of findings from studies of mentoring programs for children living in the community. There is growing interest in a multimodal orientation to intervention relevant to the children of incarcerated parents (e.g., Eddy et al., 2008), and thus an organizing framework and findings from experimental and quasi-experimental trials are presented to demonstrate applications of empirically based preventive interventions to incarcerated parents and their children and families. A new chapter in the Intervention section focuses on international policy interventions designed to explore the effects on children of alternatives to incarceration for parents. The introduction of sentencing alternatives to prison or jail is an exciting new development in the field.

## Perspectives

In the second edition of the Handbook, we added an entirely new section to better represent the variety of perspectives that exist regarding research and intervention with children of incarcerated parents. The four new chapters in this section focus on a range of issues and perspectives, including the importance of community-based participatory research as a way to empower families of color (Chap. 17) and the delineation of the benefits of collaborating with individuals and communities who have experienced parental incarceration and its effects first hand (Chap. 21). Additional new chapters focus on a children's rights approach to the reform of criminal justice systems, with encouraging examples from European countries (Chap. 18), and from a US state using data to transform their juvenile justice organization (Chap. 20). In addition, one revised chapter in this section focuses on the interface between parental criminal justice involvement and the child welfare system (Chap. 19).

## Future Directions

In recent years, research has begun to play a prominent role in shaping policy and practice at the federal and state levels; this is also beginning to happen at local levels as well, where most incarceration occurs. A variety of governments and institutions have adopted mandates to use "evidence-based" or "evidence-informed" practices, but there remain many details to work out, including how such practices are defined, implemented, monitored, and adapted. The *Future Directions* section of this volume discusses ways in which research findings might influence future policies, practices, and research relevant to children of incarcerated parents. One entirely new chapter focuses on what we know and do not know in relation to policy-relevant research (Chap. 22). A second new chapter highlights new directions that are needed in research and intervention in the area of detaining, separating, and incarcerating parents and their

children at the US southern border (Chap. 23). The suggestions for research and intervention that have been developed in the preceding chapters are tied together in the final chapters (Chaps. 24 and 25), providing students, researchers, practitioners, and policymakers a clear starting place to engage in more successful and comprehensive multidisciplinary work and decision making on behalf of children affected by parental incarceration.

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## Summary

Children of incarcerated parents are a significant, growing, and vulnerable population. Researchers from multiple disciplines have learned much about this group of children, especially over the past decade. Here, we bring representatives of these fields of study together to summarize the state of scientific knowledge about the children of incarcerated parents, discuss policies and practices grounded in that knowledge, and offer a blueprint for future research. With the number of children who have been affected by parental incarceration to date, it is not tenable for policymakers, practitioners, and researchers to ignore these children and their families. This book is our collective attempt to continue to bridge the communication gaps between and among research, practice, and policymaking relevant to children of incarcerated parents, and to encourage the further conduct of high-quality research so that sufficient knowledge will be available for evidence-based practice and policymaking that makes a positive and enduring difference in the lives of children and their families.

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# Measuring the Exposure of Parents and Children to Incarceration

# 2

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## Abstract

Estimates suggest that millions of children in the USA have a parent incarcerated in prison or jail each year. Data from the Bureau of Justice Statistics' periodic surveys of imprisoned individuals; cohort studies including the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study (FFCWS) and the National Survey of Adolescent Health (AddHealth); and large cross-sectional surveys like the National Survey of Children's Health (NSCH) have all been used to estimate parents' and children's risk of exposure to various dimensions of the criminal justice system. This chapter summarizes key studies that have sought to quantify parental incarceration and children's exposure to having a parent incarcerated. We discuss how different methods of data collection and analytical strategies influence the measurement of parents' and children's contact with the criminal justice system as well as estimates of the relationship between parental incarceration and child outcomes, and we offer recommendations for future research and practice.

At the close of 2015, nearly 2.2 million adults were incarcerated in federal, state, and local prisons and jails, and another 4.7 million people were under the surveillance of probation or parole agencies in the USA (Kaeble & Glaze, 2016). While both the number and fraction of adults incarcerated have fallen from peak levels observed in late 2008, incarceration rates in the USA continue to be dramatically higher than those in other countries, and exposure to incarceration is pervasive in some socio-demographic groups. Figure 2.1 shows incarceration rates in 2015 in the USA compared with rates in western Europe. Americans are more than ten times as likely to be in prison or jail as people living in Denmark, Sweden, and the Netherlands and four times more likely than residents of the UK (Pettit & Sykes, 2017).

Simple counts of the number of people incarcerated or the percentage of the population in prison or jail do not show the extent to which contact with the criminal justice system is stratified by race and ethnicity. In the USA, incarceration is disproportionately concentrated among African-American and Latino men, particularly those with low levels of formal schooling. Table 2.1 presents estimates of adult exposure to incarceration by race and ethnicity. In 1985, eight-tenths of one percent of non-Hispanic white men age 20–34 were incarcerated in jails and prisons, compared to 5.9% of non-Hispanic black men and 2.3% of Hispanic

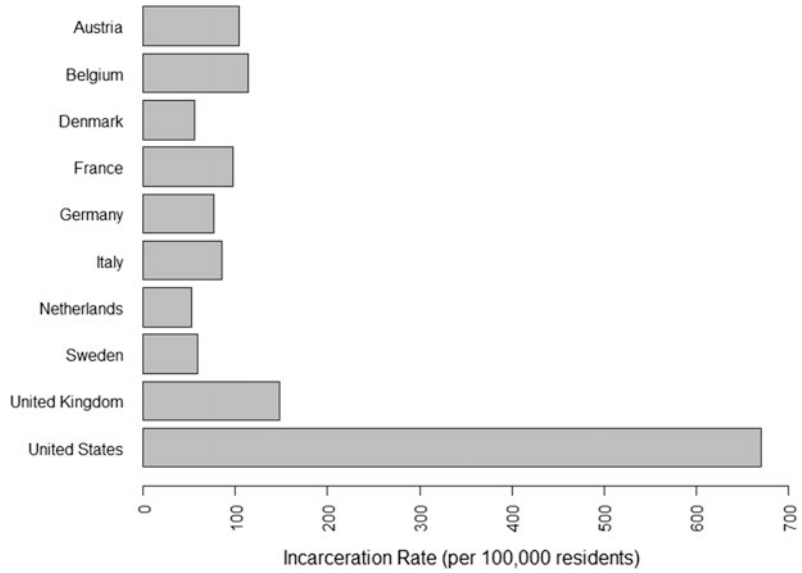
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**Fig. 2.1** Incarceration rates in selected western European nations and the USA, 2015. *Source* US rates are from Kaeble and Glaze (2016); European rates are from Aebi et al. (2016)



**Table 2.1** Exposure to incarceration by race and ethnicity, men age 20–34

	1985	2000	2015
N-H White	0.8	1.5	1.6
N-H Black	5.9	11.5	9.1
Hispanic	2.3	3.7	3.9

*Source* Authors’ calculations from the Surveys of Inmates, Bureau of Justice Statistics Annual Inmate Counts, and the Current Population Survey

men. By the end of 2015, approximately 1.6, 9.1, and 3.9% of young, white, black, and Hispanic men were incarcerated on any given day, respectively.

Growth in the criminal justice system over the last half century and its disproportionate concentration among disadvantaged groups has spawned increasing interest in research on punishment and inequality, particularly on the effects of criminal justice contact for individuals, families, and communities. Scholars routinely find that adult exposure to the criminal justice system has labor market, financial, educational, health, romantic, and political consequences for people with criminal records (Pettit & Western, 2004; Johnson & Raphael, 2009; Maroto, 2015; Massoglia, 2008; Pager, 2007; Pettit, 2012; Sykes & Maroto, 2016; Uggen & Manza, 2002; Western, 2006).

The repercussions of incarceration are not limited to current and former inmates. Growing concern about mass incarceration has resulted in a

proliferation of research on the consequences of parental incarceration for children and families. Over the last decade, research has shown that maternal, paternal, and parental incarceration are associated with a host of negative outcomes for children, including lower academic achievement, grade retention, and educational discontinuation (Cho 2009a, b, 2011; Hagan & Foster, 2012a, b; Haskins, 2016; Turney & Haskins, 2014) and greater likelihoods of material hardship, economic disadvantage, and severe deprivation (Geller, Garfinkel, & Western, 2011; Hagan & Foster, 2015; Schwartz-Soicher, Geller, & Garfinkel, 2011; Sugie, 2012; Sykes & Pettit, 2015). These consequences and hardships strain bonds between parents and children (Arditti, 2012; Braman, 2004; Comfort, 2008; Waller, 2002; Western, Lopoo, & McLanahan, 2004) and can fuel intergenerational inequalities (Foster & Hagan, 2007, 2015).

Yet, despite the expanding body of research on childhood exposure to incarceration and its

effects, few studies have assessed how differences in data and methods across studies may influence estimates of children's exposure to parental incarceration and effects of parental incarceration on child outcomes as well as their associated implications. In this chapter, we explore how methods of data collection and analysis influence the measurement of children's exposure to parental incarceration and its consequences. We begin with a discussion of conventional data sources employed to measure criminal justice contact and its correlates, and we examine how different data collection strategies influence estimates of the overall level of childhood exposure to parental incarceration and differences across socio-demographic groups. Next we review some of the recent literature on the effects of parental incarceration on child outcomes to illustrate *how* and *why* different data sources and methods influence observed findings. We conclude with recommendations for future directions in research and practice.

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## Measuring Children's Exposure to Parental Incarceration

Studies designed to estimate children's exposure to parental incarceration using a range of different data sources have generated three consistent findings: (1) There is growth in children's exposure to parental incarceration over time; (2) there is a cumulative increase in exposure to parental incarceration over the life-course; and (3) there is inequality in children's exposure to parental incarceration, both over time and over the life-course, across social and demographic groups. However, estimates of the percentage of children experiencing parental incarceration, and inequality in exposure to parental incarceration, vary in relation to sampling design, choice of respondent, and question wording in ways that may have important implications for research on the effects of parental incarceration on child outcomes and social inequality more generally.

## Point-in-Time Estimates

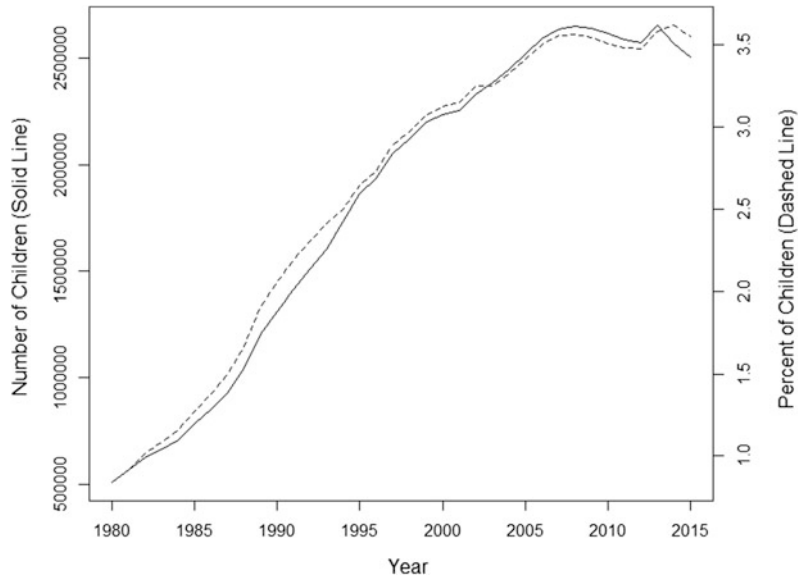
Children's exposure to parental incarceration is typically measured either at a point-in-time or as a lifetime risk. Point-in-time measures of children's exposure to parental incarceration using data from Surveys of Inmates of State and Federal Correctional Facilities estimated that nearly 1.5 million minor children in the USA had a parent in state or federal prison in 1999 (Mumola, 2000). These estimates are derived from survey questions about the number and ages of biological children of inmates housed in state and federal correctional facilities, weighted by the total number of inmates incarcerated in the respective facility types (Pettit, Sykes, and Western, 2009). Similarly constructed estimates that also include the biological children of inmates housed in local jails suggest many more, or closer to 2.1 million children, had a biological parent incarcerated in any type of correctional facility at the turn of the century (Sykes & Pettit, 2014).

Figure 2.2 demonstrates that the number and percentage of children with a parent currently incarcerated in a federal, state, or local correctional facility has grown along with penal expansion [see also Glaze and Maruschak (2010) for a discussion of growth in the number of children with a parent in state or federal prison]. Our estimates suggest that at the end of 2015, 2.5 million children had a parent incarcerated in a federal, state, or local correctional facility. It may be important to keep in mind that estimates including children with a parent in a local jail facility are typically a third or more higher than estimates that limit attention to children of parents incarcerated in only state and federal correctional facilities. Estimates of parental exposure to the criminal justice system, more generally, are even higher. One recent study suggests that nearly half of American children have a parent with an arrest record (Vallas, Boteach, West, & Odum, 2015).

Data from surveys of inmates can be used to estimate racial and ethnic inequalities in



**Fig. 2.2** Number and percentage of children with a parent incarcerated, USA 1980–2015. *Source* Authors’ calculations from the Surveys of Inmates, Bureau of Justice Statistics Annual Inmate Counts, and the Current Population Survey



children’s exposure to having a parent in prison or jail. Parental incarceration is much more common for Black and Hispanic children than for non-Hispanic White children, although the exact magnitude of racial and ethnic inequality depends on the scope of inquiry. More expansive measures of criminal justice contact—such as those that include short stints in local jails—tend to show higher levels of system involvement but lower levels of racial and ethnic inequality in exposure to incarceration for a number of different reasons related to criminal justice processing and respondent reporting. Drawing on data from Surveys of Inmates in State and Federal Correctional Facilities, Glaze and Maruschak (2010) and Mumola (2000) find that Black children are 7.5–9 times more likely than White children, and Hispanic children are 2.5–3 times as likely as White children, to have a parent in prison. More expansive measures of parental

incarceration that include parents housed in local jail facilities confirm racial inequality in exposure to parental incarceration but exhibit smaller differences between racial and ethnic groups in comparable years.

Table 2.2 displays race and ethnic inequalities in children’s exposure to having a parent incarcerated, including parents housed in local jail facilities. In 1985, six-tenths of one percent of White children had a parent incarcerated in prison or jail, compared to 4.1% of Black children and 2.0% of Hispanic children. Estimates from 2015 are much higher than those recorded 30 years earlier and racial inequality in parental incarceration persists. In 2015, parental incarceration rates for Hispanic children were approximately twice as high as for White children, while Black children were over five times more likely than White children to have a parent incarcerated.

**Table 2.2** Childhood exposure to parental incarceration by age 18

	1985	2000	2015
N-H White	0.6	1.4	1.7
N-H Black	4.1	10.1	10.0
Hispanic	2.0	3.7	3.6

*Source* Authors’ calculations from the Surveys of Inmates, Bureau of Justice Statistics Annual Inmate Counts, and the Current Population Survey

## Lifetime Risk Estimates

Children's exposure to parental incarceration can also be measured as a lifetime risk, or the chance that a child or children within a specified group has been exposed to having a parent incarcerated in a given period of time. Lifetime risks of exposure to parental incarceration have been generated using data from a number of different sources and vary quite significantly. Although studies that estimate lifetime risks of parental incarceration largely agree on the trends over time and across cohorts, discordant estimates of children's exposure to parental incarceration have been attributed to differences in sampling strategies across data sources, question wording or scope conditions, and who responds to the questionnaire (e.g., mother, father, or child) (see, e.g., Sykes & Pettit, 2014). These differences not only influence estimates of children's risk of exposure to parental incarceration but may also have important implications for studies investigating the effects of parental incarceration on child outcomes, as we will discuss in greater detail below.

Data from the Surveys of Inmates in State and Federal Correctional Facilities (SISFCF) have been used to provide estimates of children's risk of ever having a parent imprisoned in a federal or state correctional facility. When the SISFCF data are combined with inmate totals from the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), birth cohort counts from the Detailed Natality Files, and population counts from the Current Population Survey (CPS), children's exposure to parental incarceration can be estimated using life-table methods (Mueller & Wildeman, 2016; Sykes & Pettit, 2014; Wildeman, 2009). Wildeman (2009) used this method to estimate the fraction of children born in 1978 and 1990 that could expect to have a parent incarcerated by age 14. Other studies have applied these methods to estimate children's risk of parental incarceration in later birth cohorts and to age 18 (see Mueller & Wildeman, 2016; Sykes & Pettit, 2014).

Lifetime risks of parental incarceration are, by definition, always higher than point-in-time estimates generated by the same data because

they represent cumulative exposure to having a parent incarcerated. Wildeman (2009) relied on data gathered from people housed in state and federal correctional facilities and found that 1 in 25 White children and 1 in 4 Black children born in 1990 could expect to have a parent spend at least a year in a state or federal correctional facility before his/her fourteenth birthday. Subsequent estimates confirm that lifetime risks of parental imprisonment, by age 14 or 18, are much higher for all racial groups than point-in-time estimates listed in Table 2.2 (Sykes & Pettit, 2014; Wakefield & Wildeman, 2013; Wildeman, 2009).

Table 2.3 illustrates these and other estimates of exposure to parental incarceration generated by commonly used data sources. Row 1 reports estimates generated by Wildeman (2009) using data from the Survey of Inmates and population counts, and row 2 reports estimates from Sykes and Pettit (2014) using the same data and method applied to later birth cohorts and through age 17 (i.e., up to age 18). Both sets of estimates underscore that exposure to parental incarceration has grown over time and that the cumulative increase in the lifetime risk of parental incarceration is observed by early (age 14) and late (age 17) adolescence. Further, both sets of estimates illustrate large differences in children's risk of having a parent incarcerated, with Black children 6 to 7 times more likely to be exposed to parental incarceration than White children.

Comparing estimates from other studies included in Table 2.3 illustrates the salience of differences in sampling design, questionnaire wording, and respondents and their effects on estimates of children's exposure to parental incarceration. Row 3 reports estimates of children's exposure to parental incarceration generated from data gathered through the National Survey of Children's Health (NSCH) 2011–2012. The NSCH randomly samples telephone numbers in the USA to locate households with children aged 0–17 years. Within each household, one child was selected at random to be the subject of interview. Unlike previous iterations of the NSCH, the 2011–12 survey included a special supplement on adverse childhood

**Table 2.3** Exposure to parental incarceration in different studies relying on cohort and cross-sectional data

Row	Study	Data source	Data type	Respondent	Survey question	Year of study and age of children exposed	Percentage of children exposed to parental incarceration
(1)	Wildeman (2009)	Surveys of Inmates in State and Federal Correctional Facilities	Cross-sectional	Inmate	“How many children are under age 18?” “What are their ages?”	Birth Cohort of 1990; Cumulative Risk of exposure by age 14	3.6–4.2 (N-H White) 25.1–28.4 (N-H Black)
(2)	Sykes and Pettit (2014)	Surveys of Inmates in State and Federal Correctional Facilities	Cross-sectional	Inmate	“How many children are under age 18?” “What are their ages?”	Birth cohort of 1989–93; cumulative risk of exposure by age 17	3.9 (N-H White) 24.2 (N-H Black) 10.7 (Hispanic)
(3)	Sykes and Pettit (2014, 2015)*	National Survey of children’s Health 2011–2012	Cross-sectional	Guardian of focal child age 0–17	“Did the focal child ever live with a parent or guardian who served time in jail or prison after the child was born?”	2011–2012; Mixture of point-in-time and cumulative risk for children age 0–17	6.1 (N-H White) 11.4 (N-H Black) 6.4 (Hispanic) 7.2 (Total)*
(4)	Haskins and Jacobsen (2017)	Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study	Cohort	Mother and/or father of child	“Constructed -, father has [ever] spent time in jail”	Year 9, Wave 5 (collected during 2007–2010); Cumulative Risk by age 9	49.0 (Total)
(5)	Foster and Hagan (2007)	National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health	Cohort	Sampled adolescent	“Has your biological father ever served time in jail or prison?”	Wave 3, (collected during 2001–2002); Respondents were age 18–26; Cumulative risk by age 18–24	12.0 (Total)

Source Authors’ compilations derived from data codebooks and published study estimates

\*The estimate for the total percentage of children exposed to parental incarceration in Row 3 (7.2%) is published in the study by Sykes and Pettit (2015)

experiences that inquired about parental incarceration, exposure to violence, and other markers of disadvantage and thus provides an opportunity to generate nationally representative estimates of children’s exposure to parental incarceration from a large sample survey.

Row 3 in Table 2.3 shows that the NSCH asked respondents “Did the focal child ever live with a parent or guardian who served time in jail or prison after the child was born?” Compared to estimates of the lifetime risk of parental imprisonment generated by the surveys of inmates, the NSCH data generate *higher* estimated risks of

exposure to parental incarceration for non-Hispanic White children and *lower* estimated risks of exposure for non-Hispanic Black and Hispanic children. Further exploration indicates that differences in estimates can be reconciled, at least partially, by adjusting for the length of childhood exposure and information about whether the parent incarcerated co-resided with the child prior to his/her incapacitation (Sykes & Pettit, 2014). Adjusting for these factors helps to explain observed differences in estimates generated by the inmate surveys and the NSCH for Black and Hispanic children. However,

adjustments aggravated differences between surveys for White children, suggesting that White youth exposed to parental incarceration are either *overrepresented* in the NSCH or *overreport* exposure to parental incarceration in comparison to estimates generated from inmate surveys.

Row 4 in Table 2.3 shows estimates of exposure to parental incarceration from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study (FFCWS), a data source commonly used to study the effects of parental incarceration on child well-being. The FFCWS follows a cohort of nearly 4,900 children born between 1998 and 2000 in 20 large US cities with different welfare policies and labor market conditions (Reichman, Teitler, Garfinkel, & McLanahan, 2001). Roughly three-quarters of births in FFCWS were to unmarried parents. The baseline survey asked both mothers and fathers about father's incarceration histories [see Geller, Cooper, Garfinkel, Schwartz-Soicher and Ronald (2012) for a summary of differential reporting across survey waves]. These data illustrate how mothers and fathers may differentially experience, and differentially report, contact with the criminal justice system. Moreover, there is evidence that respondents in the FFCWS may significantly underreport contact with the criminal justice system. Geller, Jaeger, and Pace (2016) augment the FFCWS data in one city with administrative records from that state's criminal justice agency. After matching the survey and administrative records, they found that the number of fathers with criminal justice involvement increased by more than 20% in that city. It is unclear whether, or to what extent, data from the other cities in the FFCWS underestimate exposure to parental incarceration. Yet, data show that nearly 50% of children in the FFCWS had ever experienced paternal incarceration by age 9, or Wave 5 of the survey (Haskins & Jacobsen, 2017).

Finally, Row 5 in Table 2.3 shows estimates of parental incarceration generated by data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (AddHealth). AddHealth is a nationally representative sample of adolescents in grades 7–12 in the USA during the 1994–95 school year. The survey includes students from 132 schools in

80 different communities. More than 90,000 students completed in school questionnaires between September 1994 and April 1995 (Harris, 2013). In 2001–2002 (Wave 3), AddHealth began collecting information on whether the respondent's biological father ever served time in jail or prison. Foster and Hagan (2007) estimate that 12% of respondents had a biological father ever incarcerated.

Each of the data sources described in Table 2.3 has been used to estimate children's exposure to parental incarceration or other dimensions of criminal justice contact, differences across social and demographic groups in the risk of exposure to parental incarceration, and the consequences of parental incarceration on child outcomes. There is general agreement across studies that children's exposure to incarceration has increased in concert with growth in incarceration. However, children's exposure to parental incarceration measured over the life-course is much higher than exposure measured at any point-in-time. Additionally, exposure to parental incarceration is disproportionately concentrated among Black and Hispanic children, for both lifetime risks and point-in-time estimates. There are reasons to think that estimates from some surveys are better, more valid, indicators of underlying levels and differences in exposure to parental incarceration in the general population. For example, estimates from the NSCH are more likely to closely approximate the prevalence of parental incarceration in the USA than cohort-based studies like FFCWS and AddHealth. Yet each of these data sources have important strengths that have made them valuable resources for the study of the effects of parental incarceration on a wide range of child outcomes.

At the same time, however, differences in aspects of sampling design and measurement produce important differences in estimates of children's exposure to parental incarceration and racial and ethnic inequalities in exposure across surveys. These differences are important to recognize, and better to reconcile, in order to fully understand how exposure to parental incarceration affects children. For example, with respect to point-in-time estimates of parental incarceration,

Mumola (2000) and Glaze and Maruschak (2010) focused attention on the number of children with a parent in a state or federal prison. Much of our work, in contrast, has sought to draw attention to those children as well as children with parents incarcerated in local jails (see, e.g., Sykes & Pettit, 2014). Where and when a parent is incarcerated can have important implications for the effects of incarceration on child outcomes and there are important reasons that researchers may preference different measures. State and federal prison terms are typically longer than one year, and parents in prison may be housed long distances from their children. These factors may present significant obstacles and/or expenses to maintaining contact with children. In contrast, jail stays are usually less than a year and parents in jail are more likely to be housed closer to their home and/or children (Braman, 2004; Comfort, 2008), providing opportunities for more frequent or regular contact. At the same time, jail stays may be associated with significant churning, or movement in and out of jail for short periods of time, leading to family instability and increased uncertainty in children's lives (see, e.g., Comfort, 2008).

Differences in question wording help explain some of the variability in measures used to estimate children's lifetime risk of parental incarceration generated by surveys like the NSCH, FFCWS, and AddHealth. For example, the NSCH asks "Did the focal child ever live with a parent or guardian who served time in jail or prison after the child was born?" This measure leaves open the possibility that *non-focal* children in the household may or may not have also experienced parental incarceration. If all children in residence were subject to parental incarceration, then the prevalence of parental incarceration is not underestimated in the NSCH. Yet, if the focal child *did not* experience parental incarceration but non-focal siblings *were exposed* to parental incarceration—especially if non-focal siblings are older than the focal child—then estimates of parental incarceration are *underestimated* in the NSCH.

In the FFCWS baseline questionnaire, paternal incarceration is initially measured by a series

of mother and father reports on his presence in jail and if interviewers conducted the survey in a correctional facility. However, the type of facility and the length of time incarcerated were not asked so it was not possible to disentangle short stints in jail from long prison stays until Year 1. Unfortunately, facility-type distinctions were discontinued by Year 5 of the survey. The FFCWS began collecting data on the timing and length of incarceration in "jail/prison" by Year 1. Yet, the frequency of jail and prison stays was not recorded between the Year 1 and Year 9 surveys. This is unfortunate, as cumulative disadvantage may be most severe for children who have parents repeatedly exposed to carceral churning.

Although AddHealth has been a vital source of data for the study of parental incarceration on adolescent outcomes, it also includes a fairly broad measure of criminal justice contact that may lead to underestimates of racial and ethnic inequality in exposure to parental incarceration and its effects for child outcomes. Foster and Hagan (2007) note that in Wave 3 of AddHealth, "nearly twelve percent of the sampled youth reported their biological fathers 'had served time in jail or prison.' The timing, frequency, and duration of these incarcerations is unknown" (p. 408). The omnibus measure of parental incarceration in AddHealth may also help to explain lower levels of racial and ethnic inequality in exposure to parental incarceration in AddHealth. More expansive measures of criminal justice contact typically show lower levels of racial inequality in exposure. In the next section of the paper, we explore how these measurement differences affect substantive findings in research on parental incarceration.

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### How Differences in Data and Methods May Help Reconcile Divergent Findings

Differences in survey design are important for understanding observed differences in children's exposure to parental incarceration across surveys as well as estimated inequalities in children's

exposure to parental incarceration. These differences may also help to explain divergent findings, with respect to the relationship between parental incarceration and children's outcomes. To draw attention to these issues, we focus on how features of data and method may help explain discrepant research findings on parental incarceration and educational attainment.

Recent studies use data from AddHealth and FFCWS to examine whether and how parental incarceration influences children's educational progress at different points in the life-course. Drawing on AddHealth data, Foster and Hagan (2007) show that having a father incarcerated is negatively associated with years of education, and that paternal incarceration also results in lower grade point averages for children (Foster & Hagan, 2009). Yet, research relying on data from the FFCWS provides mixed evidence for the effects of parental incarceration on measures of childhood development and early educational progress (Geller et al., 2012; Haskins, 2014, 2016; Wildeman & Turney, 2014). How does one resolve these discordant findings between surveys?

In a recent paper published in *Demography*, Turney (2017) attempts to reconcile these findings using data from the FFCWS to estimate variation in the effects of paternal incarceration on children's problem behaviors and cognitive skills in middle childhood (i.e., to age 9). By taking into account children's differential risk of experiencing paternal incarceration—as measured by father's residential status, family poverty, and neighborhood disadvantage—she is able to explore a variety of child outcomes for children exposed to high, medium, and low probabilities of paternal incarceration. Importantly, Turney (2017) finds that “the null average effects on cognitive skills are consistent with the null test scores among younger children (Geller et al., 2012; Haskins, 2014), but they are inconsistent with the negative average effects on children's high school grade point averages (Foster & Hagan, 2007) and other educational outcomes (Murray, Loeber, & Pardini 2012). Together, these findings suggest that the average consequences of paternal incarceration for

children's cognitive skills may increase as children progress through school (also see Turney & Haskins, 2014), and future research should directly consider this possibly” (p. 382). Thus, divergent findings of educational inequality in the lives of children exposed to paternal incarceration may be resolved if researchers examine grade progressions across the life-course.

Turney's (2017) hypothesis about academic achievement worsening with grade advancement is certainly plausible and worth exploring, and her study was rigorously executed and is very convincing. To her hypothesis, we posit an additional possibility: The sampling frames of these data sources are too different to compare across study findings. The FFCWS is a stratified sample, where the first stage of sampling is based on *welfare policy regimes* and *local labor market characteristics* (Reichman et al., 2001), while the first stage of the stratified sample in AddHealth—from which Foster and Hagan (2007, 2015) draw their conclusions—is based on *secondary educational institutions* (Harris, 2013). While it is possible that academic achievement worsens over a child's life-course if exposed to paternal incarceration, AddHealth sampled schools and then adolescents while the FFCWS sampled welfare and economic contexts of cities and then hospitals and births. Thus, the units were sampled from different conceptions of the population and thus should not be compared without adjusting for sampling differences between surveys. Furthermore, the youth in both surveys aged through the educational system during different periods of carceral growth, which may obscure the relationship between exposure to parental incarceration and academic achievement for a specific grade during a particular point-in-time.

Another possibility for these divergent findings is that conventional surveys underestimate the number of children exposed to parental incarceration and do so in ways that have important implications for the relationship between parental incarceration and child outcomes. The undercounting of people with criminal records in social surveys may introduce discrepancies and bias in survey estimates of parental incarceration, thereby lowering



estimated differences in effect sizes and compromising significance tests between children exposed and unexposed to parental incarceration. Geller et al. (2016) have observed the undercounting of fathers with criminal records for one of the cities in the FFCWS. To address problems of undercounting in sample surveys, Sykes and Maroto (2016) developed a method of adjusting national survey sampling weights for differences in adult exposure to incarceration using the Survey of Inmates and other population-based data sources. Their method highlights how both effect sizes and significance tests are impacted by relying solely on survey measures that may underestimate exposure to incarceration (see also Western, Braga, Hureau, & Sirois 2016 on bias in effect sizes and significance tests when survey respondents are missing in subsequent waves of longitudinal data). Sykes and Maroto's method can be extended to adjust sampling weights in other national surveys that measure exposure to parental incarceration. It is also worth noting that similar problems arise when surveys underestimate racial inequality in exposure if those surveys use an omnibus measure of criminal justice contact or parental incarceration. In either case, researchers should consider sampling designs as potential explanations for divergent findings and exercise care in scoping their conclusions based on these issues.

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## Conclusions and Future Directions

Millions of American children are exposed to parental incarceration every year, and having a parent incarcerated in jail or prison has become a defining feature in the lives of a disproportionate number of African-American and Latino children. The collateral consequences of parental incarceration on child outcomes, in a variety of domains, are increasingly well-documented. Yet, less attention has been paid to how the data and methods—from sampling design to the conceptualization and measurement of parental incarceration—may influence estimates of children's exposure to parental incarceration and the effects of parental incarceration on child outcomes. In

this chapter, we have provided a careful consideration of whether and how sampling design, choice of respondent, and question wording influence estimates of children's exposure to parental incarceration, the relationship between parental incarceration and child outcomes, and explanations for the effects of parental incarceration on children's academic achievement.

Differences in data and methods are most consequential, in our view, not simply for understanding the prevalence and consequences of parental incarceration in the aggregate but are most important when trying to determine between (or within) group differences in exposure to parental incarceration and its effects. Sampling methods and survey designs of commonly used studies can obscure racial and ethnic inequalities in parental incarceration and its effects on children.

We have a few key recommendations for future research and practice. Future research should be more attentive to how features of data and method influence the effects of parental incarceration and their implications for accounts of inequality. Turney's (2017) hypothesis about differential risks and treatment effects across the life-course is important and illuminating. However, an inquiry into these differential risks may require further exploration into how the sampling designs of different data sources may themselves produce differential effects. For instance, it could be that the sampling designs of various surveys either miss particular groups of people because they are not attached to households (see Pettit, 2012) or because the initial stage of a stratified sample is based on city contextual attributes (i.e., welfare policies and economic conditions), educational institutions, or correctional facilities. Decomposing how much of an outcome is due to how the analytical unit was sampled, as well as how the outcome was measured across different surveys, would clarify a great deal of discordant findings in the literature.

Second, future research should investigate how changes in social policies after the Great Recession impacted the consequences of parental incarceration for children. Many of the current data sources, especially the Surveys of Inmates,

are more than a decade old, and many of the cohort-based studies selected samples well before the Great Recession. Since the collapse of the housing and financial markets in 2007, states have devised a number of programs and policies to decarcerate state prisons and jails, and the youth in a number of these studies are now teenagers or young adults. New data collection efforts must be planned to understand how these policy shifts after the recession have impacted long-term exposure to, and differential effects of, parental incarceration in America for children born during the twenty-first century.

Third, practitioners and policymakers should carefully consider the objectives of their interventions and proposed policy solutions in light of existing data limitations and measurement differences. If, for example, policymakers and practitioners seek to establish short-term policies and programs targeting children with parents incarcerated, decision-makers should consider relying on population-based point-in-time estimates of parental incarceration. Similarly, policymakers and practitioners intervening in specific domains of social life or for specific issues (e.g., educational retention or health limitations) should rely on data and findings that have their samples drawn from those ecological contexts (i.e., from schools or health services).

Finally, research should focus on additional types of exposures to the criminal justice system. Much of the literature explores exposure and effects associated with incarceration, but little is known about the fate of children with parents who were arrested but not convicted or convicted but not incarcerated. The net widening of criminal justice contact may also influence child well-being through its effects on parents, either directly or indirectly. These areas of research are important and are beginning to be investigated (see Maroto & Sykes, Forthcoming; Sugie & Turney, 2017). The sequence of criminal justice contact—being surveilled, stopped, arrested,

plead/tried, convicted, and incarcerated—should be carefully considered in the design and implementation of new studies focused on how incarceration, and the carceral state more generally, infiltrates the lives of children and structures inequalities across generations.

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# Parental Criminal Justice Involvement

# 3

Sara Wakefield and Chase Montagnet

## Abstract

This chapter presents a review of the research on the experiences of families involved in the criminal justice system. We discuss parental incarceration and other forms of justice involvement through the lens of criminal justice system processing. We partition our essay into two stages: (1) an overview of the criminal justice system and its complexities, and (2) a description of criminal justice processing (i.e., arrest, charging and adjudication, and punishment) and the potential for effects on children, using policy interventions and reforms as salient examples. In so doing, we highlight the challenges families face prior to parental incarceration and shed light on the complexities of the criminal justice system that are often insufficiently appreciated in the research literature.

Children of incarcerated parents are at high risk for a variety of deleterious outcomes, including emotional and behavioral problems as well as reduced educational attainment (Andersen, 2016; Armstrong, Eggins, Reid, Harnett & Dawe, 2017; Christian, 2009; Hairston, 2007; Haskins

& Jacobsen, 2017; Murray, Bijleveld, Farrington, & Loeber, 2014; Poehlmann, 2005; Turney & Haskins, 2014; Wakefield & Wildeman, 2013; see additional chapters, this volume). Mass incarceration and surveillance as currently practiced in the USA is overwhelmingly repressive and is increasingly implicated in a host of racial disparities in health (Massoglia & Pridemore, 2015), childhood well-being (Wakefield & Wildeman, 2013), and labor market outcomes (Western & Pettit, 2005), among others (Brame, Bushway, Paternoster, & Turner, 2014; Phelps, 2017; Shannon et al., 2017; Turney & Haskins, 2014; Wakefield & Uggen, 2010; Bruns and Lee, this volume). Decreasing the harms faced by children of incarcerated parents is thus a key concern of researchers, practitioners, policy-makers, and community members alike.

In this chapter, we discuss parental incarceration and other forms of justice involvement through the lens of criminal justice system processing. We partition our essay into two stages: (1) an overview of the criminal justice system and its complexities, and (2) a description of criminal justice processing (i.e., arrest, charging and adjudication, and punishment) and the potential for effects on children, using policy interventions and reforms as salient examples. In so doing, we highlight the challenges families face prior to parental incarceration and shed light on the complexities of the criminal justice system that are often insufficiently appreciated in the research literature.

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## The Complexities of American Criminal Justice System(s)

Despite a well-established research literature documenting harms for children of incarcerated parents, reducing these harms is not clear cut. A necessary first step is estimating and understanding the effects of parental justice involvement on children well-being, yet there are many challenges in doing so. Such a research agenda requires accurately measuring the prevalence and character of parental justice involvement (Murphey & Cooper, 2015; Wildeman, 2009; Pettit, this volume), accounting for the family life and parent-child experiences that precede the justice involvement of a parent (e.g., Giordano, 2010; Siegel, 2011; Chap. 11, this volume; Chap. 9, this volume), isolating the influence of criminal justice contact from earlier experiences (Kirk & Wakefield, 2018), and differentiating among the many different forms of criminal justice contact that may affect children's health, well-being, and safety (Apel & Powell, 2019; Sugie & Turney, 2017). While other chapters in this volume delve more deeply into the details of estimating parental incarceration effects, here we simply suggest that contemporary research rarely distinguishes among different forms of justice involvement. Moreover, the data infrastructure challenges in doing so are largely insurmountable with currently available administrative and survey data sources in the USA (for more detail on these problems, see Kirk & Wakefield, 2018; Chap. 16, this volume). Many of these challenges also make it very difficult to design effective interventions that apply broadly to the children of people who become bound up in the criminal justice system.

### Measuring Parental Criminal Justice Contact

It is incredibly difficult to measure parental criminal justice contact with currently available data in the USA (see Chap. 2, this volume). There exists no entirely accurate count of the

number of children who have a parent with criminal justice involvement, although all available estimates using administrative data, surveys, or birth cohorts suggest the number is very large in an era of mass incarceration. Arrest by police is very common, for example. By the age of 23, the best available estimate finds that between 30 and 40% of adults have been arrested (Brame, Turner, Paternoster, & Bushway, 2011), with much higher arrest rates among Black men relative to other groups (Brame et al., 2014). Incarceration and felony conviction are also common; about 3% of the adult population in the USA had been incarcerated at some point and 8% of all adults have been convicted of a felony (Shannon et al., 2017). As with arrest, these estimates mask significant racial and spatial heterogeneity in the experience of incarceration and criminal justice conviction—while 8% of all adults have been convicted of a felony, over 33% of Black males have a felony criminal record, and these percentages vary significantly across states (Shannon et al., 2017; see also Pettit & Western, 2004; Pettit, this volume). Numbers like these suggest a similarly large number of children must also experience the consequences that flow from contact with an often hostile criminal justice system.

Translating these estimates to a complete count of children who experience parental criminal justice contact is difficult. Surveys of incarcerated people show that most are parents (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008). Demographic estimates find that almost a quarter of Black children will experience the incarceration of a parent before the age of fourteen (Wildeman, 2009), and a recent survey finds that 7% of children (or about 5 million children) will have a residential parent incarcerated at some point during their childhoods (Murphey & Cooper, 2015). Importantly, the latter estimate is necessarily a large undercount because it excludes counts of parents who were not residential parents. Moreover, while there are a variety of estimates of the risk of parental incarceration, these estimates exclude the incarceration of other important family members (Lee, McCormick, Hicken, &

Wildeman, 2015) or different forms of criminal justice contact (arrest, pretrial detention in a jail, conviction, etc.) beyond incarceration.

### **Isolating the Effects of Parental Criminal Justice Involvement on Children**

As with estimates of the prevalence of parental justice involvement, there is significantly more research on parental incarceration relative to other forms of justice involvement. Studies link parental incarceration to a host of negative consequences for children's well-being, including household instability, mental health and behavioral problems, educational performance and attainment, and racial inequality in well-being (Andersen, 2016; Armstrong et al., 2017; Christian, 2009; Hairston, 2007; Wildeman, Haskins, & Poehlmann-Tynan, 2017), but much of the research on parental incarceration is unable to clearly distinguish the effects of having a criminally involved parent from those that flow from parental criminal justice contact (Giordano, 2010; Wakefield & Apel, 2017). As noted by Myers, Smarsh, Amlund-Hagen, and Kennon (1999), "most of the families affected by incarceration are at risk prior to the mother's first arrest" (p. 13).

### **Differentiating Between Various Forms of Parental Criminal Justice Contact**

Part of the difficulty in teasing out the effects of different forms and stages of parental justice involvement on children is the complexity within the American criminal justice system. The criminal justice "system" is not a system at all. It is many systems with many stages, operating across multiple jurisdictions, and—importantly—stages within the same jurisdiction may have little involvement with one another. A given location in the USA may be under the jurisdiction of multiple law enforcement agencies, including local, state, and federal courts, and may include a local jail, state prison, and/or federal

correctional facility. Depending on the location, probation supervision (a community sentence typically served in lieu of sentenced incarceration) and parole supervision (a community sentence typically served following incarceration) may be run by separate agencies. Similarly, correctional facilities may be under the administration of an entirely different agency than the one that will supervise former prisoners upon their release to the community.

Much of the research on parental incarceration highlights the size of the criminal justice system—and it is indeed a beast. But the size of the system(s) obscures the fact that the criminal justice system operates on many levels, in many stages, with little coordination among the stages. We thus use the label "criminal justice system" here because it is a common phrase (with a less well-understood scope) but note that it masks incredible heterogeneity in experiences.

Research on parental criminal justice contact today is commonly focused on one experience, incarceration. Yet such research is often either focused on incarceration in a state prison following conviction or cannot reliably differentiate between various forms of incarceration, including pretrial detention while awaiting case resolution, sentenced imprisonment in a state or federal facility, or sentenced incarceration in a local jail (for notable exceptions, see Sugie & Turney, 2017; Wildeman, Turney, & Yi, 2016). Moreover, the largest pool of people with incarceration experience is among the least studied. Here we refer to those who experience short incarceration spells in local jails. While the daily population of local jails is roughly half of the daily population held in prisons, this estimate is misleading. On any given day, about three-quarters of a million people are held in local jails but more than 11 million people pass through them on an annual basis (Minton & Zeng, 2016). Finally, despite the metaphor of the criminal justice system as a series of orderly stages, with punishment following case resolution in a criminal court, most people incarcerated in local jails have not been convicted of a crime and are instead awaiting trial or a plea agreement.

Thus, even restricting research to a seemingly well-defined experience like “incarceration” masks considerable variation. Incarceration may take place before or after trial, before or after a plea agreement, and in vastly different sorts of facilities. The conditions of confinement with respect to inmate culture, correctional policies, rates of mental health problems or communicable diseases, visitation policies and practices, and a host of other factors differ substantially across correctional institutions—and critically, all of these conditions are likely to influence the children of the incarcerated and are unmeasured in most research (Kreager & Kruttschnitt, 2018; Wildeman, Fitzpatrick, & Goldman, Forthcoming).

Beyond variation at the institutional level, research on parental criminal justice contact is often insufficiently attentive to large variations in the form and character of justice involvement across places. States, for example, vary considerably in the level and character of criminal punishment. In 2015, the imprisonment rate ranged from a low of 132 per 100,000 in Maine to a high of 776 per 100,000 in Louisiana (Carson & Mulako-Wangota, 2017; Kirk & Wakefield, 2018). Other states have relatively small prison populations but rely heavily on probation surveillance (Phelps, 2017). Contact with police and the accumulation of legal debt represent still other forms of justice involvement that may prove consequential for child well-being and vary considerably across state, city, and even neighborhood lines (Brame et al., 2011; Harris, Evans, & Beckett, 2010).

Finally, there is little systematic research on the effects of parental arrest, conviction, or community supervision on children, though a number of contemporary and classic works on related matters are instructive (Arditti, 2012, 2015; Braman, 2004; Dallaire & Wilson, 2010; Giordano, 2010; Hagan & Palloni, 1990; Kirk & Sampson, 2013). The long-term effects of parental criminal justice contact for children are also less widely understood. This presents a limitation considering that not only are millions of people currently incarcerated or supervised on parole or probation, but an estimated 19 million American residents have a felony conviction (Shannon

et al., 2017). Such convictions erect barriers to employment, housing, and education assistance and impose a host of formal and informal social disabilities that extend long after formal contact with the criminal justice system has ceased (Lageson, 2016; Manza & Uggen, 2006; Olivares, Burton, & Cullen, 1996; Wakefield & Uggen, 2010).

Having offered a broad overview of the complexities of American criminal justice system(s), we now turn to a brief overview of salient issues for families involved in each stage of the system. In so doing, however, we remind the reader that some stages of the system are the subject of the lion’s share of research attention (e.g., incarceration in state prisons) while others remain almost total black boxes (e.g., the conditions of confinement) and unmeasurable with current data sources.

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## Criminal Justice Processing and Families

### Arrest

The arrest of a parent is a first step that, for some, becomes a much longer path into the criminal justice system. Yet even arrest is likely preceded by numerous interactions with agents of the criminal justice system. Families with members who later become incarcerated are often subject to repressive policing practices in their neighborhoods, and many people experience multiple stops by police before being formally arrested (Langton & Durose, 2016). Similarly, few people are incarcerated during their first contacts with the justice system (Apel & Powell, 2019), and children of incarcerated parents likely experienced numerous interactions with police, courts, or other criminal justice actors prior to the incarceration of a parent.

Still, if we think of arrest as the first formal interaction with the criminal justice system, it is worth underscoring that the uncertainty, fear, and instability of this experience can be particularly traumatic for children. Although law enforcement has a responsibility to ensure that the



children of arrested parents are cared for, many police departments do not have protocols to safeguard children when their parent is arrested. Additionally, little attention is paid to the emotional trauma, distress, and fear that may result from witnessing a parent's arrest, interacting with armed police officers, the sudden removal of a parent, or arranging caregiving arrangements following parental arrest (e.g., Dallaire & Wilson, 2010; Poehlmann-Tynan, Burnson, Runion, & Weymouth, 2017). This, in combination with the limited resources of local child welfare agencies (hereafter CWS), can lead to a chaotic and traumatic experience for the child (Berger, Cancian, Cuesta, & Noyes, 2016; International Association of Chiefs of Police [IACP], 2014).

A number of organizations have developed practices to account for the intersection of child welfare and parental arrest, but the implementation and effect of them is limited and largely unknown. For example, in 2014, the IACP developed a set of recommendations intended to assist law enforcement agencies in developing policies and procedures to safeguard children when their parents are arrested. These arose from a series of focus groups conducted with federal, state, local, and tribal practitioners that had experience in law enforcement, child welfare, children's mental health, and children with incarcerated parents (IACP, 2014). The overarching recommendation states that "officers will be trained to identify and respond effectively to a child, present or not present, whose parent is arrested in order to help minimize potential trauma and support a child's physical safety and well-being following an arrest" (IACP, 2014, p. 8). Additionally, recommendations call for collaboration between law enforcement, CWS, and other key agencies to minimize trauma experienced by the child whose parent is arrested. Other resources have been developed along similar lines. For example, several toolkits for law enforcement describe the implementation of parental arrest policies, most notably those developed and distributed by the Bureau of Justice Assistance and the Urban Institute through a series of webinars and other publications (IACP, 2015; Kurs, Peterson, Cramer & Fontaine, 2015).

A handful of jurisdictions have adopted policies that emphasize interagency collaboration between police and child welfare, including New Haven, Connecticut; Charlotte-Mecklenburg, North Carolina; Boston, Massachusetts; and San Francisco, California. These policies are written agreements explicitly noting each agency's intentions, roles and responsibilities, and services they can/will provide, such as working together prior to an arrest of a parent, responding to arrests when child placement becomes an issue, providing emotional—as well as problem solving—support for both children and families following the arrest of a parent, and/or arranging follow-up visits to ensure that temporary caregivers are providing suitable care for the child. Certainly, this work is not easy. The challenges to interagency collaboration and understanding agency cultures are highlighted in the Urban Institute's *Toolkit for Developing Parental Arrest Policies* (Kurs et al., 2015).

Although policies and dissemination documents designed to reduce stress among children are cause for optimism, we could find no rigorous evaluations of whether the adoption of these policies has improved outcomes for children. Further, there are reasons to be concerned about tightening the link between police and child welfare agencies. Interagency cooperation may ensure child safety in the short term (during parental arrest, for example) but could create longer term harms by increasing spillover involvement with the child welfare system. Just as the previous research connected increasing maternal incarceration to foster care caseloads (Johnson & Waldfogel, 2004), more recent work highlights how interagency cooperation can combine to produce more punitive outcomes for both parents and children (Edwards, 2016; Edwards, Forthcoming).

In much the same way that bringing police officers into schools had the effect of criminalizing adolescence and increasing racial disparities in criminal justice referrals from high schools (e.g., Hirschfield, 2018), recent work on police-child welfare connections raises similar concerns. Edwards (2016) finds that states with more punitive criminal justice systems (and less

generous welfare supports) are also more likely to remove children from their families. In later work, Edwards (Forthcoming) finds that areas with high arrest rates have higher rates of police referrals to child welfare agencies, with important implications for inequality.

We raise these concerns to underscore the importance of studying the downstream consequences of parental arrest, even if that arrest does not result in criminal conviction or incarceration. American policing more broadly is under greater scrutiny today than ever before, and it remains to be seen how changes in policing practices and partnerships with child welfare influence long-term outcomes for children.

## Courts and Sentencing

Much like the movements begun to reform policing practices with respect to children during parental arrest, similar arguments have been made regarding criminal justice processing, with a particular focus on the rights and needs of children with respect to sentencing decisions (UNICEF, 1989, as cited in Boudin, 2011). Although these movements led to meaningful reform in other countries as well as in some US states, it remains the case that under most sentencing guidelines, the “children of the convicted are essentially considered irrelevant third parties to sentencing” (Boudin, 2011, p. 93).

The influence of shifts in sentencing policy at the dawn of the prison boom on children of incarcerated parents is relatively easy to observe. From 1986 to 1996, for example, following the enactment of mandatory minimums, the number of women incarcerated for drug offenses in state facilities increased by 888%, compared to 129% for non-drug-related offenses (Christian, 2009; Kruttschnitt, 2010). Increased incarceration of women for drug offenses reflects, in part, that mandatory minimum sentences “tie the hands of judges and corrections professionals and increase the chances that families will be torn apart and children put at risk” (Drug Policy Alliance, n.d.). Given the negative impact that mandatory minimum sentencing laws have on parents and their

families, many youth advocates have urged states to amend these laws (as many have), or at a minimum to take the presence of children into consideration during sentencing (Christian, 2009).

Fortunately, some progress has been made, which can be seen through a handful of family court programs. Family courts take into consideration whether the individual is a parent during the sentencing process. A sampling of these for which outcomes have been examined is listed on the National Institute of Justice’s CrimeSolutions.gov. CrimeSolutions.gov is an evidence-based database that reviews and rates evidence on criminal justice interventions and policies. An example is the Family Drug Court in Tulsa, Oklahoma, reviewed and rated as “Effective.” The Family Drug Court (FDC) is a specialized court that handles cases of child abuse and neglect involving substance abuse by either the parent or caregiver. By following the family dependency court model, the FDC adheres to its core components: convening as a team prior to the incarcerated parent’s court hearing to discuss the case, focusing on both the welfare of the child and the needs of the incarcerated parent, utilizing random drug screenings and positive/negative reinforcement, and ensuring collaboration and training across agencies (Brook, Akin, Lloyd, & Yan, 2015).

There are other programs and legislative reform efforts that have sought to reduce the carceral footprint by diverting parents from incarceration and toward community sentences (Human Impact Partners and Free Hearts, 2017, 2018; Myers et al., 1999). Some of these efforts are homegrown. For example, the Parenting Sentencing Alternative, passed into law in Washington State in 2010, allows judges to impose a 12-month community custody for eligible caretakers of children (see Chap. 16, this volume; Washington State Department of Corrections, 2017). Others have been influenced by national-level efforts. For example, the National Institute of Corrections developed Children of Incarcerated Parents, an interagency working group, to provide guidance to governments wishing to implement policy and practice



reforms. Their work has led to a handful of family-focused justice reforms for convicted parents, some of which have dealt with the sentencing context (Council of State Governments, 2013; Feig, 2015; see Christian 2009 for a discussion).

Despite such advances in various court practices, policies, and legislation, sentencing reforms and diversion programs based on parental status remain rare, and it is uncommon to find rigorous evaluations of them. In our search for promising programs and reforms, we found few evaluations, but we were also struck by the emphasis on the “low-hanging fruit” of criminal justice populations. The Family Drug Court described above is a good example; it provides sustained support services and has been rated as effective by an outside evaluator—yet it is restricted to a small population of incarcerated women (those with abuse or neglect cases as a result of substance abuse). Thus, it remains the case that criminal courts largely ignore the interests of children, and parents are often sentenced to jail or prison, contexts that make maintaining connections to children difficult (Christian, 2005).

### **Incarceration and Reentry**

A relatively large research literature documents the harmful effects of parental incarceration on children (see Armstrong et al., 2017; McKay et al., 2018; Myers et al., 1999; Naser & Visser, 2006; Wildeman, Haskins, & Poehlmann-Tynan, 2017), and a parallel research literature in criminal justice highlights the importance of maintaining family connections for reducing misconduct while incarcerated and recidivism once released (see Cochran, 2012, 2014). Many corrections officials understand that families are an important part of their work in theory, but institutions vary greatly with respect to whether or not maintaining these connections is a core institutional goal in practice.

As described in Chap. 13 and elsewhere in this volume, a variety of programs have been developed to support parents on both the inside

and the outside of correctional facilities. Programs may include parent education, wherein parents learn effective parenting techniques; enhanced visitation, such as allowing children and parents to have long visits or even live together at prison while receiving support and counseling, relationship-building visitation activities, parent counseling and training, nursery programs, and support groups (Loper & Tuerk, 2006; Wildeman, Haskins, & Poehlmann-Tynan, 2017; Loper, Clarke, & Dallaire, this volume). Parents involved in some of these programs reported increased awareness of the importance of fatherhood, better parenting skills, and increased contact with their children, all of which can potentially increase a child’s well-being and decrease the incarcerated parent’s likelihood of recidivating (Harrison, 1997; McKay et al., 2010; Robbers, 2005; Skarupski et al., 2003). Unfortunately, the bulk of research on parenting programs do not include designs (e.g., RCTs) that allow for confident statements about program effectiveness (Armstrong et al., 2017; Loper & Tuerk, 2006).

As one salient example, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ (HHS), as part of the Responsible Fatherhood, Marriage and Family Strengthening Grants, funded the Incarcerated and Reentering Fathers and the Partners (MFS-IP) initiative. The MFS-IP initiative was designed to build collaboration between the criminal justice system and human service agencies to provide services to incarcerated fathers, their children, and their extended families, with a focus on strengthening the bond between father and child. While this is a step in the right direction, across the country, there are only 12 MFS-IP sites (i.e., grantees). Grantees are given the opportunity to select the curriculum they want to implement, which typically focuses on topics such as “the importance of father involvement, communication with children and other family members, child development, discipline techniques, and anger management” (McKay et al., 2010, p. 2).

Programs implemented during the initiative have included, but are not limited to, *Active Parenting Now*, *24/7 Dads*, *InsideOut Dad*, and

*Basic Parenting*. Despite the promise of the MFS-IP, evidence regarding the effectiveness of these programs is limited, illustrating the great need for more evaluation research on parenting programs, and particularly with this population. For example, although prior to the MFS-IP, *Active Parenting Now* was evaluated through a quasi-experimental design, found to be “effective,” and listed on the NREPP, the actual version implemented by the New Jersey Department of Corrections during the MFS-IP was an adapted version that to our knowledge has yet to be evaluated (McKay et al., 2010).

The MFS-IP example is repeated across a variety of correctional policies and practices with the goal of providing parenting support to incarcerated parents. There has been an increasing number of such efforts but, as noted by Armstrong and colleagues (2017), the increase in programming has not been accompanied by an increase in rigorous evaluations of the programs. Instead, more often than not, interventions are implemented with little prior research on whether the intervention is effective within any sample. Further, if research is conducted, the methodological rigor of the study is low, and reliable and valid conclusions cannot be drawn on program effectiveness.

Reentry supports are similarly haphazard. The Urban Institute has conducted a handful of studies on reentry and the challenges associated with reentry. For example, in their longitudinal reentry study—*Returning Home: Understanding the Challenges of Prisoner Reentry*—the importance of family was continuously stressed (Visher & Courtney, 2007). Moreover, La Vigne, Visher, & Castro (2004) found that during interviews with formerly incarcerated individuals, approximately four to eight months after release, a majority indicated that family support was the most important factor keeping them out of prison. Similarly, Visher, La Vigne and Travis (2004) note that “the greatest resource in reentry planning is the family” (p. 7). Despite these findings, families may bear a heavy burden during the reentry period, often performing services and supports that should arguably be provided elsewhere (Comfort, 2016).

Although individuals who maintain family ties while incarcerated, and successfully reunite with their families once released, are less likely to recidivate (Arditti & Few, 2008; Naser & Visher, 2006; Petersilia, 2003), the correctional system often provides few supports for this process. Individuals released from prison face multiple challenges, but a basic one involves transitioning from one stage of the system to another. Recall that moving from prison to parole supervision often involves moving from the control of one bureaucracy to another and that agencies often do not coordinate with one another. For people reentering the community, the lack of continuity between stages of the criminal justice system results in fragmented service delivery, a factor that may play a role in the return of some men and women back to prison or jail.

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## Conclusion

In this chapter, we have offered a brief primer on the complexities of criminal justice contact and the implications of that complexity for children of justice involved parents. As sociologist David Garland pointed out long ago, the “schizophrenic” nature and contradictions evident in criminal justice today may arise in part because pieces of one system rarely act in coordination with one another (Garland, 2001). In highlighting these gaps, we hope to make several points clear. First, a full accounting of the impact of parental criminal justice contact for children requires an understanding of all stages of the system. Such an accounting is substantially complicated by the various levels of the justice system (i.e., federal, state, and local), large differences in the settings and conditions of confinement (e.g., prisons versus jails), and a lack of specificity on what harms flow from which stage of the system (e.g., arrest versus felony conviction).

Second, by highlighting reforms and interventions at each stage, we note that each such effort represent examples of criminal justice practitioners both partnering with outside

organizations or experts that specialize in child or parent well-being and moving beyond their core institutional and bureaucratic goals. Reform and intervention strategies of this nature offer prospects and perils. The prospects of the reforms described here and in this wider volume are clear—they aim to reduce the carceral footprint, prioritize the rights and needs of children, and reduce harm. We are enthusiastic about them but we stress that the perils are many, beginning with the reality that criminal justice system(s) are spectacularly ill-suited for addressing social and familial problems related to childhood well-being. Police officers are not social workers, court officials are not trained in family functioning, and corrections administrators will always be most interested in securing people safely and efficiently. The main challenges to intervention, then, are often simply that the goals of the criminal justice system rarely align with those of organizations more focused on child well-being. Changing the culture of law enforcement agencies, involving child welfare agencies without unduly increasing foster care caseloads, diverting parents from prison while also treating what may have brought them to court in the first place are difficult tasks—doing all of these things at once within a series of systems that have not historically worked well together is immensely challenging.

Finally, we wish to highlight how simply reducing incarceration may not yield large gains in child well-being. People who end up in prison are often struggling mightily—with poverty, mental illness, substance abuse, violence, and trauma—long before they come into contact with an arresting officer, judge, or correctional officer. Their children are often struggling right along with them. The research evidence highlighting that mass incarceration has been a failure, especially for children of incarcerated parents, is strong. Yet, we should be mindful of what takes its place as we move forward to best serve the needs of the children who are the focus of this volume.

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# Racial/Ethnic Disparities

# 4

Angela Bruns and Hedwig Lee

## Abstract

Black, Hispanic/Latinx, and Native American men and women are overrepresented in the criminal justice system, including arrests, convictions, and incarceration, which means their children are also disproportionately affected. Although these disparities often motivate research on the consequences of incarceration for children and families, studies that explicitly engage with the dynamics of race/ethnicity and the criminal justice system are rare. In this chapter, we review quantitative and qualitative research that takes on the important task of understanding how parental criminal justice involvement interacts with race/ethnicity to shape children's life experiences. We first summarize statistics on racial/ethnic disparities in the criminal justice involvement of parents. We then review research that examines whether the impact of parental criminal justice involvement varies by race/ethnicity and perspectives on why differences in the consequences may exist. Next, we consider how these disparities contribute to overall inequalities in child well-being. We

consider a range of social outcomes and domains, from infant mortality to physical health and problems at school as well as avenues for future research on race/ethnicity and criminal justice system contact.

In the USA, race/ethnicity and the carceral system are indelibly intertwined. Indeed, racial/ethnic disparity in incarceration is one of the most undisputed facts about the US criminal justice system. Black individuals are incarcerated at a rate 6 times the rate for Whites. The rates for Hispanic and Native American individuals are 2 and 3 times the rate for Whites, respectively<sup>1</sup> (Hartney & Vuong, 2009). Incarceration has become so pervasive in Black communities that it is now considered a common stage in the life course for young, Black men, who are nearly twice as likely to have spent time in prison than to have completed a bachelor's degree (Pettit & Western, 2004).

Racial/ethnic disparities are not limited to incarceration. Disparate treatment of Black, Hispanic/Latinx, and Native American men and women exists at every stage of the criminal justice process. Men of color are more likely to be stopped and searched, arrested, and face more severe charges than White men (Durose, Smith, & Langan, 2007; Meierhoefer, 1992; Rehavi &

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<sup>1</sup>Asian individuals are incarcerated at a lower rate than White individuals. Asians tend to be underrepresented in the criminal justice system, but disaggregation by subgroup where possible may reveal some disproportionalities.



Starr, 2014; Ross 1998). In 2015, about 27% of all arrests were imposed on Black individuals, despite comprising only 13% of the US population. Native American individuals experienced 2% of arrests, even though they constitute only 1% of the population<sup>2</sup> (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2015). Such discrepancies cannot always be explained by the propensity to commit crimes. For instance, despite similar rates of drug use and sales across racial groups, Black individuals are more likely to be arrested for drug offenses than are White individuals (American Civil Liberties Union, 2014; National Research Council, 2014). There is also evidence that defendants' race/ethnicity shapes decisions regarding bail, plea bargaining, and sentencing (Spohn, 2014). The cumulative disadvantage people of color experience throughout the criminal justice system means that Black, Hispanic/Latinx, and Native American men and women are more likely than White individuals to be under correctional supervision (Carson, 2018; Minton, Brumbaugh, & Rohloff, 2017) and experience the collateral consequences of criminal justice system involvement, which include diminished work opportunities, political disenfranchisement, and legal debt (Harris, 2016; Manza & Uggen, 2006; Pager, 2003).

The consequences of incarceration and a criminal record extend far beyond the prison or jail and the incarcerated individual. A growing body of research shows that incarceration poses considerable harm to romantic partners, parents, and children of inmates. As described in Chaps. 2, 3, and 5 of this volume, studies have linked the incarceration of a parent to economic instability and material hardship for the family (e.g., Schwartz-Soicher, Geller, & Garfinkel, 2011; Turney & Wildeman, 2017), children's behavioral and school problems (e.g., Haskins, 2014; Poehlmann, 2005), and diminished psychological well-being among children with incarcerated fathers and children's mothers (e.g., Dallaire & Wilson, 2010; Fishman, 1990; Wildeman,

Schnittker, & Turney, 2012). Racial/ethnic disparities in incarceration rates mean that Black, Hispanic/Latinx, and Native American families are more likely to experience these spillover effects. Thus, children of color, who already experience a wide range of disadvantages in a social system that discriminates and stratifies access to social goods (e.g., education and housing) based on skin color, ethnic origin, and immigration status, bear the brunt of the impact of incarceration on families.

Racial/ethnic disparities in exposure to the criminal justice system are related to a long history of inequality. Scholars such as Loïc Wacquant (2000) and Michelle Alexander (2010) have argued that mass incarceration is a modern-day form of slavery and Jim Crow era disenfranchisement, respectively, or a system of racial/ethnic oppression that has merely evolved over time. Social control and systematic exclusion of Native American and Hispanic/Latinx communities have also persisted throughout US history and are reflective of a larger narrative of racial/ethnic inequality in this history. For instance, nineteenth-century policies confined Native American communities to reservations, criminalized tribal codes, and defined everyday Native activities (e.g., having long hair) as "offenses." Thus, mass incarceration could be construed as a present-day apparatus of historic attempts to control Native American populations, an apparatus deeply rooted in early attempts to bring Native American peoples under the "civilizing influence of the law" (Teller 1883, as cited in French, 2005). Indeed, scholars have argued that criminal justice policy is the legacy of the brutality, exploitation, and marginalization characteristic of early conquest of not only Native American but also Mexican, Puerto Rican, and other Hispanic/Latinx populations (Ross, 1998; Urbina, 2012). For Hispanic/Latinx communities, especially, this history also includes continued efforts to not only detain but deport those whose activities are perceived as a threat to the interests of the dominant group. Black, Native, and Hispanics/Latinx identities have been criminalized throughout US history, and crime has become increasingly racially/ethnically coded.

<sup>2</sup>Hispanic/Latinx individuals were more accurately represented. They experienced 18% of arrests and constituted 18% of the US population.

To be sure, mass incarceration is not the only racialized system impacting racial/ethnic minority families. Due to the long history of discrimination in the USA, these families also face assaults from other institutions and experience co-occurring disadvantages. The raced history and raced context in which incarceration occurs call for particular attention to race/ethnicity when we consider the impact of incarceration and other forms of criminal justice contact on men, women, their romantic partners, and their children. It is important that we consider how raced institutions interact with one another to stratify the experiences of families and children. Moreover, it is essential to examine not only how race and ethnicity condition exposure to incarceration but also how they might condition the effects of parental incarceration, or interact with parental incarceration, to produce disparities in life chances.

Although racial/ethnic disparities in criminal justice system involvement often motivate research on consequences of incarceration for families, studies that explicitly engage with the dynamics of race/ethnicity and the criminal justice system are rare. In other words, there exists a dearth of studies that investigate how such disparities contribute to racial/ethnic inequality in children's social and physical well-being. A deeper understanding of the criminal justice system (see Chap. 3, this volume) and its impact on individuals, families, communities, and society as a whole can be derived only from specific engagement with race and ethnicity as a phenomenon that shapes the experience. As race/ethnicity becomes more dominant in discussions about criminal justice policy and procedure, researchers must keep pace in order to inform best practice about how to serve families and children of color who directly or indirectly come into contact with the criminal justice system.

In this chapter, we review research that takes on the important task of understanding how parental criminal justice involvement interacts with race/ethnicity to shape children's life experiences. We first summarize statistics on racial/ethnic disparities in the criminal justice involvement of parents. We then review research that examines whether the impact of parental

criminal justice involvement varies by race/ethnicity and perspectives on why differences in the consequences may exist. Finally, we consider how these racial/ethnic gaps contribute to overall inequalities in child well-being. Throughout, we consider a range of social outcomes and domains, from infant mortality to physical health and problems at school as well as avenues for future research on race/ethnicity and criminal justice contact.

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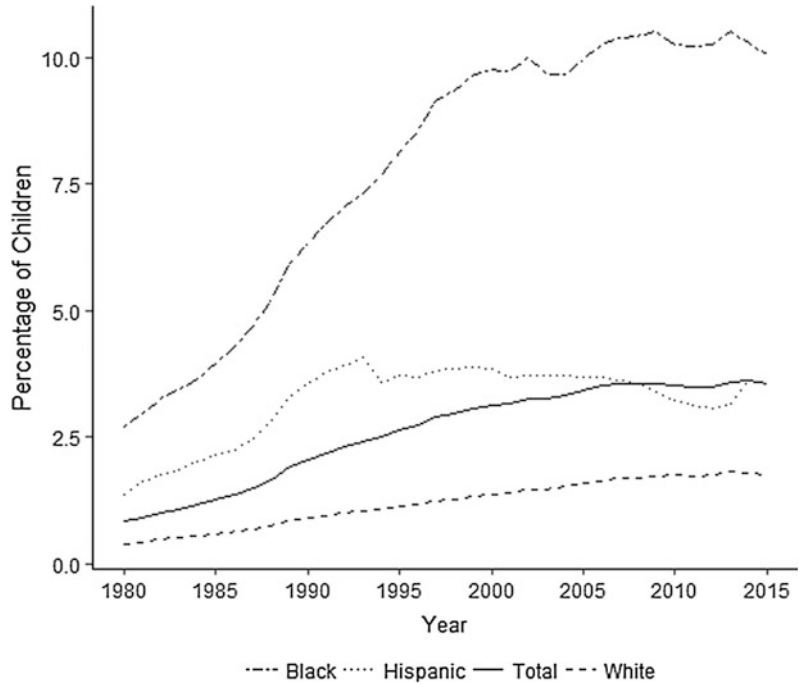
### **Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Parental Criminal Justice Involvement**

On any given day, about 2.6 million children have a parent in prison or jail (Pettit, Sykes, & Western, 2009; Sykes & Pettit, 2014; Wildeman, 2009). The racial/ethnic disproportionality observed in the incarcerated population is mirrored in the children's experience of parental incarceration. Figure 4.1 shows that about 10% of all Black children and 4% of all Hispanic children under the age of 18 had a parent in custody in 2015, while rates of parental incarceration were much lower among White children (1.7%) (Pettit & Sykes, 2017; Pettit et al., 2009; Sykes & Pettit, 2014). Reliable estimates of parental incarceration among Native American children are not available but likely to be high given overrepresentation of Native American adults in US jails and prisons. Racial/ethnic disparities are even more striking when we consider the cumulative risk of having a parent imprisoned over the course of childhood. Sykes and Pettit, (2014) estimate that, in 2009, 25% of Black children and 11% of Hispanic children had experienced parental imprisonment in either a state or federal correctional facility at some point before the age of 17, compared with 4% of White children.

The vast majority of children experience a father's, rather than a mother's, incarceration, but both are unevenly distributed by race/ethnicity. Among children born in 1990, 3.6% of White children and 25.1% of Black children



**Fig. 4.1** Percentage of children (age <18) with a parent incarcerated by race/ethnicity, United States, 1980–2015. *Source* Survey of Inmates and the Bureau of Justice Statistics. Pettit et al., 2009; Pettit & Sykes, 2017; Sykes & Pettit, 2014



experienced their fathers' incarceration by age 14. For the same cohort, less than one percent of White children experienced the incarceration of their mothers. Among Black children, this figure is 3.3%, or almost the same as the risk of paternal imprisonment for White children (Wakefield & Wildeman, 2013; Wildeman, 2009).

We know little about racial and ethnic disparities in children's exposure to other forms of parental contact with the criminal justice system, but it is likely that children of color are more likely than other children to have a parent involved in some way with the criminal justice system. As noted previously, people of color tend to be disproportionately represented in arrests and convictions. Given that parenthood is common among incarcerated individuals (e.g., Glaze & Maruschak, 2010) and rates of fatherhood are even higher among imprisoned men of color, compared to those in the general population (Western, 2006), it stands to reason that some of the men and women arrested and convicted but not incarcerated are also parents, and that children's exposure to their parents' involvement in all stages of the criminal justice process is

unevenly distributed across the population. However, data from a socioeconomically disadvantaged sample of women who participated in a nurse home visiting program following the birth of their first child have shown that Black mothers are more likely to have spent any time in jail compared to White mothers, but there is little racial/ethnic difference in maternal conviction or arrest during childhood and early adolescence (Shlafer, Poehlmann & Donelan-McCall, 2012). These patterns suggest the need for further attention to racial/ethnic variation in parental criminal justice system involvement and its consequences for children.

## Racial/Ethnic Variation

It is clear that Black, Hispanic/Latinx, and, quite possibly, Native American children are at a greater risk of exposure to parental incarceration, making them more likely to experience the harmful consequences. The general nature of the harm associated with parental incarceration has been well documented, but we know much less

about how race and ethnicity shape these effects. For instance, how does racial/ethnic inequality in access to opportunities and resources interact with racial/ethnic inequality in the criminal justice system to produce differential outcomes for children? Given persistent racial/ethnic disparities in both incarceration and child well-being, an examination of whether and how race and ethnicity condition the impact of parental incarceration on children is needed (Foster & Hagan, 2015; Haskins, 2014; Haskins & Lee, 2016). Such an investigation can help us to better understand the sources of childhood disparities in social and physical well-being. In other words, are these disparities shaped solely by disproportionate contact, or are the negative impacts of parental incarceration also amplified for these vulnerable populations? Furthermore, understanding differences—whether in terms of race/ethnicity, gender, living arrangements, or the conditions of incarceration—can provide better guidance for practitioners and policymakers. As more studies investigate racial/ethnic differences in children's experience of and response to the incarceration of their parents, researchers are coming to agree that diversity, rather than universal harm, is the norm (Poehlmann-Tynan & Arditti, 2018; Wakefield, Lee, & Wildeman, 2016). In this section, we summarize dominant explanations for racial/ethnic variation in children's experience of parental criminal justice involvement and research that has investigated such variation. We summarize the data, methods, and outcomes of studies included in this section in Table 4.1.

There are several reasons to expect that parental incarceration will be experienced differently by White children and by children of color, with either stronger or weaker effects among children of color. Stronger or more negative outcomes for children of color may occur because parental incarceration compounds the disadvantages they experience because of racism (Christian & Thomas, 2009). For instance, the double jeopardy hypothesis suggests the combined negative effect of being associated with multiple marginalized statuses is greater than the effect of being associated with either status alone (Dowd & Bengtson, 1978; Grollman, 2014). Research on stigma

suggests incarceration and race/ethnicity are distinct forms of stigma that may be compounding, and both forms of stigma can extend to those connected to the stigmatized (Braman, 2004; Pager, 2003). Similarly, the minority vulnerability hypothesis suggests that socially disadvantaged groups may be more susceptible to the impact of exposure to stressors (Foster & Hagan, 2015). Many Black, Hispanic/Latinx, and Native American children are disadvantaged in ways that could impact how they cope with the stressors they experience. Their position within the race structure could mean they have fewer resources and opportunities for dealing with parental incarceration (Massoglia & Pridemore, 2015). For instance, because of residential segregation and other racialized social processes, families of color are more likely than White families to live in under-resourced neighborhoods, which restricts children of color's access to both institutions and individuals that could open up opportunities for success, provide support, and help mitigate the harmful impact of incarceration in children's lives (Siegel, 2011).

In line with these perspectives, some studies show stronger effects of parental incarceration for Black and Hispanic children, compared to White children. Craigie (2011) uses data from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study to show that paternal incarceration is associated with externalizing behavioral problems among Black and Hispanic five-year-olds but not among White five-year-olds. Similarly, Swisher and Roettger (2012) use data from the Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health to examine the relationship between paternal incarceration and delinquency among adolescents. They find that paternal incarceration during childhood is associated with a higher propensity for delinquency among Hispanic adolescents but not among White or Black adolescents. In another study, Wakefield and Wildeman (2013) find the effect of paternal incarceration on children's risk of homelessness is concentrated almost entirely among Black children. Incarceration is associated with a 140% increase in Black children's risk of homelessness (Wakefield & Wildeman, 2013; see also Wildeman, 2014). Additionally, Sykes

**Table 4.1** Summary of cited studies examining racial/ethnic variation in the impact of parental incarceration

Outcome <sup>a</sup>	Developmental Stage <sup>b,c</sup>	Reference	Race/ethnicity <sup>d</sup>	Gender <sup>e</sup>	Inequality <sup>f</sup>	Criminal Justice Involvement	Data <sup>g</sup>
Behavior	Early childhood	Craigie (2011)	Black, Hispanic, White	No	No	Paternal incarceration	FFCWS
Behavior	Childhood	Dallaire et al. (2015)	Black, White	No	No	Maternal incarceration	Interviews with women jailed in Virginia and their children's caregivers
Behavior	Early childhood to adolescence	Wakefield & Wildeman (2011); Wakefield & Wildeman (2013)	Black, White	No	Yes; Yes	Paternal incarceration	FFCWS, Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods
Behavior	Childhood	Wildeman & Turney (2014)	Black, Hispanic, White	No	No	Maternal incarceration	FFCWS
Behavior: aggression	Early childhood	Wildeman (2010)	Black children whose fathers did not complete high school, all others	Boys only	No	Paternal incarceration	FFCWS
Delinquency	Adolescence	Swisher & Roettger (2012) <sup>h</sup>	Black, Hispanic, White	No	No	Paternal incarceration	AddHealth
Delinquency: arrest	Adolescence	Roettger & Swisher (2011)	Black, Hispanic, White	Boys only	No	Paternal incarceration	AddHealth
Delinquency: theft	Childhood, adolescence	Murray, Loeber & Pardini (2012)	Black, White	Boys only	No	Maternal or paternal arrest, conviction, and incarceration	Pittsburgh Youth Study
Education: early grade retention	Childhood	Turney & Haskins (2014)	Black, Hispanic, White	No	No	First-time paternal incarceration	FFCWS
Education: high school dropout	Adolescence	Cho (2011)	Black, Hispanic, White	No	No	Maternal incarceration	Illinois administrative data on children whose mothers were incarcerated and had received TANF, Medicaid, or Food Stamps

(continued)

**Table 4.1** (continued)

Outcome <sup>a</sup>	Developmental Stage <sup>b,c</sup>	Reference	Race/ethnicity <sup>d</sup>	Gender <sup>e</sup>	Inequality <sup>f</sup>	Criminal Justice Involvement	Data <sup>g</sup>
Education: high school dropout	Adolescence	Cho (2010)	Black, Hispanic, White, other	No	No	Timing and dosage of maternal incarceration	Illinois administrative data (see entry above)
Education: high school GPA	Adolescence	Hagan & Foster (2012a)	Black, White	No	No	Maternal or paternal incarceration	AddHealth
Education: high school GPA	Adolescence	Hagan & Foster (2012b)	Black, Hispanic, White	No	No	Paternal incarceration	AddHealth
Education: school readiness	Early childhood	Haskins (2014)	Black, White	Yes	No	Paternal incarceration	FFCWS
Economic hardship: homelessness	Early childhood	Wakefield & Wildeman (2013); Wildeman (2014)	Black, non-Black	No	Yes; No	Maternal and paternal incarceration	FFCWS
Economic hardship, program participation	Early childhood to adolescence	Sykes & Pettit (2015)	Black, Hispanic, White	No	No	Maternal and paternal incarceration	National Survey of Children's Health
Family relationships	Early childhood, childhood	Poehlmann et al., 2008	White, non-White	No	No	Maternal incarceration	Interviews with incarcerated mothers who have retained custody of their children
Family relationships	Early childhood	Swisher & Waller (2008)	Black, Hispanic, White	No	No	Paternal incarceration	FFCWS
Health: BMI	Adolescence	Roettger & Boardman (2012)	Black, Hispanic, White, Asian, Native American, other	No	No	Maternal or paternal incarceration	AddHealth

(continued)

**Table 4.1** (continued)

Outcome <sup>a</sup>	Developmental Stage <sup>b,c</sup>	Reference	Race/ethnicity <sup>d</sup>	Gender <sup>e</sup>	Inequality <sup>f</sup>	Criminal Justice Involvement	Data <sup>g</sup>
Health: infant mortality	Early childhood	Wakefield & Wildeman (2013)	Black, Hispanic, White, other	No	Yes	Paternal incarceration	Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System, state-level data
Health: depression	Adolescence	Swisher & Roettger (2012) <sup>h</sup>	Black, Hispanic, White	No	No	Paternal incarceration	AddHealth

<sup>a</sup>In several studies, multiple outcomes were included. Only outcomes for which racial/ethnic variation was examined have been included here

<sup>b</sup>Early childhood = birth to 5 years old; Childhood = 6–11 years old; Adolescence = 12–17 years old

<sup>c</sup>In several studies using data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Adolescent to Adult Health, young adult outcomes were also considered

<sup>d</sup>The first column indicates the races/ethnicities considered in examination of differences in outcomes. The second column indicates whether racial/ethnic differences were found

<sup>e</sup>Whether interaction among criminal justice involvement, race/ethnicity, and gender was considered

<sup>f</sup>Whether the analysis tested for effects on population-level inequality

<sup>g</sup>FFCWS = Fragile Families and Child Well-being Study; AddHealth = National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health

<sup>h</sup>Two entries for Swisher & Roettger (2012) were included because outcomes in multiple domains were examined

and Pettit (2015) find that Black and Hispanic children who experience parental incarceration are more likely to enroll in government assistance programs (e.g., Children's Health Insurance Program, Free and Reduced Lunch) than their White counterparts.

It is also possible that parental incarceration has weaker effects for children of color. This theoretical orientation draws from research on Black families and is often extended to other disadvantaged racial/ethnic groups; it focuses on the ways in which incarceration and other forms of disadvantage are so pervasive, and have been for some time, that the effects of incarceration on children of color may be minimal. For instance, the resilience perspective suggests that disruptions in family life are less stressful when they are less unexpected and when families have alternative systems of support in place (Mineka & Kihlstrom, 1978). Thus, parental incarceration may be less harmful to children of color, compared to White children, because incarceration is part of the everyday lived reality of growing up in their families and communities. Their families may have already adapted, perhaps through reliance on extended kin support networks (Dunifon & Kowaleski-Jones, 2002; Haskins & Lee, 2016; Stack, 1974), to incarceration and other long-standing forms of disadvantage that remove individuals from family life for periods of time (Arditti, 2012; Dilworth-Anderson, Burton, & Johnson, 1993; Jarrett, 1998). Children of color may be less harmed by the incarceration of a parent for a second reason. Recent research highlights the possibility that disadvantages in Black families and communities that exist prior to criminal justice involvement could result in "floor effects" for some outcomes. It may be that the impact of incarceration is stronger for White children and their families simply because they have "farther to fall" (Massoglia, Firebaugh, & Warner, 2013).

There is empirical research that supports these hypotheses. In a study using administrative data from Chicago, Cho (2011) finds a greater risk of school dropout for all children whose mothers are currently incarcerated, but models stratified by race/ethnicity show the magnitude of risk is

considerably lower for Black and Hispanic youth than it is for White youth. Along the same lines, Swisher and Waller (2008) use data from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study to show that the link between paternal incarceration and contact between fathers and their children is weaker for Black and Hispanic families than it is for White families. For instance, past incarceration is associated with nine fewer days of contact for White fathers and children, but only one fewer day for Black and .01 fewer days for Hispanic fathers and children. Using data from the National Survey of Children's Health, Sykes and Pettit (2015) find that White children with a parent in prison or jail experience greater material hardship and residential instability compared to Black and Hispanic children with incarcerated parents.

Additionally, Dallaire, Zeman, and Thrash (2015) find that among children whose mothers are in jail, Black children have fewer internalizing and externalizing behavioral problems. Similarly, Murray, Loeber, and Pardini (2012) use the Pittsburgh Youth Study to show that parental incarceration is weakly associated with theft for Black boys, compared to White boys. Finally, a study conducted by Wildeman and Turney (2014) finds little to no effect of maternal incarceration on problematic behaviors among Black and Hispanic children and a negative effect for some measures among White children. In other words, White children with incarcerated mothers experience significantly fewer behavioral problems than otherwise similar White children. Although this study finds a weaker effect for children of color, the findings do not align perfectly with common theoretical orientations; instead, this research suggests that children may benefit from their mothers' incarceration when they belong to groups for which incarceration is relatively uncommon.

The studies described above demonstrate that parental incarceration can impact children of different racial/ethnic groups differently. Among this group of studies, there appears to be little consistency in the type of outcome (e.g., homelessness, behavior, delinquency), the type of parental incarceration (e.g., maternal, paternal),

the developmental stage at which the incarceration occurs, or which groups experience stronger effects. That contact with the criminal justice system is differentially associated with outcomes for Black and Hispanic/Latinx children in these studies suggests that it is not enough to distinguish solely between groups advantaged and disadvantaged by systems of racism. Additional research on variation among children of color who experience parental incarceration is necessary, as is data collection that allows researchers to include Native American children in their analyses. These patterns as a whole suggest we have a long way to go in understanding how race/ethnicity interacts with parental incarceration to produce disparate outcomes for children across the life course.

Qualitative research may be well suited to address some unanswered questions, particularly uncovering the mechanisms that lead to racial/ethnic variation in outcomes based on parental incarceration. For instance, Braman's (2004) research suggests that the stigma and social isolation experienced by families of incarcerated individuals are bound tightly with racial/ethnic stereotypes of criminality. Stereotypes about Black families keep several participants in the study from discussing family member incarceration with friends, family, and co-workers. They express concerns about reinforcing negative perceptions of people of color and about others making assumptions about their family member based on racial stereotypes. In addition, Black participants indicate they remain silent in part because of their own internalization of the messages mainstream society tells them about their racial group—messages that undermine their self-esteem and self-respect and leave them feeling undeserving of support. For these families, the consequence of being Black in a racialized society combined with family member incarceration results in some degree of social isolation and absence of support others might have provided. Although Braman interviewed adults experiencing the incarceration of variety of family members, similar processes may shape children's experiences of parental incarceration. This research draws attention to what it may

mean for a Black, Hispanic/Latinx, or Native American child to have an incarcerated parent for the day-to-day hard work of growing up—for children's understanding of who they are, who they are capable of being, and how much they matter to society. Additional qualitative research on parental incarceration, although not directly interrogating race/ethnicity (Arditti, 2012; Poehlmann-Tynan & Arditti, in press; Siegle, 2011), and on race/ethnicity and criminal justice system contact, although not directly addressing parental involvement (Goffman, 2014; Jones, 2009; LeBlanc, 2003; Rios, 2011), suggests that qualitative approaches may be key to exploring these issues.

Table 4.1 shows several other studies that report testing for how the impact of incarceration might depend on race/ethnicity, but a majority of these studies find no racial/ethnic variation (e.g., Cho, 2010; Hagan & Foster, 2012a, b; Poehlmann, Shlafer, Maes, & Hanneman, 2008; Roettger & Boardman, 2012; Turney & Haskins, 2014; Wildeman, 2010).<sup>3</sup> Given that the lion's share of evidence, thus far, suggests similarity in the effects of incarceration on children across groups, researchers may be inclined to omit examination of heterogeneity from their studies. It may appear that race and ethnicity simply do not matter, but studies that do signal the importance of race and ethnicity in conditioning children's experience of parental incarceration point to effects across a wide range of outcomes. More qualitative and quantitative research is needed to replicate these studies so that we can draw more clear conclusions. Finally, it may be tempting to avoid consideration of racial/ethnic differences in

<sup>3</sup>To populate Table 4.1, we searched databases across disciplines for empirical research that examined how the impact of criminal justice system involvement might differ for US children from different racial/ethnic groups. All studies that fit these criteria are included in Table 4.1. We limit our review to studies that examine the impact of parental criminal justice involvement on children ages birth to 18. In addition to the studies included in Table 4.1, several studies consider and find racial/ethnic differences in the impact of parental incarceration during childhood and adolescence on young adults (e.g., Foster & Hagan, 2009, 2013; Lee, Porter, & Comfort, 2013).



the consequences of mass incarceration because finding such differences may require a discussion of cultural conditions in Black, Hispanic/Latinx, and Native communities that reifies generalizations about these groups (Haskins & Lee, 2016). However, such omissions are problematic if the end goal is to improve outcomes for children of color.

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### **Additional Gaps in the Literature**

A closer look at Table 4.1 also reveals what is missing from research on race/ethnicity and the consequences of parental criminal justice system involvement. Few studies that examine racial/ethnic variation in the impact of parental incarceration also consider the impact of other stages in the criminal justice process. Just as we might consider the impact of parental involvement in the criminal justice system by stages in the life course, we must similarly consider the “life course” of the criminal justice process (see Chap. 2, this volume). Although Murray, Loeber, and Pardini (2012) do examine how parental arrest, conviction, and incarceration impact children, they find no average effect of arrest and conviction on youth’s problematic behavior and subsequently limit their examination of racial/ethnic variation in outcomes to incarceration only (results note above). As researchers turn attention to understanding how forms of criminal justice involvement other than how jail and prison incarceration impact children and families, we encourage simultaneous attention to the role race and ethnicity play in shaping these experiences.

The literature has been more attentive to gender differences in children’s experiences of parental incarceration than it has been to race/ethnicity. In this research, the patterns of influence appear more consistent or, at least, interpretable within a gender framework (for review, see Foster & Hagan (2015)). How children make sense of a parent’s incarceration may be shaped by their understandings of masculine and feminine ways of being in the world, and

these may vary by race and ethnicity. A truly intersectional approach would consider not only race or only gender but both. To be sure, stratifying already limited data in such a way is challenging, but doing so when we can is important for understanding disparate effects. Haskins (2014) is the only quantitative study of which we are aware that considers race and gender together. This study shows that both Black and White boys—but not Black and White girls—who experience first-time paternal incarceration between ages one and five perform significantly worse on non-cognitive readiness measures than boys who have never had an incarcerated father. She finds gender variation but no racial variation. Finally, studies that leave girls out should not be mistaken for studies that examine race and gender together (e.g., Murray et al., 2012; Roettger & Swisher, 2011). Studies that omit girls often focus on externalizing behaviors (e.g., aggression, delinquency), and research has shown that, on average, girls experience weak to no effects of incarceration on externalizing behaviors (Wakefield & Wildeman, 2013). It is unclear if the effect for girls might vary by race/ethnicity, as no studies have conducted such analyses.

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### **Inequalities in Child Well-Being**

Racial and ethnic inequalities in child well-being have been observed across a variety of indicators. Children of color, compared to White children, have higher rates of not only parental incarceration but also infant mortality, obesity, and poverty (Lin & Harris, 2008; Mathews, MacDroman, & Thoma, 2015; Patten & Krogstad, 2015; Wang & Beydoun, 2007). Researchers have begun to question the role of incarceration in maintaining and widening racial/ethnic gaps for several important indicators of health and well-being, surmising that elevated exposure to the stress and material hardship associated with parental involvement in the criminal justice system may contribute to other racial/ethnic disparities we observe at the



population level (for reviews, see Comfort, 2007; Hagan & Dinovitzer, 1999; Wakefield & Uggen, 2010; Wildeman & Muller, 2012).

Although several studies are motivated by the possibility that parental incarceration exacerbates racial/ethnic inequalities among children, few have taken on the task of explicitly measuring the contribution of incarceration. Wakefield and Wildeman (2013) provide the most comprehensive examination to date. Using data from a variety of sources, including the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study, Vital Statistics Reports, and data from the Bureau of Justice Statistics, they show that mass incarceration widens Black–White gaps in infant mortality, child behavior problems, and child homelessness. They demonstrate that the increase in the incarceration rate between 1973 and 2003 is associated with an 18% larger Black–White disparity in infant mortality (see also Wildeman, 2012). Similarly, they find that for children born in 1990, the Black–White gap in child homelessness would have been 65% lower if they had been born under zero incarceration. Paternal incarceration also exacerbates Black–White inequalities in children’s externalizing behavior problems by 26% and internalizing behavior problems by 46% for children born in 1990. Together, these findings suggest that mass incarceration is a causal force contributing to current racial/ethnic disparities in child well-being. That disparities increase even when the harm of incarceration is experienced across racial/ethnic groups, such as in the case of infant mortality and children’s behavior problems, suggests improving outcomes for children of color in the USA requires particular attention to the raced policies and practices that lead to the over-incarceration of their parents.

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## Conclusion

We have reviewed a growing literature that seeks to understand how parental incarceration interacts with race and ethnicity to shape child well-being. We have emphasized statistics on racial/ethnic disparities in parental criminal

justice involvement, research that examines whether the impact on children varies by race/ethnicity, and studies that consider whether the Black–White gap in exposure to parental incarceration contributes to overall inequalities in child well-being.

It is clear that racial/ethnic disparities in children’s exposure to parental incarceration are persistent. However, this review shows that more information is needed about how race and ethnicity interact with the criminal justice process as a whole. We know little about children’s exposure to forms of parental criminal justice contact other than incarceration and racial/ethnic inequalities thereof. Furthermore, additional information is needed about whether and how race and ethnicity condition the impact of parental criminal justice involvement on children. Although a limited body of research has attempted to examine racial/ethnic variation in the impact of parental criminal justice system contact on child well-being, this research has produced equivocal findings. Empirical evidence suggests parental criminal justice contact is sometimes stronger or weaker or no different by race/ethnicity depending on the outcome considered and other characteristics of the study sample. Although we should expect to find variation across outcomes and stages of the life course, more research is needed to replicate singular findings of previous research and to draw clearer conclusions. This is a large and enduring challenge given the limited data sources available. Advances through future research will require not only novel uses of available data sources but also new data collection efforts that involve both quantitative and qualitative methods.

What is also clear is that we need to do more to understand the nature of the relationship between race/ethnicity and parental incarceration and how, together, they interact with other features of social status, such as gender, age, and immigrant status to impact child outcomes. Such work is imperative if our goal is to improve the well-being of children, particularly children of color, and reduce disparities in child well-being. Future work will require more theorization on the

reasons to expect variation in outcome by race and ethnicity that take into consideration gender, stage in the life course, immigrant status, and other important social characteristics. As mentioned earlier, use of intersectionality and qualitative approaches will continue to be a useful step.

Racial/ethnic disparities in parental criminal justice involvement exist alongside disparities in other areas, such as child health and poverty. It is important that future research seeks to better understand the contribution of criminal justice contact to these gaps and how children's lived experiences in a racialized society not only shapes their exposure to parental involvement in the criminal justice system but also how that exposure impacts their daily lives and long-term health and well-being. Research should also consider not just whether race/ethnicity matters but how it matters. To this end, research should include multiple racial/ethnic groups when possible—to move beyond Black–White comparisons—and collect data with diverse samples, including Native populations and subgroups within Latinx and Asian populations. Finally, the contexts in which children of color grow and develop can pose additional risks to well-being, but it can also offer additional supports. We must consider the role of resilience of families and communities.

There are also important policy considerations that grow out of our findings. It is important to consider both upstream (dealing with root causes of incarceration) and downstream (dealing with the consequences of incarceration for those currently living through it) policy interventions that will serve to improve the lives of racial/ethnic minority children in both the short- and long-terms. Interventions should be sensitive to self-defined racial/ethnic identities of participants and avoid essentializing, or assuming individual differences can be attributed to inherent or biological characteristics shared by members of a racial/ethnic group. Moreover, interventions should be sensitive to the various structural forces—all of which are racialized—impacting children's experiences with incarceration. As our review suggests, structural factors, such as

residential segregation, may compound disadvantage or desensitize families to the impacts of incarceration and may also serve as entry points for upstream interventions that prevent incarceration and also reduce negative impacts of incarceration. In addition, those with leadership positions within the criminal justice system should consider the ways in which policy and practice have been intertwined with racial/ethnic subjugation throughout history and involve race/ethnicity scholars from a wide range of disciplines as well as men, women, and children impacted by incarceration (see Chap. 21, this volume) when considering criminal justice reforms. Racial and ethnic inequality and the criminal justice system are undeniably intertwined. Improving the lives of children means that in our research, practice, and policymaking, race and ethnicity should always be at the forefront of our minds.

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# Parental Incarceration and Children's Well-being: Findings from the Fragile Families and Child Well-being Study

# 5

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## Abstract

The Fragile Families and Child Well-being Study, which follows a cohort of US children born around the turn of the twenty-first century to mostly unmarried parents in urban areas, is one data source commonly used to examine the relationship between parental incarceration and children's well-being. In this chapter, we synthesize the existing literature that has used the Fragile Families data to understand the intergenerational consequences of parental incarceration. First, we provide an overview of these data, by documenting the sampling frame and outlining its strengths and limitations. Next, we describe key findings that have emerged from the Fragile Families data, focusing on research that examines how parental incarceration shapes children's family environments and their well-being. Finally, we provide suggestions for future researchers interested in using the Fragile Families data to further extend our understanding of the intergenerational consequences of incarceration for families and children across the life course.

More than 2.6 million children in the USA currently have a parent incarcerated in jail or prison. Many more have mothers or fathers who have been recently released from jail or prison. The growth of parental incarceration, and the concentration of parental incarceration among race/ethnic minority and poor children, has prompted a burgeoning literature that examines the intergenerational consequences of parental incarceration. By and large, this research documents that children who experience parental incarceration, compared to children who do not, encounter a multitude of disadvantages that stem from exposure to this traumatic event (for recent reviews, see Foster & Hagan, 2015; Haskins & Turney, 2018; Turney & Goodsell, 2018).

A challenge for researchers interested in unpacking the link between parental incarceration and children's well-being has been collecting and analyzing appropriate data (Geller, Jaeger, & Pace, 2016). Finding appropriate data sets—and in particular, contemporary, large-scale, broadly representative, and longitudinal data—that include information about both parental incarceration and children's well-being is not an easy task. The Fragile Families and Child Well-being Study (hereafter, Fragile Families), which follows a cohort of US children born around the turn of the twenty-first century to mostly unmarried parents in urban areas, is one data source commonly used to examine the relationship between parental incarceration and children's well-being. In this chapter, we synthesize existing literature that has used the

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Fragile Families data to understand the intergenerational consequences of parental incarceration.

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## Fragile Families and Child Well-being Study

### Sample and Design

The Fragile Families data include a birth cohort of 4898 children born between February 1998 and September 2000 in 20 US cities with populations greater than 200,000 (Reichman, Teitler, Garfinkel, & McLanahan, 2001). Researchers used a stratified random sample to identify 20 cities, stratifying cities across welfare generosity, child support enforcement, and the strength of the local labor market. Researchers then sampled hospitals within cities and births within those hospitals. This strategy resulted in a sample that is representative of all children born in urban areas around the turn of the twenty-first century. Unmarried parents were over-sampled, as the study was initially designed to understand the correlates and consequences of unmarried parenthood in the USA.

A key feature of the Fragile Families data set is its longitudinal design. Families have been interviewed across six time periods. Mothers and fathers were interviewed in person at baseline (when children were born) and then via telephone at the 1-, 3-, 5-, 9-, and 15-year surveys (with only primary caregivers interviewed at the 15-year survey). Additionally, at the 3-, 5-, 9-, and 15-year surveys, a subsample of families participated in at-home interviews. The data set also includes information from other individuals connected to the parents: children's childcare providers were interviewed at the 3-year survey, children's teachers were interviewed at the 5- and 9-year surveys, and the children themselves were interviewed at the 9- and 15-year surveys. Finally, contextual data on neighborhoods and schools have been collected across various waves. General documentation—including questionnaire maps and guides to the data files—can be found at <http://www.fragilefamilies.princeton.edu/documentation/general>.

[fragilefamilies.princeton.edu/documentation/general](http://www.fragilefamilies.princeton.edu/documentation/general). Response rates throughout the study were quite high. Approximately 86% of mothers and 78% of fathers in the sampling frame completed the baseline interview. Of these, about 89, 86, 85, and 76% of mothers, and 69, 67, 64, and 59% of fathers completed the 1-, 3-, 5-, and 9-year surveys, respectively. About 74% of children's primary caregivers completed the 15-year survey.

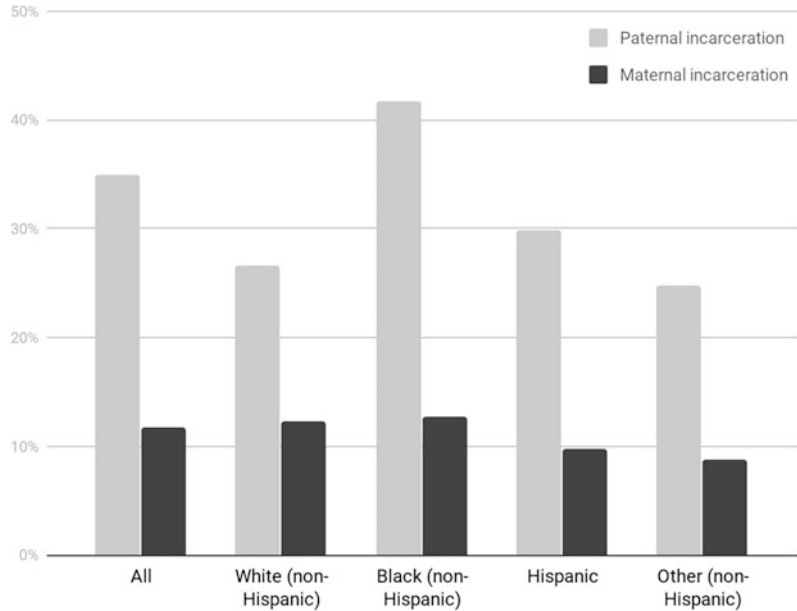
In terms of demographic characteristics, the majority of parents in the sample are members of racial/ethnic minority groups. For example, nearly half (48%) of mothers identify as non-Hispanic Black, followed by Hispanic (27%), non-Hispanic White (21%), and other race (4%). About one-sixth of mothers (17%) are foreign-born. Mothers, on average, are 25 years old at baseline. At baseline, the majority of parents are unmarried, with 36% in cohabiting relationships, 26% in non-residential romantic relationships, and 13% not in relationships. Nearly two-thirds (65%) of mothers do not have education beyond high school at baseline (authors' calculations).

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### Strengths of Data for Studying Parental Incarceration and Children's Family Environments and well-being

The Fragile Families data have several characteristics that make them well-positioned to understand the intergenerational consequences of parental incarceration for contemporary American children. First, initial data collection aligns well with the timeframes most relevant to understanding the intergenerational consequences of mass incarceration in the USA (Wakefield & Wildeman, 2013). A relatively large number of children in the sample were exposed to parental incarceration. By age 15, 12% of children experienced maternal incarceration and 35% of children experienced paternal incarceration (Fig. 5.1). The sizeable number of children exposed to parental incarceration means that it is possible to make rigorous comparisons

**Fig. 5.1** Parental incarceration percentage of children exposed to parental incarceration in the fragile families and child well-being study. *Note* Percentages indicate exposure to paternal and maternal incarceration between ages 1 and 15. Race/ethnicity based on mothers' reports. Sample restricted to observations who participated in the 15-year survey ( $N = 3580$ )



between these children and their counterparts. Moreover, when compared to national samples, the Fragile Families' parental incarceration data appear to be representative of incarcerated parents with young children (Turney & Wildeman, 2013; Wildeman and Turney, 2014).

Second, the Fragile Families data are advantageous for examining the intergenerational consequences of parental incarceration because they include well-established and standardized measures of children's well-being. Children's behavior is measured with the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL; Achenbach & Rescorla, 2001)—a commonly used indicator of internalizing, externalizing, and other behavior problems—at the 3-, 5-, 9-, and 15-year surveys. Children's educational outcomes include the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT; Dunn & Dunn 1997), the Forward and Backward Digit Span Tests of the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children IV (Wechsler, 2003), and Math and Reading Comprehension subtests of the Woodcock-Johnson III Tests of Achievement (Woodcock, McGrew, & Mather, 2001). Children's delinquency is measured with the Things You Have Done scale (Maumary-Gremaud, 2000), and there are many opportunities to assess

indicators of children's health (e.g., obesity, asthma, mental health, overall physical health).

Third, these data provide a unique opportunity for examining the intergenerational consequences of parental incarceration because data are collected at multiple time points and across various stages (infancy, early and middle childhood, and adolescence) in the developmental life course. This allows researchers to continually explore the consistent, changing, and developmentally sensitive ways parental incarceration can influence child well-being. Longitudinal data are critical to account for observed selection into incarceration (e.g., the fact that children who do and do not experience parental incarceration are quite different from each other).

Fourth, the multitude of reporters—mothers, fathers, teachers, and the children themselves—in these data allow for the comparison of child well-being across various respondents, addressing potential concerns about reporting accuracy and reliability. Research on the link between parental incarceration and children's well-being has been recently critiqued because of its reliance on parental reports of children's well-being (Johnson & Easterling, 2012). A benefit of these data is that they provide additional and



alternative reporters, allowing researchers to explore similar well-being measures across multiple respondents and therefore offering a robust and broad picture of the consequences of parental incarceration for children.

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### **Limitations of Data for Studying Parental Incarceration and Children's Family Environments and Well-Being**

Though the Fragile Families data provides information that well-positions researchers to understand the relationship between parental incarceration and children's well-being—especially among disadvantaged urban families—limitations do exist. Like many other current data sources that include incarcerated parents, details about incarceration-related experiences—such as incarceration duration, type and severity of crime, and number of incarceration spells—are not included. There are no data focusing on the arrest process and whether children witnessed the parent's criminal activity or arrest. There is also limited information about facility type (e.g., jail, prison, or immigration detention centers), facility location, or parenting programs available to incarcerated parents. There are no data focusing on parent-child communication during incarceration including frequency or type of visits, calls, or written correspondence or how information about the parent's incarceration has been communicated to children. These features of the incarceration experience may be differentially consequential for children's well-being (Dallaire & Wilson, 2010; Poehlmann-Tynan, Burnson, Runion, & Weymouth, 2017; Wildeman, Turney, & Yi, 2016).

Further, the sampling frame excludes children living in rural areas at birth. Though children living in urban areas is a population of considerable policy interest, some recent work suggests exposure to (residential) parental incarceration is more common among rural children (Murphey & Cooper, 2015), and the consequences of parental incarceration may vary by region and geographic area. Finally, though the relatively large number of children exposed to parental incarceration

allow for rigorous assessments of the consequences of parental incarceration, on average, the sample size sometimes precludes a rigorous assessment of variation in effects (e.g., by race/ethnicity, social class, immigration status).

In relation to the examination of the potential consequences of parental incarceration for children, the data set has primarily been used to compare children who have never experienced a parent's incarceration with children who have ever experienced it. Importantly, because children's and parent's incarceration-related experiences have not been measured, it is likely that the data set will not be able to be used to address mechanisms of effects that involve incarceration-related processes (e.g., child trauma because of witnessing the parent's arrest, parent-child communication during incarceration, visits in facilities that use barrier or video visitation, what children are told about the incarceration, etc.). Finally, biological markers of early child and family stress were not included in the study, which may mean that critical mechanisms of effects are missing, especially in the context of early childhood poverty and exposure to trauma (e.g., Blair & Raver, 2016).

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### **Key Findings About the Familial Consequences of Parental Incarceration from the Fragile Families Data**

Families provide critical contexts for children's growth and development, with some family contexts facilitating positive well-being in children and other family contexts facilitating negative well-being in children (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). Therefore, understanding the relationship between parental incarceration and children's well-being necessitates understanding the consequences of parental incarceration on the broader family system. In this section, we review research that has used the Fragile Families data to examine the consequences of parental incarceration for four aspects of family life: (1) parental romantic relationships, (2) family economic well-being, (3) parenting, and (4) parental health

and social support. These data provide an unparalleled opportunity to examine how the consequences of incarceration proliferate to the entire family unit. Because the vast majority of this research examines paternal incarceration as opposed to maternal incarceration (though see Turney & Wildeman, 2015), our discussion here focuses on paternal incarceration. A recent discussion of how maternal incarceration has transformed family life for urban children is available in Turney and Wildeman (2018).

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### Parental Romantic Relationships

To begin with, research using the Fragile Families data finds that paternal incarceration is a stressor to the family system that has implications for romantic relationships between parents. One analysis, which examines the link between paternal incarceration and union dissolution, finds that incarcerated fathers are more likely than their counterparts to dissolve a marital or cohabiting union. This analysis also finds these consequences for union dissolution, which are relatively short-lived, can be explained by incarceration duration and changes in relationship quality following incarceration (Turney, 2015a). These findings, and specifically the finding about relationship quality as a key mechanism linking paternal incarceration to union dissolution, dovetail with those from other research examining the association between paternal incarceration and relationship quality (Turney, 2015b). That analysis suggests that current and previous incarceration are differentially consequential for relationship quality, with current incarceration linked to more favorable relationship quality and previous incarceration (within the past two years) linked to less favorable reports of relationship quality (Turney, 2015b). Paternal incarceration is also associated with a greater probability that mothers repartner, increasing family complexity and instability (Turney & Wildeman, 2013; for research documenting an association between paternal incarceration and children's co-residence and contact with grandparents, see Turney, 2014a).

### Family Economic Well-Being

Research using the Fragile Families data finds that paternal incarceration has wide-ranging economic consequences for families. For example, one analysis finds that incarceration impedes fathers' abilities to contribute financially to families and, among men who do contribute, is associated with reduced contributions. This research suggests that these impediments to fathers' contributions result both from the lower earnings of formerly incarcerated fathers and from their increased likelihood of living apart from their children (Geller, Garfinkel, & Western, 2011).

The familial economic consequences of paternal incarceration extend beyond income. One analysis finds that paternal incarceration increases material hardship (e.g., being unable to pay rent or mortgage) among the women who share children with formerly incarcerated fathers (Schwartz-Soicher, Geller, & Garfinkel, 2011). Other research considers other specific indicators of hardship, finding that paternal incarceration increases food insecurity (Cox & Wallace, 2016; Turney, 2015c), housing insecurity (Geller & Curtis, 2011; Geller & Franklin, 2014), public assistance receipt (Sugie, 2012), and homelessness among children (Wildeman et al., 2014). Finally, the consequences of paternal incarceration may extend to wealth, as research finds a negative association between paternal incarceration and asset ownership (Turney & Schneider, 2016).

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### Parenting

Research using the Fragile Families data finds that incarceration, by and large, hinders parenting for incarcerated fathers as well as for the mothers of their children. The majority of fathers are connected to their children prior to incarceration (Geller, 2013). Incarceration changes and challenges these relationships. Compared to their counterparts, formerly incarcerated men are less likely to reside with their children and, among those who are non-residential, are less likely to

see their children (Geller, 2013; also see Swisher & Waller, 2008). Paternal incarceration also decreases fathers' engagement, shared responsibility in parenting, and cooperation in parenting, especially among fathers living with their children prior to incarceration (Turney & Wildeman, 2013; also see Woldoff & Washington, 2008). Relatedly, among mothers caring for children of incarcerated fathers, paternal incarceration is associated with more harsh parenting behaviors such as neglect and physical aggression (Turney, 2014b). This research all highlights the importance of the parental relationship in conditioning the association between paternal incarceration and parenting (also see McLeod & Tirmazi, 2017). Importantly, paternal incarceration—net of characteristics associated with experiencing paternal incarceration—is not negatively associated with all measures of parenting. For example, research suggests that paternal incarceration does not increase or decrease fathers' or mothers' parenting stress (Turney & Wildeman, 2013), mothers' engagement (Turney & Wildeman, 2013), or fathers' harsh parenting (Mustaine & Tweksbury, 2015).

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## Parental Health and Social Support

Finally, research using the Fragile Families data examines the consequences of paternal incarceration for the health and social support of fathers and the mothers of their children. For example, research finds that previous incarceration is associated with an increased likelihood of taking medication for physical or mental health problems (Curtis, 2011). Other research finds that currently and recently incarcerated fathers, compared to those previously or never incarcerated, have a greater likelihood of major depressive disorder (Turney, Wildeman, & Schnittker, 2012). Relatedly, current (but not recent) incarceration is associated with more life dissatisfaction (Wildeman, Turney, & Schnittker, 2014). There is also some evidence that facility type is differentially correlated with mental health. Fathers in jail report more depression, heavy drinking, and illicit drug use than those in prison,

possibly resulting from the fact that individuals in jail may have had more recent easier access to substances (Yi, Turney, & Wildeman, 2017).

Additionally, research using the Fragile Families data shows that the consequences of incarceration for health and social support spill over to mothers connected to incarcerated fathers. One study finds that paternal incarceration is associated with an increased risk of major depressive disorder and higher levels of life dissatisfaction among mothers (Wildeman, Schnittker, & Turney 2012). Other studies find that mothers who share children with recently incarcerated fathers have lower perceptions of social support (Turney, Schnittker, & Wildeman 2012), diminished political participation (Sugie, 2015), and increased work hours (Burns, 2017).

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## Key Findings About the Intergenerational Consequences of Parental Incarceration from the Fragile Families Data

In addition to the research that examines how parental incarceration affects domains of family life that are important for children's well-being, other research uses Fragile Families data to directly examine the association between parental incarceration and children's well-being. These studies examine children's academic and behavioral outcomes. The majority of these studies focus on either paternal or maternal incarceration, but not both, and accordingly we distinguish between the two in reviewing the literature (though, for research considering both, see Geller et al., 2009; Jackson & Vaughn, 2017; Wildeman & Turney, 2014).

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## Children's Academic Outcomes

### Average Consequences of Parental Incarceration

To begin with, research uses the Fragile Families data to consider the relationship between parental incarceration and children's academic outcomes in early and middle childhood. Overall, findings

suggest that parental incarceration—especially paternal incarceration—is deleterious for children's academic outcomes but findings also suggest the relationship is complex (and may depend on the timing of paternal incarceration, the specific outcome, and the gender of the incarcerated parent). For example, some research finds that paternal incarceration is not associated with children's PPVT scores (a measure of receptive vocabulary) at age 3 (Geller, Garfinkel, Cooper, & Mincy, 2009), age 5 (Haskins, 2014), or age 9 (Haskins, 2016; Turney, 2017) and is not associated with children's Woodcock-Johnson Reading or Math Comprehension at age 9 (Turney, 2017). Yet other research finds that exposure to *first-time* paternal incarceration between ages 1 and 9 is associated with reductions in children's Woodcock-Johnson Reading and Math Comprehension scores and Digit Span short-term memory scores (Haskins, 2016). Furthermore, with respect to maternal incarceration, there is no evidence that, on average, children who experience the incarceration of their mother have lower PPVT scores than children who do not (Turney & Wildeman, 2015).

Research using the Fragile Families data also suggests that parental incarceration is associated with children's academic outcomes beyond test scores. One study finds that children exposed to paternal incarceration, compared to unexposed peers, are more likely to experience grade retention in elementary school. This association is not explained by lower test scores or more behavior problems experienced by children of incarcerated fathers; instead, findings suggest this relationship is driven by teachers' perceptions of children's academic proficiency (Turney & Haskins, 2014). Other studies find that children of incarcerated fathers are more likely than their counterparts to be placed in special education (Haskins, 2014) and suspended or expelled from elementary school (Jacobsen, 2016). Finally, formerly incarcerated fathers and children's primary caregivers are less involved in their child's schooling, suggesting that paternal incarceration is a unique marker of disadvantage associated with reduced parental involvement in children's education over time (Haskins & Jacobsen, 2017).

## Variation in the Consequences of Parental Incarceration

Research suggests that the consequences of parental incarceration are unequally distributed across children; that is, some children are more vulnerable to deleterious effects of parental incarceration than other children. Two studies—one focusing on paternal incarceration and the other on maternal—find that the magnitude and statistical significance of the consequences of parental incarceration vary by children's risk of exposure. Risk depends upon an array of demographic, socioeconomic, and familial characteristics, with some children having a relatively low risk of experiencing parental incarceration and others having a much greater risk. This research finds that the deleterious consequences of paternal incarceration for children's PPVT and Woodcock-Johnson Reading and Math Comprehension scores are strongest for children with a relatively low risk of exposure to paternal incarceration (Turney, 2017). This research also finds similar differential consequences of maternal incarceration (Turney & Wildeman, 2015). Additional research examining variation in the consequences of parental incarceration for children's academic outcomes generally finds no evidence of variation by gender (Haskins, 2016; Turney & Haskins, 2014), race/ethnicity (Haskins, 2016; Turney & Haskins, 2014), or fathers' residential status prior to incarceration (Turney & Haskins, 2014).

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## Children's Behavioral Outcomes

### Average Consequences of Parental Incarceration

Research also uses the Fragile Families data to examine the consequences of parental incarceration for children's behavioral outcomes in early and middle childhood. With respect to the intergenerational consequences of paternal incarceration, this research generally finds that, on average, paternal incarceration is not associated with children's internalizing behaviors such as depression, anxiety, and withdrawal (Geller et al., 2009, 2012; Turney, 2017), but is associated with increases in children's externalizing behaviors, including broad measures

of externalizing behaviors and more specific indicators such as aggression and delinquency (Craigie, 2011; Perry & Bright, 2012; Turney, 2017; Wakefield & Wildeman, 2013; Wildeman, 2010). Most of this research relies on caregiver reports of children's behavior, via subscales from the CBCL; however, one study capitalizes on children's reports of their own behavior, finding that paternal incarceration is associated with child-reported antisocial behaviors but not prosocial skill development (Haskins, 2015).

Much less research has used the Fragile Families data to consider the intergenerational consequences of maternal incarceration for children's behavioral outcomes. One analysis finds that, on average, the descriptive differences in 5- and 9-year-old children's caregiver- and teacher-reported behavioral problems between those exposed and not exposed to maternal incarceration disappear after adjusting for demographic and socioeconomic characteristics that are associated with incarceration (Wildeman & Turney, 2014). Another analysis finds that maternal incarceration, in addition to the incarceration of a father, is associated with risky sleep behaviors (e.g., sleeping fewer than eight hours a night) and eating behaviors (e.g., having high levels of sweet or soda consumption) during childhood (Jackson & Vaughn, 2017).

### **Variation in the Consequences of Parental Incarceration**

Additional research considers variation in the association between parental incarceration and children's behavioral outcomes in early and middle childhood. Research examining variation across race/ethnic groups finds that the association between paternal incarceration and children's behavioral outcomes is similar for non-Hispanic Whites, non-Hispanic Blacks, and Hispanics (Craigie, 2011; Haskins, 2014). However, other research suggests the relationship between maternal incarceration and children's behavioral problems does vary across race/ethnicity, with maternal incarceration diminishing behavioral problems among non-Hispanic Whites but having null associations among non-Hispanic Blacks and Hispanics (Wildeman & Turney, 2014). Research considering

variation by gender finds some evidence that associations between paternal incarceration and child behavioral problems are concentrated among boys (Geller et al., 2009; Haskins, 2014; Wildeman, 2010; though see Craigie, 2011). Furthermore, the association between paternal incarceration and children's externalizing behaviors is stronger among children living with their fathers prior to incarceration (Geller et al., 2012) and among children with non-violent fathers (Wildeman, 2010). Woodard and Copp (2016) find that the relationship between maternal incarceration and children's juvenile delinquency is conditioned by children's sibling relationships. Furthermore, similar to the academic outcomes, the consequences of both maternal and paternal incarceration are stronger for children with a relatively low risk of experiencing parental incarceration (Turney, 2017; Turney & Wildeman, 2015; also see Markson, Lamb, & Losel, 2016).

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### **Future Directions**

The ongoing longitudinal design of the Fragile Families data, alongside the breadth of research studies that have already drawn on these data to examine the relationship between parental incarceration and children's well-being (see <http://crcw.princeton.edu/publications/publications.asp>), allow for recommendations to be made for two types of future research: (1) research continuing to use the Fragile Families and (2) research using other data that can build upon, and address gaps in, the existing knowledge base. This existing research also allow for recommendations to be made for future practice and policy.

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### **Future Research Using Fragile Families Data**

The 15-year survey wave of the Fragile Families was released to the public in 2018, which means there are currently six waves of available data. The release of these data allow for updated information on local children's well-being and



development; the analysis of new data on health and health risk behavior, school performance, and anti- and prosocial behavior; and, accordingly, allow researchers to explore the consequences of parental incarceration for adolescent outcomes. This may be particularly helpful in illuminating developmental or timing-sensitive consequences of parental incarceration for child well-being and highlighting to what extent parental incarceration is associated with cumulative disadvantages as children transition from birth to adulthood.

As with previous waves, the 15-year survey contains questions used in other national longitudinal surveys (e.g., National Longitudinal Survey of Adolescent to Adult Health [AddHealth] and the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997 [NLSY97]), allowing for comparisons of youth experiences with parental incarceration or replications of studies across different survey populations. Given the oversampling of disadvantaged urban families, these comparisons would help strengthen the consistency of previous findings and could aid in our understanding of the representativeness of the Fragile Families data.

Lastly, those interested in combining cutting-edge research on racial perceptions or gene-environment interactions with research on the intergenerational consequences of parental incarceration can use the skin color observations and saliva samples collected in the 15-year Fragile Families data to better understand how race, genes, and social environments interact to transmit disadvantage across generations. These types of studies would be particularly informative as there is renewed focus on biological markers and genetically informed (or epigenetically informed) studies of behavior in the social sciences (e.g., Farrington, 2017; Freese & Shostak, 2009; Shanahan, Bauldry, & Freeman, 2010) and a call for more research to address the critical and nuanced interplay between race and criminal justice involvement among American families (e.g., Haskins & Lee, 2016; Chap. 3 of this volume).

## **New Directions Building off Fragile Families Studies**

Studies using Fragile Families data have provided much-needed insight into the family environments of children with incarcerated parents, alongside providing strong evidence that the social patterning of parental incarceration is consequential for children's well-being. However, given the urban focus of the Fragile Families data, much of what we know about the correlates, consequences, and complexities of parental incarceration is limited in its geographic scope. Future work can build on this understanding by looking at whether experiences of parental incarceration differ by geography, particularly as interest in inequality and punishment within rural America has grown.

Research using Fragile Families data has importantly highlighted the Black-White racial disparities present in parental incarceration experiences (e.g., Haskins, 2016; Wildeman, 2010). As Fig. 5.1 indicates, Black children in the Fragile Families are more likely than their White urban peers to have an incarcerated father (42% compared to 27%) or mother (13% compared to 12%) by adolescence. However, given growing racial diversity and complexity in the USA, research on the link between parental incarceration and child well-being beyond the Black-White binary is sorely needed. In particular, as immigration policies become more criminalized, research focused on the consequences for child well-being of the detention of undocumented Hispanic and Latino parents would importantly extend our understanding of the varied collateral consequences of punishment (see Chap. 23, this volume).

Finally, though the Fragile Families data have allowed researchers to quite thoroughly assess direct associations of parental incarceration for a broad range of child health, behavioral, and educational outcomes, empirical studies to date have yet to fully be able to identify or tease apart the relative importance of the various mechanisms potentially driving the associations between par-

ental incarceration and child well-being. In particular, much-needed qualitative research with children affected by parental incarceration could help flesh out suggestive evidence from Fragile Families studies (e.g., Haskins & Jacobsen, 2017; Turney & Haskins, 2014) that indicate teachers' perceptions and system avoidance play important roles with regard to educational decisions for children with incarcerated fathers. Moreover, while Fragile Families work has mostly focused on the mechanism of economic and social strain (e.g., Schwartz-Soicher, Geller, & Garfinkel, 2011; Turney, 2017), our understandings of the ways stigma, stress, trauma, or ambiguous loss drive intergenerational consequences, as well as developmental mechanisms such as impact on children's brain development, are underdeveloped. Lastly, deficit models have dominated much of the work using Fragile Families data, helping to heighten awareness of the many consequences of parental incarceration but not providing much information or recognition of resilience processes at play. Future research focused on identifying resilience processes that lessen the effects of stigma, trauma, strain, and ambiguous loss in children's and families' lives will help policymakers, practitioners, and the public better understand issues that arise for children and families when a parent has served time and can help in the design of supportive measures.

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### Future Practice and Policy

Research findings from analyses of Fragile Families data have implications for future practice and policy. Findings suggest that children exposed to parental incarceration are an especially vulnerable population of children. These children might benefit from social services designed to alleviate the strains associated with parental incarceration. Findings also suggest that parental incarceration has deleterious consequences for the entire family unit; therefore, children might benefit indirectly from services targeted toward their caregivers, such as programs to increase economic self-sufficiency or reduce the financial consequences of incarceration or programs to improve

the mental health of those connected to the incarcerated. More specifically, much research using these data show that the negative consequences of parental incarceration are concentrated among those living with the incarcerated parent before his or her confinement. Therefore, services targeted toward this group might help the largest amount of children and families. Further, from a policy perspective, to the extent that parental incarceration causes deleterious outcomes for children, reducing incarceration may be one way to promote well-being among already disadvantaged children (see Chap. 16, this volume).

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### Conclusion

Mass incarceration is one of America's most powerful stratifying institutions. In the US context, institutional punishment is deeply intertwined with racial injustice, economic inequality, and political marginalization. The Fragile Families is one contemporary, large-scale, broadly representative, and longitudinal data set that has allowed researchers to closely study the relationship between parental incarceration and children's well-being. These data have been used extensively to study the consequences of parental incarceration, with some research identifying how parental incarceration redefines the family environments in which children are embedded and other research identifying how parental incarceration directly shapes children's well-being. Research using these data has found that parental incarceration, by and large, has harmful consequences for aspects of children's family environments including parental relationships, family economic well-being, parenting practices, and parental health and social support. Research using these data has also found that parental incarceration has harmful consequences for children's behavioral, educational, and health outcomes. Given the concentration of parental incarceration among already vulnerable children, in conjunction with the capacity of parental incarceration to have deleterious consequences for all children, research using the Fragile

Families data shows that parental incarceration may increase inequalities among children in the USA.

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# Effects of Parental Incarceration on Children: Lessons from International Research

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## Abstract

In recent years, the increasing availability of longitudinal datasets has made it possible to investigate the consequences of parental imprisonment for children living in different countries. In this chapter, we compare international findings on three child outcomes hypothesized to be affected by parental imprisonment: offending, substance use, and mental illness. By comparing results across countries, we consider which effects of parental imprisonment on children are internationally generalizable. We find that with the current evidence available, it is difficult to disentangle cross-national differences in the effects of parental imprisonment on children from differences in sample selection, time of data collection, and other differences in research design. However, the increasing diver-

sity and richness of international data sources nevertheless widen the focus of research on parental imprisonment in new ways. We make suggestions for research directions that will extend knowledge about the specific circumstances and mechanisms that determine whether and how imprisonment affects close family members of prisoners.

Since the 1960s, there has been a slow but steady rise in academic interest in the potentially harmful consequences of parental imprisonment for children (e.g. Friedman & Esselstyn, 1965; Hagan & Dinovitzer, 1999; Robins, West, & Herjanic, 1975; Wildeman & Andersen, 2017). Since then, parental imprisonment has been found to correlate with a variety of adverse intergenerational outcomes, including antisocial and delinquent behaviour, low academic attainment, and substance misuse (e.g. Murray & Farrington, 2005; Wildeman, 2014b).

Although the outcomes associated with parental imprisonment are well-established, there remains uncertainty about their cause. High levels of disadvantage in the families of prisoners make it difficult to identify whether negative outcomes are a consequence of parental imprisonment itself or a reflection of children's greater exposure to pre-existing and concurrent risk factors (Bijleveld, 2009; Johnson & Easterling, 2012; Murray & Farrington, 2008; Wakefield, Lee, & Wildeman, 2016; Wildeman, 2014b). A global lack of longitudinal data sources with a sufficient sample

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size and variable range to control for selection effects has long meant that few studies could address this critical question. Most studies that investigate the direct effect of parental imprisonment on children rely on a small number of US-based data sources (Johnson & Easterling, 2012; Murray, Farrington, & Sekol, 2012a; Wildeman, 2016). A 2012 systematic review of children's antisocial behaviour, mental health, drug use, and educational performance after parental incarceration found that of 50 research samples used to investigate these outcomes, only 14 were from outside of the USA (Murray, Loeber, & Pardini, 2012b). The body of international studies large enough to allow for rigorous causal tests is now expanding (Murray, Bijleveld, Farrington, & Loeber, 2014). This internationalization raises new questions about differences and similarities between children of prisoners in different countries.

Harms from parental imprisonment may vary across places and time periods. Differences in welfare systems, public policy, and penal policy may affect the social composition of the prison population (Hartwell, 2004). In countries where prison sentences are used as a last resort, prison populations are more likely to have other social problems, such as addiction and mental illness. In such contexts, parental imprisonment may have a less negative (or even positive) effect on families. In addition, cultural and social contexts likely determine the extent to which prisoners' families fear and experience stigmatization (Murray et al., 2014).

Imprisonment also has different effects on different groups of children within countries. Research evidence suggests ethnicity may influence the consequences of parental imprisonment for affected children (Murray et al., 2012b; Swisher & Roettger, 2012; Wildeman, 2014b). Also, the way individual prisons regulate visitation and other forms of communication has a critical influence on children's relationships with imprisoned parents (Comfort, 2003; Dennison, Smallbone, & Occhipinti, 2017a; Dennison & Besemer, 2018, forthcoming; Dennison, Smallbone, Stewart, Freiberg, & Teague, 2014). Such regulations and practices differ not only between

countries, but also between prisons (Murray et al., 2014). Moreover, differences in welfare systems and public health care may substantially reduce the extent to which parental imprisonment introduces economic hardship and other forms of strain into children's lives. For all of these reasons, it is likely that the consequences of imprisonment for children may differ between countries, within countries and across time periods.

There are only a few international reviews of the literature on the effects of parental imprisonment on children. Most reviews aggregate country-specific findings to identify average effects (e.g., Johnson & Easterling, 2012; Murray et al., 2012a; Wildeman, Wakefield, & Turney, 2013b). Two studies also attempted to match the samples and outcome variables between two or more international datasets so that national differences in the effects of imprisonment can be more easily identified (Besemer, van der Geest, Murray, Bijleveld, & Farrington, 2011; Murray et al., 2014). Besemer et al. (2011) found that the relationship between parental imprisonment and offspring offending differed considerably between the Netherlands and England and suggested that these might be due to major discrepancies in the penal landscape in each country. Murray et al. (2014) found differences between groups of countries. They found larger, positive relationships between parental imprisonment and male offspring offending in England, the Netherlands in the 1970s–1980s and the USA and smaller or negligible effects in the Netherlands in the 1950s–1960s and Sweden. They concluded that variations in both social and penal climates may explain these differences. The current chapter draws together and extends these reviews by considering the generalizability of international studies that look at the effects of parental imprisonment on children's outcomes.

In this chapter, we identify three specific outcomes for the children of prisoners that have been studied in more than one country: substance use, mental health problems, and adult offending. For each outcome, we discuss the extent to which studies in different national contexts show consistent results. Our main purpose is to reflect on the extent to which international evidence can be

used to identify similarities or differences in the effects of parental imprisonment between countries. From this, we consider to what extent the current evidence base can be used to draw conclusions about the way imprisonment affects children globally. Finally, we discuss other ways in which the increasing internationalization of parental imprisonment research may benefit our understandings of the way imprisonment affects family members and identify gaps in the existing knowledge base.

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## Method

We begin by identifying outcome variables that have been investigated in more than one national context. Most studies were selected because they had been reviewed in other recent literature reviews (e.g., Johnson & Easterling, 2012; Murray et al., 2012a; Wildeman et al., 2013b). More recent work was identified through targeted searches within each topic area. We restricted the review to studies that controlled for pre-existing risk in affected children's lives, for example, through comparison groups, fixed effect modelling, and covariate adjustment. In all studies, children were affected by imprisonment after birth. We excluded qualitative studies from our comparison, although we did consider results from these studies to inform our discussion of future directions in international family imprisonment research.

Unfortunately, many child outcomes thought to be affected by parental imprisonment have only been studied in one country. For example, effects of parental imprisonment on children's education (e.g. Cho 2009, 2010, 2011; Dallaire, Ciccone, & Wilson, 2010; Hagan & Foster, 2012) and on physical health (e.g. Lee et al., 2014; Turney, 2014b) have, thus far, only been examined in the USA. In fact, we only found three specific outcomes for prisoners' children that could be compared across at least two different countries: offending, substance use, and mental illness.

We reviewed the international studies both in terms of the effects they found on children's substance use, offending or mental health, as well as for differences and similarities between the designs, locations, and samples. Specifically, we considered (a) what type of parental imprisonment was investigated; (b) whether the study population is representative of all children affected by that experience within the national population; (c) the method of causal inference (e.g., covariate adjustment, matching, or other types of analyses); and (d) the way the outcome variable was operationalized. In the following sections, we consider the effects of imprisonment on children's later offending risk, on children's substance use, and on children's mental illness.

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## Findings

### Parental Imprisonment and Intergenerational Crime and Delinquency

The association between parental imprisonment and children's adulthood offending risk has been one of the oldest foci in the parental imprisonment literature (e.g., Farrington, Barnes, & Lambert, 1996; Glueck & Glueck, 1950; Robins et al., 1975; Wildeman & Andersen, 2017), as well as in criminology more generally (Murray et al., 2012b). Maternal and paternal imprisonment have been found to be associated with an increased adulthood offending risk in all countries in which such associations have been measured (Murray et al., 2014). However, it is not certain that these associations represent a causal effect. To date, there are only five countries in which there have been longitudinal studies that estimate direct effects of parental imprisonment on offspring offending. The characteristics of these studies are summarized in Table 6.1.

Wildeman and Andersen (2017) used an exogenous Danish sentencing reform as a natural experiment with which to compare the effects of parental (and specifically, paternal) imprisonment on children. This policy reform resulted in a sudden drop in the use of custodial sentences.

**Table 6.1** Cross-national selection of studies measuring the association between parental imprisonment and offspring offending

Authors (year)	Country	Parents imprisoned (age child)	<i>N</i> children with imprisoned parents after birth	Nationally representative parental imprisonment sample?	Causal inference	Offspring outcome (age at outcome)	Association with parental imprisonment after controls
Wildeman and Andersen (2017)	Denmark	Biological fathers imprisoned 1999–2000 (12–18)	786 boys 760 girls	Yes. Registry data of full Danish population	Natural experiment	Being charged by 22–28 years of age	Boys: + girls: null
Murray and Farrington (2005)	UK	Boys born around 1953, father / mother imprisoned (0–10)	23 boys	No. Boys born in area of South London	Comparison to other paternal absence	Convicted at age 17–25 or age 26–40	+
Murray et al. (2007)	Sweden	Boys born 1953, <i>mostly fathers</i> imprisoned (0–19)	283 boys	No. Only contains children living in the Stockholm metropolitan area in 1963	Covariate adjustment and comparison to imprisonment before birth	Police records of offence between ages 19 and 30	Null
van de Rakt et al. (2009)	Netherlands	Whole sample was affected by paternal imprisonment after 1977, some additionally by maternal imprisonment. Children had at least reached the age of 12 by 2003.	562 boys 504 girls	Yes. Fathers drawn from representative sample of all criminal offences tried in 1977	Covariate adjustment and control group of men who were not convicted	Convictions between ages 12 and 18–40, depending on birth year.	Very weak +
Dennison et al. (2017b)	Netherlands	Boys born around 1932 (G3), 1960 (G4) and 1986 (G5) aged 0–18 when father imprisoned	G3: 257 boys G4: 630 boys G5: 590 boys	No. Contains only offspring of 198 boys placed in a reform school in 1911	Adjustment for age and comparison to imprisonment before birth	Criminal records containing charges and sentences (18+)	G3: null G4: null G5: +

(continued)

**Table 6.1** (continued)

Authors (year)	Country	Parents imprisoned (age child)	N children with imprisoned parents after birth	Nationally representative parental imprisonment sample?	Causal inference	Offspring outcome (age at outcome)	Association with parental imprisonment after controls
Porter and King (2015)	USA	Respondent reported on childhood paternal imprisonment retrospectively in wave IV, when aged 24–34	2,283 children	Yes—but only of students in grades 7 to 12 in 1993–1994 academic year	Reference category of respondents experiencing paternal imprisonment in future wave	Self-reported engagement in delinquency (grade 7–12)	Null
Murray et al. (2012b)	USA	Child's caretaker supplied information on biological and step-parental incarcerations (7–18)	121 boys	No. Boys 1st and 7th grades in Pittsburgh 1987–1988	Propensity score matching and fixed effects models	Theft	+

The authors compared children ages 12–18 years at the time of their father's sentence to custody versus a matched group of same-aged children whose fathers received non-custodial sentences. The authors found that paternal incarceration had a substantial effect on boys' risk of criminal justice contact in the next 10 years but found no significant effect for girls (Wildeman & Andersen, 2017).

Most other research in this area has controlled for selection bias through covariate-adjusted regression (though see also Murray et al., 2012b). Of these studies, the strongest intergenerational effects of offending were found in The Cambridge Study in Delinquent Development, a prospective longitudinal study of 411 boys born in 1953 in a working-class area of South London, England. Of these 411 boys, 23 boys were found to have had a father or mother imprisoned between birth and age ten. These 23 boys were more likely to engage in criminal behaviour (Murray, Janson, & Farrington, 2007) or antisocial–delinquent behaviour (Murray & Farrington, 2005) than boys affected by parental death, parental separation, and boys with parents imprisoned before their births.

Project Metropolitan in Sweden is also a prospective longitudinal survey. In a study which directly compared results from Project Metropolitan to the Cambridge study, parental incarceration in the Swedish study was found to have no significant effect on criminal convictions in adulthood after statistically controlling for the criminality of the parent. In a comparison of children exposed to parental imprisonment in childhood with children whose parents were imprisoned only before the child's birth, both had an equal likelihood of adulthood conviction. This suggests that in Sweden, parental imprisonment was not a direct cause of children's offending during adulthood (Murray et al., 2007).

In the Netherlands, the effect of parental imprisonment as a cause of second-generation offending has differed between studies using data from different time periods. The Criminal Career and Life Course Study (CCLS) used court information and life course data from 4615 randomly selected individuals convicted of a crime



in the Netherlands in 1977. Using these data, van de Rakt, Murray, and Nieuwbeerta (2011) found that there was a significant association between fathers' imprisonment and child convictions. When fathers' criminal history was controlled for, the influence of paternal imprisonment became very weak and only increased risk of conviction by a factor of 1.2.

The NSCR Transfive study, also in the Netherlands, started with a group of 198 high-risk working-class boys born in 1899 (G2) (Huschek & Bijleveld, 2015). Conviction data were obtained for their children (G3), grandchildren (G4) and great-grandchildren (G5). The Dutch findings suggest that the effect of parental imprisonment varied across different historical periods. There was no significant relationship between paternal imprisonment and offspring offending in earlier generations of the study, but G5 children of incarcerated G4 parents were at a significantly increased risk of offending compared to children of criminal but never-imprisoned parents (Murray et al., 2014). This suggests that in the 1950s–1960s, parental incarceration was not a risk factor for sons' adult crimes, but parental incarceration did influence children's offending outcomes from the 1970s–1980s onwards, the period in which the G5 children grew up. A further study of the Transfive dataset found that for G3-G4 and G4-G5, only fathers who were incarcerated after their son was born, and before that son turned 18, had an influence over their son's risk of being incarcerated, suggesting a causal relationship between paternal and offspring imprisonment (Dennison, Bijleveld, & van de Weijer, 2017b).

In the USA, results across different studies have largely supported a direct effect of parental imprisonment on offspring offending. Burgess-Proctor, Huebner, and Durso (2016) used the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (AddHealth), a longitudinal nationally representative sample of 20,748 respondents who were enrolled in grades 7–12 in 1994–95, 15,587 of whom had information in the first and final wave. Both maternal and paternal incarceration significantly increased the odds of adult offspring's self-reported arrest, conviction or incarceration after age 18. Murray et al. (2012b) also reported a

positive association using the Pittsburgh Youth Study. Using a combination of fixed effect models and propensity score matching, the authors found that parental imprisonment predicted increases in youth theft. However, these findings contradict an earlier study also using AddHealth data (Porter & King, 2015). In this study, delinquency measures in children in a survey wave prior to their father's imprisonment were compared with the same measures in children who had already experienced paternal incarceration. Using this method, the authors found no significant association between paternal incarceration and offending (Porter & King, 2015).

Looking at findings across countries, it remains difficult to draw general conclusions regarding the effects of parental imprisonment on delinquency and offending in offspring. Notably, there are few studies that include girls. For boys, the database is larger, and the effects of imprisonment on adulthood offending appear to be contextually dependent. Results differ between countries, as well as in other important ways, such as in different generations in the Netherlands. The cross-temporal differences in the Netherlands may relate to a shift in the Dutch penal climate, which became less liberal after the late 1970s. In this period, the penal climate shifted towards a greater focus on the expansion of imprisonment. At the same time, government became skeptical about the ability of prisons to rehabilitate prisoners. It is possible that over the course of this period, parental imprisonment may have become more stigmatized and perhaps more damaging to children (Murray et al., 2014). Nonetheless, it is difficult to know whether differences in results represent generational differences, national differences or differences in methodology. For example, it might seem surprising that two Scandinavian studies would find completely different effects of imprisonment on children. However, as the children in the Danish study were born roughly 30 years after the children from Stockholm and were from rural areas as well as metropolitan locations, these seemingly contrasting findings could easily be explained by differences that do not relate to the national context in which each study took place.

Overall, the results do not allow for any firm conclusions about the effects of imprisonment on children across countries in terms of delinquency and crime.

### Parental Imprisonment and Addictive Substance Use

There are a number of mechanisms that might link parental imprisonment to the use of addictive and/or illegal substances in offspring, including selection effects. Evidence from studies conducted within the USA shows that, within a sample of young people in mental health settings, children of prisoners were far more likely than others to have been exposed to parental alcohol or drug abuse as well as other family risk factors (Phillips, Burns, Wagner, Kramer, & Robbins, 2002). Although few authors have discussed causal mechanisms that might directly link parental imprisonment to drug use, mechanisms could include the way young people are supervised and parented as well as the psychological responses of youth to parental absence (Murray & Farrington, 2008).

Despite these potential causal connections, there have been only a few studies that investigated the connection between parental imprisonment and alcohol, drug, or other substance use in prisoners' children. In a 2012 systematic review of effects of parental imprisonment on drug use, Murray found only eight studies that investigated the impact of parental imprisonment on either child substance use or the propensity to use. A pooled odds ratio of 1.0 across these eight studies suggested no average cross-country effect of parental imprisonment on offspring substance use. It is, however, possible that this average effect may have hidden country-specific differences (Murray et al., 2012a), or differences that depend on the type of substance misuse, and the timing at which it was measured. A selection of these and subsequent studies have been summarized in Table 6.2. For this review, we have separated studies that look at substance use in prisoners' children during childhood, i.e., before

the age of 18, and those that look at substance use in adulthood.

An Australian study by Kinner, Alati, Najman, and Williams (2007) used data from the Mater Hospital University of Queensland Study of Pregnancy (MUSP), a prospective birth cohort study of children born 1981–83 in Brisbane, Australia ( $N = 2399$ ). In their study, paternal incarceration correlated significantly with children's alcohol and tobacco use at age 14, but these associations became non-significant after controlling for family characteristics. The authors conclude that in Australia, adverse outcomes for adolescent children of imprisoned fathers (or maternal spouses) are attributable to social and familial risk factors rather than to the effects of paternal imprisonment (Kinner et al., 2007). Murray et al. (2012b) used data from the Pittsburgh Youth Study, a longitudinal study of 1009 inner-city boys, to examine within-individual change from before to after parental incarceration. They found that parental arrest and conviction had no effect on increases in youth-reported marijuana use when compared to boys with similar behaviors and family and peer environments before parental incarceration occurred (Murray et al., 2012b). As fixed effect models have the advantage of controlling for both observed and unobserved time constant variables, this lack of any effect of parental arrest and conviction on young people's marijuana use is a strong indicator against any causal link between parental conviction and marijuana use in boys in the USA. Neither study suggests any link between (step) parental incarcerations and substance use in childhood. Effects of parental imprisonment on adulthood substance use have been more mixed, including positive, negative, and null associations.

Hayatbakhsh, Kinner, Jamrozik, Najman, and Mamun (2007) tested whether the experience of the arrest or incarceration of a mother's partner before a child reached 14 years of age was associated with the use of cannabis in early adulthood. The study found a possible positive effect of paternal (or stepfather) imprisonment. Children who experienced the arrest of their mother's partner before they reached the age of



**Table 6.2** Cross-national selection of studies measuring associations between parental imprisonment and substance use

Authors (year)	Country	Parents imprisoned (age child)	<i>N</i> children with imprisoned parents after birth	Nationally representative parental imprisonment sample?	Causal inference	Offspring outcome (age at outcome)	Association with parental imprisonment after controls
<i>Substance use in childhood</i>							
Kinner et al. (2007)	Australia	Mother reported imprisonment of her current partner only if child's biological father, before child reached the age of 14	137 boys and girls as above	No. prospective birth cohort study of children born 1981–83 in Brisbane. Excludes children if parents separated before age 14.	Comparison to arrests without imprisonment	Have drunk full glass of wine (14), smoking (14)	Alcohol: null Tobacco: null
Murray et al. (2012b)	USA	Child's caretaker supplied information on biological and step-parental incarcerations (7–18)	121 boys	No. Boys attending 1st and 7th grades in Pittsburgh public schools in 1987–1988, oversampled disruptive boys	Propensity score matching and fixed effects models	Marijuana use after parental incarceration (up to 18)	Null
<i>Substance use in adulthood</i>							
Hayatbakhsh et al. (2007)	Australia	Mother reported imprisonment of her current partner before her child reached the age of 14	123 boys and girls	No. Prospective birth cohort study of children born 1981–83 in Brisbane	Comparison to arrests without imprisonment	Young adults' cannabis use (21)	-
Murray and Farrington (2008)	UK	Boys born around 1953, father/mother imprisoned (0–10)	23 boys	No. Boys born in a working-class area of South London 1962–1963	Comparison to other paternal absence	Illegal drug use (32–48)	+
Roetger et al. (2011)	USA	Respondent reported on childhood paternal imprisonment retrospectively in wave IV (24–34)	Boys: 982 girls: 1152	Yes—but only of students in grades 7 to 12 during 1993–1994 academic year	Covariate adjustment	Marijuana use; other illegal drug uses (18–27)	Null
Mears and Siennick (2015)	USA	Respondent reported on childhood paternal imprisonment retrospectively in wave IV (24–34)	1865 girls and boys	Yes—but only of students in grades 7 to 12 during 1993–994 academic year	Propensity score matching	Marijuana use and heavy alcohol use (18–28) and alcohol (26–34): +	Marijuana: + alcohol(18–28): null alcohol (26–34): +

14 used more cannabis at age 21 than children whose mothers' partners were not arrested, but children whose mothers' partners were imprisoned did not have a higher risk. The authors conclude that continued exposure to a criminal father or stepfather may pose a greater risk to children's subsequent drug use than that person's removal through incarceration.

Using the Cambridge Study dataset in England, Murray, and Farrington compared drug use in children affected by parental imprisonment with four control groups: boys who did not experience separation, boys separated by hospital or death, boys separated for other reasons and boys whose parents were only imprisoned before their birth. They observed that compared to boys in these reference groups, parental imprisonment increased the odds of offspring illegal drug use between ages 32 and 48 years by a factor of 3.7 (Murray & Farrington, 2005).

Research from the USA also produced mixed results on the relationship between parental imprisonment and drug use. Roettger, Swisher, Kuhl, and Chavez (2011) used the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (AddHealth) to investigate the effects of having a biological father imprisoned on the number of days a year that young people used marijuana. Using covariate adjustment to control for confounders at the family, parental, and individual level, Roettger et al. (2011) found that for both males and females, having ever had a biological father imprisoned was associated with an increased frequency of marijuana use and increased odds of any other illegal drug use. A subsequent study, which again used AddHealth data, used propensity score matching to compare children who reported that one or both of their parents had been incarcerated with a matched sample of children with similar characteristics. Compared to this matched sample, parental incarceration significantly increased the odds of marijuana use in early as well as late adulthood, but had no significant effect on heavy alcohol use in early adolescence, and only a very small effect on heavy alcohol use in late adolescence (Mears & Siennick, 2015). However, research looking at children's marijuana use before as well as after imprisonment did not find a net effect.

When comparing these apparently contradictory results both between and within countries, it should be emphasized that there were major differences in study designs. In the Australian Mater study, the authors operationalized paternal imprisonment as the incarceration of the mother's spouse (Kinner et al., 2007). At age 14, it is likely that a substantial number of mothers' spouses would have been the child's stepfather. In AddHealth and in the Cambridge study, the imprisoned father was the child's biological father. This is a salient difference. Stepfathers may enter and leave a child's life and may therefore have less influence on a child's ongoing behaviour when imprisonment results in their removal from the household. Biological fathers may be more likely to have a longer and more enduring influence on children, which could explain the difference in results. Moreover, the Mater study included tobacco and alcohol use, both of which are legal, whereas other studies examined illegal drugs. In addition, maternal imprisonment may not only have different effects from paternal imprisonment, but also select a group of children with different pre-existing problems. The extent to which there may be country-specific differences in the nature and extent of the relationship between exposure to parental imprisonment and drug use therefore remains unclear.

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## Mental Health

A number of studies have described the emotional distress many children experience after the imprisonment of their mother or father (Arditti, 2012; Condry, 2007; Dennison & Besemer, 2018). Such negative emotions, as well as a resulting strain on family relationships, could lead to depressive symptoms in children (Gaston, 2016). In addition, parental imprisonment may precipitate other stressful changes within a family system that may have negative impacts on the mental health of a child (Arditti, 2016). For example, material deprivation caused by increased expenses and a loss of the prisoner's income may affect children's ability to engage in social activities. Such

deprivations may contribute to the maladaptive emotional responses of a child and contribute to the development of enduring mental health problems (Besemer & Dennison, 2017; Dennison & Besemer, 2018, forthcoming).

Some scholars have proposed that parental imprisonment in childhood could potentially be a cause of mental illness in adulthood. As mental illness is normally episodic, it is improbable that children affected by imprisonment would subsequently exhibit continuous depressive symptoms. Causal explanations of mental health problems in adult children of prisoners are therefore quite distinct from causes that may provoke depressive responses in childhood (Gaston, 2016). It is possible that children's deprivation of shared interactions with an imprisoned parent could impair their acquisition of capabilities necessary for healthy long-term physical, socio-emotional, and cognitive development (Arditti, 2016; Dennison & Besemer, 2018), resulting in a lifelong vulnerability to mental illness. Some authors also propose that the cumulative effects of parental imprisonment on children might affect their long-term disengagement or alienation from society (Besemer & Dennison, 2017, 2018 forthcoming; Foster & Hagan, 2015). Such explanations of adulthood consequences of parental imprisonment remain speculative. However, given the likely divergent pathways between the effects of parental imprisonment during childhood and in adulthood, we discuss each outcome separately.

As can be seen in Table 6.3, both child and adulthood mental health outcomes of parental imprisonment have been studied in more than one country. Nonetheless, as with substance use and offending, outcomes are difficult to compare. Kinner et al. (2007) found no evidence of a causal effect of prior parental imprisonment on teenage internalizing symptoms of fourteen-year-old children born in Brisbane, Australia. Murray et al. (2012b), on the other hand, found that Pittsburgh children were more likely to experience depressive symptoms within four years after a parental imprisonment that took place between ages 7 and 18. Various factors could explain this discrepancy. It may be that reactive psychological responses to parental imprisonment are immediate, rather than

long-term, and were therefore not captured in the Australian study. It is also possible that imprisonment after the age of 10, which formed the majority of the Pittsburgh sample, provokes stronger psychological responses. Without further evidence, it is difficult to disentangle cross-national differences. Similarly, though results on adulthood mental health effects of parental imprisonment appear to be consistent between the UK and the USA, the large time difference between the birth years makes it difficult to be certain whether this convergence represents a true and contemporary commonality between the effects of parental imprisonment on adult offspring living in those countries.

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### Emerging Directions for International Family Imprisonment Research

For all three subject areas reviewed in this chapter, we found that current research on the consequences of imprisonment has yielded conflicting evidence in different countries. At the same time, the work reviewed in this chapter also demonstrates that across many different locations and time periods, children with imprisoned parents are a vulnerable population. There is also enough evidence to come to the conclusion that at least in some countries, for a substantial proportion of children and families affected, parental imprisonment compounds pre-existing harms in the lives of affected children. The international evidence reviewed in this chapter thus creates a compelling argument for the need to protect children and families affected by imprisonment. However, findings are far less specific about what children and families, under what circumstances and policy climates, suffer worse outcomes. Ongoing work measuring average effects of parental imprisonment on children has therefore been less than successful in assisting policymakers or practitioners in targeting support (see also Wakefield & Wildeman, 2013). For future studies to have a better practical application, potential reasons for heterogeneity in prisoners' children's outcomes need to be examined and addressed. This section will focus on two key

**Table 6.3** Cross-national selection of studies measuring associations between parental imprisonment and mental health problems in children or adults

Authors (year)	Country	Parents imprisoned (age child)	N children with imprisoned parents after birth	Nationally representative parental imprisonment sample?	Causal Inference	Offspring outcome (age at outcome)	Association with parental imprisonment after controls
<i>Mental health problems in childhood</i>							
Kinner et al. (2007)	Australia	Mother reported imprisonment of her current partner only if child's biological father, before child reached the age of 14	137 boys and girls	No. Prospective birth cohort study of children born 1981–83 in Brisbane	Comparison to arrests without imprisonment	Child internalising (14)	Null
Murray et al. (2012b)	USA	Child's caretaker supplied information on biological and step-parental incarcerations (7–18)	121 boys	No. Boys attending 1st and 7th grades in Pittsburgh public schools in 1987–1988, oversampled disruptive boys	Propensity score matching and fixed effects models	Depression within four years after incarceration (11–22)	Null
<i>Mental health problems in adulthood</i>							
Murray and Farrington (2008)	UK	Boys born around 1953, father/mother imprisoned (0–10)	23 boys	No. Boys born in a working-class area of South London	Comparison to other paternal absence	Adult internalising (48)	+
Gaston (2016)	USA	Respondent reported on childhood paternal imprisonment retrospectively in wave IV, when aged 24–34	1865 girls and boys	Yes—but only of students in grades 7 to 12 during 1993–1994 academic year	Covariate adjustment	Depressive symptoms (23–34)	+ only for children who are unborn or <1 at first parental imprisonment
Mears and Siennick (2015)	USA	Respondent reported on childhood paternal imprisonment retrospectively in wave IV, when aged 24–34	1865 girls and boys	Yes—but only of students in grades 7 to 12 during 1993–1994 academic year	Propensity score matching	Depressive symptoms (18–28) and (26–34)	Depression (18–28): + depression (26–34): +

directions such work should take and reflect on how such work could contribute to policies to protect affected children.

First, studies need to identify which children, under what circumstances are most likely to be harmed by the imprisonment of a parent (Wakefield & Wildeman, 2013). Qualitative data suggest various potential sources of variability in prisoners' children's outcomes, depending on a range of contextual differences between affected families and on what types of imprisonment-related experiences children are exposed (e.g. Giordano, 2010). Much of the research reviewed in this chapter uses samples of children affected by the imprisonment of a biological or social mother or father, treating these distinct experiences as a single predictor of risk. Consequently, it is still unclear whether maternal and paternal incarceration initiates distinct pathways towards negative child outcomes (Wildeman, 2014a). Similarly, few studies have been able to differentiate between children affected by varying durations of parental prison sentences (Geller, Jaeger, & Pace, 2016), by different types of criminal justice involvement or between parental imprisonments that take place at different points in children's development (though see Murray et al., 2012b). In addition, few studies have been able to distinguish between children whose parents had more (or better quality) parenting involvement in their lives prior to their imprisonment and those whose relationship with the imprisoned parent was already impaired.

From a policy perspective, empirical studies of variability in children's outcomes are not only important in identifying circumstances under which parental imprisonment is most likely to be harmful, but also to identify the types of families least able to provide stable support to children at stressful times (Besemer & Dennison, 2017). Studies may also help to identify circumstances in which the removal of a criminal, and potentially chaotic or violent, parent from the home may improve children's well-being (Hissel, 2014; Jaffee, Moffitt, Caspi, & Taylor, 2003). Indeed, research from the Netherlands suggests that for children of violently criminal fathers,

parental separation reduces prisoners' children's offending risk (van de Weijer, Thornberry, Bijleveld, & Blokland, 2015). A better understanding of such variability may also help to understand incongruities in the findings of different studies examining the effects of maternal imprisonment (Arditti, 2015; Turney & Wildeman, 2015) and paternal imprisonment (Wildeman, Wakefield, Lee, Wakefield, & Powell, 2016), including those described in this chapter.

A second direction of work pertains to the mechanisms through which imprisonment may affect children through their developmental context. Specific investigations of these mechanisms are rare (though see Murray et al., 2012b) and have received far less research attention than average effects (Auty, Farrington, & Coid, 2015). Consequently, current scholarship has yielded few theoretical foundations with which to understand the way imprisonment may impact on children and has made even less progress in testing the few theoretical mechanisms that have thus far been proposed (Auty et al., 2015).

A key reason for the lack of progress in testing and developing theories about the effects of parental imprisonment has been a lack of data. There are few large longitudinal studies that contain measures of the mechanisms that are thought to be most important in affecting children's long-term outcomes after the imprisonment of a parent. For example, authors have proposed causal pathways relating to the effects of traumatic child-parent separation for children's bonding and attachment; reductions in the quality of parenting, care, and supervision of children; financial hardship; and children's development of a delinquent identity through stigma or labelling (Besemer et al., 2011; Murray, 2007; Murray & Murray, 2010; Schlafer & Poehlmann, 2010). Empirical tests of such mechanisms have remained quite limited. Some potential mechanisms, such as stigma and discrimination, are very difficult to investigate through existing longitudinal data sources due to a lack of information. A slightly larger number of studies have focused on mechanisms that may cause disruptions to children's secure emotional

support from caring adults after parental imprisonment, including effects on caregiver stress (Arditti, 2016; Chui, 2016), parenting (Turney, 2014a), and depression (Wildeman, Schnittker, & Turney, 2012). Also, a growing body of work has developed around the ways in which parental imprisonment may limit children's ability to engage in normal social activities, potentially resulting in their long-term social exclusion (Besemer & Dennison, 2017; Dennison & Besemer, 2018; Schwartz-Soicher, Geller, & Garfinkel, 2011; Sykes & Pettit, 2015). As parental imprisonment research grows internationally, there may be greater scope for research to build and test theories about the way imprisonment impacts on children's lives. It is essential to identify potential risk and protective factors that can be targeted through policy and for the design of successful interventions to protect and support affected children.

Finally, there is also a need to widen the scope of family imprisonment research. Until now, there has been almost no empirical evidence regarding the risks associated with the imprisonment of any household members and/or close family other than a parent (Meek, 2008; Meek, Lowe, & McPhillips, 2010; Wildeman & Wakefield, 2014). Yet from a theoretical perspective, many of the same mechanisms currently thought to affect prisoners' children could also apply to the imprisonment of other close family members. For example, parents who are coping with stress associated with the imprisonment of their own sibling, or the imprisonment of one of their older children, may experience psychological distress that could affect their ability to parent and care for children in their household. In addition, children of non-parental incarcerated family members may similarly experience the effects of increases in household expenses associated with travel for prison visits, subsidizing prisoner phone calls and making financial contributions to prisoners' commissary accounts for personal items. Such costs can severely limit families' contact with the prisoner and may have a detrimental effect on households' finances (Christian, Mellow, & Thomas, 2006; Shlafer & Poehlmann, 2010; Braman, 2004). These financial consequences may also impact

on children's ability to engage in social activities, including school activities, leisure activities or family outings (Besemer & Dennison, 2017; Dennison & Besemer, 2018, forthcoming).

A small number of studies around the world have begun to examine the effects of non-parental family imprisonments. Recent Australian evidence showed that children who experienced non-parental household imprisonment were at least as vulnerable to social exclusion as children living in families where a parent was imprisoned (Besemer & Dennison, 2018 forthcoming). In the UK, qualitative research described severe psychological distress in children affected by the imprisonment of a sibling (Meek, 2008; Meek et al., 2010; Slomkowski, Rende, Conger, Simons, & Conger, 2001). Other qualitative research in the UK showed that the stigma of imprisonment is not limited to parental incarceration, but affects other family relationships as well (Condry, 2007). A recent qualitative study in the USA, by Comfort (2016), described the cumulative disruptions to the lives of women caring for different types of family members with frequent and chronic criminal justice involvement.

Rigorous empirical studies of the direct consequences of non-parental family imprisonment have been quite rare, though limited research suggests that as with parental imprisonment, non-parental household and close family imprisonments are associated with long-term problems in children. A number of studies have confirmed that like parental imprisonment, the criminal convictions of siblings, fathers, uncles, aunts, and grandparents also predict children's subsequent delinquency (Farrington et al., 1996; Farrington, Jolliffe, Loeber, Stouthamer-Loeber, & Kalb, 2001; Slomkowski et al., 2001). Wildeman and Wakefield (2014) found that children affected by the imprisonment of parents were also much more likely to experience the imprisonment of other family members, suggesting that the effects of parental imprisonment may be aggravated by this additional criminal justice exposure. In the Netherlands, van de Rakt, Nieuwbeerta, and Apel (2009) similarly found that non-parent family members' offending



had an additional effect on children's own offending, net of the effect of parental imprisonment itself. However, there have been no studies examining outcomes other than offending in relation to non-parental imprisonment. If imprisonment transmits risks not only to prisoners' own children, but also to prisoners' siblings, grandchildren, and other family, the group of children and adults potentially affected is much larger than has previously been assumed. Even if prisoners' family members' risk is primarily caused by selection effects rather than by factors directly related to imprisonment, the current exclusive focus on parental imprisonment still excludes a much larger and potentially equally vulnerable group.

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## Conclusions

The consequences of imprisonment for children may differ substantially between countries, within countries, and across time periods. However, the nature and extent of such differences remain largely unknown. In this chapter, we attempted to find areas where outcomes studied in different countries might be sufficiently comparable to allow for a cross-national analysis of the effects of parental imprisonment on children. We found that within the area of parental imprisonment research, cross-national comparisons were difficult to make. Substantial differences between studies on parental imprisonment in different countries mean that as yet, there are only a few topics where research outcomes are similar enough to be compared. For many types of child outcomes, there were no studies that contained sufficiently similar measures across more than one country. In fact, in this study, we were only able to identify three child outcomes, substance use, offending, and mental illness, which could be compared cross-nationally.

For both substance use and offending, it was often difficult to distinguish whether conflicting cross-national findings derived from genuine differences in the social and penal contexts in which they were investigated or from differences

in the research designs and methodologies (see also Murray et al., 2014). Although we found outcomes that had been studied in several countries, the studies were not easily comparable because of differences in the sample of children, the type of parental imprisonment they were affected by, the time period they grew up in and in the variables used to study each outcome. Although two previous reviews have matched international samples in order to remove some of the discrepancies in child gender, age, and child outcome between studies (Besemer et al., 2011; Murray et al., 2014), many of the differences in design and time period cannot be overcome through statistical means. To more accurately identify cross-national variations would require a harmonization of questions in the design stage of future studies of parental imprisonment, as well as in large longitudinal surveys more generally. This would make such data sources more easily comparable.

We conclude that, despite the considerable increase in international evidence on the effects of parental imprisonment on children, this evidence cannot yet be used to draw firm conclusions about the moderating effects of national context on the effect of parental imprisonment on children. While the nature and extent of country-specific effects remain unknown, researchers should be very cautious in generalizing findings regarding potential effects of imprisonment on children in one country to potential consequences for children growing up in very different national contexts. In particular, researchers should be sensitive to the possibility that findings from the USA may not be generalizable to other countries with fundamentally different penal and welfare contexts (see also Wildeman, 2016). However, although current limitations in research evidence mean that country-specific effects remain difficult to identify, a wider array of data across different parts of the world has also opened up new research opportunities to explore mechanisms through which parental imprisonment may affect children, as well as the extent to which there are broader, family-based effects associated with imprisonment.

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**Part II**

**Developmental and Family Research**

# Infants and Young Children with Incarcerated Parents

# 7

Cynthia Burnson and Lindsay Weymouth

## Abstract

Drawing on attachment theory, a bioecological systems perspective, and a resilience framework, this chapter explores what is known about the experiences and well-being of infants and young children with incarcerated parents. We emphasize developmentally salient issues in infancy and early childhood for children impacted by the involvement of their parents in the criminal justice system, especially attachment processes and behavioral and cognitive functioning. Special attention is given to contextual and social factors related to incarcerated parents and the caregivers who provide for children while their parents are incarcerated. Research gaps are identified, with suggestions for future scholarship that could further inform relevant policy. Finally, given the dearth of empirical data for this population and the somewhat difficult logistics and ethical concerns surrounding primary data collection, practical fieldwork strategies are discussed, derived from the years that our team has worked with

young children and their families in their homes and in jails and state prisons.

For the 7% of children residing in the USA who will experience the incarceration of a parent, the majority will be exposed prior to their ninth birthday. In early childhood, before the age of six, 5% will have a parent sent to jail or prison (Murphey & Cooper, 2015), more than five times the rate of maltreatment for children of any age (Child Trends, 2016). Yet unlike the child welfare involved population, about which much is known, we know comparatively little about the children of incarcerated parents. For these especially young children, the experience of parental incarceration and the potential ripple effects for their development depends on a host of factors including their relationships with their parents and additional caregivers, the explanation of the separation, the contextual milieu in which they are embedded, and their own unique set of characteristics that enable them to flourish, or not, during times of upheaval.

In this chapter, we explore the experience of parental incarceration for infants and young children and their families. First, we root our discussion in relevant theories and frameworks. Next, we detail the unique developmental and familial considerations for young children exposed to the criminal justice system. It is especially important to understand the ecological context in which children are embedded, and we explore these themes in relation to their

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development prior to and during parental confinement. Next, we examine what is known developmentally about these young children, with emphasis on their relational bonds, or attachments, and their behavioral and cognitive well-being. With close attention paid to methodology, we discuss this literature critically, noting where more research is needed. Finally, we conclude with gaps in our current body of knowledge, implications for policy and practice, and recommendations for scholars wishing to conduct research with these young children, their families, and their incarcerated parents.

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## Theoretical Framework

We use three frameworks to guide our discussion of the impact of parental incarceration on infants and young children: attachment, bioecological systems theory, and resilience science. A major developmental task of infancy and early childhood is the establishment of a secure attachment to one or more adult caregivers (Bowlby, 1982; Masten, 2014). This task is central to not just the emotional grounding that a child brings to future experiences, but also social, cognitive, and behavioral development (Bowlby, 1982). Attachment theory lends insight into the experience of parental incarceration in two major ways: First, it offers a framework to understand the potential effects of the caregiving disruption caused by a parent's incarceration, and second, it highlights the importance of the ongoing caregiving context that the child experiences in the absence of the incarcerated parent.

Bioecological systems theory emphasizes not only the context of development, but the interaction of those contexts across time (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). In the event of parental incarceration, multiple systems must be considered, from proximal contexts that the child may experience directly, such as caregiving, day care, and the jail or prison visitation space, to more distal contexts such as the parent's experience of the prison or jail and the caregiver's workplace. Additionally, the interaction of these contexts

over time is posited to affect child well-being, such as the coparenting relationship between the incarcerated parent and the caregiver. In the case of parental incarceration, the effects of the outermost level of the bioecological systems model, the exosystem, are particularly salient. This level includes societal structures and policies, such as the criminal justice system, systemic racism, and anti-poverty policies. Indeed, it is the pervasive, macro-influence of this level that has resulted in the scale of children affected by parental incarceration.

Resilience science is the inquiry of how positive outcomes are achieved despite conditions of adversity (Masten, 2014). Ample research has documented that experiencing parental incarceration is a risk factor for maladaptive outcomes. However, substantial variability has been observed as well, indicating that some infants and young children faced with the absence of a parent due to incarceration are able to overcome risk and demonstrate good outcomes. A resilience framework facilitates the examination of the processes and contexts that are involved in the positive development of children of incarcerated parents.

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## Early Childhood Development and Parental Incarceration

The incarceration of a parent who has an established relationship with his or her child is a significant event for most children, regardless of age. However, with maturation comes new ways to experience and understand the world, including flourishing capacities to form and maintain relationships and manage difficult emotions arising from stressful events, and young children are just beginning to develop these competencies. Indeed, early childhood is characterized by these and other stage-salient developmental tasks (Cicchetti, 1993), many of which may be impacted by parental incarceration and the cascade of events prior to and surrounding the event (e.g., criminal activity, arrest, court proceedings, visitation, reentry, and reunification). To date, a key focus of research with these young children

has been an examination of their propensity, if any, toward maladaptive behavior. Absent is an exploration of the developmental processes defining this early period of life, and the potential, but not necessarily inevitable, ways in which parental incarceration may undermine, or even promote, these outcomes. Next, we briefly explore a few of these milestones in relation to experiencing parental incarceration in infancy and early childhood.

In the context of parental incarceration, attachment formation and maintenance, or the organization of a relational bond with a primary caregiver, is often impacted (Sroufe, Egeland, & Kreutzer, 1990). Attachments are characteristic of the child, and the quality of these emotional bonds is said to emerge from a caregiver's ability to provide sensitive responsiveness and emotional availability to the child (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978). Although primary attachments are typically established in the first year of life, subsequent attachments form throughout the life span (Bowlby, 1982). For young children with incarcerated parents, it is not only their bond with the parent, but also the quality of the relationship with their caregiver, the adult who provides care during the incarceration, that has the potential to influence development (e.g., Poehlmann, 2005a; Poehlmann-Tynan, Burnson, Weymouth, & Runion, 2017). While most children who experience paternal incarceration reside with their mothers prior to and during their father's incarceration, children of incarcerated mothers often transition to living with their grandparents (Glaze & Maruschak, 2010). Depending on with whom the child has established attachments prior to his or her parent's incarceration, there is the potential for attachment disruption and exposure to new caregiving relationships (Poehlmann-Tynan & Arditto, 2018).

The likelihood of attachment disruption is often magnified if the incarcerated parent was engaged in caregiving activities prior to the incarceration. During incarceration, parents become physically unavailable to their children

and their ability to remain emotionally responsive is significantly reduced (Travis & Waul, 2003). One additional hallmark of parental incarceration is sporadic and inconsistent visitation as well as other forms of contact. Although research focusing on parent-child contact during parental contact has burgeoned in the past several years, limited information is available on whether phone calls, letters, and in-person visitation buffer parents' ability to maintain quality relationships with their young children (see Chap. 10, this volume). We have found that preschoolers tend to exhibit heightened emotional lability, vacillating from happy to somber, during jail visits with their parents compared to when they are observed in their home environments (Poehlmann-Tynan et al., 2015). A young child's ability to cope with an attachment disruption depends not only on the frequency and quality of contact with the parent once incarcerated, but also on prior circumstances as well. For example, children with incarcerated mothers are more likely to witness their mothers' criminal activity and experience disruptions in caregiving following the arrest, compared to children with incarcerated fathers (Dallaire & Wilson, 2010). However, a recent study found that when young children of incarcerated fathers witnessed the criminal activity or arrest of the father and exhibited distress about it, the child was more likely to have an insecure attachment with her caregiver (Poehlmann-Tynan et al., 2017). The factors intimately tied to incarceration (e.g., quality of the parent-child relationship, circumstances surrounding the arrest, and subsequent contact and visitation), as well as the quality of care the child receives prior to, during, and following the incarceration, have implications for attachment formation, maintenance, and disruption, as well as for related developmental tasks associated with early childhood.

During the toddler and preschool years, rudimentary emotion regulation emerges. For children experiencing the unexpected removal of a parent, managing emotions such as sadness and confusion can be difficult, especially for young



children who lack the coping strategies and the cognitive capacities to fully comprehend the complexity of parental incarceration. Additionally, stage-salient tasks build upon one another and thus attachment security and the regulation of emotion are interrelated. Children's sense of insecurity and lack of safety with their attachment figure may have led to difficulties modulating emotion, in part due to increased hypervigilance (Davies, Manning, & Cicchetti, 2013). The ability for children to regulate complicated emotions in the presence of their parent during visitation may be related, at least in part, to what they are told about their parents' absence. We have found that the younger children are, the more often they are told distortions about their parents' absence, such as "dad is at work" (Poehlmann-Tynan et al., 2015; Poehlmann, 2005a; Runion, 2017). Experiencing conflicting information in the presence of a parent in jail or prison may be confusing and overwhelming for young children and further impede their sense of security. Moreover, difficulty regulating emotion is often a precursor to maladaptive behavior, and thus it is of little surprise that internalizing and externalizing behavior have been a major focus of the empirical research with young children of incarcerated parents, as detailed below and in Chap. 5, this volume.

Of course, children's developmental trajectories are the product of multiple interacting variables, including contextual factors to which the child is exposed (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007). For infants and young children, family is a key proximal factor influencing early development. Young children with incarcerated parents often share certain characteristics with their older counterparts, and we note those next, in addition to unique circumstances for infants and preschoolers.

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## The Caregiving Context

The quality of the caregiving context in which young children are embedded, including the characteristics of the incarcerated parent and

caregiver, is a significant determinant of children's development and well-being during parental incarceration (Parke & Clarke-Stewart, 2003; Poehlmann-Tynan et al., 2015; Poehlmann, 2005b; Poehlmann, Park, Bouffiou, Abrahams, Schlafer, & Hahn, 2008). What follows is a description of broader family contexts that are often found for children with incarcerated parents. We examine these factors in regard to how children likely experience these factors, from distal processes to the most proximal processes (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994). However, it is important to note children with incarcerated parents are not a homogenous group and their experience of their familial context depends on a wide variety of indicators (e.g., race, parental gender, socioeconomic status, social supports, developmental period), and many children exhibit resilience despite the risks (Burnson, 2016).

Young children with incarcerated parents often experience economic disadvantage (Phillips, Erkanli, Keeler, Costello, & Angold, 2006). Recent research from a nationally representative sample of US children suggests that those living in poverty are more than three times as likely to experience parental incarceration than children living in families with higher incomes (Murphey & Cooper, 2015), a finding consistent with previous studies (Geller, Garfinkel, Cooper, & Mincy, 2009; Glaze & Maruschak, 2010; Phillips et al., 2006). A large body of research has documented the relation between poverty and children's deleterious outcomes, including the finding that caregiving quality appears to mediate this association (Luby et al., 2013). Caregiving quality is important throughout childhood and adolescence, but is particularly relevant to infants and young children with incarcerated parents given their often limited interactions with adults besides their primary caregivers.

Compared to their peers without jailed or imprisoned parents, children experiencing parental incarceration are also more likely to experience both caregiving and residential instability (Geller et al., 2009). Although data are sparse, recent findings from Oklahoma suggest that upwards of half of imprisoned mothers were the

only caregiver in the home prior to incarceration, suggesting child displacement (Sharp, Jones, & McLeod, 2014), a finding similar to previous research reporting that the majority of mothers in state prison lived with their children prior to imprisonment (Glaze & Maruschak, 2010). Indeed, it appears that children typically experience at least one residential move during the first year of their mothers' incarceration (Johnston, 1995). A recent study of children with jailed parents highlights the residential instability some children experience prior to their parents' incarceration. Muentner and colleagues (2018) reported that 71% of jailed parents experienced one or more housing transitions in the year prior to their incarcerations and nearly half of these moves included their children. Additionally, nearly 20% reported periods of homelessness during this period, and 32% indicated their children were homeless as well. Parents reported doubling up with friends and spending time on the street or in shelters and cars. In these circumstances, consistency and responsivity in alternative caregivers may buffer parental absence and residential instability, and research has found that caregiver stability is associated with more secure representations of family relationships in young children with imprisoned mothers (Poehlmann, 2005b).

Young children with incarcerated parents may also experience a host of incarceration-related risks including witnessing the parent's crime or arrest, sometimes repeatedly. Indeed, in two recent reports the majority of jailed parents with young children reported significant histories of arrests prior to their current incarceration (Poehlmann-Tynan et al., 2015, 2017), findings corroborated in a national report in which the majority of imprisoned parents in state institutions reported prior arrests (Glaze & Maruschak, 2010). The nature of the arrest, such as handcuffing, police-parent interactions, and even violence, along with the removal of the parent from the home, and the subsequent treatment of the child (e.g., separation from siblings, placement in nonfamilial care), may be confusing, upsetting, and even traumatic, especially for young children (Poehlmann-Tynan et al., 2017).

Additionally, exposure to parents' criminal activity, such as drug use, and mental illness likely has implications for child well-being (Dallaire, 2007). These risks are often present prior to incarceration (Phillips et al., 2006), and the prevalence among incarcerated parents is high. For example, of the parents incarcerated in state prison in 2007, 67% reported dependence or abuse of a substance and 57% reported a mental health issue (Glaze & Maruschak, 2010).

Although most children with incarcerated parents will experience the incarceration of their father (Glaze & Maruschak, 2010), research suggests that maternal incarceration may pose unique risks (Turney & Wildeman, 2017). Mothers are more likely to reside with their children and report greater involvement with daily caregiving, prior to incarceration (Dallaire, 2007; Dallaire & Wilson, 2010; Myers et al., 1999). For example, 61% of mothers in state prison reported residing with their children prior to incarceration, compared to less than half of fathers in state prison (Glaze & Maruschak, 2010). Children with incarcerated mothers are more likely than their peers with incarcerated fathers to live with extended family members, such as grandparents, although children are typically removed from their homes prior to maternal incarceration (Glaze & Maruschak, 2010). Mothers in state prison are about 2.5 times more likely than fathers in state prison to report living in single-parent homes prior to incarceration and report significantly higher rates of homelessness (Glaze & Maruschak, 2010).

Finally, caregivers who provide for young children while the parent is away play a pivotal role during this time, yet they remain considerably understudied compared to incarcerated parents. As noted previously, the majority of children live with their mothers during paternal incarceration, while children with incarcerated mothers most often reside with grandparents or other extended family (about 4–10% of children enter foster care; Glaze & Maruschak, 2010). Caregivers are often responsible for economic support, explanations of parental absence, and visitation arrangements with the parent.



Additionally, we have observed that caregivers often shoulder financial arrangements associated with court processes and other legal issues of the incarcerated parent. Arditti and coauthors report that 79% of caregivers in their sample indicated problems of parenting strain and emotional stress (Arditti, Lambert-Shute, & Joest, 2003).

Not surprisingly, data from small, purposive samples suggest that the quality of caregiving during parental incarceration is associated with young children's well-being. For example, support from caregivers in children's home environment and the quality of the caregiver-child relationship are associated with preschoolers' behavior problems, cognitive outcomes, and attachment security during their parents' incarceration (Poehlmann-Tynan et al., 2015; Poehlmann, 2005a, b). Further, increased caregiving stress is associated with more child behavior problems, worse attentional abilities, and fewer expressive prosocial skills in preschool children, although child outcomes and caregiving stress were both caregiver-reported, potentially biasing results (Goshin, 2010; Perry & Bright, 2012). Similarly, studies examining coparenting quality between young children's incarcerated mother and grandmother who served as caregiver during the incarceration found that better coparenting quality was associated with fewer child externalizing and internalizing problems, and better child social skills and self-concept (Baker, McHale, Strozier, & Cecil, 2010; McHale, Salaman, Strozier, & Cecil, 2013).

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### Developmentally Salient Outcomes

Research examining the effect of parental incarceration on developmental outcomes in young children has primarily focused on attachment and parent-child relationship quality, behavior problems, and cognitive and language development. Taken together, findings suggest that young children of incarcerated parents face potential risk in stage-salient tasks, such as establishing a secure attachment to a caregiver and regulating their behavior appropriately. However, there is considerable variation in outcomes, pointing to the

importance of context. Further, findings suggest that a stable, supportive caregiver is key in helping young children facing parental incarceration.

### Attachment

Attachment processes are a critical area of study in infancy and early childhood, and although still sparse, there is a growing body of research examining attachment in infants and young children of incarcerated parents. Given the primary developmental importance of establishing a strong attachment relationship to one or more caregivers in infancy and young children, abrupt or traumatic separations from a parent because of incarceration have the potential to be especially deleterious to infants and young children (Murray & Murray, 2010). Conversely, a secure attachment to a consistent caregiver could be especially supportive of positive development even in the context of parental incarceration (for an in-depth review of attachment issues related to parental incarceration, see a special issue of *Attachment and Human Development*, 12[4], 2010). In this section, we review attachment research related to attachment representations, visitation, and interventions in infants and young children with incarcerated parents.

Attachment representations are children's internalized working models of attachment relationships, which guide ideas about the self and expectations about how caregivers might behave (Bretherton, Ridgeway, & Cassidy, 1990). Several studies have examined attachment representations in young children with an imprisoned mother. Poehlmann (2005b) found high rates of insecurity in attachment representations of children's caregivers and imprisoned mothers. Younger children were more likely to have insecure representations than older children, and higher-quality home environments were linked with more secure attachment representations. Poehlmann, Park, Bouffiou, Abrahams, Shlafer, and Hahn (2008) found attachment representations of children being raised by custodial grandparents in the context of maternal imprisonment did not differ from those of children being raised by custodial grandparents for other reasons, and that insecure attachment

representations were associated with elevated externalizing behavior problems. These findings point to the importance of the caregiving and home context in buffering children from the potentially negative effects of parental incarceration.

Practitioners are often interested in the experience of young children visiting their incarcerated parent, which has the potential to be stressful and therefore may activate children's attachment systems. Recently, several studies used observations of visits between young children and their incarcerated parent to examine attachment-related constructs. A recent study of preschoolers' visitation with their parents in jail suggests that children increasingly displayed maintenance behaviors with their caregivers, such as proximity seeking and clinging, possibly indicating distress, although positive emotions directed toward the parent, such as smiling and saying "I love you," were also observed (Poehlmann-Tynan et al., 2015). Poehlmann-Tynan and colleagues (2017) found that young children who witnessed their jailed father's criminal activity or arrest were less likely to be rated as securely attached to their caregivers, using the Attachment Q-Sort (AQS). Additionally, children whose caregivers demonstrated more sensitivity and responsivity in interactions and who provided a higher-quality home environment had higher security scores on the AQS. Children with more attachment-related behaviors and emotions while visiting their parent in jail were rated higher on the AQS. Findings suggest that young children's attachment system is central to their experience of visitation and other incarceration-related events.

Attachment security is often studied within the context of prison nurseries and other parent-child relationship-focused interventions with parents and their young children and infants. Building on earlier pilot work (Baradon, Fonagy, Bland, Lenard, & Slead, 2008), Slead, Baradon, and Fonagy (2013) conducted a cluster randomized control trial of an attachment-based prison nursery intervention for imprisoned mothers in the UK. They found that reflective functioning and mother-infant interaction deteriorated in the control group, and did not change in the

intervention group. However, no assessment of infant attachment was conducted. Condon (2017) conducted a qualitative study of infants' experiences in a prison nursery program and reported that 59% of infants had positive relational health with their mothers upon leaving prison, although standard attachment assessments were not administered. She also reported that, while in the program, every infant had a healthy, positive relationship with at least one adult, if not the mother, then with a staff member in the program or family member who came to visit regularly. Additionally, infants who co-resided with their mothers in a prison nursery achieved similar rates of secure attachment as community samples, as assessed using the Strange Situation Procedure (Byrne, Goshin, & Joestl, 2010). The high proportion of secure attachment was notable in the high risk context, and longer co-residence was associated with higher rates of secure attachment. Similar rates of secure attachment were found by Cassidy et al. (2010) in the context of a jail diversion program. Neither of these studies were able to include a control group nor randomize mothers to treatment due to practical and ethical concerns; thus, comparisons were made with preexisting published data. A more detailed review of outcomes and issues in prison nursery programs can be found in Chap. 12, this volume.

Another intervention study examined changes in father-child interaction quality among fathers incarcerated in juvenile detention facilities and their infants and toddlers while taking part in the Baby Elmo visitation intervention (Barr, Brito, Zocca, Reina, Rodriguez, & Shauffer, 2011; Richeda et al., 2015). Fathers showed significant improvement in emotional responsiveness, communication, and interactional quality; however, there was no comparison group. Infant attachment was not directly assessed. Taken together, findings reaffirm the key role of attachment processes in this developmental period and suggest that programs for incarcerated parents and their infants and young children that focus on enhancing the parent-child relationship may be particularly beneficial.

The body of work examining attachment in young children and infants of incarcerated

parents is growing, but some challenges remain. Most studies of attachment and parental responsiveness in infants and young children with incarcerated parents focus on children of imprisoned mothers (Condon 2017; Byrne, et al., 2010; Poehlmann, 2005b; Poehlmann, Park et al., 2008; Slead et al., 2013). Examining attachment processes in children of imprisoned mothers is important, as most imprisoned mothers were primary caregivers prior to incarceration. However, the majority of infants and young children affected by parental incarceration experience an incarcerated father, and more research should examine attachment quality with caregivers while fathers are incarcerated, as well as attachment with incarcerated fathers. Further, only two studies collected data from comparison groups (Poehlmann, Park, et al., 2008, Slead, et al., 2013). For a more detailed discussion of attachment and children of incarcerated parents prior to 2010, see Poehlmann (2010). Given the central importance of attachment in this developmental period, combined with the critical role of secure caregiving in resilience processes, further research on attachment processes in young children and infants of incarcerated parents is imperative to inform policy and interventions. It should also be noted that interventions for children with incarcerated parents have not typically focused on children's caregivers, at least as discussed in the research literature (see Wildeman, Haskins, & Poehlmann-Tynan, 2018, and Chap. 9 this volume, for discussion).

### **Behavior Problems**

Most research examining the potential impact of parental incarceration on young children includes a focus on behavioral outcomes, likely for several reasons. Behavioral disturbances in early childhood are linked to an increased likelihood of delinquency and eventual criminal justice involvement (Campbell, Shaw, & Gilliom, 2000; White, Moffitt, Earls, & Robins, 1990). Experiencing the incarceration of a parent is classified as an adverse childhood experience and may be experienced as a traumatic event; thus, trauma symptomatology and comorbid behavioral disturbances may be present (Arditti & Savla, 2015).

Behavior is central to understanding the experience and well-being of children during this age period (Lieberman, Silverman, & Pawl, 2000).

Elevated externalizing problems, especially among boys, is the most robust finding regarding behavior problems in the young children of incarcerated parents. Using data from the Fragile Families and Child Well-being (FFCW) Study (summarized in Chap. 5, this volume), Geller, Cooper, Garfinkel, Schwartz-Soicher, and Mincy (2012) found that paternal incarceration predicted elevated aggressive behavior at age 5, especially for boys. This association held even after controlling for multiple socio-demographic risk factors and was still significant, though somewhat attenuated, for children who did not reside with their father prior to his incarceration. Additionally, paternal incarceration had a stronger effect on aggressive behaviors than paternal absence for other reasons, suggesting a unique effect of paternal incarceration above and beyond the disruption of parental separation. Similarly, other studies using the FFCW dataset found that paternal incarceration predicted elevated externalizing behaviors at age three and five, again especially for boys (Craigie, 2011; Geller, Garfinkel, Cooper, & Mincy, 2009; Haskins, 2014; Wildeman, 2010). This association may differ based on contextual factors. For example, Craigie (2011) found that the effect of paternal incarceration on boys' aggressive behavior was moderated by race, such that the effect only held for Black and Hispanic boys. A discussion of the strengths and challenges of using the FFCW study to examine outcomes for children with incarcerated parents is provided in Chap. 5.

Although the association between paternal incarceration and externalizing behavior problems is found fairly consistently, support for parental incarceration and internalizing in preschoolers is lacking. Some studies, all using the FFCW dataset, found no association between paternal incarceration and parent-reported internalizing problems at ages 3 and 5 (Craigie, 2011; Geller et al., 2012, 2009).

Most studies examined behavior outcomes using the FFCW; however, two studies used different samples and methods. One study looked

at behavior problems in preschoolers who had spent time as infants with their mothers in a prison nursery program. Results indicated that they had significantly fewer withdrawn and anxious/depressed behaviors than preschoolers who were separated from their mothers due to incarceration, though the two groups did not differ on aggressive and attention problems (Goshin, Byrne, & Blanchard-Lewis, 2014). However, the comparison group was drawn from the FFCW study and was not a true control group. Results suggest that prison nursery programs may have beneficial effects beyond attachment security and beyond infancy. Another study examined emotion recognition, assessed via an emotion recognition task completed by the children, in 3 to 8 year-olds (Hindt, Davis, Schubert, Poehlmann-Tynan, & Shlafer, 2016). No differences in emotion recognition were found between children of jailed parents and those without, and emotion recognition improved with age in both groups.

In general, research suggests that young children experiencing parental incarceration are at risk for elevated externalizing problems. Not only are behavior problems important for understanding young children's well-being as preschoolers, but they are also important for future development. Regulated behavior and positive social-emotional development in early childhood are building blocks for later stage-salient tasks, including academic achievement, getting along with one's peers and following rules (Cicchetti, 1993). For example, Haskins (2014) reports that increased behavior problems at the onset of formal schooling put children of incarcerated parents at a disadvantage early on and disproportionately impact the academic success of African American boys. Indeed, Haskins reported a significant effect of paternal incarceration on special education placement for African American boys at age 9, which was partially mediated by increased behavior problems at age 5. Further research is needed to trace the effects of experiencing early parental incarceration on children's developmental trajectory and future maladaptive behavior.

### **Cognitive and Language Outcomes**

Several studies have compared cognitive skills between young children with incarcerated parents and those without. Geller and colleagues (2012, 2009) and Haskins (2014) did not find a significant effect of paternal incarceration on children's receptive vocabulary scores at age 3 and 5 years. Poehlmann (2005a) reported that about a third of young children with an imprisoned mother scored in the subaverage range on a cognitive assessment, and that rates of delayed cognitive functioning were about one and a half times the number expected from a standardization population. No studies have examined cognitive and language functioning of infants under the age of 2 when experiencing parental incarceration.

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### **Practice and Policy Recommendations**

By now, the threat of parental incarceration to child well-being is well documented and, in the context of offering policy and practice recommendations, it must be said that large-scale efforts to reduce the number of children affected by parental incarceration in the first place would be most effective at preventing deleterious impacts and promoting positive child and family well-being (see Chap. 13, this volume). A discussion of such efforts includes attention to alternatives to incarceration, adequate AODA treatment, effective anti-poverty policies, and a serious investment in the youngest members of our society and their families (Aguiar & Leavell, 2017; Clear & Austin, 2009; Shonkoff, 2014).

Research examining infants and young children affected by parental incarceration is still limited; however, many current policies and practices regarding this population can confidently be condemned as antithetical to positive child development. Four examples of possibilities for improvement include adopting best-practice arrest guidelines when young children are present, supporting families during the

visitation process by implementing child-friendly procedures, implementing additional prison nurseries, and providing resources for parents and their children and families as they integrate back into their communities.

### **Guidelines for Arrest of Parents**

The International Association Chiefs of Police has developed detailed policy and procedure recommendations to guide law enforcement in parental arrests that minimize harm to children (International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2014). Recommendations in the report include avoiding arrest in front of children, supporting parents in calming their children, explaining to children what will happen next, and making sure children are left with a caregiver that is known to them. Sample policy, webinars, online training, and other training materials are available at <https://www.theiacp.org/resources/safeguarding-children-of-arrested-parents-toolkit>.

### **Supporting Families During Visitation**

With relatively little effort, correctional facilities could make changes to visiting practices to promote developmentally appropriate visits with reduced stress for caregivers, incarcerated parents, and children. For example, facilities may provide books, toys, and snacks as well as support staff to assist families in structuring visits that are attuned to the needs of very young children (Peterson, Fontaine, Kurs, & Cramer, 2015). One resource that may be particularly helpful for young children is the Sesame Street's Little Children: Big Challenges toolkit on incarceration (<https://www.sesamestreet.org/toolkits/incarceration>). The toolkit offers concrete advice and vocabulary to caregivers and parents in supporting their preschooler with visits and processing the incarceration of their parent. Additional family-friendly visitation recommendations are discussed elsewhere in this volume (Chap. 10, this volume).

### **Prison Nurseries**

A small but growing literature supports the efficacy of prison nursery programs.<sup>1</sup> The evidence indicates reduced recidivism and positive

outcomes for both mothers and infants (see Chap. 12, this volume). In cases where alternatives to incarceration are not possible, adequately funded prison nurseries should be considered for incarcerated mothers and their babies (Byrne, 2010). Moreover, because the positive effects of prison nurseries can deteriorate after dyads reintegrate into their communities, resources and supports are needed during this time of transition.

*Support for families during reentry.* Reentry from correctional facilities is a critical transition time for families. Using a family systems perspective, Begun, Hodge, and Early (2017) detail the complex considerations in family reintegration. Drawing from a framework originally developed for the reintegration of service members following deployment, five risks in the incarceration situation were identified: incomplete understanding, impaired family communication, impaired parenting, impaired family organization, and lack of guiding belief systems. For each risk, concrete possible program responses are detailed. Some examples of strategies for practitioners working with families that are particularly relevant to families with young children include proactive family planning for absence and reentry, training on collaborative family skills and maintaining care routines, parent leadership training, activities/assignments to enhance family structure and closeness, and highlighting strengths and past successes. Generally speaking, strength-based strategies aimed at supporting family functioning that begin well before the reentry are likely to be protective for young children and promote the likelihood of a successful process. One good resource that practitioners and families can access is the Family & Children Toolkit: A Primer for Families Supporting Their Loved One's Reentry, available at <http://www.rootandrebond.org/>

<sup>1</sup>Some prison nurseries in the USA include nurseries in the Bedford Hills Correctional Facility, the Nebraska Correctional Center for Women, the Ohio Reformatory for Women, and the Washington Corrections Center for Women. Interested readers can refer to the National Institute of Correction's National Directory of Programs for Women with Criminal Justice Involvement (<https://info.nicic.gov/jiwp/>).



[reentry-planning-toolkit](#) (Root & Rebound, 2016). Although it has some information that is specific to California, the toolkit is an accessible guide to the main legal issues involved in reentry. Another resource is the National Reentry Resource Center, located at <https://csgjusticecenter.org/nrrc>, which provides a large library of resources, programs, and factsheets aimed at successful reentry (National Reentry Resource Center, n.d.). Additional discussion about reentry is provided in Chap. 15 of this volume.

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### **Conducting Research with Young Children of Incarcerated Parents: Practical Advice from the Field**

Conducting research with infants and young children and their families experiencing parental incarceration is a unique endeavor that requires persistence and tenacity, but is especially rewarding. Given the dearth of information regarding infants and young children and their families experiencing the incarceration of a parent, we extend practical recommendations to encourage future scholarship with the specific purpose of studying this phenomenon. Thus, our recommendations are most pertinent for those wishing to engage in primary data collection with families.

The first step in establishing a study of children with incarcerated parents is often to develop working relationships with local county jails or state and federal prisons. These establishments serve as gatekeepers for finding incarcerated parents and as a springboard for subsequently locating their children and caregivers, as young children with incarcerated parents are difficult to locate in the community. Jails hold individuals following arrest as well as those awaiting hearings, trials, conviction, and sentencing, and they confine individuals serving sentences for misdemeanor crimes, whereas state and federal facilities typically house inmates convicted of felonies. Depending on the research question and if the protocol includes observing visitation, establishing connections with one or more facilities may be appropriate. In general, county jails

located in central cities may be easier to schedule. Moreover, families can rely on public transportation or researchers can provide transportation support (e.g., taxis, Uber) within a reasonable distance. State or federal facilities may be hours or more away from where the family resides, making it more costly and time consuming to visit the imprisoned parent, especially with young children. However, prison visits are more likely to occur face-to-face at longer intervals, while the type of visitation at local jails varies significantly, from barrier (i.e., video or Plexiglas) to contact (less common), and is sometimes reliant on the parent's behavior and whether they have earned additional visitation privileges (Shlafer, Loper, & Schillmoeller, 2015). Regardless of whether one works with jails or prisons, one possibility is to contact the local extension agency, situated at most land grant universities, as its extension agents may have previously established relationships with certain correctional facilities. Contacting non-profit organizations who work on incarceration and reentry issues can also be fruitful.

Once partnerships are established with one or more institutions, it is important to submit human subjects' review far in advance of the start date. Many institutional review boards (IRBs) purposed with the protection of human subjects are less familiar with this particular type of research, when many groups of vulnerable populations are involved (i.e., incarcerated individuals, young children, and sometimes pregnant women). Special review processes are required for research with the incarcerated. Ensuring approval of final protocols and other study details well before you begin data collection will safeguard a timely commencement to the study and provide ample time for recruitment. In our experience, recruitment efforts have extended far beyond what was initially planned, partially due to negotiating jail or prison schedules that require specific visitation hours with incarcerated individuals. Connecting with seasoned scholars in the field and learning about their previous successes can improve the chances of experiencing a steadfast approval process. One should also consult the federal guidelines that specify what

research is allowed with incarcerated individuals because they are a protected group.

There are also necessary steps to gain trust within the community from which you hope to recruit. Substantial headway can be made by hiring local residents who are well connected and who are fully aware, if not immersed, in the culture and customs of a particular community, as well as who are familiar with the nuances of working in—including conducting research within—a correctional facility. The National Institutes of Health (NIH) also provides an additional level of protection to participants in the form of a certificate of confidentiality (CoC, <https://humansubjects.nih.gov/coc>). This document protects the privacy of research participants by providing legal protections against disclosing identifiable information collected as part of a research study. The CoC also assures that researchers will not be automatically forced to testify if subpoenaed. Effective October 1, 2017, all NIH-funded projects using identifiable, sensitive information are automatically issued a CoC. If the study is not federally funded, researchers can apply for a CoC from NIH.

Finally, once fieldwork begins, it is often helpful to meet families where they are. Some families may be experiencing homelessness, require visits to a laboratory or other location, and be unable to host a home visit. For families that are housed, offering childcare may be particularly helpful, especially if the caregiver is solely responsible for the care of young children. It may also be necessary to negotiate complex confidentiality issues within a family. For example, if the caregiver has a restraining order against the incarcerated parent, prepare explanations about the nature of confidentiality in the context of legal issues. Finally, prior to meeting a family, it is important to learn what the child has been told about his or her parent's incarceration. Respecting these boundaries, and incorporating them into the consent process, will build trust and ensure that the research team does not unwittingly disclose particularly sensitive information. If research involves data collection with other sources, such as teachers, care must be taken to avoid revealing the fact that the child is

or has experienced the incarceration of a parent, thus maintaining the family's right to decide whether or not to disclose this information. This may mean taking particular care around consent from language, study title, mailing forms, and other sources that might reveal the nature of the study. These are examples of issues that are important in human subjects' protections and thus to IRBs, and why special reviews by the IRB of research conducted with incarcerated individuals are required.

Similar to other research with vulnerable families, conducting primary research with children of incarcerated parents carries some likelihood of emotional distress and need for extensive debriefing and reflective practice opportunities for researchers and research assistants. Including student assistants can be invaluable as an educational opportunity, but care must be taken to consider the potential emotional impacts and adequate training. Resources and ample time should be allotted for processing and additional support for research team members.

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## Conclusion

Research with infants and young children of incarcerated parents remains limited, but the last decade has seen increasing contributions to the literature. Parental incarceration represents a significant risk factor for this age group, and families with young children affected by incarceration by and large experience multiple threats that are known to impact child development. However, children's experiences vary and protective home environments and caregiving contexts are likely important sources of resilience for this vulnerable population.

Future research directions should prioritize projects that result in a solid knowledge base that is easily translatable to policy makers. Bogen-schneider (2015) argues that researchers in this area should focus on replication studies and traditional experimental designs where possible in order to produce research that is likely to drive policy change. She notes, "Research on incarceration, no matter how good, has a better chance

of influencing policy decisions when it is designed and communicated in policy-relevant ways that emphasize how actions to protect children and reunite former offenders with their families benefit the larger social and economic goals of society” (p. 109). Combining cutting-edge research and intervention on adverse childhood experiences (of which parental incarceration is one), trauma, and early brain development can facilitate the integration of research in very young children and infants experiencing parental incarceration into the public discourse. To this end, interdisciplinary work including members of key and complementary fields such as developmental psychology, infant mental health, neuroscience, economics, law, medicine, public health, psychiatry, and sociology has the potential to make great strides in improving the well-being of the very youngest facing the consequences of incarceration.

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# Parental Incarceration During Middle Childhood and Adolescence

# 8

Rebecca J. Shlafer, Laurel Davis and Danielle H. Dallaire

## Abstract

In 2004, more than 500,000 children between 10 and 14 years, and more than 250,000 youth between 15 and 17 years old, had a parent incarcerated in prison. These figures underestimate the total number of older children and adolescents affected by a parent's incarceration, as they do not account for over 700,000 adults who were held in local jails or the thousands of other adults with minor children who were on probation or parole during that same year. Middle childhood and adolescence are important developmental periods, each characterized by significant changes in cognitive, social, and emotional skills. Compared to infants and younger children, older children and adolescents have greater emotional and cognitive capacities to understand the facts about a parent's incarceration, process the loss of their parent, and express their preferences about their living arrangements and contact with the incarcerated parent. In this chapter, we sum-

marize the empirical research on parental incarceration among older children and adolescents, and consider the implications of a parent's incarceration for children's wellbeing at home, school, and in their communities.

According to the most recently published national data from the Bureau of Justice Statistics (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008), 30–34% of parents in state and federal prisons have children between the ages of 5 and 9, an additional 32–35% have children between the ages of 10–14, and another 15–16% have children between the ages of 15–17. Thus, the majority of parents in state and federal prisons have a child in the developmental periods of middle childhood or adolescence. These figures are dated and underestimate the total number of children and adolescents affected by a parent's incarceration, as they do not account for over 700,000 adults who were held in local jails during that same year (Sabol & Minton, 2008). More recent data from the National Survey of Children's Health indicate that, on average, eight percent of US children between 6 and 17 years old have experienced the incarceration of a residential parent at some time during the child's life (Sacks, Murphey, & Moore, 2014).

There is a growing literature on children with incarcerated parents in these age groups. In this chapter, we consider how parental incarceration impacts the development of children's age-appropriate competencies during middle

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childhood (roughly, 6–12 years old) and adolescence (roughly, 12–17 years old) across developmental domains and contexts. After briefly reviewing relevant theoretical frameworks, we review research examining how parental incarceration is related to older children and adolescents' physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development, at home, in school, and in their communities. We conclude with suggestions for directions for future research on older children and adolescents with incarcerated parents, and consider practice and policy implications given the current state of knowledge.

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### **Theoretical Frameworks Guiding Research on Children and Adolescents with Incarcerated Parents**

Several theories provide guiding frameworks for considering the cognitive, social, and emotional development of children and adolescents with incarcerated parents. Here, we briefly consider Piaget's stages of cognitive development, Erikson's psychosocial stages of development, and Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory as they relate to children and youth with incarcerated parents.

#### **Piaget and Cognitive Development**

During middle childhood and through the adolescent years, children and youth show considerable gains in their cognitive sophistication. Between the ages of four and seven, children's understanding of mental states, rules, and emotions grows rapidly (Hoffman, 2000), and children become more competent at taking multiple perspectives on a given situation, a phenomenon Piaget referred to as "decentration" (1952). Due to these gains, older children may be less likely than younger children to blame themselves for their parent's incarceration. Adolescence is characterized by an increased capacity for formal operational thinking and the development of

abstract decision making. Adolescents with incarcerated parents may be better equipped than younger children to understand the complexities of a parent's incarceration, in part due to improvements in language and communication skills.

#### **Erikson and Social and Emotional Development**

Erikson's psychosocial stages theory (1950) provides a useful framework for understanding children's development during middle childhood and adolescence. Erikson posited that in middle childhood, one must develop competencies and skills in the tools of society, such as in the academic and peer domains. Parental incarceration can disrupt the development of these competencies by exposing children to risks that may undermine their potential to succeed in school and social contexts. During adolescence, youth are exploring identity formation, which involves balancing psychological and emotional connections to the family, while becoming an autonomous individual. Youth with incarcerated parents may face a number of difficulties navigating the tasks of identity development, such as seeking to maintain identification with a parent, but not with that parent's criminality.

#### **Bronfenbrenner and Contextual Influences on Development**

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory can also be used to consider how parental incarceration affects the environments in which children develop. These environments include children's proximal contexts of development, termed "microsystems" (e.g., home, school); "exosystems", or contexts that affect children indirectly (e.g., parent's workplace); and the "macrosystem", which is the cultural context (e.g., cultural norms). "Mesosystems" refer to interactions between microsystems, such as parents' involvement with their children's school and teachers.

Children with incarcerated parents may be exposed to more proximal risk factors in microsystem contexts, including harsh, unresponsive parenting practices (e.g., Phillips, Burns, Wagner, & Barth, 2004), stigma in school settings (e.g., Dallaire, Ciccone, & Wilson, 2010; Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008), and risk for association with delinquent peers (e.g., Hanlon et al., 2005). Children of incarcerated parents also face risks outside of their immediate contexts of development. For example, research has demonstrated that parental incarceration reduces families' economic resources (Kjellstrand & Eddy, 2011; Western & Wildeman, 2009), even after release (Arditti & Few, 2006; Travis & Waul, 2004). Within the mesosystem, children of incarcerated parents face issues related to inadequate visitation environments. An ecological systems framework is particularly valuable for considering influences across systems, such as how social stigma and isolation due to parental incarceration may influence children's academic functioning and behavior problems. An ecological approach is equally valuable for examining successful adaptation in the face of parental incarceration. For example, supportive and stable relationships between children and their caregivers may combat stigma and positively influence interactions with peers, leading to better social and emotional adjustment in youth.

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## Developmental Outcomes During Middle Childhood and Adolescence

### Physical Development in the Context of Parental Incarceration

Below, we briefly review research that has examined parental incarceration as a risk factor for physical health outcomes during middle childhood and/or adolescence. We acknowledge, however, considerable research has examined how parental incarceration during these developmental periods may be related to physical health later in life, including obesity (Roettger & Boardman, 2012; Lee, Fang, & Luo, 2013), reproductive health (Gottlieb, 2016), and various

chronic conditions, such as asthma, high cholesterol, diabetes, heart disease, HIV/AIDS, and hepatitis C (Miller & Barnes, 2015; Lee, Fang, & Luo, 2013).

In recent analyses using data from a large statewide survey of 119,029 youth in public schools in 8th, 9th, and 11th grades, Hiolski and colleagues (Hiolski, Eisenberg, & Shlafer, 2019) found that parental incarceration was a risk factor for a variety of physical health indicators, including lower levels of physical activity, fruit and vegetable consumption, sleep, and higher levels of fast food and sugar-sweetened beverage consumption, after controlling for key sociodemographic characteristics.

Sexual and reproductive health is particularly relevant during adolescence and has implications for successful navigation of future developmental tasks, such as parenting and romantic relationships. In a sample of 142 youth and young adults (12–24 years old), Nebbitt, Voisin, and Tirmazi (2017) examined associations between parental incarceration and youths' onset of sexual intercourse. In statistical models that included youth gender, maternal and paternal incarceration, and parent substance abuse, youth with incarcerated fathers were found to have initiated sex earlier than their peers with no history of parental incarceration.

### Cognitive and Language Development in the Context of Parental Incarceration

During middle childhood and adolescence, children experience considerable growth in cognitive and language skills, which might help them cope with and adapt to a parent's incarceration. Adolescents typically develop the cognitive capacities to understand right from wrong, abstractions related to rules and laws, and the potential consequences of their actions and the actions of others. Thus, many adolescents are capable of understanding why a parent was incarcerated, whereas younger children are not as likely to understand the consequences of breaking a law. Folk and colleagues (2014) examined children's

understanding of incarceration in a sample of 106 youth (9–14 years old), in which 42% of the youth had experienced parental arrest, and/or incarceration. Older participants provided a more accurate description of the criminal justice system. However, age interacted with parental incarceration, such that older youth with experience with the criminal justice system had a more accurate representation of the criminal justice system than youth with less experience. This suggests that with experience, younger children may be capable of demonstrating an accurate understanding of the criminal justice system.

Unlike younger children, older children and adolescents are capable of verbally expressing their thoughts about their parent's incarceration. They may ask questions, express their feelings about their parents' behaviors, or communicate their preferences about placement and contact during a parent's incarceration. Research has shown that caregivers typically regulate children's contact with incarcerated parents, particularly when children are young (Enos, 2001; Poehlmann, Shlafer, Maes, & Hanneman, 2008). However, little is known about older children and adolescents' preferences for contact, or how they may maintain contact with the imprisoned parent during the incarceration. In one study, Shlafer and Poehlmann (2010) found that caregivers of younger children often acted as "gatekeepers" of children's contact with incarcerated parents. However, it was common for adolescents to have contact with the incarcerated parent that was facilitated by someone other than the adolescent's primary caregiver, bypassing the caregiver's gatekeeping role. Some adolescents reported that they communicated with the incarcerated parent using personal cell phones, writing letters, or arranging visits to the prison without their caregiver's knowledge.

The circumstances surrounding a parent's incarceration can be complex and confusing, even for the adults involved. Having some understanding of these complexities may be overwhelming for older children and adolescents and may itself be a source of stress. In a sample of 32 children (7–17 years old) with a parent in jail, Dallaire, Ciccone, and Wilson (2010) found that

when children witnessed their parent's criminal activity, arrest, and sentencing, they had lower receptive verbal skills compared to their peers with incarcerated parents who had not witnessed these events. Dallaire, Ciccone, and Wilson noted that exposure to these events is likely traumatic for children and that trauma may compromise their cognitive and language development. Additional research is needed that explores older children and adolescents' understanding of their parent's incarceration, their preferences for placement and contact, and how these issues affect their developmental outcomes.

## **Social and Emotional Development in the Context of Parental Incarceration**

### **Family Relationships**

Attachment to parents and other significant adults is no less important during middle childhood and adolescence than it was during infancy and early childhood (Marvin & Britner, 2008). Maintaining contact during a parent's incarceration can be difficult for many reasons, including location of the prison, cost of travel or telephone calls, and conflicted family relationships (Myers, Smarsh, & Amlund-Hagen, 1999; Poehlmann, 2005a). When contact with the incarcerated parent is infrequent, inconsistent, or of poor quality, youth may perceive their incarcerated parent as emotionally unavailable. Findings from probability samples of prisoners in the USA suggest that few incarcerated parents receive regular visits from their children, and statistics regarding the frequency and type of contact with the incarcerated parent have not been examined according to the child's age (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008; Mumola, 2000).

A few studies provide information about older children and adolescents' experiences of contact with their incarcerated parents. In a sample of families affected by maternal incarceration, Trice and Brewster (2004) found that adolescents who communicated more with their incarcerated mothers were less likely to have been suspended or drop out of school compared to those who communicated less. However, there were no



significant differences in noncompliance at home (e.g., arriving home after curfew) or in youth arrests.

In a sample of children who ranged in age between 9 and 15 years, Shlafer and Poehlmann (2010) found that children who experienced contact with their incarcerated parent reported fewer feelings of alienation and anger toward the parent compared to children who had no contact. However, they found no differences between groups regarding children's feelings of trust, communication, or overall feelings about the incarcerated parent.

In a study of 45 single caregiver-child dyads, Arditti and Savla (2015) examined visitation as a potential mediator of child trauma symptomatology among children (average age 10 years) with and without incarcerated parents. They found that reports of child trauma symptomatology were significantly higher among children with incarcerated parents than the comparison group. In addition, they found that parents' perception of their children's functioning was mediated by the quality of the child's experiences visiting their parent. Specifically, when visits were perceived as problematic or distressing, children's trauma symptomatology was higher. The authors cautioned that visitation may be a "proximal traumatic reminder" (p. 558) for children and recommended that visiting environments and programs be used to improve children and families' experiences in these settings.

Similarly, Dallaire, Zeman and Thrash (2015a) examined type of contact youth had with their incarcerated mother (i.e., mail, phone, and visits) in relation to children's internalizing and externalizing behaviors. They found more frequent physical contact was associated with greater internalizing behavior problems, whereas mail and phone contact was associated with fewer internalizing behavior problems. The authors suggested that "children may be able to create their own gentler version of reality about their incarcerated mother that is abruptly dispelled when they encounter an in-person visit" (p. 35).

Caregivers provide a crucial context for children and adolescents' social and emotional development. For older children and adolescents with incarcerated parents, the role of the caregiver before a parent's incarceration, the consistency and dependability of the caregiver during the parent's incarceration, and the caregivers' psychological and tangible resources, are likely to have important implications for youths' developmental outcomes. Caregivers are often single parents with limited financial resources, low educational attainment, and poor mental health (Poehlmann, 2005b). Combined, these risk factors have important implications for older children and adolescents' living environments and the quality of the caregiver-child relationships.

Several studies have examined caregiver characteristics and other family processes as they relate to children and adolescents' social and emotional development when a parent is incarcerated. Shlafer and Poehlmann (2010) examined attachment and caregiving in a sample of youth whose parents were incarcerated, and found high rates of internalizing (19%) and externalizing (33%) symptoms. In children aged 7–15 years, they found that when caregivers reported less positive feelings about the child, both teachers and caregivers reported more externalizing behavior problems six months later, after controlling for externalizing problems at intake. These results suggest that the caregiver-child relationship may be important for children's behavioral outcomes in families affected by parental incarceration.

Aaron and Dallaire (2010) analyzed the Children-at-Risk dataset (see Harrell, Cavanagh & Sridharan, 1999) to assess the impact of family dynamics on children with incarcerated parents. Family dynamics constituted parent-child interactions (e.g., parent-child conflict), as well as interactions between and behaviors of other members in the household (e.g., sibling delinquency), and significant experiences of the members of the household (e.g., parental drug use, family victimization). Their dataset included a sample of 874 children aged 10–14 years

recruited from high-risk neighborhoods in four US cities, 18% of whom experienced a history of parental incarceration at some point during their life, and 4% of whom experienced parental incarceration during the course of the 2-year study. After controlling for children's experience of sociodemographic risk factors (e.g., parental unemployment, drug use), history of parental incarceration predicted problematic family processes, including family victimization, and higher levels of sibling delinquency. History of parental incarceration was also associated with higher levels of parent-reported child delinquency. However, after accounting for these problematic family processes, history of parental incarceration no longer predicted child delinquency.

These results suggest that although parental incarceration is associated with negative family processes and children's delinquent behavior, when familial factors are accounted for, parental incarceration may no longer predict child delinquency. Aaron and Dallaire (2010) also found that the experience of recent parental incarceration, (i.e., within the course of the 2-year study) predicted higher levels of parent-child conflict. This finding was robust after controlling for sociodemographic risk experiences and previous exposure to parental incarceration. These results suggest that a recent parental incarceration may negatively impact family processes and interactions following the parent's release from prison, and that the negative impact of parental incarceration on children's wellbeing may be at least partially mediated by problematic parent-child interactions.

Using prospective longitudinal data as part of a randomized control trial, Kjellstrand and Eddy (2011) examined parent health and parenting strategies among families that had experienced parental incarceration with those who had not. Results indicated that parents in families with a history of parental incarceration experienced more depression and worse physical health than parents in families who had not experienced incarceration. In addition, parents in families with a history of parental incarceration were significantly more likely to report using inconsistent

and inappropriate discipline strategies than parents with no history of parental incarceration. Their findings indicate that children and youth in homes affected by parental incarceration are exposed to numerous risks in their proximal environments. Risks like harsh and inconsistent discipline have been shown to be associated with affiliation with delinquent peers and adjustment problems in adolescence.

### **Peer Relationships**

In contrast to younger children, the influence of peers and friends becomes increasingly important during middle childhood and especially adolescence. Adolescence is characterized by increasing concerns about peers' impressions and the need for approval from friends. Parental incarceration can be a socially stigmatizing and isolating experience, particularly during a period of development in which peer relationships and intimacy in friendships become increasingly important. Despite the numerous theoretical and anecdotal writings on this topic (e.g., Adalist-Estrin, 2005), few empirical studies have examined the effects of social stigma, secrecy, and isolation regarding parental incarceration among older children and adolescents.

Nesmith and Ruhland (2008) conducted interviews with children and teens who were affected by a parent's incarceration. They found that adolescents frequently reported challenges in their social lives, including circumstances that inhibited or interfered with their abilities to connect to individuals outside their families, difficulties developing a sense of belonging to their neighborhoods and communities, and trouble-making friends and relating to their peers.

Johnson and Easterling (2015) conducted in-depth interviews with 10 adolescents. Their qualitative analyses revealed three strategies that youth commonly used to cope with their experiences of parental incarceration: de-identification from the incarcerated parent, desensitization to incarceration, and strength through control. De-identification may be considered an avoidant strategy, as youth appeared to distance themselves from the stress and stigma associated with having an incarcerated parent during interactions



with friends and peers. Desensitization was described as a young person's normalization or minimization of their experience with parental incarceration. Finally, strength through control was described as ways that young people "found strength by maintaining some control over their lives" as it related to their parent's incarceration (p. 257).

### **Relationships with Teachers and School Outcomes**

During middle childhood and adolescence, children spend most of their waking hours in school. As such, school is an important context to consider for youth with incarcerated parents. A growing body of research has examined the impact of parental incarceration on children's interactions with their teachers and in school contexts. In Nesmith and Ruhland's (2008) qualitative study of 34 children (aged 8–17 years), all "seemed keenly aware of negative assumptions that might be made about them because they had a parent in prison" (p. 1123). A major issue that emerged from their work was the social challenges these children experienced in regard to fears of stigmatization by teachers and peers. The researchers identified an intense internal tension between children wanting to talk about their parent's incarceration and fear of the negative consequences of discussing it. They noted that "the children who suffered from social stigma and isolation were at times able to locate some supportive resources; but on the whole, they were without role models, unable to connect to others like themselves, or to find trustworthy people who would help them feel less marginalized in general" (p. 1123). Such feelings of isolation from peers and other adults, including teachers, can hamper children's development of supportive, intimate peer relations, thus undermining emerging social and academic competence.

Dallaire, Ciccone, and Wilson (2010) interviewed 30 teachers about their experiences with children and families affected by incarceration. The teachers identified a variety of risk factors experienced by children affected by parental incarceration, including the instability of their home situations. They noted that home instability was associated with behaviors that made success

at school difficult, such as misplacing book bags or leaving educational materials at various locations. They also identified several emotional reactions, such as "falling apart," which manifest themselves in the classroom and make concentrating difficult. Developmentally, these teachers felt that parental incarceration was more detrimental to elementary and middle school-age children than to adolescents. Though the majority of teachers noted that it would be helpful for them to know about a child dealing with parental incarceration, they also noted that they have witnessed their colleagues be "unsupportive," "unprofessional," and have lowered expectations for children with incarcerated parents.

In a follow-up experiment with elementary school teachers, Dallaire, Ciccone, and Wilson (2010) found further evidence for teacher stigmatization. In this study, 73 elementary school teachers rated their expectations of competency for a fictitious child new to their classroom. Teachers who were randomly assigned to a scenario describing a new student who recently moved in with their grandmother because their mother was "away at prison" rated the child as less competent than teachers randomly assigned to scenarios in which the child's mother was described as being either "away," "away at rehab," or "away at school."

Wildeman and his colleagues (2017) also found evidence of teacher stigmatization of youth with incarcerated fathers. The researchers used vignettes about fictional children to compare teachers' expectations of children's behavior problems in children whose fathers were said to be incarcerated, versus youth whose fathers were not involved in their lives for an unspecified reason. They found having an incarcerated father was associated with a 10–40 percent increase in teachers' expectations for children's behavior problems, and that this effect was stronger for boys than for girls.

Facing stigmatization and having feelings of isolation because of parental incarceration in the school context could negatively affect children and adolescents' interactions with teachers, peers, and other adults, as well as their feelings of acceptance and belonging in an academic environment and their academic outcomes. Little

is known about the processes that influence children's and adolescents' school success or failure when their parents are incarcerated. It is possible that the cumulative effect of stigmatization and negative interactions at school, combined with family risks, contributes to a disinclination to persist in academic endeavors. It is unknown whether (and to what extent) older children and adolescents with incarcerated fathers or mothers experience cognitive delays or prenatal risks that impact their short- and long-term school outcomes. However, a growing body of evidence has documented a range of school-related problems associated with parental incarceration, including truancy, delinquency, suspension, failure, absence from school, drop-out, and disengagement (Hanlon et al., 2005; Trice and Brewster, 2004; Murray and Farrington, 2008a).

Cho (2010) used administrative data from criminal justice, education, employment, and other social and child welfare systems to examine the timing, length, and frequency of maternal incarceration and adolescents' risk for high school dropout. Results indicated that adolescent boys, but not girls, were sensitive to the timing of their mother's incarceration. Boys exposed to maternal incarceration during early adolescence (ages 11–14) had the highest risk of high school dropout, when compared to boys who experienced their mother's incarceration in middle childhood (ages 5–10) or late adolescence (ages 15–17). Cho also found that adolescents' risk for school dropout decreased as the number of maternal incarcerations increased. She posited that frequent and long-term maternal incarcerations may lead to more stable living environments that may promote youths' academic outcomes.

Using data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Adolescent Health (AddHealth), Hagan and Foster (2012) found that parental incarceration was negatively associated with youth's high school grade point average, both for individual students and for students in schools with high rates of maternal incarceration. This examination of school-level spillover effects is an

innovative contribution to the literature examining individual-level effects.

Nichols, Loper, and Meyer (2016) analyzed data from AddHealth to consider the impact of parental incarceration on educational outcomes in adolescence and young adulthood. After controlling for demographic risk factors (e.g., socioeconomic status, parent education), they found that parental incarceration was significantly associated with truancy, cumulative academic achievement, and highest level of education, but with small average effects. They also considered other individual- and school-level risk and protective factors, including school connectedness, parent/family connectedness, school size, and school-based mental health services. They found, for example, that family and school connectedness were compensatory factors for truancy and academic achievement, regardless of youths' experience with parental incarceration.

In her analysis of data from the Fragile Families Study, Haskins (2016) examined paternal incarceration as a risk factor for children's cognitive skills (i.e., verbal ability, reading comprehension, math problem-solving skills, and working memory/attentional capacities) during middle childhood. Results demonstrated that experiencing paternal incarceration before age 9 was associated with lower cognitive skills for both boys and girls, even after controlling for children's cognitive ability before their fathers' incarcerations.

Shlafer, Reedy, and Davis (2017) used a large, statewide survey of adolescents in public schools, alternative learning centers, and juvenile correctional facilities to examine associations between parental incarceration and youths' self-reported school-based outcomes, including grades, discipline, school connectedness, and student engagement. They found consistent and strong negative associations between exposure to parental incarceration and school outcomes among youth in public schools. However, their findings were mixed for youth in alternative learning centers, and there were no significant effects of parental incarceration on school-based

outcomes among youth in juvenile correctional facilities.

Taken together, these results indicate that parental incarceration may be a risk for negative school performance and behaviors during middle childhood and adolescence; however, more research is needed on the potential moderators (i.e., for whom does parental incarceration impact the most) and the mechanisms (i.e., how does parental incarceration impact youths' adjustment in school). Additional research should also explore how parental incarceration during these key developmental periods is related to educational and employment outcomes later in life.

## Behavioral and Psychosocial Outcomes

### Internalizing and externalizing symptoms

A growing body of evidence has examined parental incarceration as a risk factor for youths' internalizing symptoms, including depression, anxiety, withdrawal, self-injury, and suicide, as well as youths' risk for externalizing symptoms and antisocial behavior. Evidence comes from several studies in the USA and abroad that are summarized in Chaps. 5 and 6 of this volume. For example, in their analysis of prospective data from the Cambridge Study on Delinquent Development, Murray and Farrington (2008a, b) found that boys who were separated from a parent before age ten because parental incarceration were more likely to exhibit antisocial behaviors and internalizing symptoms in adolescence and adulthood compared to boys who experienced other types of childhood separations from parents. For example, 61% of the boys who experienced parental incarceration before age ten showed antisocial personality characteristics at age 14 years, whereas only 16–33% of boys in the comparison groups showed such characteristics (Murray & Farrington, 2008b). Further, boys who were separated within the first ten years of life because of a parent's imprisonment had the highest rates of co-occurring internalizing and antisocial problems in adolescence. These findings remained significant even after controlling for parental criminality and other

family risks. While these findings are intriguing, similar analyses using data from a Swedish longitudinal study did not replicate these findings (Murray, Janson & Farrington, 2007).

Other researchers have examined associations between parental incarceration and adolescents' externalizing and internalizing symptoms. Kinner, Alati, Najman, and Williams (2007) found that a history of incarceration for the mother's current partner was associated with more internalizing and externalizing symptoms in adolescents, compared to adolescents whose mothers' partner did not have a history of incarceration. Further, a history of incarceration for the mother's current partner was associated with self-reported internalizing symptoms among girls, although it was not related to externalizing symptoms. In addition, the incarceration of the mother's partner was not significantly related to self-reported behavior problems among boys. However, after controlling for other risk factors (e.g., maternal age and education, family income, maternal mental health and substance use, dyadic adjustment, domestic violence, and parenting style), the associations between arrest and incarceration and children's outcomes became non-significant, suggesting that a history of incarceration in the mother's partner may not have been a unique risk factor for less optimal outcomes when examined in the context of other sociodemographic and family risk factors.

Dallaire, Ciccone, and Wilson (2010) found that children's exposure to incarceration-related events (i.e., parent's criminal activity, arrest, and sentencing) was positively associated with caregiver-reported symptoms of children's anxiety and depression, and negatively correlated with children's self-reports of emotion regulation. In follow-up work with a larger sample of youth with an incarcerated mother ( $N = 151$ , ages 9–12), Dallaire, Zeman, and Thrash (2015b) found that children's exposure to incarceration-related experiences predicted youth's internalizing and externalizing behavior problems over and above the contribution of other risks in the environment (e.g., socioeconomic status, maternal psychopathology). These results suggest that specific, traumatic experiences associated with a

mother's incarceration, like witnessing her arrest, and being separated from siblings during her incarceration, contribute to youth's adaptation during the time of incarceration independently of other risks. However, using this same sample, Zeman, Dallaire, Folk, and Thrash (2017) found that the relationship between youth's experience of incarceration-specific risks and externalizing behaviors was mediated by youths' ability to positively regulate their anger.

Kjellstrand and Eddy (2011) compared parent- and teacher-reported externalizing behavior (assessed at 5th, 8th, and 10th grades) and youth-reported serious delinquency (assessed at 10th grade) among adolescents who had an incarcerated parent before age 10 with their peers who had not experienced parental incarceration. Across all measures, youth with a history of parental incarceration had more externalizing behavior problems and serious delinquency than their peers with no such history.

Shlafer, Poehlmann, and Donelan-McCall (2012) used longitudinal data from the Nurse-Family Partnership intervention program to examine the effects of maternal conviction, arrest, and jail time on adolescents' antisocial and health risk behaviors (e.g., being stopped by police, arrest, substance use) at age 15. After accounting for treatment status, maternal prenatal risk factors (e.g., smoking, prenatal care), child gender, and maternal arrest and conviction, maternal jail time was not a significant predictor of any of the adolescent outcomes they examined. Their findings highlight the importance of examining maternal risk factors and criminal behavior, in addition to confinement, when considering effects on youths' outcomes.

Davis and Shlafer (2017) examined mental health outcomes among adolescents with currently and formerly incarcerated parents. Using data from a statewide survey with 122,180 youth ages 12–19 in public schools, they found that youth with currently and formerly incarcerated parents were significantly more likely than their peers with no history of parental incarceration to self-report internalizing symptoms, purposeful self-injury, suicidal ideation, and suicide attempt. These strong associations remained significant even after

controlling for key sociodemographic characteristics (i.e., race, poverty, family structure). They also examined whether parental closeness moderated the associations between parental incarceration and youths' mental health outcomes. In all of their models, parental closeness was a significant moderator. Notably, though, parental closeness seemed to be most protective for youth without a history of parental incarceration.

### **Substance Use and Abuse**

Unlike Substance use younger children, some degree of risk-taking behaviors is considered normative during adolescence. Substance use is particularly relevant during this period and a growing body of research has examined parental incarceration as a risk for adolescents' substance use and abuse. For example, research by Kinner and colleagues (2007) found that girls whose mothers' partners had ever been imprisoned were more likely to use alcohol and tobacco at age 14, compared to girls whose mothers' partners had never been incarcerated. They also found that the partners' histories of arrest (but not imprisonment) were associated with boys' use of alcohol and tobacco at age 14.

Davis and Shlafer (2017) examined substance use and abuse among a statewide sample of 122,180 youth in 8th, 9th, and 11th grades. They found that youth with currently and formerly incarcerated parents were significantly more likely than their peers with no history of parental incarceration to report early alcohol initiation, recent alcohol use, binge drinking, tobacco use, marijuana use, and prescription drug use. Youth with currently and formerly incarcerated parents were also more likely to self-report substance use dependence and a history of treatment for drug or alcohol abuse than their peers with no history of parental incarceration.

Combined, these studies suggest strong associations between parents' and adolescents' antisocial behaviors. Such behaviors include, but are not limited to, violating the rights of others, breaking the law, and disregard for social standards or the legal system. Although one cannot equate incarceration with the full range of antisocial behaviors, incarcerated individuals have

most likely engaged in some type of antisocial behavior (e.g., stealing, assault, drug use). Scholars have offered numerous and wide-ranging explanations for intergenerational associations in antisocial behavior, including parental modeling of negative behaviors, family socialization regarding the acceptance of deviant behaviors, and lack of supervision (e.g., Patterson, DeBaryshe, & Ramsey, 1989), the heritability of potential genetic markers relevant to antisocial behaviors (e.g., Carey & Goldman, 1997), and the accumulation of risks relevant to children's antisocial behaviors.

It is often assumed that many young people with parents involved in the criminal justice system will grow up to be criminals themselves. Although research has documented an increased risk for offending among youth whose parents were involved in the criminal justice system (Farrington, Barnes, & Lambert, 1996; Murray, Janson, and Farrington, 2007), there is also considerable discontinuity between generations (Bijleveld & Wijkman, 2009). Having an incarcerated parent by no means determines whether or not an adolescent will take the same developmental trajectory. Research on this topic must consider the processes through which antisocial and criminal behaviors are and *are not* transmitted across generations. The specific processes that explain the intergenerational transmission of antisocial behavior remain unclear. There is a need for additional research that examines parents' functioning prior to incarceration (e.g., criminal behavior witnessed by the adolescent, harsh or neglectful parenting, mental health and substance use) and young people's subsequent outcomes.

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## **Future Directions for Research, Practice, and Policy**

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

The research reviewed in this chapter generally falls into one of two categories. In the first category, analyses were conducted on an archival dataset which allowed questions about parental incarceration to be tested, as well as more

complex relations and interactions, though the measures in the dataset were not intended to examine such questions. In the second category, data were collected as part of a relatively small research study (e.g., with sample sizes rarely larger than 50) designed to examine very specific questions pertaining to parental incarceration. Studies in the latter group often contained rich qualitative data and interesting results, but with insufficient power to detect more complex quantitative associations and interactions.

These methodological limitations could be remedied with purposefully planned, well-funded, large scale, mixed methods research projects focused on how parental incarceration affects children and families across developmental periods. Such studies could better address important questions related to factors which may moderate children and adolescents' reactions to parental incarceration, including the influence of family dynamics and gender, for example. Few of the studies cited in this chapter specifically addressed important issues related to either parent or child gender, for example, or the possible interaction between parent and child gender.

A further step would entail examining longitudinal relations for a cohort of children who are followed across important periods of development. For example, questions might include "how does separation from mothers during infancy due to incarceration impact children's peer relations at school age?" or "how does witnessing parental arrest during middle childhood affect children's association with deviant peers during adolescence?" A longitudinal study would also allow researchers to address important questions related to how parental incarceration impacts a family's dynamics and the extent to which family dynamics impact child development during and after a parent's incarceration.

There is also a real need for resilience-focused research—empirical work that recognizes and examines factors associated with children and adolescents' successful adaptation despite the considerable adversities they experience in the context of parental incarceration. The research that has emerged within the past decade has provided



important information about the development of children and adolescents with incarcerated parents. However, this research has been overwhelmingly problem-focused (Eddy & Reid, 2003). Scholars should examine the outcomes of children and adolescents with incarcerated parents using a resilience framework (e.g., Masten, 2001). Research with children and adolescents with incarcerated parents should consider protective factors that are suggested by theory and previous developmental research, including positive family relationships, supportive relationships with non-family members (e.g., a teacher, mentor, or coach), youths' self-efficacy, supervision provided in the home, and positive peer relationships (Grossman et al., 1992; Werner & Smith, 1992). As researchers and practitioners, it is vital that we begin to understand how and why some children and adolescents exhibit successful adaptation, despite the considerable risks associated with parental incarceration. Furthermore, it is important for researchers to begin to understand the factors that promote resilience processes so that we can guide practitioners in a way that capitalizes on protective factors.

### **Recommendations for Practice**

Several resources exist for practitioners working with older children and adolescents affected by incarceration. We recommend that practitioners become acquainted with these, disseminate information from them to their community-partners and professional networks, and modify recommendations, as appropriate, to meet the developmental needs of the older children and adolescents in their care. For example, as discussed in Chap. 7 of this volume, Sesame Street recently developed materials for young children affected by parental incarceration (Little Children, Big Challenges: Incarceration, 2013; <http://www.sesameworkshop.org/incarceration/>).

Although the materials were developed for young children, some of the videos and many of the messages in the caregiver guide are relevant for older children as well. For example, these resources emphasize the importance of providing

children with developmentally appropriate and honest information about the parent's incarceration—recommendations that are equally relevant for older children and adolescents. Additionally, a Tip Sheet for Youth ([http://youth.gov/sites/default/files/COIP\\_TipSheet\\_Youth\\_Final.pdf](http://youth.gov/sites/default/files/COIP_TipSheet_Youth_Final.pdf)) and a Tip Sheet for Providers ([http://youth.gov/sites/default/files/COIP-TipSheet-Providers\\_Final.pdf](http://youth.gov/sites/default/files/COIP-TipSheet-Providers_Final.pdf)) were developed following a listening session hosted by the federal government. These resources address many salient issues for adolescents with incarcerated parents, including having increased responsibilities in the absence of a parent, navigating complex systems, dealing with stigma, coping with complex emotions, and identifying resources and supports in school and in the community. Most of these resources are free and available online. Because many were developed by youth for youth, they are particularly accessible for older children and adolescents.

Additionally, we recommend that practitioners working with older children and youth with incarcerated parents capitalize on the unique developmental capacities and transitions happening during these periods of development in order to support youth. With increased cognitive and language skills, youth may find writing or talking about their experiences particularly valuable. Ensuring that youth have a safe and confidential space to address their concerns is important in every therapeutic setting, but is particularly relevant to these youth, given what is known about the shame and stigma surrounding parental incarceration. Finally, recognizing the variation in youths' experiences when a parent is incarcerated is critical. Parental incarceration is not a singular experience and is often characterized by a series of traumas and transitions. Being prepared to meet youth "where they are at" as they move through these experiences is critical for providing them with support.

### **Recommendations for Policy**

Research findings on parental incarceration during middle childhood and adolescence have

implications for policies formulated and implemented at the local, state, and national levels. During a 2016 White House Listening Session, youth with currently and formerly incarcerated parents identified six areas for changes in practice and policy, including: (a) increased opportunities to visit, (b) more frequent and less expensive opportunities to communicate, (c) better communication between corrections and schools, (d) improved sharing of information about parents, (e) better understanding about the impact of mandatory reporting rules, and (f) friendlier interactions [with corrections staff] when visiting. Policy implications relevant to the development periods of middle childhood and adolescence concern how youth at these stages may handle the arrest of their parent and how parental incarceration may impact youths' experiences in different settings, particularly school.

In contrast to younger age ranges, children in middle childhood and adolescence are fully cognizant of what is happening when their parent is arrested. In these instances, it would be helpful to have officers trained in child development to help children understand the context of parental arrest. However, if a parent is arrested and taken away when a child is at school, then the child would likely return home to an empty home with no knowledge of what has happened to their parent. With children's needs in mind, the International Association of Chiefs of Police recently developed a model policy for safeguarding children during the arrest of a parent. In addition, they have developed and disseminated comprehensive training materials which are widely accessible for law enforcement professionals throughout the USA. We recommend that law enforcement agencies implement the model policy and monitor implementation.

Another policy-relevant area for middle childhood and adolescence concerns youths' interactions in the school context. Following the arrest or imprisonment of a student's parent, teachers and administrators may only be informed of the situation by word of mouth, and many teachers may never know that their students are affected by parental incarceration. Increased communication among staff within

interacting systems, including criminal justice, child welfare, and education, would assist with the early identification of children affected by parental incarceration and allow for interventions that attempt to decrease social isolation and stigma, increase opportunities for positive youth development, and promote older children and adolescents' school attendance and completion of academic work. As studies have shown that parental incarceration confers risk for youths' school outcomes (e.g., Trice & Brewster, 2004; Shlafer, Reedy, & Davis, 2017), it is important that teachers understand how a parent's incarceration may impact academic and behavior in the school setting. Privacy concerns, however, may make informing teachers of such events difficult or unlikely, and these concerns are well-founded, as children who know that their teachers are being informed about their home situation may be even more sensitive to stigmatization from peers (e.g., Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008). In spite of these limitations, however, policies which allow administrators and teachers to be aware of how parental incarceration affects their students may be important to help raise awareness about this issue and to help circumvent school-related problems associated with experience of parental incarceration.

Finally, as a society, it will also help affected youth if we attempt to decrease social stigma through more effective efforts at reintegration of formerly incarcerated parents back into society and into roles that promote their positive civic engagement, including issues related to employment, housing, education, and voting. Alternatives to incarceration for individuals with children (see Chap. 16, this volume) should also be considered as a means to decrease family disruption and to minimize the impact on the next generation.

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## Conclusions

Middle childhood and adolescence are characterized by significant changes in cognitive, social, and emotional skills. These developmental changes are essential to consider when seeking to understand how a parent's incarceration



impacts older children and adolescents. Researchers, practitioners, and policymakers must all consider the developmental needs of older children and adolescents, when identifying strategies to best support them before, during, and after a parent's incarceration.

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# A Family Perspective: Caregiving and Family Contexts of Children with an Incarcerated Parent

# 9

Joyce A. Arditti and Casey M. McGregor

## Abstract

A growing body of research evidence suggests that as a group, children with incarcerated parents face unique challenges that can contribute to poor developmental outcomes and the reproduction of disadvantage. Yet how a parent's incarceration impacts children can vary widely and may depend largely on the ways in which children's caregiving scenarios and the quality of their family relationships are altered as a result of a parent's criminal justice involvement. Utilizing a family perspective, which considers the collateral consequences of parental incarceration for children and their caregivers, we examine resource adequacy, caregiver and family stability, and the quality of care children receive. We conclude with a discussion of intervention and policy implications aimed at strengthening children's family contexts and enhancing positive developmental and parenting trajectories.

A family perspective draws attention to the implications of how widespread incarceration impacts family life, with particular emphasis on the experiences of nonincarcerated family members (caregivers) and their children

(Arditti, 2012). A burgeoning literature has documented the predominantly negative effects of parental incarceration on children even after controlling for other risks or selection factors (see Chaps. 5–8, this volume). Examples of these effects include children's antisocial behavior (Murray, Farrington, & Sekol, 2012), psychological and behavioral difficulties (Dallaire, Zeman, & Thrash, 2015; Midgely & Lo, 2013; Wakefield & Wildeman, 2014), and health vulnerabilities (Lee, Fang, & Luo, 2013; Mitchell et al., 2017; Turney, 2014).

A family perspective moves beyond documenting negative child outcomes and is concerned with the “how” and the “why” of these effects, as well as the consequences of a family member's incarceration for children's caregivers. Such a perspective is based on research and theory that conceptualizes a parent's incarceration (and quite possibly multiple arrests, convictions, incarcerations, and re-entries) as an ongoing stressor that influences important parenting processes and indices of family functioning (Arditti, 2012, 2016). A family perspective represents a shift in emphasis regarding mass incarceration and its consequences from how incarceration affects incarcerated adults and other individuals to how incarceration impacts families, including children and their caregivers (Arditti, 2018; Wakefield & Wildeman, 2014).

Incarceration presents unique and often difficult challenges to family relationships due to the stigma connected with incarceration and the

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material hardship it often brings to families (Geller, 2013; Wakefield & Wildeman, 2014). Therefore, a centerpiece of a family perspective approach involves the consideration of the context and processes associated with parenting and caregiving in families with a parent in prison or jail (Arditti, 2012). Examination of family-level processes takes us inside the “black box” of what happens in families (Roy & Kwon, 2007) and helps to answer questions regarding variation in child outcomes as well as the lived experiences of caregivers who either step in or continue caring for children during a parent’s incarceration. The purpose of this chapter is to examine caregiving contexts and processes in order to better understand the implications of parental incarceration for children, and why some children and their families seem to do well in spite of a parent’s incarceration.

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### **Children’s Caregiving Contexts: Structure and Features**

Children’s caregiving relationships are perhaps the most fundamental influence in determining their developmental trajectories. Parenting is implicated in multiple studies examining childhood resilience and psychopathology (Masten, 2014) and has been conceptualized as a protective and mediating process in examining the implications of parental incarceration on children across the social and behavioral sciences (e.g., Arditti, 2012; Poehlmann-Tynan et al., 2015; Turney & Wildeman, 2013). The structure of children’s caregiving arrangements is largely determined by whether they have a mother or father in prison or jail. Eighty-four percent of fathers in prison reported that children’s other parent (i.e., mothers) were caring for their children, followed by grandparents (15%) or relatives (6%). Mothers in prison, however, provided very different responses with only 37% reporting that their children were with the other parent (i.e., fathers). The most common care arrangement for children experiencing maternal incarceration was a grandmother (42%) followed by other relatives

(23%). Incarcerated mothers (11%) were far more likely to report that their children were in foster care than incarcerated fathers (2%) (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008). Similar statistics are not available for parents who are incarcerated in jails. However, the structure of the arrangement alone tells us little about caregivers’ experiences and children’s chances of positive developmental pathways. In the following section, sources of variation in children’s caregiving contexts are examined. Three key features of children’s caregiving contexts are discussed, based on their empirical and theoretical significance: cumulative disadvantage, family stability, and parenting quality.

### **Cumulative Disadvantage**

While the preponderance of evidence regarding children with parents in prison or jail points to their vulnerability, social scientists struggle to answer *why* the repercussions of parental incarceration are typically negative. It is difficult to ascertain the effects of a parent’s incarceration on the family because children in families most likely to experience incarceration often display behavior problems and developmental concerns that are broadly connected to disadvantaged environments and exposure to additional adverse events (Murphey & Cooper, 2015; Wakefield & Wildeman, 2014). Indeed, most incarcerated individuals have histories of disadvantage, often characterized by low education, unemployment, neighborhood and early family life disadvantage, mental health challenges and substance abuse, and intergenerational criminality (Phillips, Erkanli, Keeler, Costello, & Angold, 2006; Uggen, Wakefield, & Western, 2005). These disadvantages likely extend to the children of the incarcerated who are at risk of experiencing homelessness and food insecurity (Wakefield & Wildeman, 2014), housing instability (Cox & Wallace, 2013), and other forms of disadvantage such as low educational achievement (Foster & Hagan, 2009; Haskins, 2014). Additionally, recent research has documented that children with an incarcerated parent are, on average,



exposed to more adverse and traumatic childhood experiences than their peers such as the death of a parent, witnessing domestic and community violence, and parental divorce (Arditti & Savla, 2015; Dallaire, 2007; Murphey & Cooper, 2015; Poehlmann-Tynan, Burnson, Runion, & Weymouth, 2017).

Moreover, parental and in particular paternal incarceration, seems to intensify pre-existing material hardships for families of the incarcerated. Research suggests multiple ways in which disadvantage is compounded by parental incarceration (see Chap. 5, this volume, for a summary of the findings from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing study on this issue). First, among those in state prisons, 54% of fathers and 52% of mothers reported that they were the primary source of financial support for their children prior to their incarceration (findings were similar for parents in federal prison; Glaze & Maruschak, 2008). Therefore, children and their caregivers may lose ongoing and direct financial investments from parents that were contributors before incarceration. Similar statistics are not available for parent in jail.

Families also may lose child support as a result of parents' incarceration (Arditti, Lambert-Shute, & Joest, 2003; Geller, Garfinkel, & Western, 2011). Lost child support funds are not easily recovered even if parents go into arrears during their incarceration (Brito, 2012). Further, incarceration of a parent may not only reduce material resources for affected families, but confinement is also associated with significant financial costs such as legal fees, fines, costs associated with maintaining contact, and the provision of financial support to the incarcerated person. It is women on the outside who bear the primary responsibility for these costs, including expenses associated with prison or jail visits, phone calls, and commissary (Arditti et al., 2003; Comfort, 2008; deVuo-powell, Schweidler, Walters, & Zohrabi, 2015). These debts are significant and increase hardship among the most disadvantaged families (deVuo-powell et al., 2015; Harris, Evans, & Beckett, 2010).

This context of disadvantage, intensified and perpetuated by parental incarceration, has

profound implications for children, not only in terms of direct effects, but indirectly through its effects on caregivers. Caregivers may experience financial shortfalls, unemployment, and other strains that come with economic hardship, particularly in conjunction with inadequate state safety net expenditures (e.g., Adams et al., 2016). In addition to these strains, mothers who share children with recently incarcerated men have a significantly lower likelihood of asset ownership compared to their counterparts, including vehicle, bank account, and home ownership. Each of these is typically linked to greater family well-being (Turney & Schneider, 2016). While children's nonincarcerated caregivers' good mental health and resource management skills may serve to protect against financial inadequacies, material hardship as a function of parental (and mostly paternal) incarceration seems to persist over time and serves as a causal pathway to undermine caregiver efficacy and child development (Schwartz-Soicher, Geller, & Garfinkel, 2011; Wakefield & Wildeman, 2014). Therefore, parental incarceration can be seen as a lever to perpetuate multiple disadvantages to the families of the incarcerated.

## Family Stability

A second important feature of caregiving contexts that bear on children's outcomes, as well as family functioning, in general, involves the stability of children's care arrangements. Stable care arrangements, characterized by infrequent movements between households and among caregivers, have been documented to connect with better psychological and behavioral outcomes for children (Adams et al., 2016; Trotter, Flynn, & Baidawi 2017). Alternatively, the psychological literature has documented that instability in relationships with parents and caring adults can be disruptive to children's healthy development (Arditti, 2015a; Luthar, 2006). Unfortunately, parental incarceration can contribute to family instability and frequent household moves for children (Muentner, Holder, Burnson, Runion, Weymouth, & Poehlmann-Tynan, 2018;

Turney & Wildeman, 2013), particularly in conjunction with nonparental care (Arditti & Savla, 2015).

As it pertains to parental incarceration, family instability has several facets including not only the consistency and continuity of care, but family composition instability (Adams et al., 2016). Family composition stability involves entrances and exits of parents' intimate partners and spouses into or out of the child's household as well as a parent's multi-partner fertility (MPF) (Adams et al., 2016; Fomby & Osborne, 2017). MPF involves parent's experience of having biological children with more than one partner and is often associated with the nonincarcerated parents' relationship dissolution, which is an all too common experience connected to parental incarceration (Turney & Wildeman, 2013; Western, 2004). Relationship dissolution and MPF have spillover effects that can contribute to harsh discipline and less optimal parenting practices (Beck, Cooper, McLanahan, & Brooks-Gunn, 2009; Braman, 2004; Turney & Wildeman, 2015) as well as maternal distress (Arditti, Burton, & Neeves-Botelho, 2010). Indeed, analyses of data from predominantly urban African American families have indicated that paternal incarceration was strongly related to MPF, even after controlling for other known correlates, which in turn is connected with lower levels of parental well-being (Carlson & Furstenburg, 2006; Guzzo, 2014). Family instability, in conjunction with material hardship as well as other stressors associated with a parent's involvement in the criminal justice system, can compromise child adjustment by undermining parenting (Turney & Wildeman, 2013) and challenging children to adapt to potentially disruptive and chronic changes (Gershoff, Aber, Raver, & Lennon, 2007).

Family scholars have long discussed how children "stand to lose" as a result of family instability by diminishing overall parental investments in children and spreading family resources too thin (Carlson & Furstenburg, 2006). Despite this, very few studies specifically consider the stability of children's care arrangements and the structural conditions that promote positive family functioning in light of a parent's

imprisonment. The Urban Institute's recent report on the importance of stable environments and relationships in promoting children's healthy development acknowledged that "instability is not inherently bad" (Adams et al., 2016; p. 4) and depends on its characteristics, chronicity, and magnitude as well as positive countervailing influences in children's lives. Given variation in child outcomes as it pertains to parental incarceration (e.g., Turney & Wildeman, 2015), it is more useful to view family instability on a continuum from positive to toxic—a view which acknowledges that although instability may not be ideal, circumstances change and resilience processes may buffer children from negative outcomes (Adams et al., 2016).

Contextual factors seem to influence the continuity of care for children of incarcerated parents (Poehlmann, 2010). For example, in the event of maternal incarceration, children have more continuous care when mothers help to choose the caregiver, when children are with the other biological parent, and when co-caregiving relationships are positive (Poehlmann, Shlafer, Maes, & Hanneman, 2008). Similarly, Trotter and colleagues' (2017) examination of Australian children's care arrangements in the context of parental incarceration (60% of which are with women caretakers) provided some interesting clues regarding context and family stability processes. While the majority of incarcerated participants in the study reported their children had experienced only one move since the time of their arrest, about one-third of parents reported that children remained in the same placement and setting, suggesting a great deal of stability. Children in the most stable arrangements were cared for by their other biological parent or grandparents. Other factors related to stability included involving primary parents prior to their imprisonment in the negotiation of care arrangements, shorter prison sentences, and in-home placement (vs. foster or institutional care). Children who resided with the incarcerated parent prior to his or her imprisonment were actually prone to more frequent movements than other children—a fact that suggests greater care disruptions when primary caregivers of children



are incarcerated regardless of gender, although more often than not, primary caregivers were mothers.

Research investigating the effects of maternal incarceration on children may also provide some clues regarding children's experiences on the caregiver stability continuum. Studies finding unexpected "null effects" of maternal incarceration on children (Wildeman & Turney, 2014), or unexpected, varied effects in which the most advantaged children had the most negative outcomes (Turney, 2017; Turney & Wildeman, 2015), point to the complexity of interpreting child effects of a parent's criminal justice involvement. While scholars struggle to explain why empirical findings run counter to a body of literature, and theory suggesting relatively dire consequences to children resulting from mothers' incarceration, a family perspective offers an intriguing explanation that may have to do with the stability and quality of children's care arrangements (Arditti, 2015b). Turnovic and colleagues' recent qualitative study (2012) provides some support for not presuming parental incarceration inevitably equates with caregiver instability. Caregivers of imprisoned women's children who participated in the study were likely to express either no changes or positive changes in their lives as a result of mothers' incarceration. Similar themes of stability in care emerged in a study of black mothers with substance use issues who later become incarcerated and their children ( $N = 88$ ; Hanlon et al., 2005). Most children in the study did not display psychopathology, as was originally expected by the study authors. However, for the majority of youth in the sample, mothers had not been their primary caregivers prior to incarceration. Rather, children's primary caregivers (in most cases, the grandmother) had already "assumed major responsibility for their upbringing" with "80% of children ... living in a peaceful and caring home atmosphere" (Hanlon et al., 2005; p. 83).

In addition to thinking about stability on a continuum, the issue of caregiver stability is best considered from an intersectional lens, given the many factors that likely play into who will care

for children over time and how well children and caregivers fare. An intersectional lens is useful to help tease out how underlying structural conditions, such as racism, sexism, classism, and stigma associated with criminal justice involvement may underpin negative child and family outcomes typically associated with family instability. Such a viewpoint calls attention to how widespread mass incarceration often equates with heavy caregiving burdens for under-resourced African American women in particular, who may face other forms of discrimination and hardship (Christian & Thomas, 2009). Research has yet to consider, for example, under what circumstances MPF may connect with positive family outcomes or, at the very least, not factor into family difficulties and child psychopathology. Repartnering in conjunction with paternal incarceration could lead to greater family stability and even curb the experience of domestic abuse for some women (Comfort, 2008; Sano, 2005; Turney & Wildeman, 2013).

## Parenting Quality

High-quality parenting on the part of nonincarcerated caregivers is believed to be a powerful contributor to child health and well-being in families with a parent in prison or jail (Arditti, 2012, 2016; Parke & Clarke-Stewart, 2003; Poehlmann, 2010; Turney & Wildeman, 2013). Positive relationships between youth and their primary caregivers promote resilience and can mitigate the degree to which youth are negatively impacted by trauma exposure (Federal Intergovernmental Working Group, 2013; Masten, 2014). As per developmental and family stress frameworks (see, for example, Arditti, 2012, 2016; Poehlmann & Eddy, 2010) the most proximal relationship influencing children is likely that of the nonincarcerated caregiver. Yet, despite the theoretical significance of incarceration for parenting and caregiving (Geller, Cooper, Garfinkel, Schwartz-Soicher, & Mincy, 2012), research is relatively thin regarding how one parent's incarceration directly impacts the quality of care children receive (Turney, 2014) as

well as how positive relationships with caregivers may serve as a protective factor for children with a parent in prison or jail (Poehlmann-Tynan et al., 2017).

### **Parental incarceration and the quality of caregiving**

Research suggests indirect effects of parental incarceration on parenting in that children with a parent in prison are more likely to experience “caregiver risks” such as caregiver mental health problems, high stress levels, and substance abuse and victimization histories (Aaron & Dallaire, 2010; Mackintosh, Myers, & Kennon, 2006; Phillips, Burns, Wagner, & Barth, 2004; Phillips et al., 2006). These risks are believed to confer disadvantages to children because of their influence on the quality of care they receive from caregivers (e.g., Turney, 2014). It is surprising, however, how little is actually known about parenting processes in justice-involved families. Quantitative studies suggest children with an incarcerated parent may experience harsh discipline, less parental supervision, and maternal neglect (Phillips et al., 2006; Turney 2014). Other research seems to point to higher rates of maltreatment among children with an incarcerated parent and involvement in the child welfare system (Berger, Cancian, Cuesta, & Noyes, 2016; Hines, Lemon, Wyatt, & Merdinger, 2004; Phillips et al, 2004). However, the causal mechanism driving this association remains unclear. For example, maltreatment rates could reflect race and class disparities in Child Protective Services reporting and foster care involvement (Berger et al., 2016; Hines et al., 2004) as well as income inequality and shortfalls in state expenditures for children (Eckenrode, Smith, McCarthy, & Dineen, 2014; Isaacs & Edelstein, 2017).

### **Caregiver Mental Health**

There is emerging evidence, most of which examines female caregivers’ experience of their partner’s incarceration, to support theorizing that parental incarceration does contribute to caregiver distress and parenting challenges. For example, the incarceration of a romantic partner appears to connect with maternal depression and life

dissatisfaction (Wildeman, Schnittker, & Turney, 2012). Grandmothers who care for children (more likely in instances of maternal incarceration) may be particularly challenged within the context of parental incarceration, given that many elders are poor and infirm (Hanlon, Carswell, & Rose, 2007) and economically disadvantaged (Bloom & Steinhart, 1993). Grandparents raising grandchildren may be unprepared for the demands of child rearing and/or may be spread thin as they are often also serving as primary caregivers for other family members staying in the same residence as well (Dressel & Barnhill, 1990; Poehlmann, 2005). A variety of child problems have been reported by grandparents who become caregivers as a result of parental incarceration including children’s learning problems and child mental health and behavior difficulties (Bloom & Steinhart, 1993; Harm & Thompson, 1995). A caveat of the available research includes the fact that we know very little about specific parenting and resilience processes among grandparent caregivers. Such information is important as children who perceive their grandparent caregivers in positive terms seem to demonstrate competence (Sands, Goldberg-Glen, & Shin, 2009).

Qualitative and descriptive studies provide context and depth regarding the nuances of caregiver’s experience as it pertains to their emotional state and parenting relative to the incarceration of a child’s parent (typically fathers). Themes pertaining to loss, disenfranchised grief, and raw emotions paint a poignant portrait among the families of the incarcerated (Arditti et al., 2003; Chui, 2010). Feeling overwhelmed and strained with role obligations and parenting responsibilities also characterize many solo caregivers of children whose partners are incarcerated. A recent study by Thomas and colleagues (2016) illustrated how the stress of parental incarceration led to “secondary stressors” in women’s daily lives that necessitated adaptation responses aimed at survival in order to meet the demands of caring for children. For the women in the Thomas, Smith, and Muhammad study (2016), survival strategies might ensure children’s care and upbringing, but at the cost of women’s own health and well-being.

Given the unequal distribution of incarceration across the population and its disproportionate impact on poorly educated minority men (Wakefield & Uggen, 2010), the parenting of children for African American women is particularly consequential (Christian & Thomas, 2009; Comfort, 2008; Thomas et al., 2016). Caregiver “deficiencies” must be considered within the context of racist mass incarceration policies and strategies (e.g. Alexander, 2010; Johnson, 2011) as well as a Western ideological framework of intensive mothering that upholds “strenuous expectations” of affectional and economic support of children (Granja, da Cunha, & Machado, 2014, p. 1214). Intensive mothering standards idealize women’s self-sacrifice and child centeredness and generate additional pressure on under-resourced mothers (Granja et al., 2014). These pressures could in part underlie caregiver tendencies to surrender attending to their own needs in order to care for children. Indeed, Black feminist scholarship points to Black motherhood as a paradox which on the one hand can be empowering (Collins, 2005), but on the other hand, may have high costs for caregivers. Black women’s embrace of the “warrior mode” of survival (Thomas et al., 2016, 104) or “Strong Black Women” ideal (Gillespie, 1984) emphasize strength and self-reliance in the face of adversity but may undermine women’s health and psychological well-being, and their ability to actualize their own hopes and dreams (Thomas et al., 2016).

### **Caregiving quality as a protective process for children**

Some of the most compelling evidence for the mediational role of caregiving/parenting processes and child development comes from research examining adolescent development or the effects of economic distress on families. Caring and connection between youth and family members have been demonstrated to be an important resilience process in protecting adolescents from psychopathology and health risks (Resnick et al., 1997; Resnick, Harris, & Blum, 1993). Indeed, a recent dissertation study of resilience processes among emerging adults who experienced parental

incarceration as children revealed that a “home-caring relationship” was one of the most important protective factors with regard to positive youth development (Alstadt, 2015). Adolescents’ sense of connection with family has been found to partially and positively mediate any variance on school achievement that might be attributed to parental incarceration (Nichols, Loper, & Meyer, 2016). Additionally, resilience-focused research conducted on grandparents raising grandchildren suggests that trusting and supportive relationships with alternative caregivers can ameliorate the negative effects of attachment disruptions for young children—a pertinent issue with regard to the experience of parental incarceration (Poehlmann, 2003, 2010). Further, a recent study of children with jailed fathers points to protective factors in the home environment as contributors to resilience in young children (Poehlmann-Tynan et al., 2017).

Studies from the literature examining the impact of material hardship on children’s developmental trajectories are particularly telling with regard to the protective importance of relationships with caregivers. For example, a Gershoff et al. (2007) analysis of a national sample of children revealed that the negative effects of material hardship on children were almost entirely mediated by parental stress and parenting behavior. When economic hardship was lessened, parents’ stress was reduced and their behavior was characterized by more warmth and positive parenting strategies, which in turn led to greater cognitive and socio-emotional competence in first-grade children (Gershoff et al., 2007). Similar results were found in a longitudinal examination of how parental distress and parenting behaviors may reduce the harm of economic hardship on child behavior (Neppel, Senia, & Donnellan, 2016). Again, the negative effects of economic pressure on child outcomes were fully mediated by parent distress and parenting. While these studies did not examine parental incarceration specifically, we can extrapolate from their findings given that criminal justice involvement typically corresponds to both material hardship (discussed in the previous section) and caregiver distress.

In conclusion, while it seems the literature predominantly suggests that parental incarceration, and particularly fathers' incarceration, can strain caregivers and contribute to their distress, it is important to note variation in the quality of parenting. Not all caregiving scenarios are undermined by a parent's incarceration, and there seems to be fewer negative impacts in cases when the incarcerated parent was a nonresident (Hanlon et al., 2005). For example, Turney & Wildeman (2013) examined the effects of paternal incarceration for mothers' parenting and found only weak average effects. Study findings also revealed that paternal incarceration was associated with positive changes for children's mothers in the form of increased parenting engagement suggesting that mothers spent more time involved in child-centered activities after a father's incarceration. Similarly, Arditti et al. (2003) found that after a parent went to jail (typically fathers), caregivers (typically mothers) reported spending more time with their children, which could be cautiously interpreted as a positive parenting shift. Moreover, caring connections between youth and their caregivers seem to ameliorate risk, and children's caregiving scenarios are sometimes improved as a result of incarceration, particularly in cases where the incarcerated parent engaged in abusive, violent, or criminal behavior in the home (Comfort, 2008; Hanlon et al., 2005; Turney & Wildeman, 2015). Finally, qualitative studies, in particular, reveal evidence of positive parenting strategies on the part of solo mothers and caregivers of children with histories of parental incarceration. These strategies include advocacy and care for children (even in conjunction with harsh discipline; Arditti et al., 2010) as well as positive expressiveness about children, closeness with children, teaching children through struggle, optimism, and empathy (Johnson, Arditti, & McGregor, 2018).

### **Implications for Practice and Policy**

In this chapter, we reviewed a family perspective on parental incarceration and three key features

of children's caregiving contexts: cumulative disadvantage, family and caregiver stability, and the quality of care children receive. In this section, we will briefly cover some policy and practice options that align with the family perspective on incarceration with a focus on how best to promote positive caregiving contexts. Central to our recommendations are policies and intervention strategies that support parenting across diverse family structures and caregiving scenarios. However, it should be noted that efforts to support resilient and effective caregiving among families impacted by parental incarceration occur, for the most part, in a context of deep social, racial, and economic inequality, therefore necessitating sweeping reform aimed at social justice and harm reduction (Arditti, 2012). We acknowledge how exclusionary practices aimed at those who are involved in the criminal justice system (e.g., discriminatory punishment strategies, felon disenfranchisement laws) have far-reaching consequences, not only for incarcerated persons and re-entrants, but for their families and children in terms of perpetuating inequality and poverty (Ratcliffe & McKernan, 2010; Western & Pettit, 2010). Therefore, recommendations to support caregivers and children connected to the incarcerated would be far more effective in a social and political context that advances social justice, expands opportunity for all, enacts meaningful anti-poverty interventions (Noyes, Paul & Berger, 2018), and seeks to reduce, rather than increase, prison populations (Arditti, 2012; 2015a).

However, even in the absence of sweeping criminal justice reform, much can be done to improve the lives of children and their caregivers within the context of parental incarceration given the profound influence children's immediate context and day-to-day relationships have on their development. As such, intervention strategies and approaches that are reviewed in this section focus on microprocesses pertaining to parenting quality and stability, although the benefits of addressing micro-ecological contexts would be greater in conjunction with wide-range policy initiatives. Thorsen and Kim (2015) describe these efforts as systematic approaches,

which involve policy and intervention strategies that address underlying inequality at the structural level. For example, it is believed that systematic approaches to socioeconomic challenges will have a positive cascade effect on microprocesses, such as parenting quality and relationship stability, within families (Thorsen & Kim, 2015).

A family perspective on parental incarceration places the family on “center-stage” and highlights the various contexts that influence child and family well-being. As reviewed, families and children of incarcerated individuals often encounter additional socioeconomic risks such as homelessness, food insecurity, and housing instability that hinder optimal child and family development. As such, in order to better serve their needs, individuals who work with families of incarcerated persons should first and foremost be aware of how parental incarceration can intensify socioeconomic disadvantage among families in order to better serve their needs. However, the strengths of children and families of incarcerated people should also be noted and cultivated. Professionals, such as social workers, teachers, or therapists, who come into contact with children and families interfacing with the criminal justice system may consider utilizing a strength-based approach in interventions to foster family connection and efficacy. Strength-based approaches tend to focus on maximizing family choices, sharing power, and honoring self-determination—especially important given emerging evidence that caregiving in the context of incarceration may result in women surrendering to their own needs in order to fulfill their responsibilities toward the children under their care (Thomas et al., 2016). By considering strengths, resilience will be fostered in terms of family members’ ability to withstand and rebound from adversity.

The “Strengthening Families Program” (SFP) is a rare community-based intervention that attempts to respond to the needs of nonincarcerated caregivers and their children by enhancing protective factors such as quality parenting and minimizing risk (Miller, Perryman, Markovitz, Franzen, Cochran, & Brown, 2013). Preliminary

findings associated with SPF were indicative of increased positive parenting behaviors, decreased caregiver depression, and enhanced family strengths (i.e., family connection and communication)—changes that occurred even within the context of continued family stress. While the evaluation methodology used to examine the SPF program disallows causal conclusions, initial findings suggest the promise of strength-based approaches for supporting families of the incarcerated. Strength-based approaches like SPF follow the belief that focusing on and cultivating strengths of individuals and families, rather than weaknesses, produces greater benefits (Quinlan, Swain, & Vella-Brodrick, 2012). Practitioners utilizing this approach consider perspectives, resources, and challenges that are unique to each family, and important to those at the “receiving end” of service. Moreover, grandparents and other kin may serve as caregivers to children with incarcerated parents. Clinicians and other professionals should be sensitive to such “non-traditional” family models that may be accompanied with unique challenges and resources, as well as unique strengths.

Unfortunately, caregivers of children with incarcerated parents are rarely the focus of intervention despite the great potential of such programming to help families affected by parental imprisonment (Miller et al., 2013). In addition to strength-based programs, addressing parental quality through home-visiting programs has also shown promising results with populations similar to, but not necessarily affected by parental incarceration (Kendrick et al., 2000). For instance, interventions aimed at specifically addressing parenting quality have been shown to be successful in also reducing child behavior problems (Sanders, Turner, & Markie-Dadds, 2002). Children who experience parental incarceration are likely to exhibit emotional and behavioral challenges that may relate to the stigma of parental incarceration or other relational contexts (e.g., Kjellstrand & Eddy, 2011; Shlafer & Poehlmann, 2010). Interventions aimed at enhancing parenting quality and parent-child



interactions may help ameliorate child behavior problems. However, it should be noted that not all families that interface with the criminal justice system experience parenting challenges and child behavior problems. Therefore, it is important for researchers and practitioners alike to refrain from pathologizing families experiencing incarceration, in addition to acknowledging variability in individuals and families.

Finally, in addition to changes at the policy and intervention front that address family strengths and variation, researchers would do well to embrace a family-centered approach that is sensitive to the experience of families who are involved in the criminal justice system. Methodologically, such an approach might involve research through which scholars and scholarly institutions can integrate the “voices and concerns of children, youth, and families ... and join with communities in the maintenance and perpetuation of civil society” (Lerner, Fisher, & Weinberg, 2000, pp. 11–12). Community-based participatory research approaches (see Chaps. 17 and 21, this volume) combined with the use of mixed methods designs that incorporate a strong qualitative component hold particular promise by equalizing power between “the researched” and the researcher, and can provide much needed depth regarding the experiences of families and children (Arditti, 2015c). There is great value in allowing research participants to “tell their stories” that ultimately empower participants and build trust between families and the institutions with which they interface.

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# Parent–Child Visits When Parents Are Incarcerated in Prison or Jail

# 10

Julie Poehlmann-Tynan and Kaitlyn Pritzl

## Abstract

As the number of children affected by parental incarceration has risen, so too have issues regarding children's visits with parents at corrections facilities. Many incarcerated parents do not receive any visits. For some, this is a choice because they do not want their children to see them in jail or prison, but for others it occurs because of factors outside of their control. If visits do occur, visit *frequency* is affected by numerous factors including location of the jail or prison, availability and cost of transportation, availability and willingness of a parent, grandparent, or caregiver to bring the child to the corrections facility, days and times offered for visits, and policies of the corrections facility. In addition to these factors, the *quality* of the visit experience is related to policies and practices of the corrections facility including type of visits offered, privacy, length of visits, and availability of toys and books; family factors such as children's interactions with caregivers before,

during, and after visits, the child's relationship with the incarcerated parent, and what children are told about the parent's incarceration; and factors related to the incarcerated parent such as institutional behavior and the ability to maintain contact through other means, such as letters and phone calls. A number of studies have examined how children cope with visits and tried to address the question about whether or not visits are helpful for child and family well-being at the time of the parent's incarceration, whereas other studies have examined the relation between visits and post-release adjustment, including relationship quality and parental recidivism. The chapter closes with recommendations for positive visit experiences.

The USA is in an age of mass incarceration. At year end 2016, there were 1,505,400 individuals in prisons under state or federal jurisdiction (Carson, 2018), and at midyear 2016, 740,700 individuals were confined in county and city jails (Zeng, 2018). Going beyond these snapshot statistics, it has become apparent that most incarceration occurs at the jail level, with 10.6 million admissions to jails in 2016, similar to the years prior. More than half of incarcerated individuals are parents (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008), resulting in more than 5 million children experiencing the incarceration of a co-resident parent by age 14 (Murphey & Cooper, 2015). This is surely an underestimate, however, as it

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does not include children whose nonresident parents go to jail or prison. These statistics should be of great concern to society, as now a substantial body of research indicates that, on average, parental incarceration harms children, particularly in the areas of behavior problems and academic functioning (see Haskins & Turney, 2018, for a summary, as well as Chaps. 2–5, this volume).

As the number of children affected by parental incarceration has risen, so too have issues regarding children's visits with parents at corrections facilities. Given the large numbers of parents who are incarcerated in the nation's jails and prisons, children have become common visitors to correctional facilities (Arditti, Lambert-Shute, & Joest, 2003; Poehlmann, Dallaire, Loper, & Shear, 2010), yet children's visits to correctional facilities are still considered controversial. Thus, a growing number of studies have examined why children do and do not visit their incarcerated parents, how and why frequency and quality of children's visits vary, and how visits relate to child, parent, and family well-being during and following the parent's incarceration. Family visits are a key opportunity to maintain, manage, and even create parent-child relationships during incarceration, yet they pose challenges as well. In this chapter, we present recent research findings focusing on the benefits and drawbacks of parent-child visits in corrections facilities and conclude with recommendations for positive visit experiences.

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## Patterns of Visits and Other Forms of Contact

The Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), based on surveys of nationally representative samples of individuals incarcerated in state and federal prisons, has estimated the frequency of children's contact with their imprisoned parents. A majority of parents incarcerated in federal and state prisons report having mail contact with their children, and more than half report phone contact with their children; however, slightly less than

half report having at least one in-person visit from their children during the incarceration period (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008). Parents incarcerated in federal prisons, on average, report more frequent contact with children than parents incarcerated in state prisons, and imprisoned mothers report more frequent contact with children than imprisoned fathers (Cochran & Mears, 2013). Specifically, imprisoned mothers report more phone and mail contact compared with imprisoned fathers, but not visits; Loper, Carlson, Levitt, and Scheffel (2009) have suggested that this may be because distance from the prison is an equal impediment for both mothers and fathers.

There are no comparable national estimates for children's contact with parents incarcerated in local jails, however, as similar national surveys with jailed individuals have not been conducted. Arditti et al. (2003) argue that family members are frequent visitors to jails because jails are more likely to be located in communities where families live. In a recent study with 315 jailed fathers, Shlafer et al. (2018) found that telephone contact was the most common way of communicating with children during a paternal jail stay. Indeed, most fathers had at least weekly phone contact with their children, with 22% reporting daily calls. In contrast, 46% of jailed fathers never had a visit with their children, although 25% reported visiting at least weekly with their children, 18% reported visits one to three times per month, and 12% reported rarely or occasionally visiting with their children. Nearly half of jailed fathers indicated that they wrote to their children weekly or monthly and 16% wrote rarely or occasionally. In addition, types of contact were positively correlated with each other—the more fathers and children had contact through one mode, the more likely they were to have contact in another. Although a recent analysis of data from the Fragile Families and Child Well-Being study found few differences in family contact based on whether the parent was incarcerated in local, state, or federal corrections facilities, information about the type of corrections facility was missing in 53% of cases (Wildeman, Turney, & Yi, 2016), pointing to the need for more complete data. To

give some idea of how commonly children visit corrections facilities, Poehlmann-Tynan et al. (2015) reported that in the 12-month period between July 2011 and June 2012, the Wisconsin Department of Corrections recorded visits at half of its corrections facilities for adult men. They found that 48,000 visits from children occurred, with more than 131 children walking into Wisconsin state prison visiting rooms per day in those facilities (Poehlmann-Tynan et al., 2015).

Writing letters is the type of contact that primarily lies within the incarcerated parent's control; thus, it is not surprising that letter writing is a common form of contact between incarcerated parents and their children, as incarcerated parents report that they miss their children and being separated from them is among the most difficult aspects of incarceration (e.g., Poehlmann, 2005b). Phone calls and visits include the participation of children's caregivers to support the contact, especially when children are young. While some caregivers readily support children's contact, many others find it challenging to do so, as we discuss later in this chapter.

### **When Incarcerated Parents Do Not Receive Visits**

About 60% of mothers and fathers incarcerated in state prisons do not receive any visits (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008). For some incarcerated parents, this is a choice that they make because they do not want their children to see them in jail or prison or they think that saying good-bye after a visit might be too emotionally painful for themselves or their children (e.g., Woodall & Kinsella, 2018). For some incarcerated parents who wish to have visits from their children, visits may not occur because of factors outside of their control. Some of these factors include the distance of the corrections facility from the family's residence or the family's inability to find or fund transportation, but in many cases it is because of resistance from family members regarding bringing children to corrections facilities and estrangement between the incarcerated individual and family members. Some scholars have written

about the paradoxical quality of visits—on the one hand, visits are an opportunity for positive family connections, but on the other hand, they may be stressful or even recreate traumatic separation or “secondary prisonization” for visitors (e.g., Arditti, 2003; Tasca, 2016). The important point here is that caregivers often function as gatekeepers of the incarcerated parent–child relationship and whether or not visits occur, especially when children are young (Tasca, Mulvey, & Rodriguez, 2016). The nature of the incarcerated parents' kinship relationship to the caregiver may matter as well. For example, Tasca (2016) analyzed data from interviews with 300 men and 300 women imprisoned in the Arizona Department of Corrections who had at least one child under the age of 18. Children cared for by their grandmothers were more likely to visit their incarcerated mothers than children with other caregivers, whereas children cared for by their mothers were more likely to visit their incarcerated fathers than children with other caregivers.

### **What Impacts Frequency of Visits?**

If visits do occur, visit frequency is affected by numerous contextual factors including location of the jail or prison, distance from the family, availability and cost of transportation, sentence length, days and times offered for visits, and the policies of the corrections facility (e.g., security level, barrier or contact visit, length of visits, number of people allowed for visits, days that visits occur) as well as the support (emotional and instrumental) provided by the parent, grandparent, other relative, or caregiver when bringing the child to a corrections facility (Cochran & Mears, 2013; Mowen & Visher, 2016; Poehlmann-Tynan, Burnson, Runion, & Weymouth, 2017; Schlafer, Loper, & Schillmoeller, 2015; Tasca, 2016). Parent–child involvement prior to incarceration appears to influence visit frequency, as do demographic variables of the incarcerated parent, including parental age, race, education, marital status, and mental health, with the effects of some variables



depending on the gender of the parent (e.g., Lahm, 2016; Tuerk & Loper, 2006).

For example, using data from the BJS 2004 Survey of Inmates in State Correctional Facilities and a sample of fathers with at least one minor child, Galardi, Settersten, Vuchinich, and Richards (2017) found that paternal age was a significant predictor of contact with children. The older an incarcerated father was, the less contact he had with his children, including fewer visits, even controlling for child age. In addition, fathers who were never married or no longer married were significantly less likely to report any type of contact with their minor children than married fathers, highlighting the gatekeeping role that mothers often play when fathers are incarcerated (Roy & Dyson, 2005). Although paternal education was not a significant predictor of visit frequency, it was significant for calls and mail contact; for both, each additional year of a father's education increased his odds of contact by 5%. Being Hispanic was not a significant predictor of mail or visit contact, and Native American fathers did not have significantly different levels of contact than White fathers. However, for Black fathers, the odds of receiving visits increased by 39–60% compared with White fathers. In addition to these demographic factors, incarcerated fathers who experienced more childhood risk factors had less frequent contact with their children. This finding was most pronounced for visits, where an additional paternal childhood risk reduced the odds of visits from children between 10 and 22%. Perhaps, fathers with more childhood problems or risks are more likely to have more difficulties in relationships during adulthood and thus have less support from caregivers for having contact with kids. Or perhaps, if the fathers experienced more childhood risk factors, they were less likely to understand the importance of the parent–child relationship, and therefore they were less likely to initiate visits with their children. Many additional reasons could account for this finding as well and should be studied in the future.

Several studies have found that parental commitment to children and involvement in children's lives prior to incarceration relate to

frequency of visits. Galardi et al. (2017) found that the father's pre-incarceration commitment was a significant predictor for visits and other types of contact with children during paternal imprisonment. For each unit increase in their father commitment index, the odds of having more visits increased by 44%. In a study with 357 imprisoned mothers, Tuerk and Loper (2006) found that mothers who were responsible for their child's care before imprisonment were more likely to write letters at least several times a week, speak with their child on the telephone at least once a week, and receive visits from their child at least four times a year. Similarly, Tasca (2014) found that children were more likely to visit their imprisoned parents if the parents were more involved in children's lives prior to incarceration.

Children's caregivers and their relationships with incarcerated parents are important as well. For example, Poehlmann, Shlafer, Maes, and Hanneman (2008) analyzed data from interviews with 92 imprisoned mothers with young children. They found that children visited their incarcerated mothers more frequently when mother–caregiver relationships were more positive, warm, and loyal. In addition, visits were more frequent when children lived closer to the prison and when mothers experienced fewer pre-incarceration socio-demographic risk factors.

Clar and Duwe (2016) estimated the effects of distance on the frequency of visits to individuals incarcerated in Minnesota state prisons. The authors examined the addresses of the prisons where offenders were confined in relation to the residential addresses of those who visited them. The authors measured the frequency of visits across the different facilities at which incarcerated individuals were housed, the different neighborhoods from which the incarcerated individuals received visits, and individual differences in visit frequency. They found that the greater the distance that visitors lived from the corrections facility, the fewer visits that incarcerated individuals received. They also found that visitors' neighborhood disadvantage related to frequency of visits, with more neighborhood disadvantage reducing visit frequency.



## Quality and Implications of Visits

In addition to frequency, the quality of the visit experience is related to many additional factors, as discussed in further detail below. These factors include policies and practices of the corrections facility, including type of visits offered, privacy, length of visits, and availability of games, toys, and books; family factors such as children's interactions with caregivers before, during, and after visits, the nature of the parent–child relationship prior to incarceration, and what children are told about the parent's incarceration; and factors related to the incarcerated parent such as institutional behavior and attempting to maintain contact between visits. This next section will explore a number of studies that have examined how children cope with visits and if visits are helpful for child and family well-being, as well as examination of the association between visits and the incarcerated parents' post-release adjustment, including parent–child relationship quality and parental recidivism.

## Benefits of Visits for Children and Families

Several benefits may arise when children visit their incarcerated parents, including allowing the children an opportunity to see that the parent is physically safe and to evaluate the environment in which the parent resides (Maldonado, 2006). Visits with incarcerated parents have been discussed as potentially attenuating children's feelings of rejection, isolation, and guilt that may be associated with parental incarceration (Maldonado, 2006), and visits may help to clarify negative feelings associated with ambiguous loss (Arditti, 2016). This may be particularly true when children's last contact with an incarcerated father involved seeing him arrested (Shlafer et al., 2018). In the research literature, children's visits with parents at corrections facilities have been associated with both positive and negative behavioral adjustment among youth (Cookston & Finlay, 2006; Dallaire et al., 2015; McClure et al., 2015; Sarkadi, Kristiansson, Oberklaid, &

Bremberg, 2008; Schubert, Duininck, & Shlafer, 2016). In a review of the parent–child contact literature through 2010, Poehlmann et al. (2010) concluded that child-friendly visits that were part of intervention programs appeared to have positive effects on children (see the final section of this chapter for a discussion of the components of child-friendly visits).

Although visits between children and their incarcerated parents remain controversial, there has been interest in empirically investigating this issue for some time. As early as 1978, Sack and Siedler interviewed 22 children who visited their father either 2 or 4 times per month at the Oregon State Penitentiary. All of the children had regular contact with their fathers prior to incarceration. Children reported that the visits were a positive experience as they enjoyed seeing their fathers, and they were able to create a plan for when the parent was to return home. In another example, Boswell (2002) conducted a qualitative analysis of interviews with 25 children aged 3–19 years whose fathers were in prison. Interviews indicated that all children expressed positive feelings about visiting their fathers, although there were mixed views about the actual visiting facilities. All children also indicated that they enjoyed exchanging letters and talking on the telephone with their fathers during the incarceration, although the children also expressed sadness and distress when reflecting on the father's incarceration in general. In addition, children expressed both hopes and fears about their future relationships with their fathers.

Another more recent study involved observing children aged 3–8 years of age, half of whom were randomized to an intervention that involved giving children and their caregivers the Sesame Street parental incarceration materials, such as storybooks, videos, printable activities, and interactive activities ranging for children of all ages (<https://sesamestreetincommunities.org/topics/incarceration/>) (Poehlmann-Tynan et al., 2019). Children who were told the truth about their parent's location in a simple, honest way (e.g., “Your daddy is in jail”) were more likely to show positive emotions during visits with their incarcerated fathers compared to children who

were told a “story” (i.e., deception), information about the parent’s crime, or nothing. Some children who had not been told that the father was incarcerated walked into the corrections facility and acted confused or angry. For example, one little girl said to her mother: “You told me that dad was at work, but he works with trees. There are no trees here.” The findings underscore the importance of adequately preparing children for visits with the incarcerated parent and discussing where the parent is living prior to a visit.

Schubert et al. (2016) also investigated the effects of an Extended Visiting (EV) program in a Midwest state, in which incarcerated mothers were able to engage in 4 h long visits with their minor children. The visits were child-centered and highly structured, including time for lunch, free play, and a variation of activities; the visits also allow for natural physical expression of affection such as hugging, hand holding, and children sitting on their mother’s laps. However, the EV program is only available to incarcerated mothers living in the privileged living unit, which specifically focuses on parenting. In order to live in the privileged living unit, incarcerated mothers must have resided at the facility for at least 60 days and showed exemplary behavior during their incarceration. Schubert et al. (2016) interviewed incarcerated mothers and caregivers involved in the program to understand their perceptions of the benefits and barriers to the participation in EV. Both mothers and caregivers felt the primary benefit of the EV program was the opportunity for the parent and child to build and maintain a relationship. Additionally, incarcerated mothers reported the benefits of physical contact with the children, privacy from the child’s caregiver and corrections staff, increased support from peers and personal growth. Barriers of the program reflected those of much previous research in that one mother mentioned that “no mother can ever have enough time with her kids” (p. 225). Caregiver challenges were concentrated around the concept of travel which added many associated costs such as gas, plane tickets, overnight accommodations, food, and finding something for themselves to do during the time of the visit. Overall, this study adds to the

literature suggesting that enhanced visit programs are associated with positive outcomes for both incarcerated mothers and their children.

Tasca, Mulvey, and Rodriguez (2016) qualitatively analyzed interviews with 52 caregivers of children of incarcerated parents to identify themes regarding how families spend their time during visits. The most central theme identified was family time, with all caregivers mentioning this theme. This theme was exhibited when families experienced meal times and togetherness, and found ways of creating a sense of normalcy within the potentially stressful context of prison visits. One-third of the caregivers also mentioned attempts to bond through re-establishing relationships between children and their incarcerated parents. Forty-four percent of caregivers mentioned statements of family responsibilities such as the referring to the sacrifices and costs of caring for the children, and 40% of caregivers mentioned messages of reform, including hope for the possibility of change and the ability to help children take a different path than the incarcerated parent.

Evidence for benefits of visits also comes from research conducted in Australia and the UK. For instance, in a qualitative study, Saunders (2016) interviewed 16 children (8 boys and 8 girls) ranging from 8 to 18 years, about their visit experiences as well as the types of supports they currently utilized or would like to access. Overall, Saunders found that most children sought to maintain contact with their incarcerated parents, but this was accompanied by a roller coaster of emotions, the intensity of which depended on the prior relationship between the incarcerated parent and the child. Children reported experiencing a wide range of emotions resulting from regular visits, from anger and sadness to embarrassment and shame. Some children felt that visits provided them with a regular time and place to see the parent. However, if the parent–child relationship was strained prior to incarceration, the children felt that it was difficult to maintain the relationship. When children did not have healthy relationships with their parents, they reported trying to get whatever they were able from the parent, such as money, or

they might fall into a trap of false hope that the parent would change their ways. Children were very cognizant of the influence that their caregiver had on the time they spent with the incarcerated parent, as well as how the prison environment influenced the quality of visits. This study also highlighted the importance of support from caregivers and incarcerated parents to help children navigate complex family systems when a parent is incarcerated.

In the UK, Clancy and Maguire (2017) reported on a qualitative evaluation of the Invisible Walls Wales (IWW) project, which aimed to improve the quality of family life and community involvement and to reduce recidivism and intergenerational offending. The key innovation of the IWW is its emphasis on the “whole family,” rather than focusing on the incarcerated individual. The project provided support to 349 people (83 imprisoned men and their partners and children, two-thirds of whom were under 8 years) for six to twelve months during the father’s imprisonment and up to six months post-release. Visits took place in facilities designed to have a “family-friendly” feel, which included the use of color and art, plants, and informally dressed staff. Additionally, a children’s charity, Barnardo’s, was in charge of administering the visitor’s booking-in process and waiting room to create a more positive atmosphere at the front-end of visits. The IWW provided the family-centered visit areas as incentive for the families and incarcerated individuals to jointly participate in substantive interventions. In the evaluation, interviews were conducted with incarcerated fathers and with their partners. Overall, interviewees perceived the IWW as having a positive impact on their quality of family life and personal relationships. Families reported coming closer, that their children were happier, and that they had become better parents as a result of the program. Additionally, parents who participated in the IWW showed a significant improvement in parenting skills and family functioning over time. IWW has already impacted policy as it has been adopted by many other prisons in the UK as well as other countries.

## Visits and Incarcerated Individual Well-Being and Recidivism

In her 1991 review, Hairston emphasized the importance of maintaining family ties for children during parental incarceration. Although there was no research examining direct benefits of visits for children at that time, prior studies had found that family visits appeared to decrease recidivism; therefore, at minimum, visits indirectly benefited children, at least over the long run. Current findings continue to support the idea that family visits relate to less recidivism and higher well-being in incarcerated parents. Recently, De Claire and Dixon (2017) reviewed ten case–control or cohort studies published since 1991 regarding the effects of family prison visits on incarcerated individual’s well-being, prison rule breaking, and recidivism. Studies consistently reported positive effects of receiving visits, although studies varied in quality, methods, and results. One high-quality study reviewed by De Claire and Dixon found that visits reduced recidivism and increased post-release survival in the community, and prison visits reduced depressive symptoms in incarcerated women and adolescents. In addition, there was some evidence of reduction in rule-breaking behavior. The results did not focus specifically on visits from children, however.

### Recidivism

Visher (2013) analyzed data from the Returning Home study, a multistate, longitudinal study designed to explore the process of reentry, the challenges that returning imprisoned individuals and their families face, and the pathways to successful reintegration (La Vigne, Naser, Brooks, & Castro, 2005; Visher, La Vigne, & Castro, 2003). Participants included 324 imprisoned men from Ohio and Texas who, upon release from prison, had at least one child under the age of 18. A number of factors related to more involvement with children at post-release. Fathers who received in-person visits or mail from their children during the final 3 months of their prison term, who served shorter sentences, who expressed stronger levels of spirituality and

control over their lives, who thought it would be easy to renew their relationships with their children after release, or who assessed their families as supportive before they left for prison were more likely to report involvement with and commitment to their children. In the period immediately following release, fathers who spent more time with their children experienced several successful reintegration outcomes. In particular, when fathers spent time with their children engaging in positive parenting activities such as playing, helping with homework, and discipline, they also spent more hours per week working. In addition, engaging in activities with their children was associated with a lower likelihood of depression and of engaging in criminal activities, including supervision violations.

In a multimethod longitudinal study with 47 imprisoned mothers, McClure et al. (2015) found that more mother–child contact was associated with less recidivism. They found that mothers who lived with their child before incarceration, had more frequent contact after release, served more prison time, and lived with their child after release were less likely to get in trouble with the police and be detained in the six months after release.

Bahr, Armstrong, Gibbs, Harris, and Fisher (2005) interviewed 51 parolees on three occasions over a period of three months after their release from prison. In addition, they interviewed 19 parole officers and tracked each parolee for six months after release. Ten of the 51 parolees were reincarcerated within six months after their release from prison. Variables associated with not being reincarcerated were higher-quality parent–child relationships in addition to more close relationships within the family network, being employed, and having stable housing. However, being a parent, being married or having a partner, living with a family member, and family support were not associated with parole adjustment or with the likelihood of returning to prison.

In a recent meta-analysis of 16 studies, Mitchell, Spooner, Jia, and Zhang (2016) found that visits (in general) were associated with a 26% reduction in recidivism, in particular post-release convictions and reincarceration but

not arrests. These effects were greater for incarcerated men (53% reduction in recidivism) and incarcerated individuals who received special or extended visits (e.g., furloughs or conjugal visits; 36% reduction in recidivism). The results are not specific to incarcerated parents, nor did the study focus on visits from children.

Although the strongest test of a possible causal relation between parent–child visits and parental recidivism would involve randomizing individuals to visits and assessing outcomes for high and low visit groups, this approach would be unethical. Assessing the effects of interventions that enhance the quality of visits may be a better approach to investigating the causal effects of visits. The effects of several interventions that foster positive visit experiences for imprisoned parents and their children have been evaluated, with promising effects (e.g., *Parenting Inside Out*, see Chap. 15, this volume). Similar research needs to be conducted with incarcerated parents in jail settings, where most incarceration and visitation occur.

### **Incarcerated Parent Well-being**

In an earlier review, Poehlmann et al. (2010) concluded that studies generally found benefits of parent–child contact for the well-being of incarcerated parents. For example, more contact with children has been associated with less parenting stress in imprisoned mothers (Tuerk & Loper, 2006), and stress regarding lack of contact with children has been associated with elevated depression and institutional misconduct (Houck & Loper, 2002). In their analysis of BJS data, Roxburgh and Fitch (2014) found that incarcerated parents showed less distress when they had more frequent phone, mail contact, and visits from children. Similarly, in a study with imprisoned mothers, Poehlmann (2005c) found that more contact between imprisoned mothers and their young children related to lower levels of depressive symptoms during the incarceration. Using data from 69 incarcerated parents, Beckmeyer and Arditti (2014) found that when incarcerated parents received more frequent in-person visits from their children, they also reported less parenting stress and more coparenting with caregivers.

### **Incarcerated individuals' views on visits**

In addition to the examination of recidivism and well-being, studies have examined incarcerated individuals' perspectives on visits. Turanovic and Tasca (2017) quantitatively examined data using multilevel modeling techniques from 228 incarcerated individuals to understand both the positive and the negative factors associated with visits. The type of visitor influenced the incarcerated individual's experience; current romantic partners made the incarcerated individuals feel comforted and loved, whereas current and former romantic partners as well as parents and siblings made incarcerated individuals feel stressed, guilty, and sad. In addition, findings indicated that incarcerated individuals felt comforted, loved, and supported when visiting with someone who visited more frequently, whereas they were likely to get in arguments or feel stressed when visiting with someone who decreased their visits over time. In the UK, Clancy and Maguire (2017) found that visits with family members were often described as a lifeline to the outside world and a way to mark time in the corrections facility. However, Booth (2018) found that incarcerated parents may sometimes minimize the amount of visits or even terminate them altogether as certain policies in corrections facilities, such as not being able to get up from your chair, may not foster positive parent–child contact, and can make for an uncomfortable visit.

### **Difficulties with Visits**

Groundbreaking research conducted by Arditti (2003; Arditti et al., 2003) was among the first of studies to document difficulties associated with non-contact visits in jail settings for caregivers and children, including how visit problems contributed to feelings of loss and family stress. Jails typically employ non-contact visits, which prohibits physical contact and involves visitors seeing the incarcerated parent behind a barrier or glass or through a video screen (Shlafer et al., 2015). Prisons generally permit face-to-face interaction, although there are limits

on displays of physical affection, and prison visits tend to be longer than jail visits (Boudin, Stutz, & Littman, 2013; Shlafer et al., 2015).

Non-contact visits can be particularly stressful for young children who have little understanding as to why they cannot touch the incarcerated parent (Arditti, 2003; Poehlmann-Tynan & Arditti, 2017). In recent research using the Jail Prison Observation Checklist (JPOC, Poehlmann, 2012), an observational measure of children's behavior during a visit with their incarcerated parent, young children and their families were observed from the time that they arrived at the corrections facility until they completed the visit with the incarcerated parent (Poehlmann-Tynan et al., 2015, 2017). The majority of children sought proximity to their caregivers and exhibited high levels of clinging and hand holding during entry into the corrections facility, while waiting to visit with the incarcerated parent, and during visits, which often reflects children's anxiety. However, despite their anxiety, nearly all children (95%) talked with their incarcerated parents and the vast majority (80%) conveyed loving feelings toward their parents either through verbal or nonverbal behaviors. In another study using the JPOC, young children visiting their jailed fathers behind Plexiglas were observed to act more distressed than children visiting in other modalities, such as video or face-to-face contact visits (Poehlmann-Tynan et al., 2017).

Using an entirely different methodology, another study also suggested relative benefits of video visits compared to Plexiglas visits for children. Tartaro and Levy (2017) asked visitors their opinions about their decision for children to visit individuals incarcerated in jail and whether that decision was influenced by the availability of different visit modalities. Visitors from three jails offered opinions about the experiences of children visiting via three different modalities: Plexiglas, on-site video visits, and remote video visits (where the visitor utilizes a personal computer and video camera to connect with the jailed individual). Results indicate that, despite many advantages of in-person visits, remote video visits were seen as best for children.



In two different studies with school age children, Dallaire and colleagues found that more frequent visits between children and their jailed parents, where the visits occurred behind a barrier, were associated with concerns about children; in one study, more frequent visits related to more child behavior problems (Dallaire, Zeman, & Thrash, 2015), and in the second study, more contact with incarcerated parents, including visits, related to more role reversal in children's family drawings (Dallaire, Ciccone, & Wilson, 2012). In a study of 165 jailed parents with young children, Pritzl and colleagues (2019) reported that the association between frequency of parent-child visits and child internalizing behavior problems varied by jail; in a jail that gave families a choice between video and Plexiglas visits, more frequent visits were associated with fewer child internalizing problems, but in a jail that offered only Plexiglas visits, more frequent visits were associated with more child internalizing problems.

Even when face-to-face contact visits are possible, additional barriers to family visits have been identified, such as inaccessible prison facilities, lengthy waits, disrespectful treatment of family members by correctional staff, and stressful screening procedures (Arditti, 2003; Comfort, 2009; Hairston, 1991a, b), as well as the high cost of transportation (Christian, Mellow, & Thomas, 2006). In their study of the costs of visiting and family contributions to the commissary accounts of incarcerated loved ones, Christian et al. (2006) concluded that "Prisoners' families are essentially placed in a double bind as they choose whether to maintain the prisoner, or whether to devote resources to the family's life in the community. Families who successfully maintain relationships with prisoners often recognize this precarious situation and set clear boundaries with the prisoner that enable them to maintain a connection without compromising the family's well-being" (p. 450). These challenges may discourage visits (Hoffmann, Byrd, & Kightlinger, 2010; Kalkan & Smith, 2014; Visher, 2013) and contribute to family difficulties.

The actual facilities themselves and time allotted to visits may pose barriers to meaningful connections in some cases. For instance, Dennison, Smallbone, and Occhipinti (2017) interviewed incarcerated fathers (age 20–51 years) across Queensland, Australia, about communication and parenting skills, the family context as experienced within prison, and father-child contact. Dennison et al. (2017) found that during visits, incarcerated fathers felt that they could not engage with their children for sufficient duration, frequency, or intensity, or do so without interruptions. The fathers were aware of how the prison environment negatively influenced if and when their families visited. Many fathers wished that they had better communication skills to engage with their children, and many described barriers resulting from lack of cooperation with the child's caregiver.

While visits function as sources of family connection, they also can be fraught with emotional pain and feelings of ambiguous loss (Arditti et al., 2003; Arditti & Salva, 2015; De Masi, Benson, & Bohn, 2010)—particularly during non-contact visits in jails (Dallaire et al., 2015). Additionally, visits may contribute to parenting stress for caregivers as they supervise their children and ensure they behave (Cecil, McHale, Strozier & Pietsch, 2008; Poehlmann, Shlafer, & Maes, 2006) so that visits are not prematurely terminated or denied. Given the emotional intensity associated with visits, it is no surprise that caregivers may limit visits if they perceive them as stressful (Arditti, Molloy, & Spiers, 2016; De Masi et al., 2010; Shlafer & Poehlmann, 2010).

Difficulties with visits are also reflected in Hart-Johnson, Johnson, and Tate's (2018) study which examined the views of how prison staff and advocates carry out their roles in the context of visits. Overall, the theme that appeared was labeled "This is a Prison—This is Not a Prison" (p. 248). In other words, prison staff felt there was a delicate balance that needed to be maintained between offering safe and secure visits and emphasizing common humanity for visitors and incarcerated individuals. Both visit staff and

advocates understood how certain policies may create awkward situations for children, which may create confusion for children coming from a perception of innocence. However, the prison also served as a community for members of incarcerated individuals to network—visitors empathized with each other, their children played together, and they even sometimes swapped clothes among families. This space was sometimes used as an intervention and a child-focused space for families.

### Caregivers' views

Much has been written about the role of caregivers as gatekeepers of children's contact with their incarcerated parents (e.g., Tasca, 2016). Judges and court commissioners also report that caregivers often object to bringing children to visit their incarcerated parents, especially when there has been no or limited contact prior to the incarceration or there is a high level of interparental conflict (Maldonado, 2006). In a study with imprisoned mothers and their young children, Poehlmann (2005b) found that caregivers were more likely to foster visits and other forms of contact when their relationships with incarcerated mothers were positive, loyal, and warm.

In her dissertation, Tasca (2014) interviewed 300 fathers and mothers imprisoned in the Arizona Department of Corrections and 100 caregivers of children who experienced parental incarceration in Arizona. Caregivers reported that 65% of children reacted negatively to visiting their incarcerated parents, with children's responses including fear, anger, and anxiety. Caregivers attributed 73% of children's reactions to the institutional context, such as distance, wait times, and search procedures. When the institutional context was negative, children were seen as having negative emotional reactions. In contrast, children who experienced welcoming, friendly visiting environments were more likely to respond positively to visits. In addition, 45% of caregivers attributed children's reactions to the child's attachment to the parent. Tasca also described the "visitation paradox" in which the experience of secondary prisonization, because of the corrections environment, can produce negative reactions

from the child regarding the visit; however, visits might also maintain parental attachments with the child. Therefore, visits can produce both negative and positive outcomes.

Poehlmann-Tynan et al. (2017) observed young children's interactions with incarcerated fathers and caregivers during jail visits. Children were more likely to direct negative behavior at caregivers and positive behaviors toward incarcerated fathers during the actual visit. However, children were more likely to engage in positive behaviors overall when the child had a secure attachment to the caregiver. We speculate that children with the experience of security in their relationship with their caregiver were more likely to feel supported and have their anxiety assuaged during the potentially stressful visit experience. Unfortunately, children with incarcerated parents are less likely to have secure attachments to their caregivers than normative samples, confirming their high-risk status (e.g., Poehlmann-Tynan et al., 2017; Poehlmann, 2005a) and also suggesting one possible explanation of the challenges that caregivers experience during visits: negative child behaviors may occur as a reflection of insecure relationships not just with incarcerated parents but also with their caregivers. Caregivers may need extra support to facilitate secure relationships with the children in their care and also to cope with behaviors and emotions that arise during visits.

### Through a Children's Rights Lens

In 2003, the San Francisco Children of Incarcerated Parents Partnership published the Bill of Rights for children of incarcerated parents. The Bill of Rights recognizes that children need more than just physical comfort and security, and it was written with the hope that every decision about criminal justice policy and practice takes into account the needs and hopes of children. The eight rights of this bill are as follows: I have the right to be kept safe and informed at the time of my parent's arrest; I have the right to be heard when decisions are made about me; I have the right to be well cared for in my parent's absence;



I have the right to speak with, see, and touch my parent; I have the right to support as I face my parent's incarceration; I have the right not to be judged, blamed, or labeled because my parent is incarcerated; and I have the right to a lifelong relationship with my parent. The fourth right focuses on children's face-to-face contact visits with their incarcerated parents. Many advocates, such as the authors of the bill, maintain that children have a right to such visits; however, 15 years after the bill was drafted, most jails still do not offer contact visits (Shlafer et al., 2015) and many caregivers focus on challenges of visits (Tasca, 2014).

From a legal perspective, Boudin (2011) examined the potential problem of third-party harm to children that has arisen from current sentencing law and prison visit policies. She does so through the lens of the child's rights, rather from a parents' rights lens. Such a perspective suggests that there is a legal basis in children's First Amendment freedom of association and their due process liberty interests for decision-making during parental criminal sentencing as well as placement determinations in family court. At the present time, decisions are often made in family court about children's placement with (and visits with) incarcerated parents without the child's "rights" being considered. Instead, the standards of preventing harm and the "best interest of the child" are routinely considered (see Chap. 17, this volume).

Regarding consideration of children's well-being in criminal courts during parental sentencing, the Urban Institute recommends the use of family impact statements. These are defined as statements that allow consideration of the impact of a potential sentence on the defendant's children (Cramer, Peterson, Kurs, & Fontaine, 2015). The Urban Institute has also developed a toolkit for developing family impact statements. They suggest these statements include information such as how the caretaker is related to the children, whether the defendant is the primary caregiver and financially supports the children, if there is an active child support case, if the incident involved family violence, and whether or not the children were placed at risk

due to the offense (Cramer et al., 2015). Such statements can also be used in family court when issues regarding parent-child visits arise.

Cramer et al. (2015) reported that in San Francisco and New York, family impact statements and family responsibility questions have been incorporated into pre-sentencing investigation reports. The idea is that considering children at all stages of a parent's contact with the criminal justice system is likely to help minimize stress and trauma that children often face. "Family impact statements help to ensure that courts, judges, prosecutors, public defenders, and probation officers make sentencing or supervision decisions that are informed by the needs of the defendant's children and by the potential effect on them if their parent were to be incarcerated. Thus, family impact statements aim to improve court decision-making processes by identifying and highlighting how incarceration, or other sentencing or supervision options, can affect the defendant's children" (p. 3).

Similarly, children need to be considered and protected when parents are arrested, as this has implications for how children view their parents and law enforcement, and for their behavior when they arrive at a corrections facility to visit a parent (e.g., Poehlmann-Tynan et al., 2017; Shlafer et al., 2018). In 2014, the International Association of Chiefs of Police spearheaded an initiative to develop a model policy for how to handle parental arrest, especially when children are present. The policy is freely available (e.g., <https://www.bja.gov/publications/iacp-safeguardingchildren.pdf>); however, it is unclear how many local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies have engaged in training to implement this policy.

## **Recommendations for Positive Visit Experiences**

In a recent white paper from the Urban Institute, Cramer, Goff, Peterson, and Sandstrom (2017) reviewed the existing literature and interviewed eight experts in the field to examine multiple aspects of parent-child visits during parental

incarceration. They concluded that face-to-face contact visits appeared the most beneficial for children, especially when they offer developmentally appropriate activities and are embedded in family support programs. Programs that are helpful include such elements as identifying and working through underlying issues to promote healthy parent–child and family relationships. Visits can also support parental positive feelings and commitment to the child during incarceration and following release. If contact visits are frequent, it can result in a paradox that simultaneously includes opportunities for maintaining positive relationships but with the risk of secondary prisonization experiences, in which children become acclimated to the incarceration setting. However, in-person non-contact visits may lead to children feeling confused. Cramer et al., (2017) also note that a key barrier regarding children’s visits with their incarcerated parents is the quality of the parent–caregiver relationship and the willingness of the caregiver to support children’s visits. Visits appear to be more effective when caregivers are provided with support. The report also suggests that corrections facilities need to be more accommodating for parent–child visits, including offering support to children and their caregivers, with staff participating in training so that they can better listen to and understand family needs and complex dynamics, and offering activities for children and child-friendly materials such as toys and games.

In their 2010 review, Poehlmann et al. concluded that there are both benefits and challenges to in-person visits, whereas other forms of parent–child contact during parental incarceration, such as letter writing, appear to be uniformly helpful. However, when visits are “child-friendly,” such as in interventions designed to help children with incarcerated parents and their families, children clearly benefit. Poehlmann and colleagues outlined what was meant by child-friendly visits. This includes providing a positive, safe, friendly environment for visits; training corrections staff how to interact with children and families; fostering open communication among caregivers, children, incarcerated parents,

and supportive professionals; preparing children for visits; and supporting incarcerated parents in the visit process. Hart-Johnson (2018) also agrees with these ideas and suggests that visits need to prioritize children’s rights. Specifically, Hart-Johnson advises to allow more physical contact between children and their incarcerated parent, as well as providing visit staff with child-sensitive training. Face-to-face contact visits that are implemented as part of an intervention (e.g., Grendziak, Poehlmann-Tynan, Fanning, Pritzl, & Lavender, 2019) most often meet these criteria, although in-home video visits, where the child can be comfortable in the home during a visit, are good alternatives when child-friendly visits are not possible or as supplements to in-person visits. It is also critical that parents and children have contact with each other between visits, such as through letter writing; mailing drawings, cards, or videos; email contact; or telephone calls. For visits to be positive for children, they especially need adequate preparation, including talking to them simply and honestly about the parent being in jail or prison.

Since that time, Poehlmann-Tynan et al. (2015) have also suggested ways of making non-contact visits more child-friendly, even though Plexiglas and video visits are not inherently child-friendly. These suggestions include increasing privacy, decreasing wait time, giving a warning before visits end, including more information about visits on Web sites and adding links to resources for families with children, providing staff with additional training, recognizing the key role that children’s caregivers play, and preparing children and adults. Ideas for enhancing the content of visits through establishment of routines, using positive nonverbal communication, and having caregivers prompt children to facilitate conversations were also suggested. Pritzl et al. (2019) also suggest the importance of family choice in deciding what type of visit suits them.

In sum, visits between children and their incarcerated parents are a complex issue. There are benefits and drawbacks of visits for children, their caregivers, and their incarcerated parents, with caregivers most often expressing negative

views about visits—in part because they bear the burdens of cost, time, and sometimes coping with negative child emotions and behaviors that arise—and with incarcerated parents often expressing positive views, as visits often serve as a lifeline to the outside world and their future in addition to improving their well-being and decreasing recidivism. Overall, it seems that facilitating opportunities to strengthen healthy relationships between children and their incarcerated parents during and following incarceration is a worthy goal, and that there are many ways to achieve such connections, including supporting children's visits with their incarcerated parents, especially in child-friendly settings with adequate preparation, as well as facilitating additional forms of contact.

### **Implications for Future Research**

Research focusing on parent–child visits when parents are incarcerated is emerging, but there is still much to learn. More research is needed to examine the physical effects of the visit environment on stress levels of different visitors, including children, caregivers, friends, and family. If research suggests that visits are associated with varying stress levels, researchers might consider looking into how changes in stress are associated with behavioral changes observed in children and the incarcerated parent. Perhaps, using this line of research, researchers could seek to identify the most stressful parts of a visit. This might have direct implications for corrections visitation policies and help jail and prison administrators consider changes that might mitigate stressful situations.

Additionally, much of the existing research in this field is based on short-term snapshots of individuals and their families. There is a need for more longitudinal research that might show how establishing or maintaining contact with an incarcerated parent can influence children in the longer term. Studies are mixed regarding documenting behavior changes in children following visits with incarcerated parents. Do behavior

changes persist? When the frequency of visits changes, do children's behaviors change? Does visit frequency have different effects when visit quality is examined? Might the establishment and maintenance of the parent–child relationship be associated with decreased likelihood of the child being involved in the criminal justice system in the future? How are visits and other forms of contact related to child and family resilience (Poehlmann-Tynan & Eddy, 2013)?

Further research might investigate whether or not more caregiver support is associated with positive effects for the whole family, including the children, the incarcerated parent, and the caregiver. Perhaps, professionals could provide caregivers with more guidance and understanding of the resources available to them. Research might examine how more financial assistance might be used by caregivers, and how this resource would directly or indirectly influence children's behavior and development. Or research might delve into the ever-present issue of the time, cost, and availability of traveling to corrections facilities. How might visit frequency, and effects of visits, change if caregivers were assisted with bringing a child to see their incarcerated parent? How would it change if in-home video visits were available for children as a way to increase contact? (rather than replacing personal contact).

Additionally, future research might seek out a better understanding of children's perceptions of their parent's incarceration. It would be very useful to understand what children think and feel about different types of visits, and how policies might change to make visits easier for families. In visit spaces that are child-centered, do children perceive it as a place where they feel comfortable? If so, what do children think of prison or jail as a deterrent for crime? Do child-centered visit centers make children more or less likely to commit crimes in the future? Future research might also consider individuals who are now adults who grew up visiting an incarcerated parent. What do these individuals think about how a child-centered visiting area might influence their own perceptions of prison or jail as a whole?

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# Qualitative Research on Children of Incarcerated Parents: Findings, Challenges, and Future Directions

# 11

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## Abstract

Qualitative research has the potential to give voice to the lived experiences of children of incarcerated parents. This chapter highlights the contributions that key qualitative studies have made to our understanding of topics such as children's reactions to parental incarceration; sustaining parent-child relationships during incarceration; and the stigma facing the children of incarcerated parents. Methodological challenges associated with conducting qualitative research are discussed. Recommendations for future directions include the need for more research that examines children's experiences with their parent's involvement in different stages of the criminal justice system as well as examinations of demographic differences and resilience among children of incarcerated parents.

Qualitative research can give voice to the lived experiences of children of incarcerated parents, help us understand how children make meaning

of their circumstances and provide tools to explore the complexities of the challenges faced by families of the incarcerated. Using primarily in-depth interviews, qualitative researchers explore topics such as children's emotions and behaviors during incarceration, parent-child contact in prison and jail, and the stigma related to parental incarceration.

Existing literature on children of incarcerated parents is largely quantitative, with many studies employing secondary analysis of existing datasets to understand incarceration's effects (Easterling & Johnson, 2015). Most such research confirms that parental incarceration negatively affects children. Yet quantitative analyses, while important, do not tell the full story. By qualitatively studying children of incarcerated parents, researchers can complement quantitative findings (Easterling & Johnson, 2015), illuminating the reasons behind findings of children's emotional and behavioral problems by uncovering and contextualizing the risks they face. In particular, qualitative research can be used to better understand mediators, moderators, and the interactions identified in quantitative research. Not only can qualitative research help to explain quantitative findings, but it can propel the field's understanding of the effects of parental incarceration forward. Qualitative studies can provide information valuable to theory building or hypothesis generation that then can be tested through quantitative methods, which is especially

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important as we try to understand how families function when parents are incarcerated.

In general, qualitative methods provide tools for in-depth exploration of the experiences of children of incarcerated parents. As Daly (1992) notes, qualitative methods are appropriate for the study of “meanings, interpretations, and subjective experiences of family members” (pp. 3–4). By investigating parental incarceration qualitatively, researchers are able to examine the day-to-day experience of living with parental incarceration and how children make meaning of these circumstances. Qualitative scholars commonly take an inductive approach to their research and utilize methods including field research, in-depth interviews, or a combination of both. In the case of field research, which is also referred to as participant observation, scholars studying children of incarcerated parents commonly spend time observing the interactions between parents and children in correctional settings. Other qualitative researchers primarily rely on in-depth interviews with children, their parents and/or caregivers. Still other researchers utilize a combination of observation and interviews to both see the interactions and follow up with questions. Nearly, all qualitative research involves interviews with or observations of a child at one point in time, although some is longitudinal. Nesmith and Ruhland (2008), for instance, interviewed children three different times over the course of a year to capture changes in their experience, and Siegel (2011) interviewed children both before and after their mother’s imprisonment to contextualize how incarceration affects their lives.

Qualitative studies based on interviews with children document their perspectives on the experience of parental incarceration in their own words, providing a vehicle through which the complexities of their lives emerge. Nesmith and Ruhland (2008) note that nearly all knowledge about children of incarcerated parents’ experiences is filtered through adults’ lenses, whereas their own interviews with children of incarcerated parents tell “a story that is not told elsewhere ... as understood through the voices and perspectives of the children themselves”

(p. 1121). This quote underscores the potential for qualitative research to complement quantitative research. Some quantitative scholars who analyze large-scale existing datasets to study children of incarcerated parents may have never observed parent–child visitation in a correctional facility or even spoken to a child of an incarcerated parent. In these cases, qualitative research is especially valuable because it can provide a window into the actual lived experience of parental incarceration and help explain sometimes confusing results from quantitative studies. For example, quantitative analyses from different studies have presented contradictory results about the effect of maternal incarceration on children (Turney & Wildeman, 2015), leading some to conclude that it has no effect, but qualitative research has revealed that children are indeed affected in many ways by their mother’s incarceration (Siegel, 2011).

The research findings discussed in this chapter draw primarily from studies using in-depth interview methods, although a few studies included observational data collected during prison or jail visitation. Some scholars relied primarily on interviews with children, parents (incarcerated or not), caregivers, teachers, or mentors, while others conducted interviews with children along with the adults in their lives to tell a more complete story of parental incarceration. Nearly all qualitative studies relied on interviews conducted at one time point, while a few interviewed participants over time (e.g., Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008; Siegel, 2011). Additionally, some articles mentioned in this chapter were drawn from studies utilizing open-ended questions to supplement quantitative methods (e.g., Poehlmann, 2005; Shlafer & Poehlmann, 2010). In these cases, we only refer to the findings drawn from analysis of the open-ended questions.

This chapter highlights the contributions of qualitative studies to our understanding of children’s experiences of parental incarceration. To develop our list of qualitative studies, we conducted reviews of the existing literature, in addition to drawing from Arditti’s (2012) appendix and Dawson, Jackson, and Nyamathi’s

(2012) review of qualitative research. We did not evaluate the methodological rigor of each study before including it in this chapter, which means there is much variation in the sampling methods, sample sizes and generalizability of findings. Typically, qualitative scholars do not utilize large samples or attempt to generalize their findings; instead, researchers are focused on gaining an in-depth understanding of a particular topic of study. Throughout this chapter, in cases where researcher utilized especially rigorous methods (see Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008; Siegel, 2011), we make note of their methods.

We selectively focus on some areas where qualitative research has added to our understanding of children of incarcerated parents: children's reactions to parental incarceration; parent-child contact during incarceration; and the stigma of parental incarceration for children. We then discuss the challenges qualitative researchers face when studying children of incarcerated parents and conclude with suggestions for future qualitative study, recommendations for practitioners and policy implications.

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## What Do We Learn from Qualitative Studies?

### Reactions to Parental Incarceration

Qualitative findings suggest that children of incarcerated parents experience significant emotional and behavioral difficulties, confirming quantitative findings, but also providing context and explanation for children's reactions to parental incarceration. Qualitative studies report children of incarcerated parents exhibit a variety of problematic emotions and behaviors. Researchers find that some children "act in" through sadness, anxiety, emotional distress, crying, developmental regression, or withdrawal (Beck & Jones, 2007; Bocknek, Sanderson, & Britner, 2009; Dallaire, Ciccone, & Wilson, 2010; Poehlmann, 2005; Shlafer & Poehlmann,

2010), while others "act out," exhibiting difficulty interacting positively with their classmates, aggression, bullying, or fighting (Beck & Jones, 2007; Dallaire et al., 2010; Shlafer & Poehlmann, 2010; Siegel, 2011).

Through qualitative methodology, researchers have explored the context and nuance of these behaviors. For instance, Beck and Jones (2007) study of children with fathers on death row found that in some cases children's behaviors were related to the proximity of execution and that those who seemed to be faring best were ones who described positive relationships with their mothers or caretakers. Likewise, Shlafer and Poehlmann's (2010) analysis indicated that children's behaviors were connected to the challenging circumstances of their home lives and troublesome peer interactions. These findings underscore the importance of context and help us understand the influence other relationships exert on children throughout parental incarceration. Furthermore, Dallaire et al. (2010), in interviews with teachers, discovered teachers connected children's emotional difficulties to academic challenges in the classroom, showing how negative emotional outcomes among children of incarcerated parents may engender other problems.

Researchers also find children react to parental incarceration in ways that directly relate to their framing and thinking about parental incarceration. To minimize stigma and buttress themselves, some children engage in methods to distance themselves from their parent, such as changing one's last name so that it no longer matches the parent's or choosing not to discuss their parent's incarceration with other people (Beck & Jones, 2007; Johnson & Easterling, 2015a; Luther, 2016; Shlafer & Poehlmann, 2010; Siegel, 2011). Others have found that children downplay parental incarceration, including minimizing its significance because it has happened before (Johnson & Easterling, 2015a).

Qualitative research has also revealed that children may react to parental incarceration in constructive ways. Some children of incarcerated parents engage in coping methods that include

focusing on positive avenues that they can control, such as attending school or therapy; participating in athletic and theater activities; or engaging in religion (Johnson & Easterling, 2015a; Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008). These methods allowed children to adapt to parental incarceration in positive ways, leading some researchers to connect these behaviors to resilience (Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008). There is, however, minimal research on resilience among this population. One exception is Luther's (2015) retrospective study of college students with incarcerated parents, which found that social support from caring adults encouraged resilience; in particular, these adults supported engagement in conventional activities, helped participants develop a vision of a positive future, and fostered turning points (i.e., transitioning from participating in risky or illegal behavior to prosocial behavior). These positive influences, coupled with their own determination to forge a positive path, enabled them to gain a college education despite what many believe are considerable odds against children who have experienced parental incarceration.

## Parent–Child Contact

Contact between parents and their children is essential for maintaining a parent–child relationship, creating an attachment between very young children and their parents, and providing reassurance to children that their parent is safe. Qualitative research has substantially enhanced our understanding of the issues related to maintaining contact, especially via visiting. Reviews of research on visiting show mixed results, with some studies reporting positive effects for children but others not (Poehlmann, Dallaire, Loper, & Shear, 2010). Qualitative studies that capture the quality of visits can help make sense of such mixed findings by shedding light on factors that could influence how children respond to visits.

Observational studies and interviews have illuminated the challenges of some correctional environments for visits by children (also see Chap. 10, this volume, for an in-depth discussion

of benefits and challenges of parent–child contact during parental incarceration). Settings for visits can vary significantly from institution to institution. Many facilities have barriers such as Plexiglas windows or mesh screens that separate visitors from the person they are visiting, making physical contact impossible (e.g., Poehlmann-Tynan et al., 2015). This is a particularly troubling arrangement for a parent and child—especially very young children—because physical contact contributes to bonding and can be comforting and reassuring. In other facilities, visits take place in large, open rooms where many people are visiting at the same time. These settings can be noisy, with a lot of activity taking place in an unwelcoming institutional setting. Opportunities for physical contact between parent and child in such settings are often limited and there are few materials, such as games, toys, or books, that would allow parents and children to engage in child-friendly activities.

Other aspects that may make visits unpleasant for children include unattractive and often poorly maintained settings in which some visits take place, disrespectful treatment by correctional officers, long waiting times, and the searches to which children may be subject (Arditti, 2003; Hairston, 1998; Sharratt, 2014). In addition, Tasca, Turanovic, White, and Rodriguez (2014) point out that visits present opportunities for family members not only to enjoy being together but also to express recriminations, resentments, and grievances, which children may find upsetting.

By contrast, studies done where children have visits in child-friendly areas or as part of a special family visiting program with longer visiting hours and fewer restrictions on parent–child interactions report more positive findings (Boswell, 2002). For instance, Schubert, Duinck, and Schlafer (2016) examined an extended visit program that took place on weekends and allowed for mothers and children to interact one-on-one, engage in activities like arts and crafts, play together in the gym, have lunch together and “express natural physical affection” (p. 218). Interviews with mothers in the program and the children's caregivers found they unanimously

preferred these visits over those traditionally available to them. A qualitative study of visits in four different European countries likewise found that programs permitting physical interaction between parent and child and providing the ability to engage with toys and games were more satisfying to children. Extended time together for visits was viewed very positively, especially in light of the long journeys many families undertook to get to the facility where the parent was housed. Longer visits were particularly beneficial to children whose relationships with their parents had been fragile before the parent's imprisonment and who struggled to interact under normal visiting conditions. In addition, children who were better informed about the reasons for security measures were less fearful than children at prisons where procedures and the reasons for them had not been explained (Sharratt, 2014). Results from these qualitative studies suggest that improved conditions may explain more positive outcomes for children.

In addition to these insights about visiting, qualitative research about contact during incarceration has revealed the importance of the relationships that existed before the parent was imprisoned. Sharratt (2014) found that children who had fragmented relationships with their parent, usually due to irregular pre-incarceration contact arising from the parent's substance abuse, had difficulty even speaking by phone with their parent. This research demonstrates the challenges of repairing fragile relationships even when the parent has the opportunity to become clean and sober in prison. In some cases, parents and children face the task of establishing a relationship that did not exist before the parent's incarceration, whether because of the child's age when the parent was imprisoned or because the parent was absent from the child's life before incarceration, a situation that some have found is not uncommon (Siegel, 2011).

### **Stigma and Shame**

Qualitative research highlights the experience of stigma, shame, and isolation faced by children of

incarcerated parents, drawing attention to how children work to hide parental incarceration from their peers (Luther, 2016; Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008; Siegel, 2011). Children report that they did not want peers to know their parents were incarcerated for fear that others might perceive them negatively. Nesmith and Ruhland (2008) found that children's caregivers played a role in encouraging secrecy surrounding parental incarceration by mentioning the need for privacy about family circumstances, which was echoed in children's interviews. Keeping their parents' crimes and incarceration a secret led to feelings of isolation for many children (Beck & Jones, 2007). When parental incarceration was known at school, researchers reported negative reactions by peers, sometimes leading to fighting between students (Beck & Jones, 2007; Shlafer & Poehlmann, 2010). Typically, stigma emerged as a theme within larger studies of the effects of parental incarceration. Luther's (2016) work is an exception, as it focused on the techniques adult children of incarcerated parents used to manage their courtesy stigma, including distancing themselves from their parent's criminality and incarceration, thinking about their parents as negative role models, and framing their experiences of parental incarceration in a positive manner, as a way to promote their prosocial identities.

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### **Methodological Challenges**

Conducting qualitative research often presents challenges to investigators, but carrying out such research with a population that frequently remains hidden and difficult to access presents unique hurdles that must be addressed. In this section, we discuss issues commonly faced by qualitative researchers studying children whose parent is incarcerated.

### **Sample Identification and Recruitment**

Children of incarcerated parents are not a group that can be readily identified, apart from those

who may be involved in a program designed specifically for them. Several researchers, who have provided valuable insights into the experience of parental incarceration, have taken advantage of the relative ease of sample identification afforded by programs for incarcerated parents and/or their children (Bocknek et al., 2009; Chui, 2016; Johnson & Easterling, 2015a, b) or by family visits to an institution (Boswell, 2002). Such samples, however, may not be representative of children of incarcerated parents. For example, program participants may be living with a parent or caregiver who not only has decided that the child should participate, but also has sufficient social capital to know about the resource and the means to ensure the child can participate, making them qualitatively different from other children of incarcerated parents.

Although qualitative studies are not aiming for generalizability in their sampling methods, they do endeavor to have samples that are representative of the phenomenon of interest. Therefore, to capture the lived experience of children of incarcerated parents not fortunate enough to participate in programs or to be able to visit their imprisoned parent, researchers identify and reach children through other means. Nesmith and Ruhland (2008) recruited children and caregivers from the community, targeting specific neighborhoods using maps of incarceration and reentry concentration. Another approach is to recruit children through their parents in prison (Siegel, 2011; Turney, Adams, Conner, Goodsell, & Muñiz, 2017). Doing so, however, can be a time-consuming task that entails identifying and contacting incarcerated parents, which requires permission from correctional authorities. Once researchers have obtained permission to solicit participation, they must then devise a method to reach the population of incarcerated parents. This requires working closely with correctional officials, understanding the constraints in a given setting and formulating strategies that are feasible within those constraints. For instance, a researcher could ask a facility to provide a list of prisoner ID numbers from which a random sample could be drawn. Recruitment might then be done by distributing flyers to the

sample informing them about the research and providing a method by which they can let the researcher know they would be interested in participating. Another approach might entail organizing group informational meetings followed by screenings to see if would-be participants meet the criteria for participation. Siegel (2011) utilized a strategy that involved forging an alliance with a local public defender's office to recruit participants in a county jail. When lawyers went to the jail to review cases with their clients, the attorneys would inform clients briefly about the research and tell them they could stop by an adjacent meeting room to get more information from a researcher (Siegel, 2011).

Researchers recruiting through incarcerated parents should be prepared to deal with some parents who may be suspicious of participation because of fear that governmental authorities will intervene and remove the child from a home. Those who do agree, however, can provide contact information for the child's caregiver, enabling researchers to reach both the child and caregiver. Whatever method is used to recruit children through their parent, researchers should anticipate the need for persistence and patience as they work to deal with limitations imposed by the prison setting and the need to establish trust with parents, caregivers and children. Our own experience with parents in prison has shown that parents are responsive to the idea that research is being conducted to learn more about the dynamics and effects of parental incarceration on children, but it is important for researchers to acknowledge appreciation for a family's participation, making clear that they recognize that being granted access to families is a privilege to be respected.

### **Access to Children**

Once children have been identified as potential participants in a project, researchers seeking to obtain permission for a child to participate must next confront the challenges of persuading the caregiver to provide access to the child. Caregivers play a central role in a child's well-being

and adjustment to a parent's incarceration, and researchers must respect their gatekeeping role. In fact, researchers can expect that some caregivers will be protective of the children and potentially suspicious of the researcher (Siegel, 2011; Turney et al., 2017), especially if they have not been informed in advance about the research. A letter sent beforehand can introduce a researcher and the reason for wanting to speak with the caregiver, but there is no guarantee that the caregiver will want to speak to the researcher, even after advance notification (Siegel, 2011). If the recruitment originated with the parent in prison, it can be very helpful for the parent to ease access by first discussing the research with the caregiver and explaining that he or she has given consent for the child to participate. Having met the researcher, the parent may also be able to alleviate a caregiver's anxiety about the reasons for the research.

Once contact with a caregiver has been made, researchers should be aware that they may well have to overcome reluctance and suspicion before obtaining consent for the child to participate (Turney et al., 2017). In some cases, caregivers may hesitate if the child does not know the parent is in prison. In other cases, caregivers may have a hostile relationship with the parent in prison, making them averse to allowing the child to participate simply from a desire not to be involved with the incarcerated parent. More commonly, however, a caregiver's reluctance may stem from concern that the child will be upset by talking about their parent, leaving them "exposed and vulnerable with no one available to support them" (Brown, Dibb, Shenton, & Elson, 2001, p. 11). Whatever the reason for a caregiver's potential initial disinclination, researchers should be prepared to address their concerns and to be flexible in finding mutually satisfactory ways to address the reasons for their hesitancy (Turney et al., 2017).

One way to alleviate caregivers' concerns is for researchers to engage with them before speaking with the child. The critical role they play in children's lives makes them uniquely qualified to inform researchers about children's adjustment to their parent's incarceration.

Interviewing a caregiver before a child can build a relationship of trust that not only allows a caregiver to feel comfortable granting access to the child but also provides needed information about the child's knowledge of the parent's situation.

## Children as Research Participants

Whether undertaking open-ended interviews, an observational study, focus groups or another qualitative approach, researchers should be attuned to the fact that children differ from adults in important ways. For instance, interviews about paternal reentry that Yocum and Nath (2011) conducted with children lasted on average only 19 minutes, whereas those done with parents were two hours in duration, although it appears that the same open-ended questions were posed to both groups. Similar disparities were found in Chui's (2016) study (40 vs. 180 minutes for children and adults, respectively). Participants in those studies included children as young as 4 years, so the difference in interview duration may be attributable, in part, to the more limited language abilities of younger children, but researchers should be prepared in advance for conversations that differ qualitatively from those with adults. Thinking about alternate ways to establish rapport with children and to draw them out, even in non-verbal ways such as drawing, photography, or play, can facilitate the interview process with younger children (see Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008). Researchers without prior experience with children as participants in a study would be well advised to seek published guidance about qualitative research with children before designing their study and going into the field (e.g., Clark, 2010; Freeman & Mathison, 2008; Greene & Hogan, 2005). Ensuring that research is designed appropriately for a child's developmental stage is important as well. For instance, younger children's responses are also likely to be more abbreviated than adolescents', so researchers should consider adjusting questions accordingly and be prepared with strategies to draw them out more with follow-up questions. Nearly



all the research discussed in this chapter has focused on school-age children or adolescents. While open-ended interviews with adolescents seem to work well, research with very young children would benefit from other approaches, such as incorporating play or storytelling to elicit narratives about a child's own experience.

In addition to considering children's ages, researchers should as well take into account the ways in which their own status may distance them from their research participants, whether due to differences in race, ethnicity, sex, education or socioeconomic status, among others. Profiles of parents in prison indicate that their children are more likely to be racial or ethnic minorities and to have families that are lower income and have less education than the typical academic researcher (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008; Rabuy & Kopf, 2015). Qualitative research to date offers little insight into the question of whether or how researchers have addressed this issue. One way to address this is to ensure diversity in the members of a research team. Having research team members who are more similar in background to participants may reduce barriers between them. Researchers can also let participants know that they are the "experts" from whom the researchers hope to learn, showing respect for participants' experience and first-hand knowledge. Furthermore, as Tinker and Armstrong (2008) argue, a researcher's "outsider" status can have benefits. For instance, by admitting their lack of knowledge, a researcher unfamiliar with the experiences participants are describing may be able to elicit more detailed explanations than might otherwise be the case if participants assume they and the researcher already share some understanding that needs no elaboration.

While research with children in general requires forethought about the appropriate design, talking with children of incarcerated parents presents unique concerns because of the sensitive nature of the reason for their parent's absence from the family and the stigma associated with it. Researchers should anticipate that

some children will find the topic of their parent's incarceration upsetting, so care should be taken to begin conversations with questions related to more neutral subjects. Field staff interacting with the children should also be trained in how to respond to possible emotional distress and be informed about available resources, such as counseling, if appropriate. Those who undertake ethnographic or observational studies with children of incarcerated parents will also need to determine how to avoid exposing a child to unwanted attention by others if they accompany children in public to observe them in their everyday environments.

Establishing what the child knows about where their parent is living before asking any questions that mention prisons directly is crucial. Even if a parent or caregiver has given assurances that the child knows the parent is incarcerated, a child may not want to reveal that to a researcher, so researchers should be prepared to alter questions to avoid mentioning anything related to prison. Likewise, research in this field can be limited by children's inaccurate or limited information about their parent's incarceration (Bocknek et al., 2009). The problem of children's limited knowledge of parental incarceration necessitates the need for qualitative researchers to also interview caregivers, incarcerated parents, teachers, and/or mentors associated with each child to draw a more complete understanding of parental incarceration. Triangulation of sources, which entails obtaining data from more than one category of informant, is a well-established approach in qualitative research. Researchers can also consider triangulation of methods. For example, observing children in their natural settings can be used to supplement interviews to see how children behave and interact in places like school, home or even while visiting their parent (Poehlmann-Tynan et al., 2015). Diversifying the sources and methods employed in qualitative studies can contribute to a richer and more comprehensive understanding of the children's circumstances and reactions to their parent's imprisonment.



## Future Research

Despite the contributions of existing studies on children of incarcerated parents, qualitative approaches, including ones that are longitudinal, could enrich our knowledge about several unexplored topics. These include children's reactions to the sequence of events preceding and following incarceration, potential differences in the experience of parental incarceration by demographic characteristics, and resilience.

Before we discuss areas of future study in more detail, we draw attention to some of the challenges facing qualitative researchers in this field. Due to smaller sample sizes, use of convenience and snowball sampling, and perceived lack of generalizability, qualitative research is commonly devalued in academic departments and disadvantaged in the grant funding process. In addition, qualitative research is often a long process that yields fewer publications, which can deter people working in academic departments that reward publication quantity. A full discussion of how these issues can be redressed is beyond the scope of this chapter but those who do undertake such research should be aware in advance of these challenges.

Even with these methodological concerns, however, we see immense value in the interplay between qualitative and quantitative research to better understand the effects of parental incarceration. If qualitative scholars better frame their research as having potential to inform quantitative research, we think quantitative scholars may see more merit in this methodology. At the same time, we encourage quantitative researchers to look at qualitative research as a valuable source for new theories to test and as a way to develop a more nuanced understanding of the experience of parental incarceration and the context in which it occurs. Overall, we advocate for mixed methods research that draws a large representative sample to be studied quantitatively with a subsample studied qualitatively to explore the themes and questions raised by the quantitative research in more depth. Collaborations between disciplines can further enrich such approaches. Academic

researchers should as well consider collaborations with practitioners and think about ways in which qualitative research can enhance understanding of programs designed for children of incarcerated parents. Scant evidence about efficacious programs is available, and while evaluation is typically conducted quantitatively, qualitative research has the potential to contribute insights for both process and outcome evaluations that would not otherwise be captured through quantitative measures.

## Children's Experiences of Their Parent's Criminal Justice Involvement

Research has cast little light on children of incarcerated parents' involvement in the steps preceding their parent's incarceration, even though other parts of the process may be uniquely consequential for them, beginning with a parent's arrest and detention and extending through court appearances, sentencing, and the reentry process. Just as Comfort (2016) has noted that "it is important to take into account the specific ways that family life is affected by different stages of criminal justice involvement" (p. 65), so too is it important to understand how children are affected by these processes.

### Arrest

Children often are not present when a parent is arrested, but for those who are little is known about their perspectives of the experience. Previous research has found that 22–41% of children may witness the parent's arrest (Dallaire & Wilson, 2010; Poehlmann-Tynan, Burnson, Runion, & Weymouth, 2017). Witnessing a parent's arrest, which can include events such as having a door broken in, the house searched and the parent physically restrained or injured by the police, can induce a variety of reactions among children, including fear, anxiety, confusion, alarm, anger, and intense general distress (Dallaire & Wilson, 2010; Poehlmann-Tynan et al., 2017; Puddefoot & Foster, 2007). When children are not present when a parent is arrested, they may be completely in the dark about the parent's

whereabouts, leaving them frightened, anxious, and unsupervised. In some cases, children may even be drawn into the crime taking place or simply be at the wrong place at the time their parent is arrested and end up arrested themselves (Brown & Bloom, 2009; Siegel, 2011). Although arrest can have enduring consequences, such as symptoms of post-traumatic syndrome (Phillips & Zhao, 2010), we do not know how lasting this effect may be for children, especially in context with the greater loss that occurs when a parent leaves for prison or jail. Qualitative research could capture children's reactions to and understanding of the arrest experience through their own accounts, thereby enriching our understanding of what these experiences contribute to children's emotional health.

### **Pre-trial Detention**

After an arrest, a person usually is taken to a lock-up or jail, which can mark the beginning of a period of pre-trial detention. Detention can be relatively brief but may extend for long periods before a person is released. From a child's perspective, the distinction between jail and prison probably matters little because the parental absence is the same, yet we know relatively little about what happens to children when this initial imprisonment occurs. Questions about this period include who cares for the children, whether they need to relocate or change schools, whether they are separated from siblings, what they are told about the parent's whereabouts, contact during detention and how they respond to this unexpected separation.

### **Court Appearances and Sentencing**

Qualitative research may be an effective way of investigating children's understanding of the court process and sentencing. Although it appears uncommon for children to attend court procedures, their parent's court appearances can create anxiety and fear because they do not fully understand why their parent is going to court, the significance of the various processes, nor the possible outcomes. Searches reveal virtually no research on children's involvement in criminal

cases in which their parent is a defendant, apart from child maltreatment cases. Information about children's experiences during the court process may enhance our understanding of children of incarcerated parents' well-being. For instance, their perceptions of the legal process, based on their parent's experiences, arguably may affect their attitudes toward the system's legitimacy and fairness. Some children involved in the legal system because of child maltreatment cases have been found to have negative attitudes toward the law (Troxel, Ogle, Cordon, Lawler, & Goodman, 2009). Negative views about the legitimacy of the legal system are associated with higher rates of offending among both adults and adolescents (Fine et al., 2017), making this a salient question to investigate. Gathering information about children's involvement and reactions through participant observation over the course of the process could provide insight into children's reactions to the various legal proceedings and interviews can capture their understanding and attitudes.

### **Jail**

Most qualitative studies focus on children whose parents are in prison, not jail, yet many more adults will spend time in jail than in prison in a given year, with nearly 11 million people admitted to jails in 2015 (Zeng, 2018). Many who spend time in jail never go to prison, so studies that focus solely on children with a parent in prison are potentially missing a sizable population of children of incarcerated parents. While jail imprisonment may be briefer than prison incarceration, it also may happen more frequently. Research on the effect of the frequency and duration of paternal incarceration in Denmark shows that children whose fathers are incarcerated multiple times, even if for relatively short sentences, are at significantly higher risk of academic difficulties and criminal justice involvement than other youth (Andersen, 2016). Other recent qualitative work revealed the deleterious effect on families of a family member's frequent jail stays due to low-level offenses (Comfort, 2016). A focus on children whose parent cycles in and out of jail and how they are affected by the drain these shorter

but possibly more frequent absences places on the family will deepen our knowledge of the challenges children of incarcerated parents face.

### Reentry

Research on prisoner reentry has consistently found that family support is one of the most important predictors of success for formerly incarcerated individuals (Arditti & Few, 2006; Bahr, Armstrong, Gibbs, Harris, & Fisher, 2005; Berg & Huebner, 2011; Petersilia, 2003). Research has shown that reunification with offspring may be associated with more positive outcomes for parents returning from prison (Visher, Bakken, & Gunter, 2013), although resuming a parental role can also be challenging and stressful (Brown & Bloom, 2009; Michalsen, 2011).

For children, a parent's return from prison is an extremely consequential event, yet research on this subject from their point of view is scarce. One qualitative study revealed children's expectations and apprehensions about what would happen when they were reunited with their fathers after release, which were tempered by varying degrees of confidence in the likelihood that fathers could live up to their promises and the children's hopes (Yocum & Nath, 2011). Indeed, a parent's failure to fulfill children's hopes for their relationship with them appears to be an important aspect of adjustment for youth who have experienced parental incarceration, affecting their well-being beyond the time their parent is incarcerated (Siegel, 2011). Given the dearth of research on this aspect of children of incarcerated parents' lives, several questions about children's and their family's adjustment to their parent's release could fruitfully be addressed by qualitative studies.

### Demographic Differences

Existing qualitative research has focused little attention on how children of different races, ethnicities, sex, age or socioeconomic status experience a parent's incarceration. As others have pointed out, however, quantitative research

has revealed "dramatic variation in incarceration's impacts for family life" (Wakefield, Lee, & Wildeman, 2016, p. 13). Uncovering potential demographic differences through qualitative study might contribute to more nuanced explanations of variations found in quantitative findings. The scant amount of information we do have suggests that differences may exist. For instance, Stanton's (1980) interviews revealed differences in expectations of children by age and gender, which she hypothesized contributed to differences in attitudes toward law enforcement, thereby potentially affecting other outcomes for children. Others have noted that older children express more anger and disappointment with their parent than younger children, perhaps because they have experienced repeated incidents of reincarceration despite a parent's stated resolve to stay out of trouble (Siegel, 2011).

Race and ethnicity of course are of critical importance. The overrepresentation of minorities in jails and prisons means that parental imprisonment disproportionately affects children of color, yet relatively little has been written about their experiences. Qualitative researchers should be purposive in ensuring that their voices are heard in the literature through open-ended interviews. Ethnographic methods could be utilized to bring into focus the neighborhoods where youth live during their parent's incarceration, just as Braman's (2004) work illuminated the places inhabited by urban families affected by incarceration. Learning more about the worlds that children of color inhabit may provide important insights into how factors such as their support system, family relationships and direct and vicarious experiences with the justice system influence their experiences and reactions to their parent's incarceration.

### Resilience

Researchers who use qualitative methods need to examine children's resilience in the face of parental incarceration. There is minimal research, either qualitative or quantitative, addressing

resilience among this population, but to fully understand the effects of parental incarceration, researchers must go beyond studying challenges and negative outcomes and focus as well on the prosocial paths of many children, as Luther's (2015) research on adult children of incarcerated parents did retrospectively. We suggest that having more information about children's successful adaptations during childhood would be helpful. Future qualitative research could explore what activities, relationships, and programs help them deal with parental incarceration in a prosocial manner, which is a particularly important consideration when thinking about interventions for children of incarcerated parents.

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## Conclusion

This chapter draws attention to the current state of qualitative research on children of incarcerated parents. In what is currently a heavily quantitative field, we argue for the addition of qualitative research with the purpose of deepening our understanding of the experience of parental incarceration. Not only can qualitative researchers develop new theories to be tested quantitatively and explore quantitative findings in depth, but also qualitative findings can be used to better inform the work of practitioners and policymakers.

As highlighted in this chapter, qualitative research shows the challenges faced by children of incarcerated parents. Through qualitative research, we see the collateral consequences of incarceration as more than just high levels of externalizing or internalizing behavior; instead, we hear the voices of children enduring extremely difficult circumstances due to their parents' criminal behavior and the policies guiding the US criminal justice system. These findings should be a wake-up call for policymakers to remember that "tough on crime" laws have serious consequences for the children of offenders.

Unlike quantitative research, qualitative research taps into the complicated and varied relationships children have with their

incarcerated parents. Some research discussed in this chapter draws attention to the positive relationships that incarcerated parents can have with their children. These findings need to be kept in mind as policymakers make choices about how to punish offenders. If children can have meaningful relationships with their incarcerated parents, policymakers need to consider ways of making parent-child contact more available and easier to access during periods of incarceration and to do so in ways that are more child-friendly. These findings also suggest that the use of community-based corrections in place of incarceration for parents convicted of nonviolent crimes should be more widely considered by policymakers. Likewise, practitioners must recognize the value of nurturing these parent-child relationships in their work, including through mechanisms such as extended visits for children during which they can interact with their parent in ways that enable them to express physical affection and engage in activities together.

One unique contribution from qualitative research highlighted in this chapter is findings about the ways children cope with parental incarceration. These findings are especially important for practitioners to consider as they work with this population. Understanding the normative coping methods used by children of incarcerated parents should help to inform practice. We hope that future researchers examine coping methods in more depth and connect them to outcomes in adulthood. In addition, we hope that practitioners recognize the power of stigma to silence children and the consequent need to find appropriate ways to reach such children and their families and to gain their trust (Weissman & LaRue, 1998).

The preliminary findings from qualitative studies on resilience are important for both practitioners and policymakers. Unlike quantitative research, which has primarily focused on the study of negative outcomes among this population, studies of resilience can be used to inform the work of practitioners by taking a strengths-based approach. Policymakers must examine qualitative findings on resilience to help reframe their policies regarding families of the incarcerated. If as a society we begin

to view children of incarcerated parents as individuals with potential to lead productive and law-abiding lives, this may help to decrease the stigma of parental incarceration. More research, both qualitative and quantitative, is needed on this topic to further guide policy initiatives related to resilience.

Overall, the message is clear from quantitative research—children of incarcerated parents are disadvantaged and parental incarceration is related to negative outcomes. This chapter highlights qualitative research that both explores and goes beyond just showing the risks associated with parental incarceration. Through the studies overviewed in this chapter, we hope that practitioners, policymakers, and researchers can get a broader picture of what the lives of this population look like, and how both negative and positive outcomes play out in their lives. There is a great diversity of experiences of children of incarcerated parents, and policies and practices can be made to be more child-focused to better help children from various situations cope with separation from their parent because of incarceration.

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**Part III**  
**Intervention Research**

Mary W. Byrne

**Abstract**

A prison nursery is dedicated housing inside a criminal justice facility where incarcerated pregnant women continue to co-reside with and be the primary caregiver for their infants for a defined period of time following birth. Available globally, prison nurseries have been variously appraised as inadequate substitutes for social welfare in impoverished countries or as protections for child development and attachment where supportive resources are provided. Existence of nurseries in the USA has been relatively rare and erratic, with between one and thirteen state corrections departments supporting prison nurseries at any point in history. The exception is the New York State facility which is over a century old. Outcome studies for prison nurseries have primarily been descriptive based on observations, surveys, official records, and interviews. Evidence for reduction in criminal recidivism enhanced family support, and re-entry success remains contradictory or under-reported. The humanizing effects of infant presence on

prisoners and staff and maternal grief and worry regarding children are consistent themes. Child development outcomes have been measured in the UK, Spain, and the USA, the latter with the most promising results associated with supportive programs. Community alternatives to maternal incarceration are receiving increasing attention to avoid separation of one or more children from parents.

The concept of a prison nursery is contradictory. The phenomenon can conjure up the frequently used and inaccurate media notion of “babies behind bars” (Brodie, 1982),<sup>1</sup> with the suggestion that infants who live with their mothers in prison are being concurrently punished. It can also be heralded as a positive protection for child development and maternal/infant attachment. Confusion is reinforced by the paucity of information available about prison nurseries, with scholarly literature nascent and anecdotal reports scattered across disciplines.

This chapter presents a historical and international context for synthesis of the scant literature. Results identified from the sparse outcome studies are assessed for potential of the nursery as an intervention and policy direction in the USA.

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<sup>1</sup>NOTES. See also Vicki Haddock, “Babies Behind Bars,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 24, 2006, E1; and Lucius Lomax, “Babies Behind Bars,” *Austin Chronicle*, July 26, 2004.

## Historical and International Overview: Changing Roles of Prison Nurseries

What is a prison nursery? Essentially it is established housing inside a criminal justice facility where incarcerated women continue to co-reside with and be the primary caregivers for their infants for a period of time following birth. Since the 1800s, there have been records of US children living with their incarcerated mothers. Conditions of deprivation and suffering were documented by the philanthropic reformer Elizabeth Fry (Ryder, 1884; see Craig, 2009 for review). Gender and racial inequalities in society and its penal systems continue to taint contemporary programs (Vainik, 2008). Today, an unknown number of incarcerated women live with their infants and children in prison nursery settings throughout the world, and a relatively minuscule number do so in the USA.

The National Alliance of Nongovernmental Organizations (NGOs) on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice (NACPCJ) conducted a rare multinational survey of programs for incarcerated women with infants (Weintraub, 1987). Of the 70 nations responding, only four had a policy of customarily separating children from their imprisoned mothers: the Bahamas, Liberia, Suriname, and the collection of essays published in 1999 highlighted the comparative issues of women imprisoned in the USA, Canada, England, New Zealand, Poland, and Thailand (Cook & Davies, 1999). Together the papers identified these diverse populations as universally neglected and invisible within their societies. Common themes for women prisoners were their interrupted role as mothers and their painful concerns for the welfare of their children.

None of these book-length reports concluded with a strong endorsement of prison co-residence for dependent children. NACPCJ cautioned that keeping children with imprisoned mothers could be psychologically harmful and physically inadequate and noted that prison co-residence served primarily as an alternative to child welfare in impoverished countries (Weintraub, 1987). In addition to the four countries surveyed that did

not routinely allow infants or children to co-reside in prison, three others that legally permitted this (New Zealand, Ireland, and Luxembourg) actively discouraged the practice. NACPCJ recommended institutionalization alternatives for the mother whenever feasible and prison facilities separated from the incarcerated general population. This is in keeping with the counsel of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (2006), which has emphasized the best interest of the child in prison co-residence decisionmaking and cautioned unmet needs include adequate facilities, connections to the outside environment, and preparation for eventual separations.

Nevertheless, in a variety of countries around the world, prison nursery programs have persisted and advocates have attempted to develop supportive resources. Available reports provide limited information from Europe, the USA, Australia, and New Zealand. There is even less information circulated from Africa, Asia, and Central or South America. Following extensive fact-finding efforts, the Women's Prison Association (WPA) Institute on Women and Criminal Justice described international practices briefly in an appendix to a national report that included small amounts of information on prison nurseries in Canada, Germany, Iceland, Ghana, India, Egypt, Mexico, and Chile (WPA, 2009).

Longer reports for selected countries can be pieced together from the Quaker United Nations Office reports (Quaker Council for European Affairs, 2007; Robertson, 2008), the Internet, graphic arts exhibits, and personal networking. In Germany, a century-old maximum security prison for women in Preungesheim offers what has been hailed as the most comprehensive program in the world for imprisoned women and their children (Kauffman, 2001; Robertson, 2008). Mothers are divided by security risk categories into two groups with infants and children up to 3 years old, one confined to the prison grounds and the other with "open house" access to the adjoining Frankfurt community. Children receive prison based or community day care while mothers participate in prison programs or employment. During the work release phase,

mothers can spend time with their children of all ages in their homes in the city and return to prison at night. Spain also maintains programs for incarcerated women and children through age 3 (Jiménez & Palacios, 2003). Convicted women choose whether to take infants and young children into prison with them or leave them in the care of others. Two prison options are provided: “mother centers” in prisons, or for women nearing the end of their sentences, dependent units in open residences integrated in the community.

Because their experiences have been documented by international photographer Diana Matar, it is known that families, including children, can opt to live with an incarcerated adult in some prisons in Mexico. Visual evidence for life experiences of mothers and children in states with and without prison nurseries have also been memorialized by an Oregon videographer (Jacobs, 2008) and a midwife/photographer from Washington State.<sup>2</sup> In New Zealand, the Roper Committee recommended in 1989 that when the imprisoned mother was the sole caregiver, children up to the age of 2 should be kept with her in a nursery unit (Morris & Kinghi, 1999). For many years, the policy allowed for co-residence until the infant was age 6 to 9 months. It was not until 2008 that the political climate supported a legislative extension to two years, but the Family Help Trust reports the funding to support this change was still not approved by the end of 2009.<sup>3</sup>

In the USA, the New York State Department of Correctional Service’s prison nursery program is in a maximum security facility as old as that of the German program. In 1990, the program was expanded for a limited time to include an adjacent medium security facility. Its history since 1901 has evolved from placement in a reformatory to incorporation into the highest security

facility established later at the same location. It is the longest continually operated prison nursery program in the USA.

In the US penal system, the reformatory movement in the early 1900s included the establishment of cottage units where children could live with their mothers up to age 2. Such units existed in several states and in one federal prison for women (Alderson, West Virginia) from 1930 to the 1960s (Craig, 2009). Responses from 70 institutions to a mid-century national survey revealed that the 13 states with statutory provisions governing children born to incarcerated individuals all allowed these children to remain with their mothers for up to two years (Shepard & Zemans, 1950). Over the next two decades, prison nursery programs closed until only one, in New York State, remained (Boudouris, 1983; Morton & Williams, 1998). Reasons cited for closing nurseries included prison security and management, liability, and concerns about child development and separation (Radosh, 1988). Ironically, during this period of general decline in prison nursery programs nationwide, New York State made dramatic, developmentally oriented changes in its prison nursery environment. Under the direction of a dynamic civilian contractee, Elaine Roulet, the New York State prison program developed a children’s center in the 1970s with comprehensive distance parenting activities and community ties (Roulet, O’Rourke, & Reichers, 1993).

With the approach of the twenty-first century, several trends converged to promote renewed development of prison nurseries. A dramatic upswing in female incarceration was outpacing that of men (Belknap, 2007; Mumola, 2000) and associated with strict drug trafficking laws (Snell & Morton, 1994). Societal support swelled for toughness on crime (Acoca & Raeder, 1999; Belknap, 2007). Yet increasing advocacy was building toward the goal of identifying children with incarcerated parents as a vulnerable and unrecognized group in need of multiple social services (Bloom, 1993, 1995; Gabel & Johnston, 1995). At the same time, corrections’ departments and legislators were newly interested in reentry transition projects aimed at preventing

<sup>2</sup>See Cheryl Hanna-Truscott, “Protective Custody: Within a Prison Nursery at the Washington Corrections Center for Women. Gallery,” <http://www.protectivecustody.org/gallery>.

<sup>3</sup>Libby Robins, director, Family Help Trust, electronic communications with the author, November 8, 2008, and December 17, 2009.

criminal recidivism (National Institute of Justice, 2005).

These events coalesced to create a slow upward trend in the reintroduction of state prison nurseries which seems to have subsided by 2018. Nebraska added a nursery program in 1994; South Dakota, Massachusetts, Montana, Ohio, and Washington did so by 2001 (Pollock, 2003). As of 2009, there were nine prison nurseries in eight states (California, Indiana, Illinois, Nebraska, New York, Ohio, South Dakota, and Washington; see WPA, 2009), with legislation passed that resulted in the opening of a nursery in West Virginia in that year. The number remains the same in 2018. In addition, there is an unknown number of jail-based facilities with nurseries. New York City may be the best known and is the only one named in the WPA (2009) national report of criminal justice facilities for women with children.

The Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) has been acclaimed for the clearest standards among correctional systems for accommodating the special health care needs of female prisoners (Fearn & Parker, 2004), but there has not been a federal prison nursery since 1960. In the mid-1980s, BOP created the Mother and Infant Nurturing Together (MINT) program for pregnant incarcerated individuals who could be transferred to contracted community residences following birth and remain with their infants for up to three months, at which time the mothers would give up their infants to the custody of someone they had previously designated in the community. The National Association of Women Judges (2007) is advocating for new legislation to support reintroducing prison nurseries into the federal system (Byrne, 2008).

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## Measured Outcomes for Prison Nurseries

Despite the long history of children residing inside prisons, there has been little effort toward measuring outcomes. This history has been largely invisible, with few official records kept on

children in prison settings. Programs have emerged and been discontinued erratically with little report of aims and content from which outcomes could be evaluated. Additionally, prison nursery programs have not been consistently designated or designed as interventions, although typically assumptions have been made that they will improve infant–mother relationships and reduce criminal recidivism (Byrne, Goshin, & Joestl, 2010). These assumptions are only recently being tested.

## Findings from Spitz

The much-heralded work of psychoanalyst René Spitz brought to light the severe depression and developmental delays that resulted for children reared in institutions (Spitz, 1945). Little acknowledged is that his studies included as controls infants raised in prison nurseries. Spitz documented that even when physical needs were adequately met, impersonal care imposed “hospitalism syndrome” on institutionalized children, while those reared by their mothers in a prison nursery thrived on the attention lavished on them (Spitz, 1956). While improvements in hospitals and orphanages came to the fore following this study, the significance of the positive developmental outcomes for the prison nursery as a control condition was overlooked.

Over the past 45 years, there have been various reports of child outcomes during co-residential prison stays. These include books written by incarcerated individuals; reports based on interviews, official records, and recordings of external observers; internal program development process analyses; and longer-term developmental outcomes studies (see Table 12.1).

## Studies in New York State Prison Nursery System Conducted by a Visiting Scientist

In 2000, this author initiated a program of research assessing both the maternal and child

**Table 12.1** Descriptive, observational and interview studies of prison nurseries: 1963–2010

Setting	Sample	Methods	Results	Citation
Alderson Federal Prison (WV)	Unspecified number of children 1955–7	Incarcerated individual observations in book	Humanizing effect of infants; maternal grief at separation	Flynn (1963)
Bedford Hills Correctional Facility (NY)	Unspecified number children 1981–1993	Incarcerated individual observations in publications	Women’s hardships on path to prison; need to fund prison nurseries	Harris (1988, 1993)
Programs for incarcerated mothers	55 correctional institutions in 50 states (14,610 women)	External observer survey	Inconclusive	Boudouris (1983)
Legislated programs for in-house care of children in prison with their mothers	States with identifiable programs	Legislative records survey	Majority of children are outside prison walls	Radosh (1988)
Prison-based parenting programs	National	Administrative surveys	Insufficient; from brief parenting classes to few nurseries	Pollock (2003)
Prison nursery community alternatives	Daniel Boone, KY; Purdy, WA	Interviews: community participants, prisoners, staff, foster mothers	Maternal loss and stigma; need for longer co-residence time	Baunach (1985)
NY prisons (med & max)	Convenience: 26 female incarcerated individuals	Interviews	Inconclusive	Gabel and Girard (1995)
Federal BOP	100 women, imprisoned sometime during the 1970’s to the 1990’s	Interviews	Emotional turmoil: valued lifts from visiting room, parent education, custody assistance	Pennix (1999)
Incarcerated mothers	Parents separated from their children; recruited mothers until saturation	Grounded theory	Role reversal	Enos (2001)
Prison nursery	23 incarcerated mothers; 10 with eight-year follow-up	Field notes; participant observation	Nursery affiliation valued and missed; reentry challenges	Schehr (2004)
Nebraska prison nursery	2 cohorts ( $n = 42$ and $65$ ) at completions	Misconduct reports; recidivism	Misconduct and recidivism less than before nursery began	Carlson (1998, 2001, 2009)
Ohio Reformatory for Women	55 completers	Internal report	Resources praised	Kauffman (2002)
Residential parenting, WA	90 dyad completers	Process analysis	Community partnerships support reentry	Fearn and Parker (2004)
United Kingdom Mother-Baby Unit	74 child participants and 33 controls with incarcerated mothers	Griffith Development Scale baseline and four-month infant age	Inadequate developmental stimulations	Catan (1988, 1992)

(continued)

**Table 12.1** (continued)

Setting	Sample	Methods	Results	Citation
Spanish prisons	Unspecified	Brunet-Lezine; HOME	Developmental stimulation inadequate	Jiménez and Palacios (1998, 2003)
NYS prison nurseries	58 mothers w 60 infants in 2 sites	Batteries for parent characteristics and child development	Self-report adult questionnaires, participant observation, hands-on development testing	Byrne
Prison-based and community-based mother/child residential programs	National	Online descriptive catalog	Brief descriptions of 10 prison nurseries in nine states and 13 residential community facilities in seven states	Women's Prison Association (2009)

outcomes of the prison nursery program in New York State.<sup>4</sup> Ethnographic and cross-sectional studies were followed by a longitudinal study that extended from nursery admission through length of nursery stay and the infants' first reentry year. Multiple methods and measures were employed, including participant observation, interviews, videotaping, questionnaires, prison records, child development assessments using the Bayley Scales of Infant Development (Bayley, 1993) and intergenerational attachment measures using the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI)<sup>5</sup> and the Strange Situation Procedure (SSP; see Ainsworth, Blehar, Water, & Wall, 1978).

In the initial exploratory, cross-sectional study, 58 mothers with 60 infants were recruited across two years. Participants completed a battery of well-established questionnaires and a private interview and permitted this researcher to conduct a developmental assessment of their infant(s). Attachment and separation were key areas of concern expressed by the mothers. Mothers focused on these issues so much that the family history originally placed at the beginning of the interview was moved to a later point in the protocol, so trust and empathy could be

established before the mother's sorrow was evoked. Mothers reported good physical but worrisome mental health as measured by the Medical Outcomes Study Short Form 36 (SF-36; see Ware, Kosinski, & Gandek, 2000) and the Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale (CES-D; see Radloff, 1977). Unanticipated high levels of self-esteem (Self-Esteem Scale; see Rosenberg, 1964) and existential well-being (Spiritual Well-Being Scale; see Paloutzian & Ellison, 1982) were also reported, as well as self-perceptions of high valuing of the parent role and parenting competence (Parent Sense of Competency; see Gibaud-Wallston, 1977). The latter finding contrasted with observed knowledge gaps in parenting, particularly around child development at age 6 months and older. For all infants, developmental screening indicated performance appropriate for age (Denver Developmental Screening Test, see Frankenberg & Dodds, 1992; CAT-CLAMS, see Capute & Accardo, 1996; Early Language Milestones, see Coplan, 1993), although motor skills were more advanced than verbal skills, and there was some suggestion of borderline language competencies for a small number of older infants.

### First Longitudinal Study of Mother and Child Prison Nursery Outcomes

Subsequently, a National Institutes of Health-funded longitudinal study of maternal and child outcomes was conducted with 97 consenting

<sup>4</sup>Mary W. Byrne, "Maternal and child outcomes of a prison nursery program: Key findings," [http://www.nursing.columbia.edu/byrne/prison\\_nursery.html](http://www.nursing.columbia.edu/byrne/prison_nursery.html).

<sup>5</sup>Carol George, Nancy Kaplan, and Mary Main, "Adult Attachment Interview," 3rd ed., unpublished manuscript, Department of Psychology, University of California, Berkeley, 1996.



nursery participants and their 100 infants living together in the New York State Department of Correctional Services prison nursery program at Bedford Hills Correctional Facility and Taconic Correctional Facility.<sup>6</sup> Additional components were added to the existing nursery program, including parenting education and infant day care modeling. A two-group positive control experiment was used. Participants were assigned to one of two treatment arms emphasizing either child health or mother–infant relationship synchrony, and each was compared against normative standards, that is, child development and mother–child relationship security parameters for infant age. All study participants received weekly visits from a nurse practitioner on the research team and biweekly telephone calls and mailings during the first reentry year.

Legal and ethical constraints made it impossible to randomize imprisoned women to an experimental and true control group. Statute 611 under Article 21 of the New York State Criminal Law provides that pregnant incarcerated women can live with their newborns.<sup>7</sup> Applications are screened within the facility for eligibility based on no history of child-related crimes, no violent crimes, and a satisfactory discipline record during incarceration, with the latter two conditions sometimes waived on a mother’s appeal of her denied application. Acceptance to the program and any subsequent removal is ultimately determined by the prison administrators in accord with the current provisions of statute 611. All determinations for inclusion are made before the mother’s return from the birthing site. There are no waiting lists or later admissions of community-born infants. Altering selection of women by randomization would deny their legal rights as well as unethically impose maternal separation on randomly selected control infants so was not done.

Based on scores on the AAI completed at time of nursery (and study) entry, two-thirds of the mothers in the prison nursery intervention study had themselves reported a sense of insecurity with their own parent figures, compared with one-third such insecurity reported by low-risk community samples (Borelli, Goshin, Joestl, Clark, & Byrne, 2010). For the infants available for the SSP starting at age 1 (the earliest that the SSP is recommended to be conducted), 75% who lived a full year in the prison nursery were classified as securely attached to their mothers (Byrne, Goshin, and Joestl forthcoming). Strikingly, only 25 percent of these mothers had been coded secure (autonomous category) on the AAI at time of prison nursery entry. Compared with meta-analyzed samples using the SSP (Van IJzendoorn, Schuengel, & Bakermans-Kranenburg 1999), this proportion of secure infants was similar to 15 US low-risk community samples and significantly higher than many high-risk samples, including seven samples in low-socioeconomic studies, nine in studies with maternal depression, four with parental substance abuse, and five with maternal maltreatment. Thus, the findings suggest that the intervention facilitated maternal change, making it possible for women who had not previously internalized security to raise infants in the nursery who were securely attached. For these infants, who will encounter multiple maternal and environmental stress factors, infant secure attachment would be expected to provide a modicum of resilience over time (Sroufe, 2005).

Infants’ development was assessed with the Bayley Scales of Infant Development every three months in prison. Twice during the reentry year, children’s development was measured either in the research office using the Bayley Scales or with the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ; see Squires, Potter, & Bricker, 1999) completed by the mother or alternate caregiver. At all ages tested from 3 to 24 months, children met the appropriate developmental milestones for mental and motor domains. However, nine children, all from the health treatment arm, demonstrated measured lags in the behavioral domain during the toddler year when tested at 15–24 months.

<sup>6</sup>Mary W. Byrne, “Maternal and child outcomes of a prison nursery program.”

<sup>7</sup>New York State Correction Law, article 22, §611, “Births to inmates of correctional institutions and care of children of inmates of correctional institutions.”

All were successfully referred to their community's early intervention program for further evaluation.

The nursing intervention was continued after release by mail and phone contact, and 76 infants and caregivers were successfully followed throughout the entire first reentry year. Children transferred to alternate caregivers while mothers completed the remainder of their sentences showed signs of child dysregulation, exhibited as changes in sleeping and eating patterns and excessive crying. However, when there was only one primary alternate caregiver during this interim, these issues resolved in three to four weeks. Of greater concern was persistent regression associated with separations abruptly initiated by the corrections system and with those that resulted in multiple shifts in caregivers.

Criminal recidivism for mothers in the prison nursery intervention who were followed for one full reentry year was 10% for parole violations and 0% for new court convictions. Reentry challenges were many and resources few, with continuing concerns regarding employment, housing, relationships, and child care. Intervention advice was tailored to meet individual needs, the most common of which were child behavioral concerns, locating community services, and social isolation. Similar to findings from previously discussed qualitative studies, many women wished they could have contact during reentry with selected nursery peers—the few women they had met and befriended inside the prison nursery. Mothers and alternate caregivers volunteered multiple, unsolicited endorsements of both the experimental prison nursery intervention prison and the activities that continued after release. Since the study, the prison program has continued to conduct telephone support outreach for mothers returning from the nursery to the community.

Some differential effects between the two treatment arms match theoretical expectations. Infant and toddler behavioral competencies were of concern only in a subset of families who participated in the health arm of the intervention. More mothers who participated in the synchrony

arm of the intervention overcame their own insecure attachment representations to raise secure infants. Mothers in both the health and synchrony intervention arms showed increased maternal sensitivity, responsiveness and contingency, child care knowledge, and sense of parent competency from entry to completion of the nursery program. Future analyses comparing cross-sectional and longitudinal outcomes will partially answer which outcomes can be attributed to the prison nursery routines alone or to the additional activities in the enhanced program. Anticipated changes in one large New York county's sentencing procedures may make it possible in the future to randomize such maternal–infant dyads to a prison nursery or alternative community facility, but the legal underpinning for such a plan remains tentative (Byrne, Hajjawi, Hughes, & Fabi, 2007). Descriptive comparative studies contrasting outcomes between states with and without prison nurseries are a more likely although less rigorous design option for future studies.

### **Additional Attachment-Based Research with Criminal Justice-Involved Mothers**

In addition to this author's research focusing on infant–mother attachment in a prison nursery setting, one other published study reports on outcomes due to an attachment-based intervention with mothers co-residing with infants in a prison nursery. A small group program based on reflective assessment has been piloted in a UK mother–baby unit (Baradon, Fonagy, Bland, Lenard, & Sled, 2008). The psychoanalytic approach used trained therapists from the community who visited the units to conduct eight two-hour sessions on topics with evidence-based potential to activate the attachment relationship. The program encouraged these mothers to examine issues that critically affect their parenting. Their ability to reflect significantly improved ( $p = 0.003$ ) from pre- to post-intervention as measured by reflective functioning codes (i.e.,

one-tailed Wilcoxon Signed Ranks; Fonagy, Target, Steele, & Steele, 1998) applied to transcripts of the Parent Development Interview.<sup>8</sup> While promising, one concern is that incarcerated women may not have the resources between intervention sessions within prison to confront and resolve all that has surfaced. Programs such as these require supportive mental health services as well as a safe therapeutic milieu, which may be challenging to create in the traditionally controlled prison environment.

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### **Prison Nursery as Intervention: Essential Components, Alternative Approaches, and Recommendations for Research and Policy**

Research assessing outcomes in prison nursery settings is a field of inquiry in its infancy, and much remains to be discovered. It is not even clear if all programs are truly interventions or if they are simply relatively safe prison co-residence alternatives to confinement with an incarcerated general population. Yet, prison nurseries potentially provide a rich opportunity to create a positive parenting and change environment for an otherwise vulnerable and hard-to-reach mother–baby population that has few alternative resources.

When the reports and studies available are considered together, some consensus can be inferred concerning the essential components for an effective nursery program (Byrne, 2009). As sparse as the evidence is for positive maternal and child outcomes for nursery participants, the most persuasive evidence comes from programs that address the mothers' psychological issues and the infants' developmental needs, as well as reentry preparation and resources for both.

A major need is for a coherent theoretical model to guide prison nursery activities. Within whatever model used, essential program components include parenting support, provision of health resources, integrated substance abuse

treatment, and fostering community ties, all within the context of gender specificity. More than 20 years ago, it was argued that successful rehabilitative programs in women's prisons had to include both strong female role models and development of supportive peer networks (Morash, Bynum, & Koons, 1998). These goals are challenging but not impossible in a hierarchical environment established around control and punishment. For example, a former long-term prisoner shared how she and an incarcerated peer successfully co-facilitated psychosocial groups to examine and improve mothering while imprisoned (Boudin, 1998). Peer support can be similarly fostered in the nursery setting and facilitated in reentry through changes in policy allowing women who shared nursery time to communicate with each other following release.

Gender specificity encompasses recognizing that the needs of incarcerated women differ in key ways from those of their male counterparts. Gender regard needs to imbue occupational training, health care, mental health treatment, including substance abuse recovery, and reentry preparation. It is important to combine required care of children within prison nurseries with respite so mothers can engage in opportunities for education and occupational training. Incarcerated mothers need to prepare for the working mother role that they will inevitably have to play outside prison. Thirty percent of women in state prisons and 34 percent in federal prisons headed single-parent households before arrest (Mumola, 2000) and can be expected to do so following reentry.

Reports of poor standards for perinatal care and general health care in prison have not changed appreciably over time (Amnesty International, 1999, 2006; McCall, Casteel, & Shaw, 1985; Sered & Norton-Hawk, 2008; Siefert & Pimlott, 2001; Vainik, 2008), although health status is critical for parenting and optimum development of children. The Health Promoting Prison (HPP) movement, which has influenced prison reform in 25 European countries and New Zealand (Whitehead, 2006), has yet to change the USA. Substance abuse, often triggered by violent victimization and abuse, plays a strong role in many women's pathways to prison (DeHart, 2008;

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<sup>8</sup>Arietta Slade and J. Lawrence Aber, "The Parent Development Interview—Revised," Unpublished protocol, City University of New York, 2004.

Radosh, 2002). As in the outside community, the recidivistic nature of addictive disease, the reliance on male-oriented prevention programs, and the failure to integrate programs with parenting issues (Shearer, 2003) may explain recovery lapses even for women who are offered repeated prison-based substance abuse interventions.

Substance abuse recovery may especially benefit from criminal justice community partnerships. The California Department of Correction and Rehabilitation (2009) reports that offenders who completed both in prison and community follow-up substance abuse treatment programs showed substantially reduced return-to-custody rates, with striking drops for women (from 43.7 to 16.5 percent two years after release). Admittedly, the data were biased by only including those who completed both programs.

Alternative community residential programs for mothers have also quantified success in terms of recidivism and cost savings. In Michigan, the Women and Infants at Risk (WIAR) program was developed following a need assessment conducted by social work students under the auspices of a city council. WIAR moved incarcerated pregnant women with substance abuse histories into community residences for prenatal, postpartum, and infant care supervised by nurse midwives (Siefert & Pimlott, 2001) in lieu of creating a prison nursery, which was opposed by corrections administrators. Evaluation conducted after 45 births over four years indicated birth outcomes superior to those that occurred during the needs assessment. Maternal relapse during the year after birth remained a problem, and the evaluators recommended funding a comprehensive after-care program.

In North Carolina, the Summit House prison alternative program offers comprehensive counseling, vocational, educational, and parenting services to substance-abusing women and their children. In 2009, it reported a three-year re-incarceration rate of 6.5% compared with the state rate of 36.2% and annual taxpayer savings approaching \$750,000.<sup>9</sup> Hour Children in New

York City has reported broad positive outcomes since 1995 for its program of multiple services to support and reunite incarcerated and formerly incarcerated women and their children.<sup>10</sup> Tamar's Children, a jail diversion program in Baltimore, offered wraparound social services and an adapted attachment-based Circle of Security program to selected women and children from 2001 to 2004.<sup>11</sup> Attachment outcomes are strikingly similar to those in the Byrne prison nursery study (Cassidy et al., forthcoming).

It is difficult to evaluate comparative effectiveness of alternative, multiservice programs to one another or to prison-based programs because they tend to report success following program completions but exclude outcomes of those who leave. Critical questions for future research are what predicts completion of effective programs, how those who complete them differ from those who do not, and how this information can be used to tailor interventions for individuals who have not succeeded. How to create integration and synergy across prison-based, reentry, and community-based efforts is also a critical question.

Linking prison programs to community agencies, as collaborators or as alternative options, seems logical and critical if imprisonment is to lead to successful reentry for child-rearing women. Incorporating outside health and social service expertise highlights attention to community standards. Mental health consultants can provide relief to staff members who hold conflicting roles as advocates both for prisoners and the prison system (Silverman, 2005). The development of working arrangements with both invested external service professionals and interested scientists can not only provide precise, credible, research-based interventions but also top quality evaluations. To achieve such requires negotiations around issues such as access and collaborative strategies so that historical suspicion and obstacles can be

<sup>9</sup>See <http://www.summithouse.org>.

<sup>10</sup>See the "History" and "Supportive Services" pages of the organization's web site, <http://www.hourchildren.org>.

<sup>11</sup>Circle of Security, "COS Projects: Early intervention program for parents and children," [http://www.circleofsecurity.net/cos\\_projects.html](http://www.circleofsecurity.net/cos_projects.html) (accessed June 13, 2009).

transcended (Byrne, 2005; Zwerman & Gardner, 1986).

There now exists long-awaited data-based evidence that, at their best, prison nurseries foster positive mother–child relationships, optimum child development, and interruption of maternal criminal recidivism. These outcomes enhance the protective factors that contribute to resilience and balance risks for child-rearing women and their children. For such effective outcomes to occur, adequate resources are essential, such as those associated with the more successful programs described. Financing needs to be considered concurrently with enabling legislation. Programming within prison nurseries is enhanced by the input of civilian professionals who are keenly aware of community standards and are a valuable resource. Civilian relationships can be established through contracts for services, advisory boards, and volunteer programs.

Future policymaking related to prison nursery programs needs to incorporate a broad approach that encompasses these programs, creates links between prison-based and community-based services, and establishes community alternative programs for criminal justice-involved mothers. Prison nursery programs and their community alternatives should not exist in isolation from the events that precede women's incarceration and follow reentry. In a more ideal society, the need for prison nurseries would be largely negated by education in personal relationships and reproductive health that begins in childhood and by accessible community services that address substance abuse recovery, domestic violence, mental health, and employability for women. Meanwhile, the prison nursery provides a unique opportunity—and perhaps the only remaining one—to provide multiple needed services to a small but significant portion of underserved women and infants, and to do so at a time of unique susceptibility and readiness for change.

Yet the constraints of a punitive and authoritarian environment are difficult to overcome and may readily thwart programs oriented toward

self-help and autonomy. Connections between prison-based and community programs can enhance behavioral change and provide a bridge for support during reentry. Alternative sentencing programs for some criminal justice-involved child-rearing women may offer an even more effective approach and a milieu that more closely matches community realities.

Considerable gaps in knowledge remain that must be filled to advance knowledge for prison nursery programs. Little is known about the comparative effectiveness of prison nurseries and community alternative programs or the populations for which each is appropriate. Criteria describing who should be admitted to a prison nursery are not empirically established and are a grave concern for criminal justice systems. Most nursery programs define their lowest risk populations as eligible participants: women with nonviolent crimes, short sentences, and no histories with child protective agencies. On the other hand, the women in this author's longitudinal study fit a higher risk criminal and psychosocial profile, consistent with those of most incarcerated mothers. Notably, positive outcomes were found.

The notion of providing services to all in need rather than those with lowest risks could take the options a step further. Comprehensive therapeutic nurseries exist in the community for depressed and victimized mothers and for other families at risk for problems such as child abuse and neglect; while those with prison nursery experience have discussed this type of approach, it has not been formally attempted inside correctional environments. Decisions around eligibility and types of nurseries cannot be made well until more is known about the outcomes of current programs. To advance this dialog, common ground needs to be broken around the concept of risk. The topics of correctional security risks, child welfare risks, and maternal psychosocial risks are very different conversations that have not yet been shared across professions and systems.

Documenting outcomes of prison nurseries and related community alternative programs must continue. In the absence of randomized controlled trials, much can still be learned from descriptive comparative, longitudinal, and quasi-experimental approaches (Morgan & Winship, 2007). Researchers should direct their efforts toward innovative design alternatives that offer strong causal inference, rigor, and feasibility for studying problems to which trials cannot be applied (Vaughan, 2008; West et al., 2008).

Enhanced demographic recording and reporting within Departments of Corrections (DOC) would provide helpful baseline data that should be made available to researchers and policymakers while maintaining appropriate attention to privacy and confidentiality both for incarcerated mothers and their civilian children. Allowing and facilitating research by external scientists who fully comply with legislative protections for human subjects and are experienced in study designs is the best way for DOCs and alternative community services to credibly measure maternal and child outcomes due to their programs. Toward this end, positive and ongoing relationships between corrections departments with universities and with individual highly credentialed researchers are key to conducting research (Byrne, 2005). While criminal justice systems are understandably interested in recidivism, learning more about broader maternal outcomes related to family roles and child development is equally important to understanding how to achieve reentry success.

Another aspect barely addressed is the influence of the nursery on prison personnel and culture. The comments on humanizing effects created by the presence of infants interacting with their mother were recorded by a prisoner a half-century ago (Flynn, 1963) and have been echoed since. Mismatched values and priorities related to nurseries and their participants have been recorded among corrections administrators, officers, staff, and civilians as well as across these diverse groups but have been poorly explored.

Understanding these differences and their impact can lead to design and evaluation of policies and continuing education programs for prison personnel aimed at achieving consistent and effective support for prison nursery coresidents.

Ultimately, the knowledge base required to inform research, policy, and practice concerning prison nurseries depends on an ethical foundation to which society should subscribe. While ostensibly removed from society, nursery participants are also part of society and are expected to return to the free community. Pathways to prison, experiences inside the prison, bridges to the outside community, and resumption of a meaningful place in that community are all parts of the journey that have ethical and societal implications. Quinney (1991) has long advocated for a peacemaking approach to the study of crime and its prevention based on consideration of all that has preceded the criminal act as well as the characteristics of the criminal and the crime and not just to retribution and punishment. Peacemaking principles are uniquely applicable to preventing child-rearing women's criminal activities, to addressing them when they occur, and to productively integrating convicted women and their children into society without increasing their cumulative painful life experiences (Radosh, 2002). The peacemaking paradigm can inform current prison nursery systems aspiring to optimum effectiveness. It may also offer for the future a social environment capable of addressing women's criminal acts, and their consequences for children, through early prevention and long-term healing.

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# Parenting Programs for Incarcerated Fathers and Mothers: Current Research and New Directions

# 13

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## Abstract

This chapter considers the impact of parenting programming on incarcerated fathers and mothers from a gendered perspective. This body of work is considered relative to programming and interventions that occur outside of the correctional environment. We review both qualitative and quantitative evaluations of programs and, given the emerging state of this literature, consider some unevaluated programs as well. We focus on quantitative empirical evaluations, including pre-post designs, non-randomized comparison group designs, and randomized comparison group designs, and examine impacts on participants' parenting knowledge and attitudes, well-being and parenting stress, and behaviors. In total, 38 studies were reviewed (57% for mothers). Collectively, the findings indicate that programming has positive impacts on incarcerated mothers' and fathers' knowledge and attitudes, well-being, and stress. The results are mixed

when behavioral changes are examined. We explore limitations to this body of research and challenges researchers face in conducting evaluations of programs for incarcerated parents. We conclude with recommendations for future research, policy, and practice.

With the rise of US incarceration rates, there has been an inevitable rise in the number of incarcerated parents with minor children (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008). Bolstered by a growing literature on the impact of incarceration on children (see Chaps. 5 and 6 of this volume), as well as policies that link improved family relationships with reduced reoffending (e.g., H. R. 1593: Second Chance Act of 2007), institutions have responded by providing parenting training programs for incarcerated parents (Hughes & Harrison-Thompson, 2002). In a survey of key personnel from state correctional departments, Pollock (2003) reported that 38 of the reporting states had some form of parenting classes for incarcerated parents. Hughes and Harrison-Thompson (2002) gathered information directly from 315 participating state prisons and found that approximately half of the institutions offered parenting programs. While these data indicate that programming designed to provide parenting skills training is available in correctional settings, the numbers may overestimate the percentage of participants in those programs. Glaze and Maruschak's (2008) survey of incarcerated parents revealed that only about 22–30% of mothers and

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9–12% of fathers in state prison participated in parenting or child-rearing classes during their incarcerations.

To date, there have been a handful of literature reviews on this topic (e.g., Dallaire & Shlafer, 2017; Eddy & Burraston, 2017) and two meta-analytic reviews assessing the effectiveness of parent education programs for incarcerated populations, including an unpublished meta-analysis focusing on prison nursery programs by Shlonsky et al. (2016) and a meta-analysis by Armstrong, Eggins, Reid, Harnett, and Dawe (2017) of 16 empirical investigations. Both meta-analytic reviews indicate positive impacts of programming across different types of correctional settings (e.g., jails and prisons) despite the use of different program curricula. Armstrong et al. (2017) concluded that a small to moderate effect was found for increases in parent knowledge and improved quality of parent–child relations over comparison groups. Shlonsky et al. (2016) found that mothers who participated in prison nursery programs were less likely to recidivate than mothers who were separated from their newborns. Building from this work, we examine the impact of parenting programming for incarcerated fathers and mothers from a gendered perspective and consider the existing body of work in the context of research findings on parent programs and interventions that have been delivered and studied outside of correctional environments.

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### **Unique Aspects of Parenting Programs for Incarcerated Parents**

There is a rich and well-researched body of work on empirically supported approaches to parent training for behavioral problems in children (e.g., antisocial, noncompliant, aggressive, acting out behaviors) who come from a variety of populations (e.g., Dishion & Snyder, 2016; Sanders, Sanders, Markie-Dadds, Tully, & Bor, 2000; Thomas, Thomas, & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2007; Webster-Stratton, 2001). However, with only a few exceptions (e.g., Mindel & Hoefler, 2006;

Palusci, Crum, Bliss, & Bavolek, 2008; Schiffmann, Eddy, Martinez, Leve, & Newton, 2008), this work has not been translated into programs for incarcerated fathers and mothers. More frequently, the existing interventions in jails and prisons have been drawn from “universal parenting programs” (Valle et al., 2004) designed to provide broad psychoeducational support to parents within the general population. While there have been a few empirical investigations of some of these broader community-based programs, in general they have not received the intense level of empirical attention garnered for interventions designed for specific child behavioral problems.

The gap between interventions inside and outside of the carceral environment reflects the unique aspects of parental incarceration. Outside of jail or prison, parents typically seek parenting consultation because there is a specific problem with an identified child. Meta-analyses of parenting interventions (e.g., De Graaf, Speetjens, Smit, De Wolff, & Tavecchio, 2008) frequently focus on the reduction of child disruptive behaviors as a common marker of program success. The child’s problem behavior creates an immediate motivation for participation in treatment, with the timing to start as soon as possible. However, for the incarcerated parent, motivation for intervention can reflect a myriad of goals for self-improvement and the timing for entry into classes is likely dictated by the availability of programs and the parent’s eligibility for enrollment. Moreover, the typical skills covered in “outside” parenting interventions may not be immediately applicable. Learning how to handle children’s tantrums and other misbehaviors may have a limited shelf life for the incarcerated mother who has no opportunity for practice.

Likewise, there are unique skills addressed in parenting programs for incarcerated parents that are largely irrelevant in parenting programs for the non-incarcerated. Many of the components often included in parenting interventions for incarcerated mothers and fathers—such as instruction in specific communication avenues (i.e., letter writing, phone calls, and personal visits during incarceration), strategies for better

collaboration with at-home caregivers, awareness of legal rights concerning children, and ways to deal with intense emotions regarding separation, loss, and incarceration—would not ordinarily have a place in interventions outside of the jail or prison.

## Parenting Program Content and Parent Gender

### Program Content

The content of interventions varies considerably, making it difficult to portray a “standard” parenting intervention. The quality and curricula of parent education programs also vary widely, and there are no “commonly accepted best practices” for parenting education and skills training” for incarcerated individuals (Eddy et al., 2008, p. 89). Eddy and colleagues found that in their survey of 41 state and federal facilities, although nearly all provided some programming related to communication skills and parenting techniques, far fewer emphasized anger and stress management, provided visitation opportunities, or offered education on child development.

Interventions also vary considerably in length, duration, as well as other features. For example, LaRosa and Rank’s (2001) *Real Life Parenting Skills* Program met for one-half hours once a week for five weeks. By contrast, Sandifer (2008) implemented the *Rebonding and Rebuilding* (Meyer & Moriarty, 1995) curriculum, which met for 3 h a day, twice a week for twelve weeks. Some interventions feature the inclusion of visit experiences (e.g., Snyder-Joy & Carlo, 1998) as integral to the training. Some interventions are aimed at parents nearing their release date from jail or prison (Bushfield, 2004; Maiorano & Futris, 2005), while others include parents who are facing long sentences (Loper & Tuerk, 2011). Comparisons based on the content of interventions thus become a comparison of myriad approaches. A more fruitful way to understand the big picture in parenting programs in prisons and jails is to look at commonality in targeted outcomes with a gendered approach that

recognizes differences in parenting experiences for mothers and fathers.

### Gender-responsive Programming

Parent education programs are sometimes specific to fathers (Antonio, Winegard, Young, & Zortman, 2009; Maiorano & Futris, 2005; Skarupski et al., 2003), to mothers (Harm, Thompson, & Chambers, 1998; Loper & Tuerk, 2011; Thompson & Harm, 2000), or both mothers and fathers (Eddy et al., 2008; Palusci et al., 2008). Some scholars have argued that the criminal justice system and correctional facilities should adopt and employ more gender-responsive policies that take into account differences between mothers and fathers. Covington and Bloom (2006) define gender responsive as “creating an environment through site selection, staff selection, program development, content, and material that reflects an understanding of the realities of the lives of women and girls and that addresses and responds to their strengths and challenges” (p. 9). In short, a gender-responsive approach assumes that gender makes a difference in parenting and takes into account a parent’s identity as a mother or father when programming decisions are made.

Traditionally, correctional facilities were not designed with gendered needs in mind. Further, at least in principle, men and women involved in corrections are typically treated relatively equally with regard to gender. However, a gender-responsive approach puts gender at the forefront by acknowledging that gender is impactful within multiple settings and roles in day-to-day life. The National Institute of Corrections (NIC) began a gender-responsive project in 1999 at four pilot sites across the USA. The results of the pilot project suggest that when a gendered approach is applied at intake, in classification, and in programming decisions, the chances of successful reentry for women increase (Wright, Van Voorhis, Salisbury, & Bauman, 2012).

The gender of the incarcerated parent is central in the case of the incarceration of a pregnant or postpartum woman. Many jails and prisons are ill-equipped to deal with the medical and

emotional needs of pregnant and postpartum women (see Ferstz & Clarke, 2012; Kelsey, Medel, Cumings, Dallaire, & Forestell, 2017). However, prison nursery programs, which are only available in a few correctional facilities in the USA, help to address the needs of these women and their babies and embody a gender-responsive approach (see Chap. 12, this volume). In our review, we include the findings from empirical assessments of parenting programs, including prison nursery programming, in separate tables. Table 13.1 presents the results of 16 empirical investigations of programs implemented with fathers. Table 13.2 presents the results of 22 empirical investigations of programs implemented with mothers. When studies

included both father and mother participants, we included the study in both tables (e.g., Eddy, Martinez, & Burraston, 2013).

### Unevaluated, Qualitative, and Quantitative Evaluations of Parenting Programs

In the USA, there are many parenting programs for incarcerated parents that generally fall into one of the three categories: (1) unevaluated interventions; (2) qualitative descriptions of ongoing programs with limited quantitative documentation; and (3) quantitative studies, typically pre-post designs, that statistically

**Table 13.1** Parenting programs for incarcerated fathers

Author	Participants and program	Results
<i>I. Pre-post designs</i>		
1. Bushfield (2004)	23 fathers in 30-day daily parenting class	Improved attitudes (corporal punishment and child expectations)
2. Czuba et al. (2006)	76 fathers and 13 mothers in 10-session People Empowering People	Increase in self-assertive efficacy, sense of mastery, parenting satisfaction, and family problem-solving communication
3. LaRosa & Rank (2001)	23 fathers in 5-session Real Life Parenting Skills Program	Improved attitudes (child expectations)
4. Maiorano & Futris (2005)	74 males in 9–17-session Fit 2-B Fathers Program	Improved parenting attitudes; no difference in recidivism rates
5. Palusci et al. (2008)	169 women and 324 men (jail) in adaptation of 10-session Nurturing Parent Program	Improved parenting attitudes (child expectations, empathy, corporal punishment, parent–child roles)
<i>II. Non-randomized comparison group designs</i>		
6. Antonio et al. (2009)*	79 fathers in 12-session Long Distance Dads (control $n = 84$ )	Improved parenting knowledge, attitudes, and behavior on selected items of the author questionnaire
7. Block et al. (2014)	309 fathers in 12-session InsideOut Dad Program (control $n = 104$ )	Relative to the comparison group, fathers who participated in programming were more likely to report calling their children more after participating and gains in parenting knowledge
8. Barr et al. (2011)	20 fathers in 10-session Just Beginning Program	ER scores increased across five of the six subscales looked at (emotion engaging, parental involvement, following the lead, joint attention, child involvement, and turn-taking)
9. Robbers (2005)*	56 fathers in 10-session parenting education program (control $n = 31$ )	Increased contact, improved parenting knowledge, and attitudes (select items); no change in relationship with caregiver

(continued)

**Table 13.1** (continued)

Author	Participants and program	Results
10. Skarupski et al. (2003)*	84 fathers in 12-session Long Distance Dads (control $n = 60$ ); 37 caregiver reports	No change in knowledge, skills, or attitudes; increased child contact (findings not corroborated by caregivers)
11. Lindquist et al. (2016)	4 couples-based programs for fathers across 4 states (IN, NY, NJ, and OH)	Indiana intervention had sustained effects on partnership/parenting relationships, but results in the three other programs (NY, OH, and NJ) in parenting/coparenting and intimate relationship measures were not significant compared to control groups
12. Wilczak & Markstrom (1999)	21 fathers in 8-session adaptation of STEP (control $n = 21$ )	Increased knowledge, internal locus of control, and parent satisfaction
<i>III. Randomized comparison group designs</i>		
13. Burraston & Eddy (2017), Eddy et al. (2013, 2018)+	359 parents in 36-session Parenting Inside Out (PIO) (control $n = 177$ ); total sample included 161 fathers	In prison, significant differences between conditions on self-reported stress, depressed mood, positive intervention with children; after release, significant differences between conditions on self-reported criminal behavior, substance abuse, and official records of police arrest
14. Bayse et al. (1991)	27 fathers in 4-session How to Keep Your Family Alive While Serving a Prison Sentence (control $n = 27$ )	Reduced narcissism and improved attitudes toward present and ideal family functioning; no change in adaptability
15. Harrison (1997)	15 fathers and children in an 18-session parenting class (control $n = 15$ )	Improved parenting attitudes; no change in inmate or child self-esteem
16. Landreth & Lobaugh (1998)	16 fathers in 10-session filial therapy training class and 16 children (control $n = 16$ )	Improved parenting attitudes; decreased parenting stress; improved self-concept among children

*Note*

\*Articles marked with an asterisk are not published in peer-reviewed formats

+Articles marked with a plus are currently under peer review

**Table 13.2** Parenting programs for incarcerated mothers

Author	Participants and program	Results
<i>I. Pre-post designs</i>		
1. Browne (1989)	29 mothers in 24-session Education for Parenthood Curriculum	Improved attitudes (corporal punishment and child expectations); increased self-esteem
2. Byrne (2010)*	97 mothers and their 100 children in a Nursery Program with added tailored nurse practitioner visits	Increased maternal sensitivity, responsiveness and contingency, childcare knowledge, and sense of parent competency; low rates of recidivism; children demonstrated some behavioral lags but met appropriate mental and motor developmental milestones
3. Carlson (2001)	37 mothers in a Nursery Program	Reduced misconduct reports and recidivism rates; mothers perceived themselves to have a stronger bond with their children and improved self-confidence and self-esteem

(continued)



**Table 13.2** (continued)

Author	Participants and program	Results
4. Gonzalez et al. (2007)	191 mothers in adaptation of Partners in Parenting	No change in communication or parental control; increased parental confidence; decreased parental understanding
5. Harm et al. (1998)	104 mothers in 15-session adaptation of Nurturing Parent Program	Improved attitudes (child expectations). For substance abuse subsample: increased self-esteem and improved attitudes (parent-child roles)
6. Kennon (2003)*	66 mothers in 12-session Moms, Inc.	Improved parenting attitudes, legal knowledge, and self-esteem; no change in frequency of communication
7. Mindel & Hoefler (2006)	38 parents and 38 children in 10-session Family Strengthening Program for children and parents	Improved family resilience, opportunities for prosocial involvement of children, and family bonding
8. Thompson & Harm (2000)	104 mothers in 15-session adaptation of Nurturing Parent Program	Improved attitudes (child expectations, corporal punishment, and parent-child roles); increased self-esteem (subsample of mothers who received letters)
<i>II. Non-randomized comparison group designs</i>		
9. Byrne, Goshin, & Joestl (2010)	16 infants and their mothers in a Nursery Program and 14 dyads from the same program who were released into the community	Significantly more secure attachment than predicted by the mother's attachment status and a higher proportion of secure infants than in community samples with low income, depression, or drug/alcohol abuse
10. Carlson (2009)	65 mothers in a Nursery Program	Reduced misconduct reports and recidivism rates
11. Catan (1988, 1992)*	74 children in a Nursery Program (control $n = 33$ )	Reduced motor and cognitive development by 4 months of age
12. Gat (2000)*	16 mothers in 8-10-session Mother/Offspring Life Program (control $n = 4$ )	No change in recidivism, prosocial moral reasoning, attachment, empathy, or hope
13. Goshin, Byrne, & Blanchard-Lewis (2014a)	47 infants and their mothers in a Nursery Program (control $n = 64$ )	Reduced long-term anxious/depressed behavioral problems in the children
14. Goshin, Byrne, & Henninger (2014b)	139 mothers in a Nursery Program compared to general recidivism rates of women in that state	Reduced rates of recidivism
15. Moore & Clement (1998)	20 mothers in 9-week Mothers Inside Loving Kids (control $n = 20$ ) and enhanced visitation	Increased parenting knowledge; no change in parenting attitudes or self-esteem; no difference between groups
16. Sandifer (2008)	64 mothers in 24-session adaption of Rebonding and Rebuilding curriculum with linked visitation (control $n = 26$ )	Improved parenting knowledge and attitudes (empathy) toward children
17. Showers (1993)	203 mothers in 10-session adaptation of Systemic Training for Effective Parenting (STEP) (control $n = 275$ )	Increased knowledge of child behavior management skills
18. Shortt, Eddy, Sheeber, & Davis (2014)	47 mothers in 15-session Emotions: Taking Care of Yourself and Your Child When You Go Home Program (an extension of PIO) (control $n = 18$ )	Increase in effortful control in reactive situations (decreased dismissal of children's emotions); no effect on recidivism

(continued)

**Table 13.2** (continued)

Author	Participants and program	Results
<i>III. Randomized comparison group designs</i>		
19. Burraston & Eddy (2017), Eddy et al. (2013, 2018) <sup>+</sup>	359 parents in 36-session Parenting Inside Out (PIO) (control $n = 177$ ); total sample included 198 mothers	In prison, significant differences between conditions on self-reported stress, depressed mood, positive intervention with children; after release, significant differences between conditions on self-reported criminal behavior, substance abuse, and official records of police arrest
20. Loper & Tuerk (2011)	60 mothers in 9-session Parenting on the Inside (control $n = 46$ )	Improved parenting stress, alliance with caretakers, mental health symptoms, and letter writing; marginal waiting-list-control differences
21. Scudder, McNeil, Chengappa, and Costello (2014)	40 mothers in Parent-Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT)-based Program (control $n = 40$ )	Increase in positive parenting skills and less negative attention during child-led role play; less inappropriate expectations of child development
22. Slead, Baradon, and Fonagy (2013)	88 mothers in Mother and Baby Units following the New Beginnings Program (control $n = 75$ )	No effect on mothers' self-report of depression; decline in maternal reflective functioning in the control group

*Notes*

\*Articles marked with an asterisk are not published in peer-reviewed formats

<sup>+</sup>Articles marked with a plus are under peer review

evaluate changes among parents after participation in the program. Whereas the current chapter focuses on quantitative investigations of parenting programs, this category represents only a small portion of what is actually implemented in prisons and jails today.

### Unevaluated Parenting Programs

There are numerous unevaluated programs designed to improve parenting skills within US jails and prisons. Diverse programs may be implemented by a variety of outside organizations, religious groups, or community volunteers. Curricula may consist of informal lectures, discussions led by individuals from the community, religious discussion about parenting, or other supportive activities. The content is generally dependent upon the knowledge and experience

of the volunteer trainer. Although these classes are usually welcome additions to programming offerings at correctional institutions, the diversity of offerings, trainers, and content precludes a systematic overview within the limits of this chapter.

A number of additional types of programs which address other relevant topics for incarcerated parents are also typically available. These include a diverse array of faith-based programs. At least one or more of these programs in most institutions is a 12-step (e.g., Alcoholic Anonymous) program. Other programs that are outside the parenting realm per se, but relevant, are cognitive skills training programs. Some of these have evidence to suggest that they have a positive impact in various areas of daily life, including problem-solving relevant to interpersonal relationships (e.g., Thinking for a Change; Bush, Glick, & Taymans, 2016).

## Qualitative Evaluations of Parenting Programs

In the academic literature, many studies qualitatively describe parenting education programs for incarcerated populations (e.g., Bruns, King, & Stater, 2003; Kazura, 2001; Meek, 2007; Robbers, 2005) or use qualitative means to collect information in addition to empirically generated results (e.g., Antonio et al., 2009; Bushfield, 2004; LaRosa & Rank, 2001; Skarupski et al., 2003; NFI, 2008). These studies typically use informal interviews to learn what participants find useful about the parenting programs offered, what is missing from the program, and ideas for improvements. For example, Meek (2007) collected course feedback through open-ended questions following a one-week intensive parenting class for 75 young fathers. When queried regarding the usefulness of various components of treatment, participants valued general childcare issues, such as the correct way to care for a child, and more specific issues related to physical care of children, such as learning how to change diapers. Areas that the participants felt were absent from the class varied widely depending on the individual. All participants rated the course in the “fairly” to “very useful” range.

Qualitative studies may aid in understanding how incarcerated mothers and fathers view themselves as parents and their attitudes toward parenting in general (Bushfield, 2004; Robbers, 2005). Robbers (2005) found that the most beneficial aspect of a 10-week program for fathers in prison was, reportedly, an increase in self-esteem and renewed desire to build relationships with children. Incarcerated parents also reported an increase in contact with their children as a result of the knowledge and confidence gained through the program. Bushfield (2004) reported that, after parenting training, fathers re-evaluated attitudes regarding the importance of involvement in their child’s life. Generally, qualitative studies demonstrate that parenting education programs are met with approval from the participants. The wide variety of responses regarding optimal components of treatment suggests that while

incarcerated parents find interventions useful, they have diverse needs that may be difficult to meet with a single program.

## Quantitative Empirical Investigations

Quantitative studies that evaluate parenting programming in correctional settings are few in number. Tables 13.1 and 13.2 summarize our review of empirically based evaluations of parenting programs for fathers (Table 13.1) and mothers (Table 13.2). They include any evaluation that we could locate through a search of the PsycINFO and National Criminal Justice Reference Service databases, additional searches on the Internet, and the cross-checking of references of studies provided in each of the articles we located. In cases where insufficient information was available from these sources, we personally contacted key individuals to obtain unpublished reports or other information. In several instances, the results of an evaluation were articulated in state reports or contract summaries rather than academic journals. We included in our tables any study we could locate that included at least a pre-post design, a quantitative measure of an outcome of interest, and descriptive information regarding the specific parenting program approach used. The tables indicate whether a comparison or control group was utilized and whether there was random assignment to groups.

Typical outcomes of empirical investigations of parenting programs (listed in terms of frequency of use in currently reviewed studies) include: (1) *knowledge and attitudes*, defined as acquisition of information regarding child development and socially normative beliefs about appropriate child-rearing, discipline, and the role of a parent; (2) *mental well-being and parenting stress*, defined as improvement in mood, self-image, and stress levels; and (3) *behavioral changes*, such as frequency of contact and communication with children, rate of recidivism, and reduction of negative or harmful behaviors (e.g., institutional misconduct, substance use).

It should be noted that, in general, child outcomes are either not included in evaluations of correctional parenting programs, or they are obtained by reduced-sample auxiliary measures (Harrison, 1997; Landreth & Lobaugh, 1998). This is in marked contrast to most parenting interventions for non-incarcerated mothers and fathers for which child outcomes are a primary marker of program success. The major exception to this is in evaluations of prison nursery programs, which routinely examine impacts on newborn health, well-being and attachment (e.g., Byrne, Goshin, & Joestl, 2010), and in higher quality studies, such as the largest randomized controlled trial of a parenting intervention in a corrections system to date (Eddy et al., 2013).

### Knowledge and Attitudes

The most widely used benchmark of a successful parenting education program is a significant change in attitudes or knowledge about parenting. Consistent with the meta-analysis conducted by Armstrong et al. (2017), all of the empirical studies listed in Tables 13.1 and 13.2 report pre-post improvement in at least one aspect of knowledge or attitudes. While the instrumentation varies widely, several studies used the Adult-Adolescent Parenting Inventory (AAPI-2; Bavolek & Keene, 2001). The measure was introduced in 1979 and has since been used across a variety of studies to assess change in parenting attitudes and knowledge (Family Development Resources, 2008). This self-report measure yields an overall score and five subscales that measure attitudes involving inappropriate parental expectations, empathy toward children, corporal punishment, parent-child role expectations, and child need for power and independence.

Palusci et al. (2008) used the AAPI-2 to measure the change in parenting attitudes and knowledge following the implementation of a parenting education program in a variety of settings within a community, including a local jail. The program, *Helping Your Child to Succeed* (HYCS), is a 10-week-long program in which the parents meet weekly with trained counselors and social workers. The curriculum was adapted from a universal parenting education program, the

*Family Nurturing Program* (Bavolek, 1999), described as a “family-centered program proven to help parents and children learn to care for themselves and each other and to replace old, unwanted abusive interactions with newer, more nurturing ones (Family Development Resources, 2008).” The 10 sessions of HYCS are devoted to teaching 10 “democratic” child-rearing topics, such as positive attention and praise, setting appropriate expectations, and developing healthy communication patterns. Parents incarcerated at a county jail, in addition to other community members, participated in HYCS as a part of a 10-week substance abuse treatment program (Palusci et al., 2008). Of the parents who participated during a six-year span, 372 completed both pretest and posttest measures of the AAPI-2. Palusci et al. (2008) reported that mean scores increased significantly in a positive direction on four of the five constructs (e.g., expectations, empathy).

Other studies presented in Tables 13.1 and 13.2 use a similar design to Palusci et al. (2008) and used the AAPI to measure change (Bavolek, 1984; Bavolek & Keene, 2001). At first glance, this would seem to be a welcome sign and an opportunity to draw conclusions across programs using meta-analytic approaches. However, methods for the actual use of the measure vary substantially. For example, Robbers (2005) used only 7 of the 40 items, and Bushfield (2004) only reported scores for items with significant pre-post changes. Harrison (1997), like Palusci et al., drew from Bavolek’s *Nurturing Program*, but only reported on one AAPI score, and did not provide full descriptive information (e.g., scale standard deviations). Harm et al. (1998) likewise presented limited descriptive information regarding performance on all subscales. Thus, although there is welcome common measurement across several studies, and consensus that attitudes improved with intervention, the variations in measurement patterns preclude making statistically based generalizations regarding the impact of parenting interventions on attitudinal change.

Items on other non-standardized instruments utilized by some parenting interventions comprise broad statements to which the participant self-evaluates his or her own parenting skills.

Example questions include “I know how to talk about my child’s feelings and emotions,” “I can parent my children effectively from prison,” and “I am confident about my parenting skills” (Antonio et al., 2009; Gonzalez Romero & Cerbana, 2007; Maiorano & Futris, 2005). Generally speaking, parents show increased confidence in their attitudes and knowledge when responding to these types of items. However, so-called meta-cognitive assessment of beliefs and knowledge is not the same as direct measurement, and it is not clear whether so-measured change represents true shifts in maladaptive attitudes or broader confidence that one’s attitudes—adaptive or not—are correct.

A number of empirical studies do not utilize a standardized measure of attitudes or knowledge and favor researcher-designed surveys. The National Fatherhood Initiative (NFI; [www.fatherhood.org](http://www.fatherhood.org)), an organization that develops and evaluates parenting resources and education programs for fathers, uses this method for the internal evaluation of their many programs including *InsideOut Dad*, a NFI program designed specifically for incarcerated fathers (Block et al. 2014; NFI, 2005, 2008, 2009). The program consists of 12 one-hour sessions that address topics such as ground rules, self-awareness, being a man, spirituality, handling emotions, relationships, fathering, child development, discipline, and fathering from the inside. In preliminary evaluations, the program was implemented in several correctional institutions in Maryland and Ohio (NFI, 2008, 2009). Participants answered 26 multiple-choice questions before and after the program, such as “Self worth is a term used to describe: (a) How a person feels about himself, (b) What a person thinks about himself, (c) Both the feelings and thoughts a person has about himself, and (d) Don’t know.” Mean scores for parenting attitudes and knowledge improved significantly across facilities. In a subsequent evaluation of the program, Block et al. (2014) found general increases in parenting knowledge. In summary, increases in parenting knowledge are a common marker reported across empirical investigations. The majority of studies listed in Tables 13.1 and

13.2 reported increases in knowledge and improvements in attitudes.

### Well-being and Parenting Stress

Incarcerated men and women have high levels of mental health problems, well beyond that found in non-incarcerated samples (James & Glaze, 2006). Incarcerated women, in particular, have high levels of depression, borderline personality, and other emotional problems (Jordan, Schlenger, Fairbank, & Caddell, 1996; Warren et al., 2002). A large body of evidence links parenting stress, or high levels of concern regarding the roles and responsibilities surrounding parenting, with impaired parenting as well as with various mental health problems that may, in turn, impact parenting (Ortega, Beauchemin, & Kaniskan, 2008; Rodgers, 1998; Rodgers-Farmer, 1999).

A focus on developing methods for controlling stress regarding parenting and improving general emotional reactivity about child-related issues is appropriate for many incarcerated parents. For many incarcerated mothers, separation from their children represents the most excruciating and enduring pains of incarceration (Arditti, Smock, & Parkman, 2005; Clarke et al. 2005; Hairston, 1991). Helping incarcerated parents to deal with this unique form of pain can give the opportunity to “make lemonade from lemons,” to the extent that such is possible, and develop skills while in prison or jail that can improve communication and understanding.

Loper and Tuerk (2011) developed a program for long-term incarcerated mothers designed to equip incarcerated mothers with coping strategies for dealing with the stress of separation and to improve communication patterns with children and caregivers. The program employs a manual for each mother that elaborates on each of the eight sessions. Where possible, the sessions are structured using materials presented via computer presentation software, videotaped vignettes of difficult situations, followed by small group discussions. Central to all of the sessions is a reference to a cognitive-behavioral strategy that inserts conscious evaluation of ongoing assumptions and emotional reactions. Using the acronym “MOM-OK,” mothers learn to “Mellow

Out,” using brief breathing and relaxation strategies; use their “Mind,” to identify dysfunctional thoughts; counter negative thoughts with “Other” possibilities; and self-query “What is best for my child [Kid].” This strategy is infused throughout all eight of the sessions. For example, during the sessions that focus on dealing with child questions about why the mother is incarcerated, the incarcerated mother might be urged to replace the cognition “Her father put her up to this to shame me,” with “She is curious and wants to understand why things are this way.”

Loper and Tuerk (2011) evaluated the benefits of the program in terms of reducing parenting stress and other mental health difficulties, improving mother alliance with child caregivers, and changing frequency of mother-initiated contact through letters. Pre-post intervention comparisons documented improvements on the Parenting Stress Index (Abidin & Brunner, 1995), Parenting Alliance Scale (Abidin & Konold, 1999), the Brief Symptom Inventory (Derogatis, 1993), and the frequency of letter writing. When significant pre-post comparisons were reanalyzed controlling for the frequency of using the MOM-OK strategy, previously significant effects were no longer significant, suggesting that the strategy may mediate some positive effects. However, pre-post changes were generally not significant in comparison with a waitlist group.

Other interventions that have targeted emotional and personal stressors have focused on a parents’ personal sense of self-esteem or confidence in their ability to parent effectively. For example, Harm et al. (1998) found improvements in self-esteem among a group of incarcerated mothers with substance problems using the *Nurturing Parent* (Bavolek & Comstock, 1985) curriculum. Along similar lines, in a later study, the same authors (Thompson & Harm, 2000) found that improvements in self-esteem were more apparent among mothers who had some contact with children, emphasizing the importance of opportunities to practice skills in achieving the desired outcomes.

In general, the interventions that have examined mental health issues have found positive changes in parenting stress and sense of well-being. The question arises as to whether

such positive changes can then be generalized to improved parent-child interactions. The challenge for these programs, as is the case for programs designed to improve knowledge and attitudes, is in affording practice opportunities (and direct measurement) of the acquired skills that are intended to positively impact well-being and stress.

### **Behavioral Changes**

Changes in behaviors regarding contact and communication with children and caregivers at home are included in several evaluations. Less frequently, evaluations target reduction in recidivism. Parent-child contact and communication patterns can change abruptly and dramatically when the parent is incarcerated. A majority of incarcerated mothers and a substantial portion of fathers reside with their children prior to incarceration (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008). However, during incarceration, parent-child contact is typically limited to letter writing, phone calls, and visits (see Chap. 10, this volume). Institutional policies and financial burdens further limit the number of phone calls and visitation opportunities, and the cooperation of the caretaker and child can alter the success of the contact.

Assessment of change in communication patterns typically relies upon parent self-report of frequency of phone calls, letter writing, and visitation (Antonio et al., 2009; Harm et al., 1998; Kennon, 2003; NFI, 2008, 2009). A few studies also seek to assess change in the quality in communication by querying about the presence of specific patterns, such as yelling at children and telling children they are loved (Czuba, Anderson, & Higgins, 2006; NFI, 2008, 2009). Antonio et al. (2009) evaluated behavioral changes following the 12-week parenting program, *Long Distance Dads*, using parent responses to twelve self-reports of specific parent behaviors, such as “...how often have you ‘... talked about events that are currently going on in your child’s daily life’ or ‘...evaluated your child’s physical needs’.” The participants were also asked how often they sent gifts, communicated via phone or letters, or requested visits. Pre- and post-program analysis showed that



those who completed the program increased frequency of talking about events in their children's lives, sending gifts, phoning, and assessing their children's physical and emotional needs.

In general, evaluations of programs report mixed results concerning changes in contact frequency, with some investigations showing improvement (Antonio et al., 2009; Loper & Tuerk, 2011; Robbers, 2005; Skarupski et al., 2003) and others not detecting change (Gonzalez et al., 2007; Kennon, 2003). Null results may reflect insufficient focus on this outcome, variations in institutional constraints regarding contact, lack of family resources, and other unmeasured variables.

Mindel and Hoefer (2006) evaluated change in parental behaviors following a family strengthening program offered through a substance abuse treatment facility both for parents who were nearing release or who recently released and for their children. This was one of the few studies we review in this chapter that implemented a curriculum adapted from a universal parenting program that met the criteria as an evidence-based program by the former National Registry of Effective Programs and Practices. The 14-week program included separate 60-min meetings for children and parents, followed by a communal meeting to provide opportunity for the parents to practice newly learned skills. Mindel and Hoefer's study is exceptional in its inclusion of measures completed by participating children. Incarcerated parents as well as their children reported improvements in family bonding and parental involvement, as well as an increase in the opportunities and rewards that come with prosocial behavior.

The rationale for educational opportunities in correctional settings rests on the assumption that such intervention reduces the likelihood of dysfunctional behaviors that lead the parent to reoffend after release. Parenting education may reduce conflict and stress with family members that result in a more successful adjustment during and after prison, which in turn reduces offending. Very little research has evaluated the impact of

parenting programming on recidivism, and what exists yields little support for the assumption. Maiorano and Futris (2005) found that while recidivism rates declined slightly among fathers who completed a parenting program, they were comparable to the recidivism rates of the general prison population. Similarly, Gat (2000) found no significant differences in recidivism between a group of participating mothers and mothers who did not participate in the parenting program. While this objective makes sense in a correctional context, it may be overly optimistic to expect that relatively brief parenting interventions alone will be sufficient to reduce reoffending. Rather, the success of parenting education in reducing recidivism is likely better estimated in terms of a tandem operation providing additional forms of support for incarcerated parents and their families during and after incarceration (see Chap. 15, this volume).

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### **Recurrent Limitations in Assessments of Parenting Programs for Incarcerated Parents**

While relatively few in number, most of the publicly available reports regarding empirical evaluations of parenting programs in jails and prisons have been positive. However, several limitations appear across these studies. Much existing data-based research relies on pre-post designs rather than randomized designs with control groups. Of the 38 studies presented in Tables 13.1 and 13.2, over 65% ( $n = 25$ ) involve the use of control or comparison groups; in most cases, the comparison groups are very limited in terms of size and composition. While the generally positive observed pre-post changes are encouraging, it is important to know whether these changes are independent of factors such as preexisting group differences, regression to the mean, and/or unmeasured environmental effects at the prison. In terms of this last issue, seasonal changes, proximity to holidays, large transfers of inmate populations, and changes in administration are but a few of the overarching agents of change in the attitudes and behaviors of



incarcerated populations. Documentation that observed positive changes occur irrespective of systemic effects is particularly important for this environment.

Randomized control trials (RCTs) are currently considered the “gold standard” for evaluating the effectiveness of a psychosocial intervention (Donaldson, 1998). Due to the numerous difficulties in using this type of design within correction settings, it is unsurprising that relatively few RCTs exist for parenting programs for incarcerated mothers and fathers. The ones that do exist warrant mention; there are seven RCTs listed in Tables 13.1 and 13.2 (three for fathers, three for mothers, and one for mothers and fathers). Work by Eddy and colleagues (Burraston & Eddy, 2017; Eddy et al., 2008, 2013, 2018; see Chap. 15, this volume) on the *Parenting Inside Out* (PIO) parent management training program has demonstrated, and using an RCT design, that program participants (mothers and fathers) showed reductions in stress and depressed mood relative to participants in the control group, and program participants had lower recidivism rates (as measured by police arrests) than control participants. This RCT is strong in terms of design, sample size, measurement, and program efficacy. The number of participants in the trial ( $N = 359$ ) was higher than in all of the other RCTs presented in Tables 13.1 and 13.2 combined. Parents with children of a certain age were targeted. Attrition in the study was low. Replications of studies with similar design characteristics on parenting programs for incarcerated mothers and fathers are very much needed.

Unfortunately, most investigations do not employ random assignment, and regardless, substantial dropout rates in the various studies that are available have been common. For example, attrition of approximately 50% of the initial sample was observed by Czuba et al. (2006), Loper and Tuerk (2011), Sandifer (2008), and Skarupski et al. (2003). The presumed initial equality of groups that is the objective of random assignment can be lost when significant portions of either group drop out. Moreover, institutional conditions may limit who

is allowed to be part of a control group. For example, the control group in Antonio et al.’s (2009) evaluation of *Long Distance Dads* was comprised substantially of men who were ineligible for the training program due to problematic offenses, legal barriers to child contact, and lack of desire for program participation. These problems create substantial difficulties in understanding who is being evaluated and therefore to whom the intervention appropriately applies.

Many of the reported evaluations have very small sample sizes, sometimes due to high dropout rates described above (Browne, 1989; Bushfield, 2004; Gat, 2000; Harrison, 1997; Landreth & Lobaugh, 1998; LaRosa & Rank, 2001). The small sample sizes are particularly problematic for small waitlist comparison groups, as null results may be due to low power rather than lack of intervention effects. For example, after experiencing a considerable attrition rate, Sandifer’s (2008) evaluation of the *Rebonding and Rebuilding* curriculum was hampered by a small control group ( $n = 26$ ). In several areas, the treatment group showed positive pre-post intervention gains, while the control group generally did not change on measured variables. While these results are encouraging, the observed absence of significant change in this waitlist group may reflect lowered statistical power to detect such changes. Further, waitlist attrition is a particular problem in corrections settings as incarcerated individuals may be transferred, experience incompatible schedule changes, commit infractions that restrict educational opportunity, or simply lose interest. It is not surprising that many interventions opt for simple pre-post designs rather than dealing with the likely difficulties of finding durable control groups.

By and large, most studies in the field have relied exclusively on self-report measures. In some cases, the measures reflect a self-evaluation of a quality rather than a more direct measure of the quality itself. For example, Robbers’ (2005) assessment of improved legal knowledge included the item “I know who to call to have my support payments adjusted if my employment status changes (p. 17),” rather than a direct query

regarding who the inmate would call. The problems of using self-report are particularly risky with researcher-developed surveys that have not been subjected to psychometric scrutiny.

### **Why Are High-Quality Assessments of Jail- and Prison-Based Parenting Programs so Hard to Do?**

The spotlight on the common limitations that so frequently plague parenting education programs in correctional settings leads to the question, “Why are there so few interventions that satisfy conditions that would be seen as fairly basic to evaluation of psychosocial intervention?” The resounding answer is: “It’s a prison,” or “It’s a jail.” There are numerous unique logistical, political, and practical considerations in conducting treatment or evaluation in a correctional environment that are not apparent in other settings. Some of the most basic needs for consistent programming—dependable location for training, reliable equipment, availability of materials—can be road blocked in a prison or jail. Delays in twice-daily person counts routinely cut into scheduled time. Lockdowns that interfere with holding a class are not uncommon. Unexpected transfers of class participants can result in dramatic changes in class size. Although the use of computer presentations is normative in most educational settings, jails and prisons often have restrictions on the use of computer equipment that preclude such innovation. Simple features such as turning on electric lights, rearranging furniture, and permitting small group discussion can be curtailed depending upon institutional security policies.

While concern for the well-being of the children of incarcerated parents is typically one purpose of education initiatives, few studies incorporate child outcome measures (Harrison, 1997; Landreth & Lobaugh, 1998). However, access to children is often very difficult in correctional settings. Families of the incarcerated irregularly visit their incarcerated loved ones, and the hospitality of conditions may vary widely (Kazura, 2001; Laughlin, Arrigo, Blevins, &

Coston, 2008; Chap. 10, this volume). Many institutions have policies that prevent physical contact and limit communication during visitation. For example, incarcerated parents may be required to sit in a separate chair and refrain from touching. Long-distance travel to institutions can be burdensome on financially strapped home caregivers. The various personal activities of the inmate’s child—often scheduled on weekends—can interfere with weekend-only visitation hours. These scenarios make it difficult to adequately assess whether inmate parents are using targeted communication skills. Further complicating this is the fact that participants’ children vary widely in age. Parenting education and information that would be relevant for a mother or father of an infant may be less relevant for the parent of a teenager. Rarely do parenting programs screen or target participants whose children are between a specified age range.

Policy concerns can also influence how parenting interventions are devised and assessed. To implement a program in a correctional institution, it is sometimes necessary to demonstrate that the program has higher-order social benefits, beyond those for the individual family. For example, Antonio et al.’s (2009) evaluation of *Long Distance Dads* included goals “to become emotionally, morally, spiritually, psychologically, and financially responsible parents...” (p. 9). Along similar lines, Robbers’ (2005) intervention included objectives to: “Promote emotional, moral, spiritual and financial responsibility for children” (p. 7). Many of Robbers and Antonio et al.’s other goals included objectives for skill development that are more typical in parenting interventions on the outside. However, the inclusion of goals for improved moral behavior would rarely, if ever, occur in interventions with the non-incarcerated.

This type of conceptualization of intervention can be important in gaining political support for the intervention. A survey of 200 citizens living in Florida, Applegate (2001) found that citizens were often skeptical about the provision of many of the possible services and amenities for incarcerated individuals. However, nearly all of the respondents indicated that they would be

willing to support such programming if there was a clear linkage between the service and reduced offending. The provision of services in correctional settings can require selling the public and policymakers on the redemptive value of an intervention in ways that would not be otherwise needed on the outside. However, the focus on these objectives may obscure goals for acquisition and measurement of more parenting-specific skills. Furthermore, it would be challenging to assess the impact of a program on less tangible outcomes like moral responsibility.

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### **Future Directions for Improving Parenting Intervention Scholarship**

Despite the common limitations as well as the ubiquitous difficulties of conducting research in prison and jail settings, there has been a welcome increase over the past decade in the number of published evaluations of parenting interventions, as well as increased understanding of the value of such approaches. As given in Tables 13.1 and 13.2, we observed 38 publicly available quantitative evaluations of parenting programs between 2010 and 2017, in contrast to only 7 such studies between 1989 and 1999, and 23 between 2000 and 2009. In 2007, the US Congress passed the Second Chance Act, which provides localities with funding for initiatives to reduce prison reentry and specifically prioritizes interventions aimed at improving family relationships of prisoners. In Applegate's (2001) public opinion survey regarding correctional services, over 90% of the respondents indicated support for psychological counseling as well as opportunities for family visit experiences.

Another optimistic sign is the presence of new initiatives that, while still in development, offer promise. For example, Eddy, Martinez, Schiffman and associates' (2008) development and evaluation of a broader program that includes *Parenting Inside Out* but expands to address

other key factors related to parents and families both during and following incarceration seems quite promising (Chap. 15, this volume). The difficulties and limitations of doing intervention in correctional settings will not change. However, knowledge can still grow by the adoption of several simple initiatives that would improve this important growing body of research.

### **Consistency and High Standards for Measurement**

To demonstrate the value of parenting programs interventions, there needs to be a stronger and more unified effort regarding measurement of effects. More consistent use of established standardized measures, full reporting of descriptive information, and assessment of scale reliabilities within studies would enable opportunities for improved evaluation at little additional cost or effort. Furthermore, there is a greater push within all scientific disciplines, including psychology, for an "open science" defined as "the publication of scientific concepts together with the protocols and data upon which those concepts are based readily accessible to all levels of an inquiring society" (Hesse, 2018, p. 126). This push for open science emanates in part from the failure to replicate key findings, something which has plagued the field at large. Researchers who engage in the study of the children of incarcerated parents and their families could help achieve the goal of consistently high standards for measurement if more of us engaged in an open science way of doing business. Furthermore, another key problem with research on prison-based educational programs is that many unpublished studies are conducted by states and departments of corrections. Open science platforms could be made accessible to individuals conducting research in academic as well as non-academic settings, bringing a broader set of voices to the table to help move the work forward.

## Exploration of Key Components of Change

There is also a need for better identification of the components of treatment that are presumed to mediate effectiveness. Most of the existing researches place emphasis on demonstrating that the approach works in improving some skill or belief. But if this is effective, why is the approach working, and how can mediating mechanisms be evaluated? While some qualitative studies explore this question by querying participants on useful program aspects, quantitative investigation of such mechanisms is largely lacking. Loper and Tuerk's (2011) finding that high levels of the usage of the "MOM-OK" cognitive-behavioral strategy were associated with the observed improvements supports the inclusion of this feature as an important component. Attention to understanding the specific program mechanisms for change is needed for the continual revision and improvement of programming.

## Inclusion of Child Measures

There is an obvious need for better documentation of the impact of programming on children. The types of information collected may well vary and should be consistent with program goals. For example, if an objective of a program includes teaching parents to be more sensitive to children's feelings and emotions regarding painful separation from parents, it would be useful to gain information about changes in the child's comfort level with the separation. This might be obtained by caregiver ratings, projective examination of child drawings, or self-report in interviews or simple measures. If the objective is to teach better child management techniques, behavior rating scales completed by caregivers or teachers could be useful. Although the quality and type of information collected will likely vary, it makes sense to gather this information for ongoing improvement of the intervention. Furthermore, there needs to be a greater understanding of how a parent-based educational program could impact a child in this type of

setting, when a parent is typically limited in their interactions and contact with the child. At a minimum, a start toward the inclusion of child measures would be for researchers to report demographic information about the children of participants in corrections-based parenting programs (e.g., age, frequency of contact, living situation before incarceration).

## Opportunities for Practice

The inclusion of structured visitation programs that allow for practice of newly learned skills affords the opportunity for better acquisition and measurement of targeted skills. While some interventions include children through planned regular visitation programs (Landreth & Lobaugh, 1998), logistic and security features of many prisons bar this as a common practice. However, in these cases, more attention to direct measurement of skills can still be accomplished with a bit of creativity. Examination of letters sent before and after instruction on optimal written communication, for example, can afford objective information for assessment and instruction. Daily checklists in which parents monitor their use of covered strategies can provide routine information regarding treatment compliance. In-class exercises that call for actual practice of skills (e.g., role plays, observation, and critiques of video vignettes) afford opportunities for "virtual" practice as well as for simple measurement of skill acquisition.

## Improvement in Documentation and Description of Treatment

Efforts to replicate and build upon the existing literature will require more detailed and comprehensive documentation of treatment content, curriculum, and implementation. Currently, there is wide variation in the level of the description provided for interventions, and limited information regarding the training or professional skills of the program facilitators. Manuals or documented guidelines for how to conduct sessions

are rarely provided and may not even exist for some programs. There are, however, welcome exceptions to this pattern (Antonio et al., 2009; Czuba et al., 2006; Loper & Tuerk, 2011). Some programs use portions of the existing outside programs that provide documentation of training procedures. For example, Harrison (1997) used a combination of Bavolek & Comstock's (1985) *The Nurturing Program* as well as components from Dinkmeyer and McKay's (1989) *Systematic Training for Effective Parenting*. Specific descriptions of intervention and training content allow for the replication of reported successful interventions and guidelines on important intervention features. Further, and quite importantly, a need remains not only for the ongoing monitoring of implementation fidelity, but the documentation of such in published studies.

### **Delineation and Description of Contextual Features**

The varying content of interventions likely reflects the various contexts in which intervention is implemented. Better attention to and description of these contexts will improve understanding and cross-fertilization of efforts. While there are many situations that characterize a particular setting or program, there are two major contextual dimensions that can substantially affect the content of programming. The first concerns whether the program is implemented for mothers or fathers. While a few interventions have been used with both men and women, many are specifically designed for mothers or fathers, or at least they are noted to be such. This is not surprising: Prisons are gender-specific, and jails have gender-specific sections. The needs and stresses of incarcerated mothers can differ considerably from men, due to differences in pre-incarceration primary caretaker status, length of sentence, connection with caretakers, presence of mental health problems, and many other gendered differences (Loper & Tuerk, 2011). Detailed descriptions of exactly how a program addresses specific aspects of being a mother or a father are needed.

Along similar lines, program content may vary depending upon whether reunification is expected within the short term or long term. Parents who will soon be resuming contact with children, as is the case in many jail programs, may benefit from more instruction in behavioral management and awareness of transitional issues that can arise with unification. Parents serving longer sentences may need more instruction regarding ways of utilizing the existing communication avenues, growing personally, and collaborating with caregivers. Unlike most empirically supported family interventions that specify a particular child issue (e.g., ADHD, conduct disorder, autism), interventions with the incarcerated may be better summarized in terms of the key contextual features that permeate the incarcerated parent-child relationship.

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### **Implications for Practice and Policy**

#### **Practice Recommendations**

This review of 38 parenting programs for incarcerated mothers and fathers illuminates several opportunities for practice and policy. First, for practitioners—individuals facilitating and implementing programs in correctional facilities—it is critically important to meaningfully assess and document both the program curriculum being used and to evaluate outcomes on an ongoing basis. Program content must align with learning objectives. Practitioners can partner with university researchers to assist with evaluation efforts to help ensure that program goals are linked to measurable outcomes and to see whether such outcomes are actually achieved. When decisions need to be made by administrators about services in light of budget constraints, having assessments of program impact may help save helpful programs.

This field, on the whole, would benefit from the use of an agreed upon set of evidence-based and evidence-informed “best practices” for program content, delivery, and evaluation relative to parenting programs in general. This would help guide the development of new programs.

Practitioners are advised to select the best program for their population with consideration of the gender of the incarcerated parent, the likelihood the parent will reunify with the child(ren), and the setting of the program (e.g., jail or prison). When possible, child age should also be a consideration. An effective program in one context should not be considered the answer to all contexts. For example, although a program with fathers incarcerated at a prison facility may show positive results, it may not be a good program for mothers incarcerated in a local jail.

### Policy Recommendations

A major policy issue that impacts the type of programming and content of program relates to the gender of the incarcerated parent. Traditionally, prisons and jails, and to a certain extent educational programming within the correctional context, were all designed for men. However, increasingly, women are represented in correctional populations. Unfortunately, many correctional facilities do not yet have gender-responsive policies. A gender-responsive approach takes into account the incarcerated individuals' gender during all aspects of criminal justice involvement, from intake, to programming decisions, to reentry and reunification support. A gender-responsive policy toward educational programming would acknowledge the fact that mothers and fathers often have different roles in their family and may have quite different histories of communication and interactional styles with their children, in part due to these different roles.

A second policy recommendation concerns visitation and opportunities for contact with the incarcerated mother or father during their incarceration and perhaps while participating in educational programming. For a parenting program to be effective, a parent needs to have an opportunity to interact with their child and practice newly acquired skills and behavioral responses. Policies that facilitate parent-child contact during incarceration would include child-friendly visiting rooms and policies and perhaps provide extended contact visits for children with

their parents. Additional opportunities for enhanced connection concern the availability and affordability of phone calls to and from correctional facilities. Gender-responsive policies and child-friendly visitation policies would be major changes for many correctional facilities. However, these changes, along with institutional support for parent educational programming, could have benefits for the parent and their child and family in the long term.

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### Conclusion

Many prisons, jails, community agencies, and citizens have responded to the need to provide incarcerated parents with parenting programs. Although a relatively small portion of incarcerated parents in the USA are currently enrolled in these efforts, there appears to be a growing awareness of the importance of this type of intervention with this high-risk segment of the population. There is a need for more and better evaluation of parenting programs for incarcerated mothers and fathers, as well as a tolerance for the unique challenges of doing research and evaluation in correctional settings. Recent legislative attention to the needs of incarcerated individuals in the USA is a welcome sign. There appears to be growing support for aiding families affected by incarceration. Although there are difficulties in doing this work, there is plenty of room for the community of clinicians, community organizers, correctional professionals, and scholars to create and refine programs on the inside that make a difference on the outside.

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# Mentoring Interventions for Children of Incarcerated Parents

# 14

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## Abstract

This chapter discusses the significant challenges facing children of incarcerated parents and how mentoring might be an important prevention and growth-promoting intervention for these vulnerable youth. We review existing literature on mentoring in general, and for children of incarcerated parents, specifically, highlighting methodological limitations, gaps in knowledge, and directions for future research. We then identify potential enhancements and innovations for mentoring programs to better serve children of prisoners. We also caution researchers, practitioners, and policymakers from viewing mentoring as the panacea for the complex web of problems facing children and families of incarcerated parents, as well as society as a whole. If accompanied by tangible move-

ments toward judicial and socioeconomic reform on a societal scale, and a focus on addressing the particular challenges facing a given family, mentoring has the potential to contribute to positive outcomes for children impacted by parental incarceration.

Since 1970, the incarceration rate in the USA has quadrupled, resulting in more than 1 in every 100 US adults being in jail or prison, the highest per capita rate in the world (Kaeble & Cowhig, 2018; Nickel, Garland, & Kane, 2009). Strikingly, the majority of adult prisoners are parents of minors (Nickel et al., 2009). These children are said to be “unseen victims” of an overly punitive judicial system (Petersilia, 2003). Parental incarceration puts children at elevated risk for a range of negative developmental outcomes, particularly delinquency and other behavioral problems (e.g., Mcgee, Davis, Saunders-Goldson, Fletcher, & Fisher, 2017; Murray, Farrington, & Sekol, 2012a), indicating a need for services that mitigate risk and promote positive development.

Mentoring has been the most widely implemented service for children of incarcerated parents because it is thought to be a relatively cost-effective intervention that provides children with a measure of stability and support in an otherwise difficult situation (Jarjoura, 2016; Eddy, Cearley, Bergen, & Stern-Carusone, 2014). Here, we define mentoring as “a relationship between an older, more experienced adult and an unrelated, younger protégé—a

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relationship in which the adult provides ongoing guidance, instruction, and encouragement aimed at developing the competence and character of the protégé” (Rhodes, 2002, p. 3). In the following sections, we discuss the particular vulnerabilities experienced by many children of incarcerated parents and the ways in which both natural and assigned mentoring relationships might serve protective roles. Within this context, we consider research findings and the mentoring initiatives serving this vulnerable population that have been evaluated to date. Finally, we make recommendations for future research, policy, and practice.

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## Children of Incarcerated Parents

Many children of incarcerated parents face a host of difficulties that put them at risk for poor developmental outcomes. When a parent is incarcerated, children may experience increased poverty, family instability, disrupted attachment, and feelings of abandonment, shame, and stigmatization (Phillips & Gates, 2011; Raeder, 2012; Shlafer & Poehlmann, 2010). Further, because families with an incarcerated parent may have already struggled with violence, discrimination, instability, and/or limited access to material and social resources prior to the parent’s incarceration, their children are already at increased risk for negative outcomes at the time of parental separation (Arditti & Savla, 2015; Kjellstrand, 2017). Thus, the incarceration of a parent may exacerbate cumulative risk factors to which children have already been exposed (Kjellstrand, 2017; Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008).

Of course, there is wide variation in this group of children, and by no means do all individuals experience significant risk simply by virtue of having an incarcerated parent (Johnson, Arditti, & McGregor, 2018). However, research has identified psychosocial difficulties more likely to occur among such youth compared to the general population and even to youth separated from a parent for reasons other than incarceration. Studies have most consistently and robustly documented an association between parental

incarceration and elevated rates of externalizing and antisocial behavior, including aggression, theft, non-compliance, and minor delinquency (Kjellstrand, Yu, Eddy, & Martinez, 2018; Mcgee et al., 2017; Murray, Farrington, Sekol, & Olsen, 2009; Murray, Loeber, & Pardini, 2012b). This is concerning, given that childhood externalizing behaviors and delinquency can lead to more serious offending during adulthood, suggesting that criminal justice involvement is highly intergenerational (Rakt, Murray, & Nieuwebeerta, 2011).

Researchers have also linked parental incarceration to difficulties with emotional dysregulation (Lotze, Ravindran, & Myers, 2010; Myers et al., 2013), posttraumatic stress symptoms (Arditti & Savla, 2015; Bocknek, Sanderson, & Britner, 2009), and disrupted familial and peer relationships (Murray et al., 2012b; Myers et al., 2013; Shlafer & Poehlmann, 2010). Findings regarding other outcomes, such as internalizing problems (e.g., depression, anxiety, low self-esteem), substance use, and academic difficulties, have been more mixed, with some studies finding increased risk among children of incarcerated parents (Mcgee et al., 2017; Parke & Clarke-Stewart, 2003), while other studies show no differences compared to general samples (Murray et al., 2012a). Still, the body of research makes it clear that children of incarcerated parents are sizeable population whose members are at risk for problematic outcomes. Preventive interventions that mitigate such risk are needed.

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## The Role of Caring Adults

Beyond studies specifically focusing on children of incarcerated parents, it has been widely demonstrated that resilience processes can occur in the face of adverse circumstances—war, natural disasters, family violence, extreme poverty, parental mental illness, and parental incarceration (Boyden & Mann, 2005; Masten, 2001, 2014; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998). Research has uncovered three broad clusters of protective factors that have been associated with such resilience: (1) characteristics of the individual,

such as intelligence, self-confidence, or special talents; (2) characteristics of the family, such as authoritative parenting and socioeconomic advantages; and (3) characteristics of the community outside the family, such as a relationship with a caring adult (e.g., a teacher, a religious leader) (Masten, 2001, 2014; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998).

Although the most substantial bodies of existing research focus on the first two clusters, recent decades have seen increasing attention devoted to community factors, from which youth mentoring research and practice has arisen. The significance of supportive, non-parental adults in the lives of children was highlighted prominently in the landmark Children of Kauai study, which followed an entire birth cohort across their first thirty years of life (Werner, 1989). Many of the children studied were classified as high risk because they had been born into poverty and were living in conflictual or traumatic family environments. However, a large proportion of the high-risk children reached adulthood as competent, high-functioning individuals. A widespread feature among this group of children was a strong relationship with at least one supportive adult other than a parent (Werner & Johnson, 2004).

Subsequent studies have corroborated this finding by examining the role of naturally occurring mentoring relationships between youth and caring, non-parent adults within existing social networks (Zimmerman, Bingenheimer, & Behrendt, 2005). In both nationally representative and local samples, researchers have found that youth who report having at least one supportive relationship with a caring, non-parent adult (i.e., a natural mentor) are more likely to be academically engaged, to evidence greater educational aspirations, and to earn higher grades (Chang, Greenberger, Chen, Heckhausen, & Farruggia, 2010; Hurd & Sellers, 2013). Such youth have also been found to have lower rates of substance use, theft, and violence, compared to youth without natural mentors (Dubois & Silverthorn, 2005; Haddad, Chen, & Greenberger, 2011). Natural mentoring relationships are also associated with fewer symptoms of depression and anxiety and with higher self-esteem (Chang et al., 2010; Dubois &

Silverthorn, 2005; Haddad et al., 2011). Increasingly available longitudinal studies suggest that the lasting impact of natural mentoring relationships during adolescence endures well into adulthood. In particular, a recent study found that adults who reported having a supportive relationship with an adult outside of their family during their adolescence had higher educational attainment, income, and civic engagement at midlife, compared to adults who did not have such relationships during adolescence (Hagler & Rhodes, 2018).

However, with declines in adult civic engagement and community integration, as well as increases in race- and class-based segregation, researchers are becoming increasingly concerned that the most socioeconomically disadvantaged youth might not have access to enough caring, non-familial adults—particularly those with the social resources to expand opportunities and facilitate social mobility (Hagler, 2018; Putnam, 2015). In recent studies of nationally representative samples, youth from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds were significantly less likely than their more privileged counterparts to report having a supportive relationship with an adult outside of their families (Putnam, 2015; Raposa, Erickson, Hagler, & Rhodes, 2018). Overall, an estimated one-third of youth will reach the age of 19 years without ever having had a non-parent mentor (Bruce & Bridgeland, 2014).

In recent years, organized mentoring programs have rapidly expanded in hopes of closing this “mentoring gap” (Bruce & Bridgeland, 2014). In these programs, youth (typically those designated as “at-risk”) are matched with adult volunteers, and dyads are encouraged to meet and communicate regularly over the course of several months or years. Programs differ in the specificity of their focus. Some operate under a more general “friendship” model, with the primary goal being the development of a close, supportive adult relationship, from which positive developmental outcomes are thought to emerge organically. Other programs have more specific goals, such as improving academic performance, reducing substance use, or preventing



delinquency (Bruce & Bridgeland, 2014; Garringer, McQuillin, & McDaniel, 2017).

During the past two decades in particular, there has been a dramatic expansion of mentoring programs tailored specifically for children of incarcerated parents. The largest such effort is the federal government's Mentoring Children of Prisoners (MCP) Program, which was initiated during President George W. Bush's administration and received allocations of approximately \$50 million or more in funding between 2004 and 2010. Although this specific initiative has ended, the federal government has continued to contribute significant funds to mentoring organizations. In recent years, federal spending on mentoring has ranged from \$78 to \$90 million annually. Most of this funding is allocated and managed by the Department of Justice, which continues to prioritize mentoring for children of incarcerated parents, among other prevention initiatives (Fernandes-Alcantara, 2018; Garringer et al., 2017). Despite much public enthusiasm for mentoring as an intervention for this vulnerable population, the expansion of these programs has overtaken knowledge of whether and how they actually work for children of incarcerated parents. Although the outcomes for mentored children of incarcerated parents were thought to be comparable to those found in prior evaluations of mentoring with the general youth population, this assumption has been subjected to very limited empirical scrutiny. Thus, it is useful to take stock of what is known about the mentoring of youth in general before turning to the few studies on mentoring for children of incarcerated parents, specifically, given the paucity and nascence of this research.

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### Research on the Effectiveness of Assigned Youth Mentoring

Across youth populations of interest, most evaluations of mentoring programs have revealed only modest effects. For example, the public and political enthusiasm for mentoring in recent decades was sparked by a randomized controlled trial

of community-based mentoring (CBM) offered by Big Brothers Big Sisters of America (BBBSA), the nation's oldest and best-known mentoring organization, in which researchers compared the longitudinal trajectories of youth who were given access to the program to those of youth assigned to a waitlist control condition (Grossman & Tierney, 1998). The researchers found several statistically significant differences in behavioral, psychosocial, and academic functioning between the mentored youth and those in the control group at an 18-month follow-up, including decreased substance use, improved school attendance and academic performance, and better parental and teacher relationships among the mentored group. Publicity of these statistically significant differences helped fuel the rapid expansion of mentoring programs, establishing a pattern in which implementation outpaced research for decades.

Since this initial large-scale evaluation, researchers have cautioned overly optimistic interpretation of statistically significant findings from one study (e.g., Herrera, Grossman, Kauh, & McMaken, 2007; Rhodes, 2002). Simply put, statistical significance does not imply practical significance. In that regard, standardized effect size is a more useful metric of evaluation (Flay et al., 2005). In statistical terms, effect size represents the degree to which two groups differ (in this case, the mentoring group versus a waitlist control group). Effect size is derived as the difference between the standardized group means, using Cohen's *d*. Effect sizes using this measure are interpreted as "small" if  $d = 0.2$ , "medium" if  $d = 0.5$ , and "large" if  $d = 0.8$  (Cohen, 1988). In the Big Brothers Big Sisters study, the standardized effect sizes across all matches and outcomes in the study were quite small ( $d = 0.09$ ), although there was considerable variation in effect size based on mentor-child match quality and length (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002). Similarly small effect sizes emerged in a large randomized controlled evaluation of the BBBSA school-based mentoring program (SBM), in which mentors and mentees meet in schools rather than in the community (Herrera et al., 2007).

As mentoring programs and research have expanded, researchers have conducted meta-analyses that aggregate results from multiple studies and samples to most robustly estimate effect sizes. In the most recently published meta-analysis of assigned youth mentoring, Dubois, Portillo, Rhodes, Silverthorn, and Valentine (2011) aggregated the results of 73 independent evaluations of mentoring programs for children and adolescents, finding an overall effect size of 0.21 on youth's academic, psychosocial, and behavioral outcomes. However, an examination of this overall effect size alone masks significant variability based on several moderating factors. In particular, effects were improved when programs engaged in evidence-based best practices, such as matching mentors and youth based on shared interests and recruiting mentors whose educational and occupational backgrounds fit with program goals. There were also significant variations in program effects based on youth risk profiles. For the purposes of the study, children's level of environmental risk (i.e., social and demographic circumstances like familial structure and socio-economic status) and individual risk (i.e., individual-level characteristics such as failing in school, behavioral problems, or emotional disturbance) were classified as "low," "medium," or "high." Interestingly, the highest effects of mentoring were found among youth with either low environmental risk and high individual risk as well as youth with high environmental risk and low individual risk ( $d = 0.32$  for both). Comparatively lower effect sizes were found among youth with low environmental and low individual risk ( $d = 0.25$ ), those with low environmental and medium individual risk ( $d = 0.16$ ), and those with high environmental and high individual risk ( $d = 0.22$ ).

These findings are consistent with another study of youth in a SBM program, which found that youth with very strong or very weak preexisting interpersonal relationships with parents, teachers, and peers experienced fewer benefits from mentoring compared to youth with moderate, but not particularly strong, relationships

(Schwartz, Rhodes, Chan, & Herrera, 2011). Further, qualitative investigations of early match closure demonstrate that some mentors feel unneeded by youth with low levels of risk, while those matched with high-risk youth can feel overwhelmed by the depth and complexity of their mentees' needs (Spencer, 2007). Together, these studies suggest that youth must exhibit some degree of risk in order to benefit from mentoring, perhaps because youth with low risk may not need a mentoring relationship or be motivated to pursue one. However, when individual and environmental risks escalate and interact, mentors may begin to feel unequipped to meet youths' complex needs resulting in shorter, less effective relationships (Grossman, Chan, Schwartz, & Rhodes, 2012; Spencer, 2007). In these cases, more intensive interventions are needed.

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### **Effectiveness of Mentoring for Children of Incarcerated Parents**

Unfortunately, some children of incarcerated parents fall into this latter category of mentees because of both elevated rates of problem behaviors (i.e., individual risk) as well as challenging familial and community issues (i.e., environmental risk) (Kjellstrand, 2017). One result may be decreased effectiveness of mentoring. For example, Kupersmidt, Stump, Stelter, and Rhodes (2017) recently analyzed a large archival BBBSA dataset and found that children of incarcerated parents experienced significantly shorter mentoring relationships and had lower grades, school attendance, and parental trust after one year of mentoring, compared to youth who did not have an incarcerated parent. The shorter match length of children of incarcerated parents is concerning, given that early match termination can be harmful, particularly for youth whose relational trust is already fragile (Grossman et al., 2012; Grossman & Rhodes, 2002; Rhodes, 2002). Even when these relationships do bear out, they are not as effective for children of incarcerated parents compared to their peers (Kupersmidt et al., 2017).



Thus, it appears that children of incarcerated parents are not being served well by general mentoring programs, indicating a need for more specialized programming specifically tailored to fit the needs of this unique and vulnerable population. This notion is supported by a recent study by Stump, Kupersmidt, Stelter, and Rhodes (2018), who used archival BBBSA data to identify the program characteristics associated with the strongest outcomes for children of incarcerated parents. They found that programs with goals, funding, and mentor training specifically designated and designed to serve children of incarcerated parents were, accordingly, more effective in serving these youth. These results are heartening, given the ongoing proliferation of mentoring programs—both within and beyond BBBSA—that seek to serve children of incarcerated parents.

Shlafer, Poehlmann, Coffino, and Hanneman (2009) conducted one of the first evaluations of a mentoring program for children of incarcerated parents utilizing mixed quantitative and qualitative methods. Among a sample of 57 youth participating in Mentoring Connections, a Department of Health and Human Services-funded mentoring program administered through BBBSA, they found that over one-third of matches ended within six months, consistent with the studies discussed above highlighting the increased likelihood of high-risk youth to experience early match termination. Common reasons for termination included scheduling conflicts, youth's personal or family issues, residential mobility, mentors' underestimated commitment, and match incompatibility. However, among the matches that did persist, regular mentor–mentee contact was associated with moderate reductions in caregiver-rated externalizing and internalizing symptoms, after controlling for baseline symptoms.

In another program evaluation, Bruster and Foreman (2012) examined the impact of the Seton Youth Shelters' Mentoring Children of Prisoners Program in Virginia Beach, Virginia. A sample of 49 caregivers and 35 children completed surveys. All caregivers felt that the program was beneficial, and 80% of youth agreed or strongly agreed that mentors helped

them succeed, provided guidance, encouraged greater academic engagement, helped them feel good about themselves, and made them feel able to discuss personal problems. Further, caregivers reported that they perceived a positive change in youth's interest in school, completion of homework, and general attitude toward life since participating in the program. Similarly, Laakso and Nygaard (2012) conducted qualitative analysis of interviews from youth, incarcerated parents, non-incarcerated parents/guardians, and mentors who were participating in a specialized BBBSA program for children of prisoners. According to stakeholders' subjective perceptions, youth demonstrated increased self-confidence, sociability, and openness and trust, improved in their school performance, and showed more signs of happiness over the course of their participation in the program.

While these small-scale and qualitative investigations are informative, the most rigorous evaluations of mentoring programs for children of incarcerated parents to date have utilized control groups. In particular, ICF-International and Baylor University (2011) designed and conducted the only known randomized control trial of a mentoring program for this population. Over the course of 18 months, they compared outcomes for youth participating in Amachi, a faith-based mentoring program for children of prisoners that operates through BBBSA agencies, to youth on a waitlist for the program. After 6 and 12 months of participation, youth in the program reported higher self-esteem and a more positive view of the future compared to youth on the waitlist, with moderate effect sizes ranging from  $d = 0.37$  to  $0.43$ . After six months, youth reported stronger parental relationships compared to the waitlist group, though this difference did not hold at 12- and 18-month follow-up assessments. However, at 18 months, participating youth did report a higher perceived ability to make friends compared to control group participants. Unfortunately, no significant differences in academic outcomes were found at any time point.

More recently, Morris (2017) conducted a secondary analysis comparing a BBBSA sample of children of incarcerated parents with a sample

drawn from the Fragile Families and Child Well-being Study which included children of incarcerated parents who did not receive mentoring services. He found that after six months of participation in the mentoring program, youth experienced a decline in deviant behavior and sadness, both of which were significantly lower compared to the unmentored control group. After one year, the mentored group maintained lower levels of sadness, while levels of deviant behavior rebounded to baseline levels and were no longer significantly different from the control group, suggesting that programs may struggle to maintain some effects following match closure.

Together, these studies suggest that mentoring programs for children of incarcerated parents may be effective in achieving some positive youth outcomes. Most consistently, these programs appear to improve youth's psychological well-being and, in particular, enhance their self-esteem, optimism, and happiness. There is some evidence for mentoring to reduce engagement in deviant and problem behaviors, though this finding is inconsistent across time points and across studies. It should also be noted that these studies have a number of methodological limitations, including small samples, reliance on subjective reports of outcomes, and, in some cases, a lack of comparison group. Notably, existing longitudinal studies also suffered from significant attrition, which may limit the generalizability of the findings.

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### **Pathways and Mechanisms of Mentoring for Children of Incarcerated Parents**

Studies on mentoring for children of incarcerated parents have not yet examined the pathways through which mentoring may influence youth development. In the broader literature, caring adult mentors are hypothesized to positively influence youth development through multiple developmental pathways. According to Rhodes' (2005) widely used theoretical model, mentors have the potential to enhance youth's socio-emotional development by establishing a

close, trusting relationship that cultivates emotional well-being, self-esteem, and interpersonal skills. Children of incarcerated parents, specifically, may have long-standing and/or recently exacerbated difficulties experiencing trust and safety in adult-youth relationships (Jarjoura, Dubois, Schlafer, & Haight, 2013), including experiences of relationship loss (Arditti, 2016). Thus, mentors who are able to establish trust through patience, empathy, reliability, and consistency might provide important corrective experiences.

Mentors may also promote cognitive development by providing direct instruction, reinforcing academic engagement, and building critical thinking skills (Rhodes, 2005). In particular, caregivers for children of incarcerated parents tend to have low levels of educational attainment and may be overwhelmed by vocational and caregiving responsibilities (Schlafer et al. 2009). Thus, these youth may benefit from academic assistance as well as enriching educational experiences (e.g., visits to museums, job shadowing) facilitated by mentors. However, as noted above, evaluations to date have not found strong evidence for an impact of mentoring on children of prisoner's academic functioning.

Finally, mentors can support identity development through positive role modeling and guidance (Rhodes, 2005). This may be particularly important for children of incarcerated parents, who may de-identify themselves with incarcerated parents and/or consider those parents to be negative role models (i.e., examples of what *not* to do) (Johnson & Easterling, 2015; Luther, 2016). Having an incarcerated parent is highly stigmatizing, and children may begin to wonder what it means for them and for their future (Luther, 2016). Thus, contact with a positive role model who facilitates the exploration of different current and future selves may be a powerful intervention, but one with potentially great interpersonal challenges for the mentor, the child, and his or her family and incarcerated parent.

Beyond these developmental processes, researchers are increasingly recognizing that relationships with non-parental adults can be

important sources of social capital and that the long-term influence of these relationships might, in part, result from the expansion of youth's social networks and opportunities (Hagler, 2018; Stanton-Salazar, 2011). Families and children of incarcerated parents often are relegated to the margins of society due to the stigma attached to the incarceration, and this social alienation has serious implications on youth's future opportunities and social mobility (Kjellstrand, 2017). Thus, an infusion of social capital through a mentoring relationship might help youth connect with new relationships, knowledge, and opportunities that they can use to leverage themselves and their families out of poverty and social marginalization.

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### Recommendations for Future Research

Existing research on the efficacy of mentoring programs for youth of incarcerated parents is sparse and flawed, and the potential pathways through which mentoring influences these children's development, as articulated above, are almost entirely theoretical. Thus, more research is needed on the efficacy of mentoring programs for children of incarcerated parents, as well as the developmental pathways that these programs target. It is important that future studies improve upon the rigor of existing studies by utilizing rigorous methods (e.g., control groups and random assignment to conditions), longitudinal methods that prioritize participant retention, and multimodal measures of youth outcomes (e.g., self-report, parent report, mentor report, teacher report, behaviors measures, records), including measures of outcomes of clear societal significance (e.g., involvement in juvenile justice, school dropout, high school graduation). In addition to testing pathways using mediational analysis, studies should also examine the youth, family, mentor, and program characteristics that enhance and/or inhibit program efficacy (i.e., moderation analysis). Along these lines, several researchers have cautioned the practice of treating children of incarcerated parents as a

homogenous group, highlighting significant heterogeneity in life circumstances and the relative balance of risk and protective factors (e.g., Johnson et al., 2018; Lotze et al., 2010). It will be important for future studies to attend to this heterogeneity more intentionally and to refrain from making unwarranted generalizations about this population. Finally, researchers should move beyond simply examining statistical significance by routinely documenting effect sizes, which are absent from some existing studies.

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### Policy and Practice Considerations

Although more research is needed to make clearer recommendations for practice and policy, some insights can be drawn from existing best practices guidelines for mentoring in general (e.g., Eddy et al., 2014; Mentor, 2015), as well as the subjective experiences of stakeholders in some qualitative and mixed methods studies of mentoring for children of incarcerated parents (e.g., ICF-International, 2011; Jarjoura et al., 2013). These sources emphasize the need for careful recruitment and screening to obtain mentors with the appropriate background and experience to work with high-risk youth populations (Jarjoura et al., 2013; Eddy et al., 2014). Selected mentors should undergo specialized training to work with the challenges specific to children of incarcerated parents. Further, these mentors need ongoing training after match initiation and intensive supervision from program staff (ICF-International, 2011; Jarjoura et al., 2013; Kupersmidt et al., 2017; Eddy et al., 2014; Stump et al., 2018). Training and supervision should emphasize cultural competence by thoroughly educating mentors on the needs, strengths, and diversity of families with incarcerated parents, while encouraging mentors to examine and work through their own biases and assumptions (Jarjoura et al., 2013; Eddy et al., 2014). Match preparation and supervision should also emphasize the importance of consistency, structure, realistic expectations, trust-building, and patience (ICF-International, 2011; Jarjoura et al., 2013; Eddy et al., 2014).

Although these program enhancements may lead to increased effects of assigned mentoring interventions, some mentoring researchers and program developers are grappling with limitations in capacity and the efficacy of one-to-one formal matching models (Schwartz & Rhodes, 2016). Increasingly, hybrid models of mentoring that combine aspects of natural and formal mentoring are being developed as potentially more cost-effective, sustainable, and empowering mentoring models. The most prominent hybrid model to date is *youth-initiated mentoring* (YIM), in which youth are taught the tangible skills they need to identify potential mentors within their social networks, initiate and maintain mentoring relationships, and utilize their mentoring relationships to achieve their goals. The ultimate objective of these programs is to empower youth to build robust networks of mentoring supports as they move through developmental stages and settings (Schwartz & Rhodes, 2016; Schwartz, Rhodes, Spencer, & Grossman, 2013).

One such program is the National Guard Youth Challenge Program (NGYCP), an intensive, six-week residential program for adolescents who have dropped out or been expelled from school that, in some ways, resembles existing camp-based and residential programs for children of incarcerated parents. There are several educational, behavioral, and psychosocial modules to NGYCP, but among the most important and unique is a YIM component. Youth are required to nominate adults from their existing social networks, who first help them complete the residential phase of the program and then offer ongoing support as youth transition out of the program in order to prevent relapse and promote the maintenance of program gains. Results of a longitudinal program evaluation revealed that 74% of mentoring dyads were still in regular contact at a 21-month follow-up, revealing much more durable matches than those found in traditional assigned mentoring programs. Further, results indicated that enduring mentoring relationships were associated with increased retention of positive educational, vocational, and behavioral outcomes at a 3-year

follow-up (Schwartz et al., 2013). The YIM model could be adapted and implemented within programs for children of incarcerated parents fairly seamlessly and may result in more durable matches and retention of program effects.

Even with these program enhancements and innovations, mentoring will never be the panacea for the range of complex issues facing children of incarcerated parents. In focus groups of BBBSA mentors for children of incarcerated parents, several mentors expressed frustration with the limited scope of the program and their inability to help families with financial, employment, and other socioeconomic concerns (Davies, Brazzel, La Vigne, & Shollenberger, 2008). As discussed above, mentors of high-risk youth can feel overwhelmed by children and families' ongoing unmet needs, which, in some cases, leads to burnout and early termination of matches (Shlaffer et al., 2009; Spencer, 2007). In line with this thinking, Kjellstrand (2017) emphasizes the need for multilevel, multimodal services tailored to each child and family to meet the depth and complexity of needs. This requires intervention at several ecological levels. Mentoring, as well as psychotherapy and support groups, intervenes at the level of the child. Zooming out, parenting classes, improving visitation practices, and alternatives to incarceration (e.g., house arrest, community-based sentencing) have the potential to benefit children through improved parenting. Parents and families might also be supported through employment support, job skills training, and mental health treatment, which in turn would result in a more stable home environment for children. Zooming out even further, neighborhood factors that perpetuate criminality, such as disorder, disintegration, segregation, and violence, must be addressed through tangible efforts at neighborhood rehabilitation and integration (Kjellstrand, 2017).

Finally, policymakers, government officials, and citizens alike must work to reform the laws, policies, and practices that have contributed to the current incarceration crisis. Regardless of how well mentoring programs are designed and implemented, they must not be used as a band-aid for larger societal problems (Hagler,

2018; Schwartz & Rhodes, 2016). Until Americans address our overly punitive penal system, racist law enforcement and sentencing, and staggering socioeconomic inequality, our most vulnerable children will continue to suffer while their parents are locked away (Raeder, 2012).

## Summary and Conclusions

In this chapter, we discussed the significant challenges facing children of incarcerated parents and how mentoring might be an important prevention and growth-promoting intervention for these vulnerable youth. We reviewed the existing literature on mentoring in general, and for children of incarcerated parents, specifically, while highlighting methodological limitations, gaps in knowledge, and directions for future research. Finally, we highlighted potential program enhancements and innovations for mentoring programs to better serve children of incarcerated parents, while cautioning researchers, practitioners, and policymakers from viewing mentoring as the panacea for the complex web of problems facing these children and their families, as well as society as a whole. If accompanied by tangible movements toward judicial and socioeconomic reform on a societal scale, and a focus on addressing the particular challenges facing a given family, mentoring has the potential to contribute to positive outcomes for children impacted by incarceration.

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# Theory-Based Multimodal Parenting Intervention for Incarcerated Parents and Their Children

# 15

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## Abstract

Parenting programs for incarcerated parents have become increasingly popular within corrections departments over the past several decades. The programs are appealing as they are thought to improve not only long-term prosocial outcomes and reductions in recidivism for parents who are reentering their communities after lockup, but also outcomes for their children. While some parenting programs have been shown to be effective in various ways, they may be insufficient to produce long-lasting, positive impacts for families with loved ones involved in the criminal justice system. We proposed that an expanded definition of what a

parenting program is might be useful—a “multimodal” parenting program. Such programs address not only the development of parenting knowledge and the practice of parenting skills, but also the numerous contextual challenges that many correction-involved parents face during and following incarceration. Some of these challenges include inadequate housing, parent unemployment, parental mental and physical health issues, and conflictual personal relationships. We overview our work to build a multimodal parenting program for incarcerated parents and their families, and discuss the implication of such for future research, practice, and policy.

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Over the past several decades, the two interventions most frequently discussed in terms of incarcerated parents in the USA are correction-based parenting education classes (see Chap. 13, this volume) and community-based youth mentoring (see Chap. 14, this volume). While keen interest in and the provision of mentoring for the children of incarcerated parents have been driven largely by federal funding of nonprofit organizations that are typically not connected with corrections systems, interest in parenting programs has often been a local affair, with growth driven largely by individuals working for or within corrections departments. This situation has begun to change in recent years, as federal funding has begun to flow toward parenting programs as well, particularly for incarcerated fathers. Given the established nature, widespread reach, and growth potential of parenting programs within corrections systems, finding ways to maximize their effectiveness is a clear pathway toward potentially improving the lives of the children of incarcerated parents in the immediate future.

Parenting programs have had lasting appeal within adult corrections for at least two reasons. Over the short run, by developing and strengthening the communication skills of incarcerated mothers and fathers (e.g., with caregivers, with children), parenting programs are thought to increase the likelihood of positive contact between parents and their families, which in turn may increase family support after release, increase the probability of prosocial success in the community, and reduce recidivism to prison or jail. Over the long run, by developing and strengthening an array of skills relevant to their lives back in the community, parenting programs are thought to decrease the likelihood of the intergenerational transmission of antisocial behavior from incarcerated parent to child and decrease the risk of the next generation becoming incarcerated.

Hopes for outcomes such as these have maintained the attention of systems on parenting, or at least on family contact with parents. Increasing positive family contact appears to be a worthy intervention target, with a growing set of

studies finding that more high-quality contact is related both to increased family support and to decreased recidivism (see Chap. 10, this volume). Enhancing the parenting skills of incarcerated parents also has merit, given that numerous studies have found that the children of incarcerated parents are at heightened risk for engaging in antisocial behavior (see Chap. 6, this volume), that youth who engage in such behaviors are at risk for engaging in criminal behavior during adulthood (e.g., Lipsey & Derzon, 1998; Reid, Patterson, & Snyder, 2002), and that key predictors for the development and maintenance of youth antisocial behavior are parent behaviors within the context of the parent-child relationship (Dishion & Snyder, 2016).

Given the relation between parenting and youth antisocial behavior, it is not surprising that numerous studies have demonstrated positive impacts of participating in parenting programs in terms of decreasing child antisocial behaviors (e.g., Brestan & Eyberg, 1998; Metzler, Eddy, & Lichtenstein, 2013). These studies have been conducted with samples from general populations as well as “at risk” and clinical populations, such as families with children diagnosed with a conduct disorder. Unfortunately, few such studies, and a scant number of scientifically rigorous studies, have been conducted on the impact of parenting programs on men and women involved in the criminal justice system (e.g., Armstrong, Eggins, Reid, Harnett, & Dawe, 2018), and it is yet unclear how helpful such programs ultimately are for justice-involved parents, their children, or their families over the long run.

At this point, rigorous studies such as randomized controlled trials are needed to provide policymakers and practitioners with information on whether and under what conditions parenting programs positively influence incarcerated parents, their children, and their families (Paul, 1967). In this chapter, we propose that a new set of studies would be most beneficial if the conventional notion of what constitutes a parenting program for incarcerated parents be broadened to address the context within which the parenting of their children occurs both during and following a prison or jail sentence.

We begin this chapter by reviewing the most common conceptualization of a parenting program within corrections—a parenting education class—and describe the model behind this intervention. We then consider an alternative model, coercion theory (Dishion & Snyder, 2016; Patterson, 1982; Patterson, Reid, & Dishion, 1992), that describes the development and maintenance of youth antisocial behavior and related problems, and the role that parenting plays in such outcomes. Based on this theory, we hypothesize that a contextually sensitive “multimodal” parenting program that addresses multiple key outcomes simultaneously seems more likely than parenting classes alone to have a lasting, positive impact on incarcerated parents, their children and families, and society at large. We describe our work on the development of such a program that begins during lockup and continues after release, and conclude with a discussion of relevant issues in the areas of future research, practice, and policy.

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## Correction-Based Parenting Programs

By the 1990s, the majority of US corrections systems offered parenting programs in at least some of their institutions, but only 1% of incarcerated men and 4% of incarcerated women reported participating (Morash, Haar, & Rucker, 1994). The typical program was a group-based parent education class that took place once a week for several months (Clement, 1993; Jeffries, Menghraj, & Hairston, 2001). Contemporary prison-based parenting programs remain short term and classroom-based (Eddy et al., 2008), but the number of participating parents has increased dramatically. Glaze and Maruschak (2008) estimated that within state prisons in more recent years, approximately 11% of men and 27% of women who are parents of minor children have attended at least some parenting or

child rearing classes since their admission. Unfortunately, more recent national estimates are not available.

The typical program offers instruction in generic communication and parenting skills and provides an overview of child development (Eddy et al., 2008). While there are numerous curricula available on these topics for community-based populations, standardized curricula developed specifically for incarcerated (or recently incarcerated) parents are few and far between, and the typical prison-based class is created and delivered in house by a local parenting instructor working in relative isolation (Eddy et al., 2008; Jeffries et al., 2001). Unfortunately, similar information has not been assembled on jail-based parenting programs, although there is a fledgling literature on these types of programs (see Chap. 13, this volume).

While generally not specified by researchers and practitioners of correction-based parenting classes, most programs described in the published literature seem grounded in a model that states that parenting influences child behavior. Thus, classes are offered to improve parenting knowledge, attitudes, and skills. Gains in these areas are hypothesized to increase the effectiveness of parenting behaviors in shaping positive outcomes for children during and following incarceration. Such a model is lacking in two major respects. It ignores the day-to-day context within which the children of incarcerated parents are parented, and it fails to attend to differences in parent and child interactions over the course of child development. A life course theoretical framework that attends to these issues is needed to guide the creation of prison-based parenting programs.

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## Coercion Theory

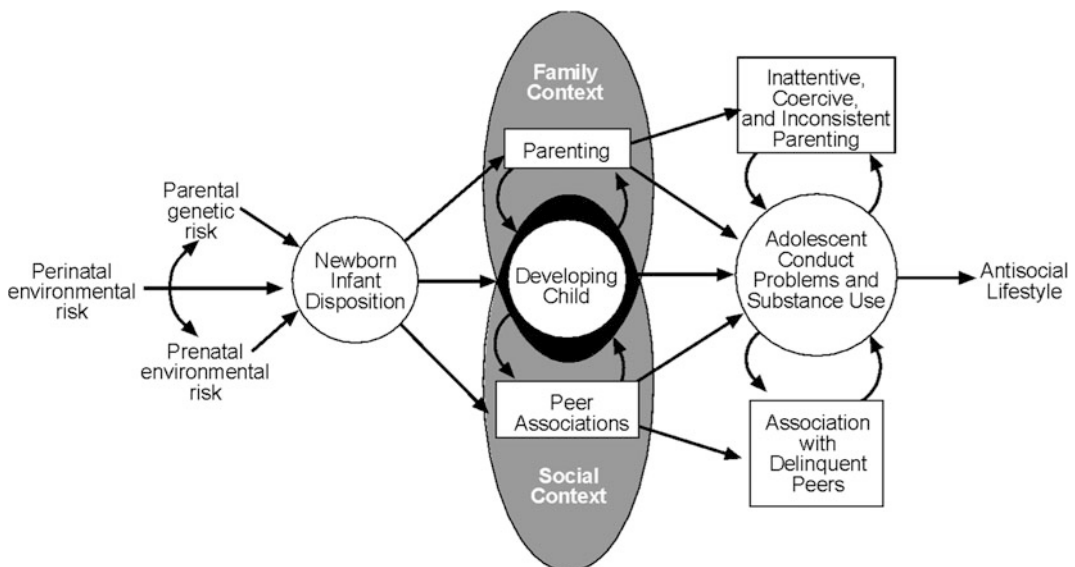
Since the 1970s, research groups from a variety of academic disciplines have converged on a general developmental model of child and adult problem behaviors—including antisocial behaviors, such as lying, stealing, aggression, and

violence—which includes context (e.g., Coie & Jacobs, 1993; Dodge, 2000; Hawkins & Weis, 1985; Kellam & Rebok, 1992; Patterson et al., 1992). Over the years, versions of these models have been revised and expanded to consider a broader set of factors relevant to a child, his or her family, peer group, community, culture, and society. Coercion theory is one of the most influential and enduring iterations of the general model (Capaldi, Kerr, Eddy, & Tiberio, 2016; Dishion & Snyder, 2016). At the center of this theory are the daily, moment-to-moment social interactions between a child and his or her parents, caregivers, siblings, teachers, and peers (see Fig. 15.1). Throughout life, social interactions are hypothesized to be a potent force in shaping the behavior of a child toward prosocial or antisocial outcomes.

Surrounding these social interactions is the environmental “context,” aspects of which play important roles in child and family development (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). Context includes both intrapersonal factors, such as the temperament of a child and the personalities of parents, and external factors, such as the various characteristics of the social and physical environment. In coercion theory, the contextual factors that are hypothesized to be most closely associated with

the development of child antisocial behavior are those that significantly disrupt day-to-day parenting, such as parent substance abuse, criminal behavior, and chronic mental or physical illness, as well as family poverty, housing instability, and neighborhood deviancy.

While child antisocial and other problem behaviors may begin at any point in childhood and adolescence, children who initiate these behaviors early in life are at increased risk for adjustment difficulties during adulthood (e.g., Moffitt, 1993). There may be a variety of reasons why children begin to behave in problematic ways, but a central reason such behaviors continue is hypothesized to be the social interactions between the child and the adults and children surrounding him or her, most notably parents and other caregivers, siblings, peers, and teachers. A key process in these interactions is thought to be negative reinforcement, and particularly within family interactions. For example, when parents back down when faced with aversive child behavior, both parent and child inadvertently receive encouragement for such a process to reoccur. The parent feels relieved that the negative behavior of his or her child stops. The child gets at least part of what he or she wanted. The result is that each person is more likely to act



**Fig. 15.1** An overview of coercion theory. From Capaldi and Eddy (2005)

the same way the next time a similar situation occurs. These types of “coercive” interactions teach the child and his or her parents to become increasingly aversive with each other as a form of control over the problems within their relationship.

As social interaction patterns such as these become regularized, they may be transported to interactions between the child and his or her peers, as well as between the child and other adults, such as teachers. This can set a dynamic of noncompliance and misbehavior into motion that can lead to a life course dominated by difficult social interactions and their consequences. An accelerator of the antisocial development process is thought to be social rejection by prosocial peers and adults, which is a common outcome of ongoing negative reinforcement processes. Rejection often leads to decreased supervision and engagement by parents, as well as increasing interaction between a child and peers who will interact with him or her, typically children who are locked in similar problematic interactions with the adults in their lives. Association with “deviant” peers, in the presence of decreased adult interaction, supervision, and monitoring, increases the likelihood of youth involvement in substance use and abuse, high-risking sexual behaviors, and delinquency (see Dishion & Snyder, 2016).

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### **Considerations for a Theory-Based Parenting Program**

In coercion theory, parents play a key role in the development of child antisocial behavior both because of what they do (e.g., engage in coercive interactions with their child) and because of what they do not do (e.g., adequately monitor and supervise their child). Coercion theory-based clinical interventions, which may be conducted with individuals or groups, are designed to assist parents in exiting coercive family processes and in establishing positive, constructive patterns of family communication and practices. Coercion theory-based preventive interventions, which are usually group-based, are designed to help parents

not get caught in a whirlpool of coercive patterns with their children in the first place, as well as strengthen and expand positive family interactions that already have been established. Both clinical and preventive interventions focus primarily on the development, refinement, and consistent application of the parenting skills of positive involvement and encouragement, supervision and monitoring, appropriate discipline, and family problem solving. These skills empower parents to be effective “managers” of the social interactions within their family, and thus programs of this type are known as “parent management training” (PMT; Forgatch & Martinez, 1999; Taylor & Biglan, 1998).

Child outcomes related to PMT have been rigorously studied, and PMT has long been considered one of the only interventions considered a “well-established” evidence-based treatment for children and adolescents with serious antisocial behavior problems (e.g., Brexan & Eyberg, 1998). A variety of intervention and prevention programs that include PMT, or at least key components of PMT, are on numerous national-level best practice lists related to the intervention and prevention of youth problem behaviors (Metzler et al., 2013). In short, of all the parenting interventions available, at present, PMT has the strongest evidence base for addressing one of the specific problems of interest in terms of the children of incarcerated parents, the development of youth antisocial behavior. This type of intervention thus has promise in terms of addressing a key concern of correction departments, the intergenerational transmission of antisocial behavior, and the possible future incarceration of the children of incarcerated parents.

While PMT may hold promise as an intervention for improving outcomes for the children of incarcerated parents, many families of the children of incarcerated parents live within a context that presents numerous challenges to effective parenting, and PMT alone does not address these. As discussed throughout this book, for many families, such challenges were present long before a parent was arrested, jailed, tried, and sent to prison, and they may continue



or deepen during the course of an incarceration. Given the presence of potentially serious disruptors to parenting in the lives of many incarcerated parents, a parenting program intended to positively impact their children over the long run not only would provide parents (incarcerated and on the outside alike) with opportunities, such as parenting classes, to develop or refine key family interaction skills, but also would address pertinent contextual factors that are likely to disrupt parenting after release.

Based both on prior analyses of the challenges facing inmates and their families (e.g., Eddy & Poehlmann, 2010; Harris & Eddy, 2018; Travis & Waul, 2003; Wildeman, Haskins, & Poehlmann-Tynan, 2018) and our collective experience working with this population, the contextual challenges that are most commonly faced by incarcerated parents are parental health problems (most notably substance addiction and other mental health problems), inadequate housing, parent unemployment, and parent problem relationships (for review, see Eddy, Kjellstrand, Martinez, & Newton, 2010).

Not surprisingly, these challenges are well known to corrections systems (e.g., Gaes & Kendig, 2003). Interventions that attempt to address at least some aspects of overcoming each of these are already delivered within most institutions, with the typical target a reduction in recidivism. For example, in the most recent published national survey on incarcerated parents, fathers and mothers were queried about their participation in programs during their sentences (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008). The area of highest participation was in programs related to employment, with 67% participating in work assignments, 27% participating in vocational or job training programs, and 9% in employment-related counseling. Next highest was participation in programs related to health problems, with 43% of those with alcohol or drug problems participating in substance abuse treatment programs since admission to prison, and 31% of those with mental health problems participating in relevant treatment programs.

Not only are these types of interventions considered important by corrections systems, but inmates perceive that their participation in them is vital to post-release success. In a survey of incarcerated parents who had served in some parenting role with their children prior to incarceration (Kjellstrand, 2018), programs considered to be most helpful in terms of success of a parent after release were those that included employment training or education (45%), interpersonal skills training (41%), parenting skills training (27%), substance abuse and mental health treatment (21%), contact with family and caregivers (18%), and housing stability (17%). Fortunately, a variety of studies have been conducted on outcomes due to programs targeting the contextual factors of health, housing, employment, and parent relationships for criminal justice-involved populations (see Eddy et al., 2010).

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## A Multimodal Parenting Intervention

A coercion theory-based parenting program for incarcerated parents would address both the development of effective parenting skills and the mitigation of the contextual challenges that are most likely to disrupt parenting, including health care, housing, employment, and intimate partner relationships. Our interdisciplinary team has been engaged with a variety of public and private partners in creating the components for a parenting program such as this for the past two decades (see Eddy et al., 2008; Eddy et al., 2010; Kjellstrand, 2018). The program comprises components that provide skills, guidance, and support to incarcerated parents and their families. The “cornerstone” for the program is PMT. Other “building blocks” include parenting support groups, intimate partner skills training, job skills training, case management, education and employment navigation, family counseling, mentoring for parents, family support centers, transitional housing, and permanent supportive housing. Underlying the delivery of each

component is staff training and support. Efforts by members of our team on developing and/or refining these components (and combinations thereof) as well as on establishing an evidence base on their outcomes are overviewed here. The work has been focused on the Pacific Northwest and specifically on Oregon and Washington State.

### **PMT and Parenting Support Groups**

The work of our team started where intervention researchers have often begun when they focus on parents in prison—parenting education. We were invited to be part of an Oregon state-level task force on the children of incarcerated parents that was led by the Department of Corrections (OR DOC). Long-term participation in this task force eventually led to a collaboration with the OR DOC on the development of an evidence-informed PMT program designed specifically for and with the assistance of mothers and fathers in prison (Eddy et al., 2008). The development process included the ongoing involvement of scientists, practitioners, policy-makers, and incarcerated parents and the caregivers of their children, and was funded through grants from the National Institutes of Health and the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation and funding from the OR DOC.

After over three years of work and multiple pilots of the emerging program, the first complete draft was finished of what was dubbed *Parenting Inside Out* or PIO (Eddy, Martinez, & Burraston, 2013; Schiffmann, Eddy, Martinez, Leve, Newton, & Burke, 2017). At the request of the OR DOC, PIO was designed to provide 90 h of group-based PMT across the course of 12 weeks. About the time we completed our development work, we received a grant from the National Institutes of Health to study outcomes related to the program within the context of a randomized controlled trial. Funding to deliver PIO during the trial was provided directly from the state legislature and the OR DOC. These funds supported not only parenting instructor “coaches”

for their time in delivering the program, but also time for each coach to prepare to teach (including participating in training in how to teach PIO, as well as one hour of preparation time for each one hour of teaching time each week) and to receive weekly individual and monthly group supervision of their work. Over the course of the five-year trial, 359 fathers and mothers were recruited to participate while in state prison and were randomly assigned to either receive PIO or not during the last months of their sentence. Participants were assessed before, during, and after the program and then again at one and six months after release. In addition, administrative data were collected from the OR DOC one year after release.

Impacts of the program were examined while parents were still in prison and then at one-year follow-up. After the program but before release, and controlling for pre-intervention levels, significant differences were found between PIO and the control conditions in three areas relevant to parenting: parent adjustment, the parent–caregiver relationship, and parent–child interaction (Eddy et al., 2013). Impacts were also found on how likely a parent thought they were to play an active role in the life of their child, indicating PIO also influenced a key cognition: hope. In the year following release, significant differences were found between the conditions on total police arrests (from official records), self-reports of criminal behaviors, and self-reports of substance abuse problems (Eddy, Martinez, Burraston, Herrera, Wheeler, & Newton, 2018). A key moderator of some of these impacts was whether or not a parent lived with their child prior to the prison, with the poorest outcomes for parents who were in the control group and who had not lived with their child before incarceration (Eddy & Burraston, 2018).

While the trial was going on, PIO was being delivered to other parents in prison who were not a part of this research. With this group, we piloted a variety of ideas for other types of parenting support within the prison setting. The first was a group that we started as a complement to PIO. A barrier that was found to delivering the

curriculum was the need to provide parents with opportunities to talk about their ongoing experiences as parents in prison. While there is structured time to discuss key aspects of such throughout the program, more time was needed. A solution was to put parent issues that required more time than was available in a class into a “parking lot.” Interested parents were invited to attend a parent support group each week that focused solely on parking lot issues.

Parents appreciated this type of support and requested more, especially after PIO ended. We responded with establishing an ongoing support group for each cohort of parents who graduated from the program (Eddy, Olin, & Newton, 2018). Parents who joined this group were eligible for special visits with their child and caregiver in private rooms, away from the noise and chaos of the general visiting area. To be eligible for these visits, parents had to agree to have their visit videotaped and to share selected clips from the visit back with the group. Specifically, parents were asked to select three examples of moments that went particularly well, and three examples of moments which they felt could have gone better. Members of the group were shown the clips and invited to provide encouragement and to brainstorm ideas for how to improve the next visit. This format provided a means to keep “alive” ideas from PIO and to give parents the opportunity to practice skills vital to being a parent, including reflection, problem solving, and collaboration. Federal funding was recently received from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention to implement this type of support group in two OR DOC facilities, one for men and one for women, and plans for evaluation are under development.

As this work was going on within the prison setting, demand for PMT outside of the prison setting arose. In response, versions of PIO were developed for use in jails and for use within community corrections. The program for delivery in community settings in particular piqued considerable interest. For example, during the PIO trial in prisons, federal Title IV-E funds were allocated by the state child welfare system to support the delivery of a community version of the program within the Portland area with the

purpose of strengthening families and helping prevent the entry of children into foster care. Programs designed to further develop key skills within the incarcerated parent population, such as emotion regulation and emotion coaching, were also developed and tested (McClure et al., 2015; Shortt, Eddy, Sheeber, & Davis, 2014).

### **Multimodal Strength in Families Program**

For the past three years, we have worked with the Washington State Department of Corrections (WA DOC) on the development of the *Strength in Families* (SIF) program (Eddy, Kjellstrand, Harris, House-Higgins, Goff, & McElravy, 2018). SIF is one of five Responsible Fatherhood Opportunities for Reentry and Mobility initiative grants currently funded by the federal Administration for Children and Families. SIF combines several evidence-based and promising practices to create a multimodal, multilevel, tailored approach to support reentering parents and their families. The content and process of the program are informed by findings from the emerging scientific research literature on reentry programs for fathers (Eddy & Burraston, 2018).

The program begins in prison with fathers invited to participate in three targeted, evidence-informed psychosocial interventions that are designed to build and support the use of specific skills relevant to being a parent. The first of these, *Walking the Line* (WTL; Erlacher, 2010; Einhorn, Williams, Stanley, Markman, & Eason, 2008) focuses on the development of knowledge and skills that support the development and maintenance of positive, lasting intimate partner relationships. WTL is an adaptation of a program called *Within My Reach* (Antle, Sar, Christensen, Eilers, Barbee, & van Zyl, 2013), a version of the evidence-based PREP program (Halford, Markman, & Stanley, 2008; Markman, Renick, Floyd, Stanley, & Clements, 1993). The second is PIO, our PMT program discussed above. The third, *Job Seeking Skills*, focuses on skills related to finding and keeping a job, and was jointly developed by the Washington State

Employment Security Department and the WA DOC Offender Employment Services, with critical input from formerly incarcerated individuals. Each of these interventions is taught by trained and supervised SIF instructors.

As a father progresses through these skills training opportunities, he works closely with both a trained and supervised SIF case manager and a trained and supervised SIF education and employment navigator to further prepare for a return to his community and family. Case managers and navigators are taught to use a *Solutions-Based Casework* (Christensen, Todahl, & Barrett, 1999) approach in their work. A tailored action plan based on the particular strengths, needs, and priorities of each reentering parent and their family guides the day-to-day work of case managers, navigators, and instructors. This plan includes a focus on family connections and relationships, but also recognizes the importance of context. Connecting a father to support services within his community is a vital part of this work, including transportation assistance, financial counseling, health care, housing, food, child care, clothing and help dealing with other basic needs or emergency situations. As a father nears release, expanded visitation opportunities, including video visiting, and brief family counseling are available. After release, fathers are assisted in obtaining any additional education and training needed for them to obtain meaningful family wage employment, an element thought vital for long-term success.

In short, skills training and support for fathers and their families, broadly defined, are the central theme of SIF, with the focus on considering and supporting each of the duties that a father must fulfill to be a parent to his child(ren). While the general framework for the program is currently set, the mechanics of program implementation are still being refined. What makes this particularly challenging is limited resources and a large geographic service area, two common problems in providing services for parents within state corrections systems. As the SIF program reaches maturity, we hope to secure funds to rigorously study program outcomes through a randomized controlled trial. Future funding will also be

sought to develop a program tailored specifically for incarcerated mothers and their families.

## **Mentoring**

A key challenge that may confront a parent after release from prison or jail is whether or not to re-engage with old friends, including intimate partners, who are involved in behaviors that might lead a person back to criminal behavior and lockup. A trained, supported, and supervised volunteer mentor from within the community where the released parent lives seems ideal to be one support person for issues such as these (e.g., Rose, Clear, & Ryder, 2001). While this idea has been tried in a variety of reentry programs, there is scant information on the influence of mentors on post-release outcomes. To assist in closing this knowledge gap, for the past two years, we have been collaborating with a local nonprofit, Sponsors, Inc., on a longitudinal, randomized controlled trial (planned sample size,  $N = 500$ ) of a volunteer mentoring program for formerly incarcerated men and women. The majority of participants are parents. The trial, funded by the US Department of Justice and the Oregon Criminal Justice Commission, is being conducted within the context of the Sponsors, Inc. transitional housing program (see below). Mentors begin to develop a relationship with the parent during prison, meet the person when he or she gets off the bus from prison, and are available throughout the reentry period. The fundamental requirement for a mentor is that their current life is exemplary in terms of a prosocial lifestyle, regardless of personal struggles they may have had in the past.

## **Family Support Centers**

While the PIO program discussed above was being developed, it was clear that in our state of Oregon, there was a dearth of services available for families with loved ones involved in the criminal justice system. It was also apparent that there was little activity going on within the state

in terms of advocating for such services. To remedy this situation, members of our team partnered with leaders from adult corrections, the state legislature, and nonprofit groups to establish a new nonprofit organization focused on the children of incarcerated parents and their families, the Children's Justice Alliance (CJA). One of the first activities of CJA was to open a "Center for Family Success" within a neighborhood in the city of Portland that had a high number of men and women returning from state prison. Established within an old YMCA building, the center became a community hub for adults under criminal justice supervision and their families. An array of services was provided, including PMT (i.e., a community version of PIO), youth mentoring, support for caregivers, family engagement activities, and instruction in advocacy and civic engagement skills. Other resources included an on-site probation and parole office, and resources for taking care of basic needs, including showers, a clothes closet, and a food pantry. Services were provided in English and in Spanish. Eventually, the neighborhood in which the center was located became gentrified, and it was no longer affordable for families who were utilizing center services to live nearby. Many families from the neighborhood moved away from the city center and into eastern Multnomah County, where housing costs were significantly lower. Ultimately, the location of the center was relocated to this part of the metropolitan area. The center remains open today and is currently operated by The Pathfinder Network, a nonprofit that brought together Pathfinders of Oregon and CJA into one organization. Outcomes related to participation in the Center for Family Success have not yet been rigorously studied.

### **Transitional Housing**

Early in the work of our team with the OR DOC on PIO, we began to conduct research and evaluation projects with Sponsors, a nonprofit agency that provides transitional housing for men

and women leaving prison and jail. Sponsors is located in Lane County, Oregon, and is about the size of the state of Connecticut. It encompasses only one urban area, Eugene–Springfield (population 230,000). Sponsors was founded in 1973 by Sister Janice Jackson, who worked with other Catholic nuns and lay volunteers to "sponsor" men who were being released from state prison and returning to Lane County. A sponsor would meet a man at the prison gate upon his release and then assist him in finding housing and employment, providing support and encouragement along the way. In 1988, the organization began to provide five transitional housing beds and to partner with both public and private partners with the purpose of helping men and women reenter their community and become "productive, law-abiding, hardworking, and taxpaying citizens." Today, Sponsors provides over 200 beds of transitional and long-term housing, and provides housing services to over 500 people each year with their return home. The organization is funded through grants and contracts from local, state, and federal governments as well as national private and public foundations and agencies as well as private donors.

The core components of the Sponsors transitional housing program are as follows. The program begins 3–4 months before release with in person or videoconferencing "reach-in" orientation and pre-planning meetings. Eligible men and women are returning home to Lane County, are of low income, and are at moderate or high risk to reoffend. Clients enter Sponsors transitional housing the day they are released. Upon entry, a case manager works with the client to develop a reintegration case plan. The case manager remains engaged with the client throughout his or her stay at Sponsors and often beyond. Sponsors provides a client housing, clothing, food, and services, as well as referral to outside services as needed. Case managers work with clients to obtain identification, food stamps, and social security disability benefits as well as legal support and health and dental care. Sponsors requires all able-bodied clients to find full-time work or to be enrolled full time in an education

or vocational training program. Once employed, clients are required to put a minimum of 50% of their earnings on account with Sponsors to use to acquire long-term, stable housing upon program completion. A variety of cognitive-behavioral, evidence-based, or evidence-informed programs are delivered on site at Sponsors residences, including PIO. To successfully graduate from the Sponsors program, residents must accomplish five goals: maintain compliance with all release conditions, remain drug- and alcohol-free as evidenced by random screening twice weekly, secure employment and/or enroll in school full time or qualify for public benefits, secure affordable permanent housing, and complete all required programming. A typical stay at Sponsors lasts 60–90 days following release from lockup.

Several years ago, our team was asked by Lane County to compare outcomes for two groups of men and women returning home from state prison—those who entered Sponsors and those who did not (Eddy, Kjellstrand, & Schumer, 2018). The sample included all men and women who were released to Lane County during a one-year period ( $N = 233$ ). Variables for the analyses were drawn from 13 data sets, including county and state official records, and encompassed a three-year period after release. Not surprisingly, given the eligibility requirements for Sponsors, men and women who went to Sponsors were more likely to have been convicted of committing more serious crimes, to have served more time in prison, and to have higher risk scores for reoffending. The average stay at Sponsors was 104 days, and 73% of those who went to Sponsors graduated from the program. Overall, outcomes for those who went to Sponsors versus those who did not were similar on most variables. However, a key, and significant, difference was that men and women who went to Sponsors were more likely to be employed full time at the end of the study period (i.e., 46% versus 27%), and full-time employees were more likely to have no criminal record after release. This set of findings is similar to those of recent scientifically rigorous examinations of reentry programs (e.g., D’Amico & Kim, 2018). Rigorous studies of outcomes related to the

Sponsors transitional housing program are in the planning stages.

## Permanent Supportive Housing

As Sponsors increased the number of transitional housing beds available in the local community, the staff began to work on a new mission—increasing the number of permanent housing units available for individuals with criminal justice histories. This eventually led to the construction of The Oaks, a 54-unit apartment complex in Eugene that was built through state low-income housing tax credits. The Oaks was developed through a partnership between Sponsors, Homes for Good (Lane County’s Public Housing Agency), and Lane County Parole and Probation, with strong support from city, county, and state leaders.

Just prior to the opening of the complex in the spring of 2017, the US Department of Housing and Urban Development and the US Department of Justice awarded a grant to the local partners and the national nonprofit advisory firm Third Sector to examine the use of “Pay for Success” contracts to support the implementation of a promising type of permanent housing for men and women involved with the criminal justice system, Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH; Rog et al., 2014). The key components of PSH are the availability of affordable housing assistance that is not time-limited and the ongoing provision of support services relevant to the success of each resident (e.g., Crisanti et al., 2017). In the case of the Sponsors/Homes for Good version of PSH, such “tailored” services include case management, cognitive-behavioral programs, substance abuse treatment, mental health treatment, and job skills development opportunities. Parole and Probation has an on-site office at The Oaks as well as at several of the other Homes for Good sites. Thus, the program transports key supports available in the Sponsors transitional housing program and embeds them within the ongoing, day-to-day life of participants for an extended period of time following release.



The federal Pay for Success grant is intended to assist partners in entering into performance-based contracts with various entities (e.g., state government) which agree to pay for specific outcomes achieved through PSH. At present, the partners are attempting to gain third-party funding (i.e., so-called social impact bonds) to bridge the gap between receiving outcome-based payments and the money needed to pay for the delivery of the program, and so far, both public entity and private entity have agreed to participate. PSH will be provided by Sponsors and partners at The Oaks but also at 46 other low-income housing units scattered throughout the local urban area.

Our team is the evaluation partner in this work. The five-year evaluation is currently in the planning stage and will launch within the next few months. Participants ( $N = 260$ ) will come from two subpopulations of men and women involved with the criminal justice system: individuals who just released from prison and are living in Sponsors transitional housing, and individuals in the Lane County homeless population, who may or may not have had involvement with Sponsors, but have released from prison in the last six months. To be eligible to participate in the study, an individual must be assessed at medium to high risk to reoffend and have from 6 to 12 months remaining on his or her post-prison supervision period.

Once enrolled, participants will be assessed via interview every three months in terms of housing, criminal justice, and health outcomes, as well as related risk and protective factors, such as the characteristics of peers, employment status, and contact with family members. Because of the limited availability of PSH units, the unpredictability of when a unit will become available, and the limited time that a person will be eligible for being placed in an unit, it is expected that who ends up in a PSH unit will be determined through a random process, and the study will become a natural experiment, with an intervention condition (i.e., PSH) and a control condition (i.e., services as usual). Across the course of the study, official records will be collected from a variety of entities, including the

Oregon Department of Corrections, Lane County Parole and Probation, and the Homeless Management Information System, to assist in the monitoring of outcomes.

## Staff Support

A key aspect of each of the above components is staff support. Work in correctional environments presents staff with multiple challenges on a daily basis (Klinoff, van Hasselt, Black, Masias, & Couwels, 2018; Lambert, Hogan, Griffin, & Kelley, 2015), and support is needed to help deal with those challenges in productive ways, both for staff and for the men and women they have in their care. Support for staff begins with the hiring process, by identifying and successfully recruiting staff members with the appropriate background for a given position, and continues with providing adequate initial job education and skills training, providing ongoing supervision, and providing regular continuing education opportunities, including retraining as needed, and the opportunity to learn coping and problem-solving skills that help improve job performance and decrease stress levels (e.g., McCraty, Atkinson, Lipsenthal, Arguelles, 2009). Support also includes developing and maintaining a positive and healthy work environment (e.g., Shuford, 2018), and ongoing monitoring of the well-being and health of staff within that environment to ensure that such efforts are, in fact, effective (e.g., Gondles, 2018). Support is vital to prevent and resolve issues related to staff isolation, discouragement, burn-out, and turnover, and to ensure the ongoing quality and the effectiveness of a multimodal parenting program. To date, our work in these regards has focused on the staff members who are delivering the program components that we have been developing. However, such work is also vital with the staff members who are responsible for the day-to-day milieu within which a multimodal program is operating, such as correctional officers, probation and parole officers, and child welfare workers.

## Discussion

Successfully supporting a child requires not only that a parent ensures that adult supervision, discipline, encouragement, and problem solving are actively occurring on a moment-to-moment basis with their child, but also that the basic needs of the parent, the child, and their other family members are met, including safety, shelter, nutrition, clothing, and health. The majority of incarcerated men and women are parents, and many had difficulty prior to their sentence in meeting one or more of these central tasks of parenthood. Except for a relatively few incarcerated mothers around the country who care for their infants in prison nurseries (see Chap. 12, this volume), none have been able to meet the entirety of the day-to-day needs of their children during their sentences. Given the numerous tasks that parents must complete to be successful after release, a multimodal program for incarcerated parents and their families that both strengthens parenting skills and provides support for addressing contextual challenges to parenting seems to have greater potential than corrections-based parenting classes alone to impact recidivism and the intergenerational transmission of antisocial behavior. As discussed in this chapter, research teams around the country, including our own, are working on developing and testing various aspects of multimodal programs, but much work remains to be done. In this regard, we conclude with a discussion of implications for this type of intervention approach for future research, policy, and practice.

## Research Implications

Multimodal efforts that have included some family focus have been undertaken in recent years not as “parenting programs” but as “reentry” programs intended to assist men and women to establish new lives after release from prison or jail (Petersilia, 2003; Seiter & Kadela, 2003; Travis & Visher, 2005). Outcomes due to reentry programs in general have been mixed (D’Amico & Kim, 2018), with some prominent efforts even leading to worse, rather than improved,

outcomes. A notable example of this relevant to parents is the two-month long institution-based Project Greenlight Reentry Program (Wilson & Davis, 2006), which focused on improving family relationships, treating substance abuse problems, and gaining post-release employment just before release. The program attempted to apply evidence-based principles to intervene with each of the targeted problems. In a quasi-experimental study, Greenlight participants were found to be *more likely* to recidivate than individuals in parole as usual conditions. A variety of hypotheses have been made as to why Project Greenlight may have had an iatrogenic effect, from failing to follow evidence-based correctional practices (Rhine, Mawhorr, & Parks, 2006) to following such practices too closely (Marlowe, 2006). Key weaknesses from our point of view were that the program occurred at the very end of a sentence, over a relatively brief period of time, and stopped at release. In short, the program did not provide long-term support for change, either inside or outside of prison.

Such a study illustrates a central problem in the field of corrections programming. While the desire is admirable to build a field that is driven by evidence-based practices and programs, information gaps remain significant. The true impacts of many popular programs remain unknown. Thus, while multimodal intervention efforts should be informed by the available research findings, research findings alone are likely to be insufficient. We propose that a multimodal program should integrate established knowledge from both research and practice, and be designed and rigorously tested by a workgroup of researchers, practitioners, instructional designers, and administrators (e.g., Eddy et al., 2008; Lipse & Cullen, 2007; Petersilia, 2004; Zhang, Roberts, & Callanan, 2006). Within such an interdisciplinary collaboration, the “best practices” conclusions of researchers such as Gendreau and Ross (1979) and Andrews and Bonta (1994) and onward can be considered in light of the “on the ground” knowledge of workers in the field, and a multimodal intervention constructed that should reasonably “work” for a particular subpopulation of inmates. During this process,

issues such as race, ethnicity, and culture cannot be ignored (see Chap. 4, this volume). Rigorous studies then can be launched to test the effectiveness of the intervention. To assist in understanding the results of such efforts, measured variables need to expand beyond recidivism, and address other important constructs that concern not only how an intervention might be effective, but with whom, why, and under what conditions (Paul, 1967).

We suggest that an intervention genre in particular need of investigation is multimodal parenting programs, and hope that a broader set of researchers working in different locales through the country will join us in work in this area. As implied by the experiences of our team in constructing such a program, an enduring effort conducted by a team that actively pursues funding in both the public and the private sectors is required to move beyond the “core” of a parenting class. The success of such work is only possible through building and maintaining and sustaining collaborations both within a team and with multiple entities, and then having all members of this broader workgroup being on the lookout for funding opportunities on a continuous basis. Engagement, kindness, and persistence win the day.

## Policy Implications

The current national economic currents, specifically in terms of reduced resources for governmental functions, compounded with the high cost of maintaining security within overburdened corrections systems, has made it increasingly difficult for corrections systems to sustain promising reentry efforts. For example, whereas it once was possible to complete graduate studies in some prisons, today, community college classes may not even be available. Cutting programs, rather than adding programs, is the norm. To meet the dual goals of punishment and reform in the face of limited resources, something needs to change. In this regard, report by the Pew Center for the States (2009) on incarceration in the USA referred to the budget crises of recent

years as “perhaps unprecedented opportunity” to “retool” the corrections system. The same remains true today, a decade later.

Retooling could be optimized if it were based on rigorous scientific information about which programs do and do not make a difference in terms of recidivism but also in other vital outcomes toward a prosocial life on the outside, such as establishing and maintaining family connections, employment, and stable housing. To do this, more studies are needed. Fortunately, the opportunities to generate such information are abundant. Petersilia (2004) estimated that over 10,000 reentry programs were operated in corrections systems across the country during the past several decades, but less than one percent of these programs were evaluated, and most evaluations used inferior scientific methods. Given the large number of programs in operation, if policymakers across the country began to fund rigorous randomized controlled trials of the most promising programs operating within their jurisdictions and actively shared the results of such trials with each other, real progress could be made toward solving issues in a relatively short period of time. Ideally, such efforts would include the investigation of multimodal parenting programs and would be coordinated across corrections systems, with specific research problems investigated within a systematic framework that includes the identification of promising candidates for testing; the conduct of randomized controlled trials that include measures of how, why, and when a program might work; and the launch of replication trials of programs that appear to be effective. Programs that survive repeated testing within a particular population and reliably produce positive outcomes within and across jurisdictions could be legitimately christened “evidence-based.”

## Practice Implications

While researchers continue to seek more information, and policymakers encourage the conduct of more studies and try to make sense of the

findings that already exist, practitioners have to do something. There are numerous parenting programs that have been studied rigorously and have been found to positively impact children and families, including children and families living in high-risk circumstances. These are easily found via the various “best practice” lists posted on federal agency and private foundation Web sites. Learning more about these programs, and the research behind them, would be a good place to start for those practitioners interested in building a multimodal parenting intervention for inmates and their families. Most of these programs were not designed to address the specific needs of the children of incarcerated parents, let alone specific cultural groups represented within the population of incarcerated parents, and thus will require adaptation and addition to their content, as well as the development of new processes that provide support for parents, children, and their families whose lives interface within the context of the adult corrections system. We suggest that this type of work is best done by an interdisciplinary workgroup of professionals and laypeople, including researchers, practitioners, advocates, and parents, working to make a program that best fits the particular group of incarcerated parents and families with whom they have the privilege to work.

A typical parenting class for men and women in prison or jail addresses only the tip of the iceberg in terms of the plethora of issues that incarcerated parents and their families face. If the primary goals are for men and women to not return to prison or jail and to guide their children on paths that do not lead to incarceration, a parenting program should address each of the key tasks that parents must accomplish for their children and families. To do this requires moving beyond the classroom to include a variety of other interventions that address key contextual issues such as finding housing, getting and keeping a job, not returning to substance abuse, and avoiding destructive relationships with friends and intimate partners. A multimodal parenting program seems more likely than parenting classes alone to meaningfully assist both parents and their children to thrive in a prosocial world.

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# Can Alternatives to Incarceration Enhance Child Well-Being?

# 16

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## Abstract

In this chapter, we consider how alternatives to parental incarceration such as probation and community service could influence child well-being. As an increasing number of studies document a variety of negative outcomes for children with incarcerated parents, the broader use of alternative sentencing may serve as an important buffer against adverse effects of parental incarceration on children. We first discuss what alternatives to incarceration in the USA typically include. Second, we outline theoretical mechanisms through which these alternatives could enhance child well-being. Next, we discuss the data structure needed to rigorously test these alternatives. We then review the limited US-based research on the topic, as well as some of the more rigorous and

expansive empirical studies on alternatives to incarceration and child well-being that have been conducted outside of the USA. We conclude with a discussion of key directions to advance research in this area, including a review of promising and ongoing programmatic efforts to implement related policy changes for convicted individuals with minor children.

## Introduction

For many Americans who experience incarceration, serving time in prison or jail means spending time away from their children. Fifty-five and 63% of State and Federal inmates, respectively, are parents, the majority of whom were living with a child prior to serving their current sentence (Mumola, 2000). A growing body of research documents the mostly negative consequences of parental incarceration for children's well-being. The more than seven percent of American children that ever experience parental incarceration appear to be at higher risk of a range of physical and mental health issues, behavioral problems, delinquency and criminal justice contact in adolescence, poorer educational outcomes, and even foster care placement (Berger, Cancian, Cuesta, & Noyes, 2016; Geller, Cooper, Garfinkel, Schwartz-Soicher, & Mincy, 2012; Murphey & Cooper, 2015; Roettger & Swisher, 2011; Turney, 2014a; Wakefield & Wildeman, 2014).

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Given the emerging evidence suggesting that parental incarceration may have a damaging effect on child well-being, the implementation of new and the expansion of existing alternatives to incarceration may have important long-term consequences for the children of incarcerated parents. Unfortunately, many of these children are members of already disadvantaged populations in the USA. These populations include Americans with little educational attainment (e.g., less than high school) and who have other socioeconomic disadvantages. Race is another key dimension that profoundly influences one's life chances. African Americans, for example, have historically faced greater disadvantage than Whites along a number of measures, including socioeconomic status, neighborhood attainment, and access to resources such as education and health care, among other processes (e.g., Laureau, 2011; Massey & Denton, 1993; Oliver & Shapiro, 2006). Indeed, more than 50% of African-American children born to parents with less than a high school education will experience parental incarceration by age 14 (Wildeman, 2009). To the extent that racial and socioeconomic disparities in child well-being are reduced by having an otherwise incarcerated parent in their home (or community), the broader use of non-custodial sanctions may be an important step toward buffering the "spillover" effects of the prison (and jail) boom for children.

As we emphasize in this chapter, our understanding of the potential implications of alternative sentencing for child well-being depends in large part on future research and the availability of better data that will allow for rigorous evaluations of the (potentially) distinct effects of incarceration versus alternative sentencing for the children of incarcerated parents. Indeed, the extent to which policymakers invest in such alternatives will likely depend heavily on available evidence supporting their long-term effectiveness for the well-being of convicted individuals and their families (Travis, Western, & Redburn, 2014).

In this chapter, we provide a brief overview of common alternatives to incarceration in the USA, which fall largely under the umbrella of

probation. Next, we outline different ways that community-based alternatives might impact child well-being based on what prior research tells us about the mechanisms linking parental incarceration to a range of outcomes for children. We then draw explicit attention to the data requirements for testing whether, and the extent to which, children may benefit from such alternatives. Finally, we review the highest quality empirical work that has considered the effects of alternatives to incarceration, most of which has been conducted outside of the USA. We close by considering important next steps for research in this area and note promising efforts to move the field forward.

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## Alternatives to Incarceration in the USA

In the USA, probation is both the broadest and most frequently implemented alternative to incarceration. According to estimates from the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), nearly 4 million individuals were on probation in 2015, comprising approximately 56.2% of adults under some form of supervision by the numerous correctional systems in the USA (Kaeble & Glaze, 2016). Broadly defined, probation involves some form of court-ordered community supervision by the criminal justice system for a set period of time, and often in lieu of incarceration (Kaeble, Maruschak, & Bonczar, 2015). In some cases, probation involves a combination of incarceration followed by community supervision (Kaeble et al., 2015). Most frequently, individuals sentenced to serve time through probation are convicted of low-level, non-violent crimes, and have little to no history of serious criminal convictions.

Probation is typically characterized by some set of formal supervision, carried out by officers who monitor individuals' conduct in the community during a set period of time. Specific probation conditions vary across convicted individuals, but often include specified check-ins with probation officers, the regulation of individuals' residency and whereabouts, (sometimes

unexpected) drug testing, and some form of community service (Petersilia, 2003). Electronic monitoring is sometimes used as part of supervising individuals on probation. Oftentimes, this monitoring system includes ankle bracelets or similar devices that are used in conjunction with global positioning systems (GPS) to supervise individuals' whereabouts, allowing supervising officers to track whether people on probation are staying within certain geographic zones that are specified as part of their probation conditions (e.g., remaining at home, only traveling to places of employment). If people on probation violate the specific conditions of their supervision (e.g., use drugs, commit a new crime), he or she may be incarcerated as a result (McCafferty & Travis, 2014).

As a number of policymakers and scholars attribute the expansion in the US criminal justice system to the increase in drug-related imprisonment (e.g., Carson, 2015; Guerino, Harrison, & Sabol, 2011), some focus has turned to incorporating social services into conditions of alternative sentencing. For example, the establishment of drug courts and treatment-related alternatives has grown dramatically since the early 1990s. In general, these efforts aim to provide intensive treatment for convicted individuals with substance abuse problems, while also placing them under close judicial monitoring (Huddleston, Marlowe, & Casebolt, 2008).

Likewise, recent years have witnessed an increasing number of state and municipal correctional departments implementing alternative to incarceration programs that feature integrated services. These programs are designed to reduce recidivism through addressing mental health and substance abuse issues, in addition to reducing the increasing economic burden of mass incarceration. People on probation may be required to work with mental health counselors and/or drug and alcohol treatment programs, as well as to complete certain job training, life skills, or other educational/programs.

A number of policymakers and state-based and national organizations have advocated for the increasing use of probation in lieu of incarceration, especially for individuals convicted of

low-level offenses who may benefit from these types of rehabilitative treatments. The benefits of such programs are also thought to extend beyond the convicted individual to his or her family and community at large. Not only are such alternatives often significantly less expensive than incarcerating convicted individuals, but also offer greater opportunity for individuals' engagement with needed social services, which in turn may assist the individual in establishing and maintaining a crime-free life in his or her community.

While appealing, empirical research supporting these claims is mixed. Further, some researchers have suggested that the expansion of probation actually increases the number of individuals convicted of low-level offenses who are ever placed under some type of correctional surveillance, increasing their risk for incarceration should they violate their probation, and ultimately increasing the number of people who are ever incarcerated (Phelps, 2013). For some politicians and members of the public, probation and other community-based alternatives to incarceration are perceived as "soft on crime" and are criticized for releasing potentially violent or otherwise harmful individuals into the general population without what some deem to be sufficiently intensive supervision (Petersilia, 1997). Another set of criticisms argues that probation conditions may be so stringent that complete adherence to such conditions for the duration of a sentence is exceptionally difficult (Phelps, 2013). As violation of probation conditions can lead to incarceration, it is possible that shorter stays in jail or prison could allow convicted individuals to be released back to their families and communities without supervision sooner than it would take to successfully complete a probation sentence.

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### **When and How Alternative Sentencing May Benefit Child Well-Being**

As a growing body of research documents a variety of negative consequences of parental incarceration for child well-being (e.g., Hagan

& Foster, 2012; Wakefield & Wildeman, 2014), alternatives to incarceration may help to buffer these adverse outcomes. In theory, however, any benefits of alternatives to incarceration on child well-being depend on the extent to which the harmful consequences of parental incarceration on children are determined by the circumstances directly related to a parent's stay in jail or prison, as opposed to the circumstances leading up to a parent's criminal conviction.

Some empirical research considers how the separation of parents and children that inevitably comes with a parent's incarceration may be especially problematic for children who had been living with the incarcerated parent. For instance, paternal incarceration is associated with a significant increase in food insecurity among young children who had been living with their father (Turney, 2015). Likewise, the associations between paternal incarceration and children's aggressive behaviors and attention problems have been found to be stronger for children of co-residing fathers than for children of non-resident fathers, though associations are still significant for children with non-resident fathers (Geller et al., 2012). To our knowledge, however, this finding has not been replicated. For those whose parents were living together prior to a father's incarceration, these children may be especially likely to be exposed to harsh parenting and maternal neglect following paternal incarceration (Turney, 2014b), potentially exacerbating other behavioral problems. Other work comparing various types of parent-child separation finds paternal imprisonment to be the strongest predictor of children's antisocial and delinquent outcomes (Murray & Farrington, 2005).

In circumstances such as these, where negative or otherwise problematic child outcomes are attributed largely to the stresses and strains emanating from the parent's absence from the household, alternatives to incarceration may offer a promising pathway for lessening the "spillover" effects of mass incarceration. Although less explored, child well-being may also benefit in important ways from contact and visitation

with parents who are not living in the household. Conditional release that allows parents to co-reside with their child, either in the same home or in the community, may significantly reduce the otherwise adverse impacts of this experience for children.

The benefits of alternative sentencing for child well-being may be especially pronounced for those children who are displaced from their homes as a result of their parent's incarceration. For instance, the rise of maternal incarceration since the 1980s explains approximately thirty percent of the increase in foster care caseloads in the USA (Swann & Sylvester, 2006). Those children who are placed in foster care as a result of parental incarceration also remain in foster care for longer than children placed for other reasons such as parental death (Shaw, Bright, & Sharpe, 2015). Alternative community-based sentencing that allows parents to retain custody of and reside with their children may be an especially important benefit for this particularly vulnerable group of children.

At the same time, little research has considered whether the stressors and stigma that may explain the link between parental incarceration and negative child outcomes are specific to parental *incarceration*, or are perhaps associated with a parent's criminal justice contact more broadly. To the extent that children experience certain strains or stigma as a result of a parent's arrest, charge, or conviction—each of which typically precedes a court's determination to place an individual on probation—alternatives to incarceration may actually do little to ameliorate how children's well-being fares in the wake of a parent's criminal justice contact.

Some qualitative research describes a parent's interaction with or evasion of police as especially traumatic or otherwise consequential for children. At arrest, children who are present witness the sudden and sometimes particularly forceful removal of their parent from their home (Braman, 2004; Comfort, 2007; Poehlmann-Tynan, Burnson, Runion, & Weymouth, 2017). In other circumstances, children may be disadvantaged by a parent's absence at important family and school events as they avoid public places where they

could easily be found by police for probation or parole violation (Goffman, 2009). An individual's probation or parole can be particularly burdensome for family members, especially when the family assumes responsibility around ensuring an individual's adherence to their release conditions and successful avoidance of incarceration (Comfort, 2016). Even years later, parents may "self-select out" of public family responsibilities given the stigma of easily discovered online records of their criminal history (Lageson, 2016)—even those that may not have resulted in incarceration. In these ways, child well-being may suffer from a lack of parental involvement, regardless of whether parents receive a community-based sentence.

While alternatives to incarceration may benefit children when negative consequences stem from a parent's time in jail or prison, it is crucial to consider how a range of social service needs that often characterize the convicted population may impact the extent to which such alternatives have any long-term effect on children's well-being. For example, the population of incarcerated individuals experiences a significantly higher prevalence of mental health problems than the general population. Approximately one in seven incarcerated individuals is estimated to have a treatable mental illness, with 10–12% suffering from major depression, and 42–65% having a personality disorder (Fazel & Baillargeon, 2011). Additionally, the proportion of incarcerated individuals with drug or alcohol dependence issues is significantly greater than that of the general population, with some studies estimating that close to half of the incarcerated population has a substance abuse problem (Fazel & Baillargeon, 2011; Fazel & Seewald, 2012). Drug overdose is among the leading causes of death for imprisoned people (Binswanger et al., 2007).

To this end, the implications of community-based alternatives to incarceration for child well-being may depend in large part on whether alternative sentences include some type of mandated enrollment in appropriate, evidence-based mental health services and other needed programming. In addition to the contribution of such programs to more positive parenting, they may

be a crucial element in preventing future offending, thereby making parents' separation from children due to criminal justice contact less likely to reoccur in the future.

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## Data Requirements

As with many attempts to measure the impact of parental criminal justice contact on child well-being, the gap between available and necessary data makes it difficult to rigorously test how alternatives to incarceration may causally alter the outcomes for children with convicted parents who might have otherwise spent time in jail or prison. Nevertheless, some existing datasets serve as useful models for the type of data structure one might use to effectively assess the causal effects of alternative sentencing for children.

The National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect (NDACAN), for example, maintains the National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being (NSCAW)—a nationally representative, longitudinal survey on children's and families' experiences with the child welfare system following reported maltreatment. Data is collected from a range of individuals tied to the family, including current caregivers, caseworkers, teachers, agency administration, as well as the focal child/young adult. The survey is designed to assess both shorter- and longer-term outcomes for children, including cognitive and social skills, academic performance, and physical and mental health, and in conjunction with their experiences with maltreatment, subsequent services, and measures of home, school, and community environment (NSCAW Research Group, 2002).

In theory, a similar dataset that tracks the social, cognitive, and health outcomes of children overtime, and in conjunction with the type and length of parental criminal justice contact, would allow researchers to rigorously examine how child well-being may be differentially influenced by parental incarceration versus some alternative supervision such as probation. Importantly, this type of data infrastructure could

be used to discern any differences in longer-term outcomes of children whose parents are sentenced to community-based alternatives versus incarceration, particularly with regard to health, education, and crime and delinquency outcomes.

Indeed, one of the major challenges of research in this area relates to limitations in researchers' capacity to distill issues of selection. Many of the social conditions that predict parental criminal justice contact also predict poorer child well-being (e.g., poverty, lower levels of education). As a result, discerning potential causal effects of a parent's criminal justice contact requires either: (1) longitudinal measurement of those variables likely to predict both child well-being and parental incarceration, or (2) data on a sufficiently large enough sample of parents and children with similar relevant characteristics, differing only on parental incarceration.

As few US survey-based datasets include extensive measurement of the first, linked administrative data is one superior infrastructure for rigorously assessing the effects of alternative sentencing for child well-being. Albeit costly, this linkage could involve matching the administrative records of parents from correctional departments with various administrative records of the children of convicted individuals (e.g., children's educational records, criminal justice system records, medical records). Such a database could provide a sufficiently large and longitudinal tracking of parents' criminal justice involvement and a range of objectively measured child-related outcomes. Ideally, this type of large administrative database would allow researchers to examine the relationship between incarceration and various alternatives and child well-being through strong causal tests. Many surveys on this topic rely on self-reported measures of criminal justice involvement and relevant outcomes, which may suffer from over or under reporting that could bias results. Many surveys are also cross-sectional (i.e., only collecting measures at one point in time), making it difficult for researchers to compare individual outcomes before and after a given "treatment." Key advantages of administrative data would include the collection of objectively measured indicators

of child well-being and forms of criminal justice involvement over time. This type of database would allow researchers to better identify the extent to which child well-being benefits from alternatives to incarceration by comparing changes in child well-being overtime across comparable children and their parents, when otherwise similar parents vary only on whether they were sentenced to incarceration or some type of community-based alternative. In addition to allowing for causal tests, large administrative databases would allow researchers to examine the impact of alternatives on rare yet serious medical outcomes in children (e.g., autism) for which smaller datasets would yield insufficient statistical power.

This type of database could also take advantage of past (and presumably future) changes in municipal and state legislation related to sentencing for individuals convicted of low-level offenses—those most likely to receive alternative sentences. By using these policy changes as exogenous "shocks" to the probability of being sentenced to either jail, prison, or some form of non-custodial supervision, researchers can make causal inferences as to the effect of type of sentencing on child well-being in the framework of a natural experiment (see Andersen & Wildeman, 2014 for an example). Even apart from exogenous variables, linked administrative data would offer researchers enough statistical power to match cases of parents and children that are virtually identical on all measurable conditions, differing only on assignment into incarceration or an alternative, thereby best isolating the effect of sentence type on child outcomes using observed data.

This is not to suggest, however, that administrative data is without limitations. State correctional departments, for example, demonstrate considerable variation in the reliability of their administrative records. In some cases, this is due to variation in reporting standards and record-keeping practices across sites and over time. Even within a given database, some probation officers and other correctional personnel can differ in the details of their reporting. Missing data can also be problematic in some US



administrative databases, and the reasons for missing data are often not easily reconcilable.

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## **Empirical Evidence: The USA and Other Countries**

Unfortunately, very little empirical research has considered the potential effects of alternatives to incarceration for child well-being in the USA. This gap may be attributed to a combination of factors, including a trend toward harsher (rather than more lenient) sanctions in recent decades, and the absence of a necessary data infrastructure for testing the impact of various sentencing practices on child's well-being using a plausibly causal framework (Andersen, Andersen, Fitzpatrick, & Wildeman, 2017).

For these reasons, our review of empirical evidence on the effects of alternatives focuses largely on studies that have considered this issue in the Danish context, where individual and family outcomes with regard to prison versus alternative sentences have been especially well-evaluated, and with exceptionally rigorous research designs. This context is unique from correctional systems in the USA in a number of ways. Among these distinctions include the Danish system's facilitation of prisoners' contact with family members during their time in prison, broad efforts focused on the maintenance of inmates' skills to assist with re-socialization following release, and the consistent provision of rehabilitation services to address mental health and addiction issues.

In Denmark, the most common alternative to a prison sentence includes various forms of probation. As one study shows, probation can have a considerable influence on convicted individual's dependency on public benefits and recidivism, but this effect may depend in important ways on the probation officer to which an individual is assigned (Andersen & Wildeman, 2015). Specifically, this study finds that earnings are not associated with which officer is assigned to an individual, but that a convicted individual's rate of dependency on public benefit transfers will be between .15 and .25 depending on the particular

parole or probation officer assigned to their case. Likewise, criminal recidivism rates can range from .20 to .50 depending on the assigned officer.

Community service and electronic monitoring are other alternatives to incarceration. Community service typically requires between 30 and 300 hours of service in a public workplace, spread out over a period of time in a way that still allows individuals to maintain other daily obligations, such as upholding a full-time job (Andersen et al., 2017). Assignment to community service in lieu of prison depends upon both agreement on the part of the convicted individual, as well as support from a judge who deems the individual and his or her initial offense to be sufficiently punishable through this alternative service.

Following a prison sentence, some convicted individuals may be selected by the Prison and Probation Service to serve their sentence under electronic monitoring. Electronic monitoring essentially allows convicted individuals to serve their sentences in their homes, while agreeing to wear a GPS tracking device. Additionally, they are subject to follow a stringent daily schedule, including some form of employment (see Andersen & Andersen, 2014 for details).

A number of recent studies have considered the effects of alternatives to incarceration using Danish registry data, examining the outcomes for individuals serving community service sentences and those with electronic monitoring devices. The registry includes information from a number of administrative and clinical databases that accrue detailed information about the Danish population over time, including criminal justice contact. In this way, casual effects are more plausibly identified than using other survey-based data, allowing for research designs that utilize various "randomly assigned" conditions to consider individual and child outcomes.

Since 2000, a number of policy reforms in Denmark have increased the use of alternative sentencing for those convicted of driving under the influence (DUI) and other serious traffic violations. Recent studies have used these reforms as frameworks for natural experiments that compare the effects of sentence type on individual (and family) outcomes among similar

individuals whose sentence is essentially determined by whether they were convicted prior to or after the reform. By and large, these studies find significantly more positive social and economic outcomes for individuals convicted of crimes who are serving sentences through either of these alternatives compared to those convicted of similar crimes but serving sentences in prison.

For example, results from one study suggest that individuals sentenced to community service sentences earn significantly more (as much as 3773 EUR in the longer term), rely less on social service benefits, and experience a short-term reduction in recidivism (by .45 crimes), depending on offense type, compared to those sentenced to a prison sentence (Andersen, 2015). This study relies on a difference-in-differences matching technique, which essentially compares the differences in pre-treatment and post-treatment measures of the outcome(s) of interest between the treatment and control groups.

Other studies using an instrumental variable (IV) approach focus on the effect of electronic monitoring. The IV approach helps to isolate causal effects in cases where the explanatory variable may be correlated with the error term of the model equation (i.e., when omitted variable bias, reverse causation, etc., are concerns). By identifying an IV that is, by definition, correlated with the explanatory variable of interest but not the dependent variable, one can better isolate and estimate a causal effect of the explanatory variable. With regard to children specifically, one study using the IV approach finds that those whose fathers serve sentences through community service are between four and six percentage points less likely to be placed in foster care (Andersen & Wildeman, 2014). Another study finds that boys' cumulative risk of ever being charged with a criminal offense by early adulthood declines by roughly 15% among those whose fathers were eligible for probation sentences with community service under a Danish criminal justice reform introduced in 2000 (as compared to those with fathers sentenced to incarceration) (Wildeman & Andersen, 2017).

Other research has found generally positive results following the use of electronic monitoring

as an alternative to custodial sentencing. Among younger individuals convicted of a crime, those sentenced to electronic monitoring demonstrated social welfare dependence rates between 3.8 and 7.2 percentage points lower during the first year after their release—a difference that could be considered in terms of a \$3500 US reduction per convicted individual per year (Andersen & Andersen, 2014). Other work finds that participation in electronic monitoring programs increases the probability of finishing upper secondary education by between 11 and 18 percentage points in the three years following release, as compared to those serving prison sentences (Larsen, 2017). Using a differences-in-differences model, Fallesen and Andersen (2017) also find that electronic monitoring as an alternative to incarceration is associated with a 4.5–13.3 percentage point lower likelihood of union dissolution, suggesting that alternative sentencing practices may have important impacts on family stability.

Additional studies in this area have used similarly rigorous research designs in other contexts. Findings from one study in Argentina (using random assignment to judges as the instrumental variable) reveal that recidivism rates are 9 percentage points lower among offenders under electronic monitoring compared to offenders who went to prison (Di Tella & Schargrodsky, 2013). Although this study does not explicitly focus on children, we can consider the potential benefits to children with parents at lower risk of reoffending. Other work from Norway using a similar methodological strategy finds no significant difference in children whose parents were or were not sentenced to prison with regard to children's own criminal activity or academic achievements (Bhuller, Dahl, Loken, & Mogstad, 2018). These results contrast with findings from a recent study using Swedish registry data, which finds that among children from the most disadvantaged families, those with parents sentenced to incarceration experience a 17 percentage point increase in teen crime, a 7 percentage point increase in teen pregnancy, and a nearly 30 percentage point decrease in employment at age 20 compared to children with

parents that experience some other judicial outcome. No difference was observed among more socially advantaged children's outcomes with regard to whether their parent was sentenced to incarceration versus another judicial outcome (Dobbie, Gronqvist, Niknami, Palme, & Priks, 2018).

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## Conclusion and Future Directions

Collectively, the findings from these studies suggest that adults' and children's well-being may significantly benefit along a number of dimensions when parental sentences are community-based rather than involving jail or prison incarceration. In some cases, the outcomes considered pertain directly to child well-being (e.g., foster care, criminal justice contact). Even for outcomes specific to adults, however, we can consider how child well-being may benefit by extension. For example, child well-being may benefit along a range of dimensions when parents are in more stable relationships. Likewise, as research suggests that parental incarceration is associated with a child's own criminal involvement (e.g., Lee, Fang, & Luo, 2016; Roettger & Swisher, 2011), even causally so (Wildeman & Andersen, 2017), any reduction in recidivism associated with alternative sentencing may have a significant impact on the future of mass incarceration.

As we have emphasized in this chapter, data limitations present a significant challenge to rigorously testing how alternatives to incarceration might affect the well-being of children of parents convicted of a crime relative to the effects of jail or prison sentences within the USA. Until researchers have access to better data infrastructure, such as Danish registry data that tracks detailed information on parental criminal justice contact and family and child-specific outcomes over time, it is unlikely that systematic evaluations of these alternatives will be made available to support potential changes in US criminal justice sentencing policy (Travis et al., 2014).

An increasing number of states are considering legislation designed to implement community-

based alternative sentencing programs for individuals convicted of non-violent offenses who are also custodial parents of minor children; however, absent investments in research efforts documenting the short- and long-term benefits of these alternatives for children, widespread adoption of such policies may not be imminent. Existing evidence suggests that alternative sentencing programs are unlikely to do harm to the well-being of individuals convicted of a crime and their children. Future research and policy in this area are inherently linked, as policy-based progress depends on investment in rigorous program evaluation to support program implementation and expansion.

Despite these challenges, we draw attention to a number of ongoing and promising projects dedicated to this issue within the US context. In Oregon and Washington State, recent legislation has allowed Departments of Corrections to establish alternative sentencing programs that are specifically developed for individuals that are convicted of low-level, non-violent offenses and that have minor children. In Washington State, these programs include the Family and Offender Sentencing Alternative (FOSA), allowing judges the option to sentence eligible parents to one year of community supervision in lieu of a prison sentence. Eligibility requirements are such that the FOSA is designed in purpose to target those parents who had physical custody of their minor children at the time of their offense, and who had no prior convictions for a sex felony or violent offense. A second alternative, the Community Parenting Alternative (CPA), is a "partial confinement" program that allows eligible convicted individuals to reside in the community with an approved sponsor for the last year of their sentence while under electronic monitoring supervision. For both alternatives, violations of the conditions of supervision can result in more stringent modification of the sentence, or in a court's decision for the individual to serve their sentence in prison. Furthermore, both alternatives involve mandated community-based treatment and programming for inmates with certain mental health and/or substance abuse conditions.

The administration of these programs includes collaboration across multiple state agencies, involving the Department of Social Health and Services and the Department of Early Learning, with the broader goal of helping parents to improve their fulfillment of parenting and broader community responsibilities. Results from an early evaluation of the CPA suggest that program participants are significantly less likely to reoffend in the two years following their completion of the program than comparable non-participants. In fact, the odds of recidivism are reduced by over 70% for participants, suggesting that CPA and similar programs may have important consequences for convicted individuals and their families (Aguilar & Leavell, 2017).

Similar legislation passed in Oregon in 2015 established the Family Sentencing Alternative Pilot Program (FSAPP), which is comparable in structure to the Washington-based programs. The FSAPP is specifically designed to promote child well-being, including preventing children from entering foster care and reducing the likelihood of future offending by both parents and children. Preliminary reports from counties participating in a pilot study indicate that few participants violated their terms of the supervision, with approximately 97% of participants (mostly mothers) remaining in the program after the first year. Counties report generally positive changes in individual participants, including use of available treatment and rehabilitative programs and improvements in parent-child relationships; however, additional time is needed to measure associations with longer-term outcomes such as recidivism (Oregon Department of Human Services, 2016).

The broad implementation of these programs, coupled with rigorous evaluations of children's outcomes, could provide an important evidence base in support of community-based sentencing for parents. As a growing body of research documents how children's well-being may suffer in a number of ways as a result of parental incarceration, the development of promising alternative sentencing programs and necessary

data infrastructure remain important next steps in moving forward with empirical work in this area, and which could ultimately support important policy changes for families.

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**Part IV**  
**Perspectives**

## Empowering Incarcerated Parents of Color and Their Families Using Community-Based Participatory Research

Tiffany G. Townsend, Katie Kramer and Giselle A. Hendy

*The nature of the criminal justice system has changed. It is no longer primarily concerned with the prevention and punishment of crime but rather with the management and control of the dispossessed.*

—Alexander 2010 p. 188

### Abstract

Parents of color must navigate a complex system of oppression, which makes incarceration more likely, while also negotiating the challenges of parenthood and family engagement. Unfortunately, traditional scientific approaches that are often used by social scientists to work with these families frequently minimize the importance of the experiential knowledge and expertise present among members of the target population. In addition, traditional approaches rarely return the information gained from the research back to the community and often leave participants, particularly participants of color feeling further disenfranchised. This chapter presents an alternative approach to research that engages

the target community at all stages of the research process. This participatory research model encourages a bidirectional flow of information in which the knowledge and benefits gained from the research are given back to the community, and the perspectives of all key stakeholders are taken into consideration throughout research development. This approach to research has been shown to increase the relevance and effectiveness of resulting intervention programs and has been used to empower populations who have been stigmatized, marginalized, and ignored.

In the past 30 years, the incarcerated population in the USA has exploded. Recent statistics indicate that over 1.7 million people are imprisoned in US prisons and another 744,000 people are incarcerated in local jails, a nearly 500% increase in just over three decades (US Department of Justice 2013, 2015). The rise in the incarcerated population has coincided with our country's push to "get tough on crime." Campaigns such as the "war on drugs" and "broken windows" policing have given rise to racial profiling and the mass imprisonment of a disproportionate number of people of color (Alexander 2010). In fact, 67% of those incarcerated in this country are people of

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color, although people of color constitute only 37% of the US population (The Sentencing Project 2017).

Proponents of these policies would argue that the justice system is fair and that racial disparities in incarceration rates result from people of color committing much of the crime in this country. However, critical race scholars would counter that the association between criminality and populations of color is grossly exaggerated (The Sentencing Project 2014) and that disparities in incarceration rates are actually due to the increased scrutiny and monitoring of communities of color by law enforcement for criminal activity. Thus, people of color are often unfairly targeted by law enforcement and face harsher penalties by the judicial system. This bias is frequently fueled by a racist stereotype that people of color are criminals (Banks, Eberhardt & Ross 2008). Accordingly, statistics indicate that 32% of African American men and 17% of Latino men will experience incarceration at some point in their lives compared to less than 6% of White men (Haney 2015). Women of color are also incarcerated at higher rates. African American women are three times more likely and Latinas are 69% more likely to be incarcerated than their White counterparts (Reading 2014).

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### **Incarceration and Institutional Oppression**

This glaring racial/ethnic disparity in incarceration rates is a reflection of the biased institutional system on which our country was built, a system that was originally designed to advantage White men at the expense of people of color and to preserve White male economic and political power (Gee & Otiniano Verissimo 2016). In fact, Liu (2017) argues that in a White supremacist society, like the USA, incarceration and physical violence is used as a form of control to maintain and legitimize White privilege. Consider for instance that American citizens convicted of a felony are ineligible to vote and find it difficult to find a job upon their release (Lewis 2010). This

helps to ensure that political and economic power remain elusive for many people of color and it provides a legal (often inaccurately translated as “objective” or “fair”) justification to blame populations of color for their disadvantaged status (Aguilar 2014).

People of color must navigate this complex system of oppression, which makes incarceration more likely, while also negotiating the everyday challenges of life, such as parenthood and family engagement. Of the 2.3 million people imprisoned in US prisons and jails, nearly 50% are parents of children under the age of 18. This means that there are approximately 1.2 million incarcerated parents, 40% of whom are African American (The Pew Charitable Trusts 2010), and another 20% are Latina/o (Mapson 2013). For these parents, incarceration poses a formidable challenge to their ability to parent their children.

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### **Parenting in the Context of Oppression**

Families with an incarcerated parent, who are three times more likely to live below the poverty level (Murphey & Cooper 2015), also face extra financial burdens (please also see Chaps. 2 and 5, this volume). Costs may include legal and other court fees, expensive phone bills, the high cost of visits, and loss of family income (Grinstead, Faigeles, Bancroft, & Zack 2001). Many of these families face major disruptions to their daily lives after a parent is incarcerated such as changes in their residences that result from efforts to be close to the incarcerated parent or as a result of a decrease to family income (Comfort 2008). Residential changes can also lead to changes in schools for children, occasionally multiple times within one school year. These disruptions may be even more pronounced for families with an incarcerated parent who are also involved in Child Protective Services (Kramer 2016). In addition, families may experience multiple traumatic events because of the parent’s incarceration, including chaotic time of arrest or difficult visiting experiences within the jail or prison (Arditti 2012). Finally, these families must manage the

stigma associated with having an incarcerated family member. Often, this stigma comes in the form of increased marginalization and alienation from social networks. For instance, youth and families with a recently incarcerated member report that community members withdraw communication (Adalist-Estrin 2006). This unspoken judgment by others can silence the voices of children and families with incarcerated parents (Adalist-Estrin 2006), particularly families of color who may already feel vulnerable and disempowered because of their race and frequently their socioeconomic status.

Clearly, there are a myriad of factors interacting at multiple levels that influence the behavior and well-being of incarcerated parents, their children and other family members (Weiner & McDonald 2013). According to the Social Ecological Model (SEM), there are five interrelated levels of influence on a person's health and behavior. These nested, hierarchical levels of influence operate at the individual, interpersonal, organizational, community, and policy levels (Bronfenbrenner 1994; McElfish, Post and Rowland 2016; Stokols 1996). McElfish et al. (2016) suggest that the most effective means to promote improvements in health and well-being is to intervene at several levels across the model. Unfortunately, social scientists who wish to develop interventions to assist these families often face challenges in gaining acceptance by the community (Ibanez et al. 2002).

Certainly, there is a problematic history of abuse (e.g., Tuskegee experiment, Henrietta Lacks) between research scientists and communities of color that make it difficult for populations of color to trust the research process (Ellis and Abdi 2017). Equally as important, there is a paternalistic quality to traditional scientific inquiry in which investigators function as if they are omniscient and infallible, while the knowledge of the community is often minimized or ignored. In addition, the benefits of research have traditionally been unidirectional, generally favoring the investigator or "the field" at large (Tremblay et al. 2017), but leaving participants and marginalized

communities of color feeling exploited and further disenfranchised.

This chapter presents an alternative approach to research that engages the target community at all stages of the research process. The proposed "participatory research" model encourages a bidirectional flow of information in which the knowledge and benefits gained from the research are given back to the community, and the perspectives of all key stakeholders are taken into consideration throughout research development. This approach to research has been shown to increase the relevance and effectiveness of resulting interventions (Israel, Parker, Rowe 2005). In addition, through the use of multiple community partnerships and interdisciplinary research teams, participatory research approaches encourage multilevel collaborations that can address factors of influence across various ecological levels (McElfish et al. 2016). This model makes use of the diverse expertise that is inherent in true community-academic partnerships, and in doing so, it empowers communities that had once been disenfranchised to take an active role in shaping their own destiny.

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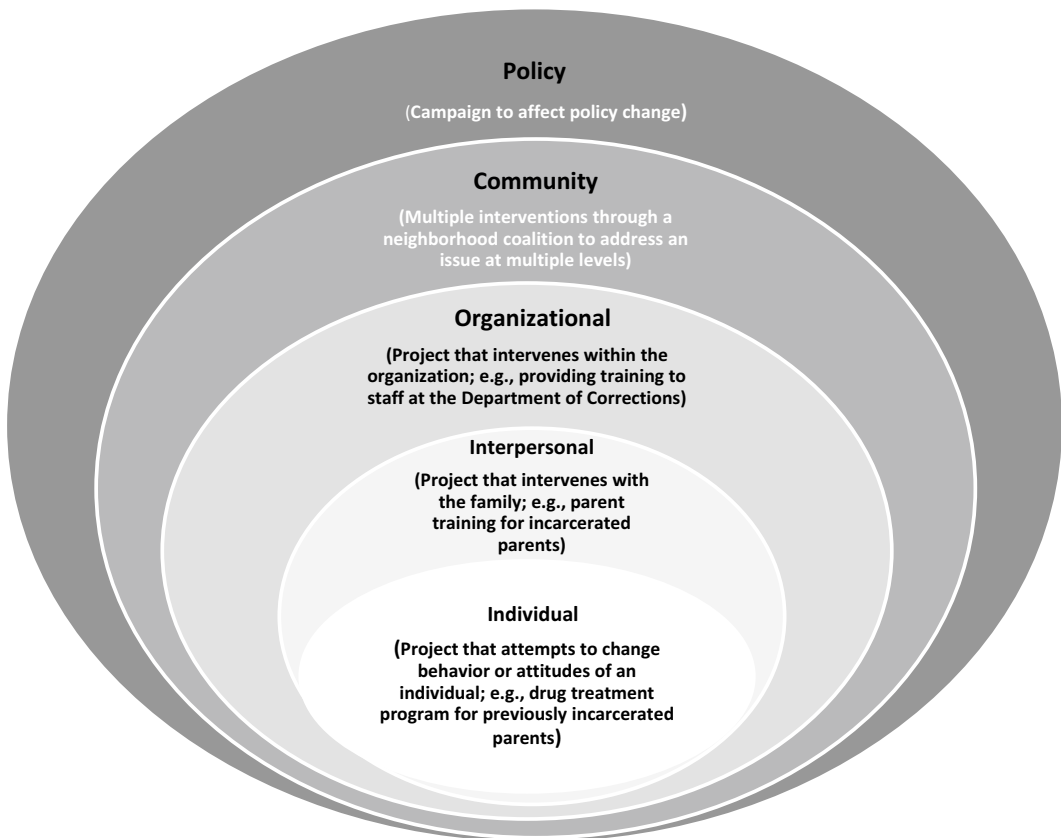
## **Empowerment Through Participatory Approaches to Research**

Participatory approaches to research have gained attention largely because they are designed to address the power differential in the traditional researcher-participant relationship, helping vulnerable and disenfranchised communities feel that they have the power to affect change in their environment (Florin & Wandersman 1990). Community members are engaged as equal partners in the research process, which helps to ensure that resulting products incorporate and build on the strengths, knowledge and expertise of the community (Leung et al. 2004). One frame for this type of approach is community-based participatory research (CBPR), within which community engagement and collaboration are key elements. Researchers using a CBPR approach work to

establish structures for participation by communities, organizations, and researchers in all stages and aspects of a research study (Ellis and Abdi 2017). These academic–community partnerships can be developed with community groups that operate on multiple levels across the social ecology, such as individual community-based organizations that provide direct service to individuals or families (e.g., former incarcerated parents or families with a current incarcerated parent), institutions that have a broader reach within a community (e.g., a district school system, Department of Corrections), and neighborhood coalitions that collaborate to provide community-wide interventions and/or policy change at more distal contextual levels (see Fig. 17.1).

## Community Empowerment Through Community Engagement

In practice, developing these collaborative partnerships is a very complex process that requires a “laddered” approach to engagement, in which community members, stakeholders, and service providers become *acclimated* to the “culture” of research and researchers have to become *sensitized* and receptive to the voice and input of the community. To ensure true mutuality and equity in a community–researcher partnership, each partner must feel validated, respected, and understood. In other words, partners need to develop a shared knowledge base and a common framework within which to work together.



**Fig. 17.1** Type of intervention at each SEM level *Source* Adapted from McElfish et al. (2016). A Social Ecological and Community-Engaged Perspective for Addressing

Health Disparities Among Marshallese in Arkansas. *International Journal of Nursing & Clinical Practice*, 3, 191. <http://dx.doi.org/10.15344/2394-4978/2016/191>

Accordingly, an important yet often neglected step to establishing a community–researcher partnership is to conduct training among the service providers and community consumers/stakeholders (i.e., workshops in research techniques and skills, including topics such as community participation in research, understanding of research methods, clinical trial participation, and ethical issues). Parallel training efforts should be conducted with investigators. Workshops for the research investigators should include topics such as cultural competence and cultural humility training (Chavez et al. 2003), community sensitivity training, and advocacy.

Following the acclimation and sensitization process, the next step in establishing a community–researcher partnership is to develop a team orientation to problem-solving, and an interdependent approach to accomplishing specific tasks. Several components or dimensions need to be put into place when establishing the partnership to help foster this interdependent and team-oriented approach. For instance, the partnership should pay particular attention to factors associated in the literature with effective, efficient working groups, such as two-way communication, shared decision-making and power, constructive conflict resolution, and the effectual use of the expertise of all members (Johnson & Johnson 2003). Many of these factors cannot be achieved without the trust and complete buy-in of each partner. According to Israel et al. (2005), the joint establishment of partnership operating norms and procedures is a key factor in helping to facilitate trust and build a sustainable relationship. Above all, true coalition building requires time and on-going effort before each partner will feel completely open and trusting of the other partners and the partnership process.

If and when an environment of trust and open communication has been established, group members are free to effectively discuss their needs and what they are willing to contribute to the group in exchange for meeting these needs (Gitlin & Lyons 2003). It is through this interdependent relationship and team approach that the research is accomplished. Based on the principles of social exchange theory,

community–researcher partnerships are most effective once the goals of the partnership match those of each individual, and the group provides the desired benefits to each member in exchange for that member’s skill and contributions. In other words, the community, as a whole, perceives that the collaboration gives more to its members than is being taken away from the community.

It is important to acknowledge that collaboration and partnership building can be challenging and time-consuming for all involved. To help ensure there is a sharing of power and resources among researchers, service providers, and community members/consumers, it is often necessary to establish a community advisory board. A community advisory board can provide feedback concerning community needs, present recommendations regarding research plans and clinical protocols, and can provide a level of community protection in the research process. According to Weijer and Emanuel (Weijer and Emanuel 2000), a community advisory board should have significant input concerning the interpretation, dissemination, and publication of research findings. When working with marginalized populations, particularly populations of color, it is important to find opportunities that celebrate diversity, acknowledge differences, and foster an appreciation for the shared human experience. Partners that feel personally validated and respected are more likely to participate in the partnership and feel a sense of ownership of the project (Braithwaite et al. 1994; Thompson and Kinne 1990).

When the partnership is established, the researchers must make a commitment to creating positive change in the community. Part of this commitment is ensuring that project activities and goals can be sustained beyond the project schedule. The researchers should provide skills to the community partners to search and apply for funding. They should also help to garner sponsorship from the community and larger ecologies and create sustainable fundraising initiatives with community partners. Israel et al. (2005) note the importance of imparting research knowledge and skills so that community



members continue to make strides to affect positive change within their communities (see Fig. 17.2 for a graphic illustration of this process).

In the next section, we describe three examples of participatory research projects (The Minnesota Prison Doula Project; The Centerforce-UCSF Research Collaborative; and the CUES Policy Work Group) that illustrate the different scope and level of intervention that can be achieved using CBPR methods when working with individuals and families affected by incarceration. Despite some difference, there are many fundamental values and principles that are shared among these projects. We will highlight these shared core ideals, paying particular attention to the research engagement process, as it is through this engagement that communities can begin to feel more empowered.

### Community-Based Participatory Research: From Theory to Practice

**The Minnesota Prison Doula Project** is an example of a focused collaboration between a university partner (University of Minnesota), a local institution (Minnesota Department of Corrections), and a community organization that worked directly with incarcerated pregnant women, intervening at the individual level. Shlafer, Gerrity & Duwe (2014) described the development of the community–university–corrections partnership, the Minnesota Prison Doula

Project, which started as a prison-based program to provide parenting support for incarcerated women. Recognizing the community of incarcerated women as a unit of identity, Erica Gerrity, LICSW, a service provider at the prison, engaged this group early in the process. Through regular “talking circles” held with incarcerated women in the prison and a survey administered to the same population, Gerrity was able to gain a better sense of the strengths and needs of the target community. This process helped to ensure that the target community (incarcerated women) was involved in the process from the very beginning and that the resulting program built on the strengths and addressed the specific needs of incarcerated women. Results of the foundational research gave rise to the development of an initial version of the program, which included weekly support groups for pregnant and parenting women, and individual sessions for each participant with a certified doula who provided non-medical prenatal, labor and delivery and postpartum support.

Later in 2010, Gerrity established a partnership with Rebecca Shalafer, PhD, a researcher from the University of Minnesota who had expertise in parental incarceration and child development. The two worked with the program staff from the prison to develop a proposal to fund a pilot evaluation of the Minnesota Prison Doula Project and to develop an ongoing plan for additional research, evaluation and dissemination that would address the needs of each partner and



**Fig. 17.2** Community engagement process

key stakeholder. Consistent with core CBPR principles, tasks and responsibilities were negotiated and agreed on by the research team to align with the experience and expertise of each partner involved. For example, the core research questions were developed collectively by the research team and all partners. However, the university partner was responsible for identifying study instruments and protocols, securing IRB approval, consenting participants, as well as collecting, managing and analyzing the data. However, the community partner was responsible for staffing, outlining a referral process, developing program materials and implementing the program.

In 2011, the project received funding from the Clinical and Translational Science Institute (CTSI) at the University of Minnesota, and the partnership was able to pilot a 12-week program with 48 women. Results of the pilot indicate that the program was able to address many of the critical concerns identified by the incarcerated women (i.e., lack of information regarding prenatal development and the birthing process, lack of support during pregnancy and anxiety during the birth). Following participation in the program, women reported they were more confident in their parenting ability and perceived greater social support (Shlafer et al. 2014).

Success of the project was facilitated by a partnership with the Minnesota Department of Corrections. Shlafer et al. (2014) found that relationships within the prison administration were important; however, progress was slowed due to lack of permissions from the Minnesota Department of Corrections. A major lesson learned was that the relationship with corrections needed to be established at the onset, before the commencement of any research activities. Another lesson garnered from this partnership was the importance of seeking and securing funding to continue efforts even after researchers are no longer involved with the program.

**The Centerforce—University of California, San Francisco (UCSF) Research Collaborative** is an example of a community research collaborative between a university partner and a broad-reaching community-based organization.

This collaborative provides a good illustration of the strength of participatory research approaches to develop multilevel collaborations that can address factors of influence across various ecological levels. From 1997 to 2008, the Center for AIDS Prevention Studies (CAPS) at the University of California, San Francisco (UCSF) collaborated with the community-based service organization, Centerforce, to conduct multiple community-based collaborative research studies. Centerforce has strong connections and presence in multiple California state prisons and local county jails. Thus, when researchers at CAPS were interested in conducting studies examining health and prevention strategies with incarcerated people, formerly incarcerated people and family members of the incarcerated, they engaged leadership staff at Centerforce to collaborate. What resulted was a collaborative research partnership. Together, the two organizations completed seven studies funded from multiple federal and state agencies.

The successful partnership represented many core tenants of CBPR such as the development of a truly integrated team approach that included shared leadership and ownership, equitable decision-making power, and a fair distribution of study resources within well-delineated study roles. UCSF took the lead on research-related activities including instrument development, IRB review, development of research instruments, data collection, data input and analysis. Centerforce took the lead on intervention-related activities including intervention design and development, staff training, intervention implementation and staff supervision. Leadership of the studies, including roles of principal investigators, co-investigators and project directors, was shared between the two organizations. Also true to CBPR, the partnership developed a collaborative training approach. Staff from UCSF organized and facilitated training on traditional research techniques such as human subjects' considerations, informed consent, confidentiality and effective assessment techniques; while staff from Centerforce facilitated training on population overview, participant strengths and assets, and intervention activities. In addition,

Centerforce organized training on “the culture of corrections” for the full research team that was facilitated by currently incarcerated people inside the prison.

The success in carrying out multiple studies documented the effectiveness of the application of CBPR with a traditional academic research institution, community service organization, and people directly impacted by the criminal justice system, including currently incarcerated people and their families. There were some challenges with the implementation of these studies, including delays in the approval of studies by the correctional facility, receiving clearance approval for study staff who had been previously incarcerated to enter the correctional facilities, and at times communication challenges among different parties within the academic/community agency collaboration. But with strong lines of communication, an appreciation for the complexities involved in conducting research within a correctional facility, and mutual respect between academic and community organizational leadership, all of these challenges were addressed, and studies were successfully completed.

Results from the many studies that came out of this CBPR partnership documented the feasibility of such programs and were utilized to inform the development of multiple effective interventions for incarcerated people and their families (Grinstead Reznick, Comfort, McCartney, & Neilands 2011). In addition, outcomes were published in a wide array of professional journals and presented at various professional meetings and conferences across the country. Former Executive Director of Centerforce, Barry Zack, stated, “these efforts brought national attention and recognition to the important work of Centerforce and led to the creation of many new programs and services at the agency” (personal communication, July 31, 2017). One example of this success is Project START and Project START+. These risk reduction and linkage to care programs for people returning to the community after incarceration originated out of a multi-site research study that included the UCSF/Centerforce study partnership. Based on the success of this research study,

Project START and Project START+ are currently being supported by both the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration who provide funding to community-based organizations throughout the USA to implement these programs.

**Center for Urban Epidemiological Studies (CUES)** is a community-oriented research institution committed to using participatory approaches to address salient health issues in the Harlem and East Harlem communities. Working with several neighborhood coalitions and a Community Action Board (CAB), the CUES Policy Working Group is an example of a broad-based coalition of community-based organizations that collaborate to encourage policy change. According to Olphen, Freudenberg, Galea, Palermo and Ritas (2003), the CUES Policy Working Group is a subcommittee of the CUES CAB. The CAB consists of community service providers, representatives of city health organizations (e.g., the Department of Health, several academic centers), representatives from local advocacy groups, and members of the Harlem/East Harlem community. In 2000, 10 members of the CUES CAB formed the Policy Working Group (PWG) with the specific aim of developing a policy-level intervention to promote community reintegration of substance users leaving jail and returning to their families. In order to identify the problem, PWG research partners from Hunter College conducted a survey of 79 counselors, social workers, and managers in drug treatment and social service agencies. This information was supplemented by two focus groups with service providers regarding policy obstacles and a review of the relevant literature. As a result of this information gathering and problem identification process, the PWG identified jail discharge policies as the point of intervention. Six problematic policies were identified through additional literature and report review. To help refine the focus, the PWG conducted several focus groups with people who had been recently released from jail, interviewed local and city officials, met with local and city advocacy groups, and developed detailed policy briefs

analyzing policy history and opportunities for policy change (Olphen et al. 2003).

The PWG used a comprehensive participatory process in which academics, service providers, community organizations, drug users, and community member all played a key role in defining the problem and developing an action plan. This process took two years, and unfortunately, the PWG was defunded in 2004. However, consistent with CBPR core principles, the group and its work were sustained beyond its funding and it was credited with playing a major role in several key jail discharge policy changes in NYC (i.e., the NYC Department of Corrections began to release many more people during daylight hours rather than at 3:00 a.m. and they began to offer people leaving jail a bus ride to a drug treatment, housing, or employment program rather than release in a subway stop). The PWG also advocated for a law that was passed in 2004 requiring the Department of Corrections to provide discharge planning services to people leaving New York City jails (Minkler et al. 2008). Despite the extended time and effort this process requires, one of the major benefits of using a CBPR approach to create policy change is the relationships and social ties that are developed across organizations, institutions, and agencies. For community members, these relationships eventually become social capital that can be used to empower and mobilize the community toward additional social change (Olphen et al. 2003).

As illustrated by the examples above, the participatory nature of the CBPR approach encourages and facilitates strong community involvement throughout the research process, resulting in community members feeling empowered to take control over their own health and well-being, and competent to shape the policies that affect their lives (Hatton & Fisher 2011). These projects highlight some of the core values of CBPR: (1) true collaborative partnerships involving community academic partners contributing as equals, (2) valuing each partner's contribution (3) striking a balance between research and action, and (4) building the capacity of local communities to increase their knowledge and social capital to affect change in the future

(Minkler and Wallerstein 2003). As Israel et al. (2005) suggest, a key aspect of CBPR is that something of value is left in the community (usually knowledge and skills), so that community members have the agency to affect change on their own behalf. The following are two examples of communities that were able to demonstrate their agency and take the important step toward independent research, and ultimately community change.

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### **Moving in the Right Direction: Communities Affected by Incarceration Empowered to Affect Change**

**Project WHAT! (We're Here and Talking)**, a program of Community Works West, is a youth-led training and advocacy group comprising young people ages 14–22 who have or have had an incarcerated parent. Using personal stories, Project WHAT! youth aim to raise awareness about the effects of parental incarceration and inspire others to identify ways they can reach out, support, and reduce the trauma young people might experience. After years of relying on estimations from national data sets, realizing the void in local data about youth in San Francisco with incarcerated parents, and acknowledging that youth are seldom included in implementing data collection efforts, Project WHAT! youth decided to lead their own participatory research study, one that highlights many of the important tenets of successful CBPR. Project WHAT! youth held primary leadership roles in all aspects of the project including overall study design, survey development, data collection, analysis, and dissemination efforts. Project WHAT! adult staff, in consultation with an independent researcher from The Bridging Group, provided support, context, and advice, but allowed the major decision-making power to stay within the youth leadership. In using this community-led leadership model, the youth took full ownership of the project and felt validated in their efforts.

From 2013 to 2014, with funding from the Zellerbach Family Foundation, Project WHAT!

youth engaged in a youth-led participatory action research project. The project utilized a multi-method study design to collect data from local youth and from service providers about the challenges young people face when their parent becomes incarcerated. Research methods included surveys collected from 100 youth, ages 12–25 living in San Francisco who had experienced parental incarceration. Further research activities included facilitating eight focus groups with stakeholder groups including formerly incarcerated individuals, caregivers, mental health and civic professionals, and police officers. Finally, Project WHAT! youth co-sponsored a hearing with a member of the San Francisco Board of Supervisors to gather information about the current state of resources and services available to support children and families affected by incarceration in San Francisco and to identify gaps in services. The data revealed four major categories of challenges faced by this community.

The Project WHAT! youth-led participatory research project incorporated many components of CBPR. First, youth held leadership positions in all aspects of the research project from design and development, to data collection, to analysis and dissemination. Project WHAT! adult staff, in consultation with an independent community researcher, provided structure for youth to consider key research project design elements but maintained space for youth to make all key decisions. An example of this work was in the development of the survey instrument. Multiple research meetings were dedicated to identifying key areas of interest and then developing survey questions based on youth-friendly language but that still yielded measurable and valuable data from a research design perspective. This was a lengthy process but resulted in a true youth-led study from beginning to end. Equally important, the dissemination of actionable results was reported from a youth-first perspective and presented directly from youth themselves. As a result, positive and culturally relevant changes occurred quickly within the San Francisco Police and Sheriff's Departments.

Results from the study were utilized to produce a research report that put forth a set of both

immediate and long-term policy recommendations to improve systems of care and support for San Francisco's children of incarcerated parents. Through ongoing advocacy efforts of Project WHAT! youth and other children of incarcerated parents stakeholders in San Francisco, some of these policy recommendations have already produced positive outcomes including: (1) new training for San Francisco Police Department officers on protocols to reduce trauma to children when arresting a parent, (2) efforts by the San Francisco Sheriff's Department to make their "inmate locator" system more user friendly and accessible online so that children and youth can find out where their parent is located and how to contact them, (3) changes in visiting policies at San Francisco County jails that reduce the age of an unaccompanied youth down from age 18 to age 16 so they can visit their parents by themselves without another parent or guardian present for their visit, and (4) the development of a new program within San Francisco County jails that provides children three private contact visits with their parent to say good-bye and come up with a plan to stay in communication as their parent prepares for transfer from jail to the California state prison system (Project WHAT!, 2016).

**Who Pays? The True Cost of Incarceration on Families.** Realizing the void in data on the costs of mass incarceration felt by family members of the incarcerated, a group of criminal justice advocates and researchers led by the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights, Forward Together, and Research Action Design, launched a national community-driven research project in March 2014. This collaborative study was supported by 33 different funding sources including community foundations, family foundations, and community groups, all dedicated to innovative criminal justice reform and engaging communities most affected by mass incarceration in bringing focus and change to this serious problem. The study team worked in partnership with 20 community-based organizations across 14 US states to develop and carry out this national study. The team also worked with researchers from eight Universities and several national criminal justice reform organizations who served



on their Research Advisory Board. These national researchers worked in partnership with the core study team to review study protocols and instruments and help identify key findings during data analysis.

As is key to effective CBPR, staff from the community-based organizations, many of whom had either been incarcerated or were affected by familial incarceration themselves, were trained by the research partners in community research practices including how to conduct surveys and focus groups, the importance of privacy and confidentiality of study participants, and the unique role they brought to the project as community researchers. Staff from the community-based organizations were asked to review and provide input on language and readability of survey instruments. They were also engaged in data analysis efforts and brought a unique insight into key findings. Highlighting another strength of CBPR, the study team determined it was important to gather information on the financial impact of incarceration from multiple perspectives. Thus, in total, the community research team collected 1107 surveys from a variety of participants including 712 formerly incarcerated people, 368 family members of formerly incarcerated people, and 27 employers who hire formerly incarcerated people. In addition, community researchers facilitated 34 focus groups with family members and formerly incarcerated people.

Results from the study were compiled into an extensive research report that outlines seven main areas of fiscal impact and provides recommendations around three main themes including restructuring and reinvesting, removing barriers, and restoring opportunities. The research report has been distributed and cited widely in many policy and advocacy efforts aimed at reducing the cost of incarceration on family members. Especially, learnings from this report have been cited in campaigns to eliminate cash bail and efforts to lobby employers to eliminate criminal background checks (deVuono-powell, Schweidler, Walters, & Zohrabi 2015).

Based on the examples above, it is clear that community members can develop the requisite

skills to affect broad community change. In fact, Hatton and Fisher (2011) suggest that populations who are most vulnerable and disenfranchised “deserve a voice in the policies that affect their lives (p. 5).” If given the opportunity, currently or formerly incarcerated parents and families affected by incarceration can help to shape programs and policies that can provide better supports. For example, prisons or jails that incorporate input from incarcerated parents and their families on ways to develop a more positive, safe, and child-friendly visiting environment can lead to a decrease in symptoms of trauma for children (Arditti & Salva 2013), a decrease in maternal stress levels during incarceration, and reduced recidivism rates for parents after their release (McClure et al. 2015). As families with incarcerated parents are not often given the opportunity to define their truth and shape their environment, a CBPR approach to research and intervention development can be incredibly empowering. However, there are numerous issues that arise when working with incarcerated parents and their families that should be considered when adapting these CBPR principles to the context and experience of these families.

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### **Engaging Families Affected by Incarceration: Important Considerations**

Clearly, there are multiple factors that researchers must consider when developing their CBPR partnerships. A successful CBPR project that targets families impacted by incarceration is most effective if it includes input from the the children, their caregiver(s), and their incarcerated parent(s). This helps to ensure that the resulting intervention addresses the needs of all family members affected. However, the dynamics of every family are unique, and these nuances must be considered when working with these families. Incarceration often drastically alters the functioning of a family. One of the primary considerations in this vein is the nature of the parent-caregiver, caregiver-child, and parent-child relationships (Adalist-Estrin 2006). Bonds may have been strong, or



relationships may have been strained prior to incarceration and/or have become strained since incarceration. Additional factors that can affect the family dynamic include the length and frequency of incarceration, nature of the crime committed, availability of resources or changes in financial stability and living conditions (Adalist-Estrin 2006; Greenwood 2016; Sexton 2016).

In working with families, Robinson et al. (2016) suggest that time spent in the acclimation and sensitization process is invaluable. Researchers must be open to the diverse array of experiences and perspectives of the participants—children, parents and caregivers. The expertise of all stakeholders must be considered with the same rigor (Johnson, Brems, Mills and Eldridge 2016). During acclimation and sensitization, the interplay of these multiple factors, and how they manifest differentially between families, must be navigated delicately. Each member of the family unit presents with their own set of unique concerns and considerations. The child of an incarcerated parent is often overlooked; their voice silenced or ignored. Children are left feeling powerless and invisible. Added to these psychological stressors, children are frequently stigmatized by family, community, and society at large. In research, children of incarcerated parents are often essentialized as if having a parent in prison is the only aspect of their identity (Adalist-Estrin 2006). There is more to these children than having a parent in jail. We are working with whole people who must be treated and considered as such.

The caregiver faces stigmatization and powerlessness as well. In fact, the experience of the caregiver is frequently given even less consideration than that of the child. Yet they are often left to support children through stressful traumatic events including parental arrest, court proceedings, and challenging jail or prison visits while dealing with their own sense of trauma and loss. They may also face the financial burdens and stress of caregiving for additional household members as well as the added costs related to maintaining family bonds between children and their incarcerated parents such as visiting costs,

sending care packages, and exorbitant phone bills. Furthermore, caregivers are strapped with a sense of powerlessness as they navigate a complex correctional system that dictates when and how they have contact with their loved one or even receive information about their family member's whereabouts or well-being. All of these challenges may be further complicated by societal stigma related to having a family member in prison or jail that may inhibit caregivers' efforts to seek additional support (Nesmith and Ruhland 2011).

For some families, parents engaged in tumultuous activities prior to their incarceration such as substance abuse and/or domestic violence. These experiences may have inhibited their ability to provide a safe, stable, and nurturing home environment for their children. Thus, parental incarceration can bring an opportunity for other family caregivers to step-in and provide a healthier and more stable home life for children. But even in these circumstances, families are left with the stress of the child's well-being, their parent's unhealthy lifestyles, and the challenges of interacting with the criminal justice system (Turanovic, Rodriguez, & Pratt 2012).

Given the different challenges and powerlessness experienced by children, incarcerated parents, and caregivers, the nuanced needs of each family member will impact relationship and trust building in the community—researcher partnership, influence the establishment of research priorities, and dictate program structure (Foster & Stanek 2007). Therefore, study designs and research interventions should be flexible and accommodating.

When working with an entity, such as a correctional facility, to develop research programs and interventions for families with an incarcerated parent, it is important to acknowledge that the power structure of the correctional facility poses a particular challenge when using the CBPR approach. Because correctional facilities are thought to be inherently coercive, incarcerated populations, including incarcerated parents, have limited autonomy and freedom to shape their environment (McDermott 2013), making it

difficult for incarcerated parents to serve as equal partners in the research process. Researchers must work within this existing power structure to foster the engagement of incarcerated parents.

In addition, there are chains of command, protocols, and approvals that go beyond the walls of the prison or jail. A successful partnership with the correctional agency, whether it is a state department of corrections or a local sheriff's department, is imperative, and should be established before the commencement of any research activities. Working within a correctional system presents additional logistic and administrative concerns (Shlafer et al. 2014). Corrections departments have their own institutional review boards whose guidelines may be more stringent than typical university regulations (Shlafer et al. 2014). These additional stakeholders must be versed in the CBPR process and even convinced of the necessity and validity of these programs (Johnson et al. 2016).

Work at the community level with multiple community-based organizations, institutions, or agencies poses its own challenge. For one, developing a partnership that is characterized by mutual respect and open communication can be difficult, particularly when diverse groups, research institutions, and community-based organizations are brought together without prior knowledge or trust in each other. In fact, Weiner and McDonald (2013) indicate that community leaders often cite lack of trust and racism as barriers to engaging in CBPR projects. Breaking down these barriers requires ample time, patience and consistency, characteristics that may be difficult to achieve in practice. For instance, academic partners often work in an institutional environment in which tenure and promotion requirements place serious limitations on the time they have to devote to one project. Similarly, limited resources and high turnover at community-based organizations make time and consistency an elusive commodity for many community partners. Thus, designing effective CBPR research programs with incarcerated parents and their families requires consideration of these challenges and thoughtful adaptation of the CBPR principles to address the specific needs of

these families within a variety of contexts (Shlafer et al. 2014)

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## **Empowering Incarcerated Parents and Their Families: Summary and Conclusion**

Although there are challenges to working with incarcerated parents, their families, and the communities in which they live, the knowledge gathered from these efforts can help fill gaps in data and information, lead to much needed changes in policies and practices, and bring power and leadership to those families whose stories are often silenced or whose needs are ignored. Effective CBPR creates space for the voices and needs of these families. A major strength of the approach is its emphasis on fostering and maintaining relational trust among community members, researchers, practitioners, and policymakers. CBPR efforts have been effective when strong collaborations are established and remain beyond the project cycle. These relationships are vital to the research process because it provides a space for currently and formerly incarcerated parents and their families to make known what issues or challenges should be prioritized, and for researchers and practitioners to offer their knowledge to strategize interventions. In addition, these relationships serve as social capital that families touched by parental incarceration can use to influence policy development and/or to advocate for additional change in the future.

Another major strength of CBPR is the transfer and exchange of knowledge between and among participating partners and community members. Knowledge is power, and marginalized communities, such as those affected by incarceration, are often overlooked when information is disseminated. With this approach, the community is empowered to assess, strategize, implement, and evaluate issues and effective solutions for their own problems. Designing and implementing a CBPR project from inception to completion can create a sense of collective efficacy, not only in the ability to acquire

scientific knowledge, but also in the capacity to effect change within the community. Increased knowledge and the skills to apply that knowledge for positive changes can create a sense of ownership over what happens within one's community. In addition, realizing you have the power to influence change is healing for communities that have experienced years of marginalization and disenfranchisement. Civic and community engagement in the children and families of incarcerated individuals can provide positive influence over the incarcerated parent/family member upon their return, possibly reducing risk of recidivism.

A positive consequence of knowledge exchange and the desired next step of the CBPR approach is that participating families and community members have the agency to affect change on their own behalf. As described in this chapter, community members can initiate research to offer informed strategies to address their own identified issues. As researchers, we need to value the knowledge that can be found in these communities and engage these families with authenticity and respect. Research that uses this approach has been shown to have greater long-term viability, more positive outcomes, and result in the development of interventions that are culturally tailored to the specific needs of the population (Israel et al. 2005; Michener et al. 2008; O'Fallon & Dearry 2002; Shaefer and Bronheim 2007). Equally as important, this approach empowers families affected by parental incarceration to take an active role in shaping their own destiny.

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# From Research to Reform: Improving the Experiences of the Children and Families of Incarcerated Parents in Europe

# 18

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## Abstract

The degree to which prisons influence the families of those imprisoned is a relatively recent “discovery,” which calls for significant penal reforms. Experiencing a family member’s incarceration can be positive, for example, when the incarcerated individual was violent or abusive. However, it is much more likely that a family member’s incarceration can lead to negative effects such as economic hardship, change in family structure, health problems, and child behavior changes. Starting with the Convention on the Rights of Children, researchers and programs began to address the standards of the rights of children and discuss ways in which this standard can be applied to practice. In Denmark, during a time in which politics focused on penal populism, conversations which centered around the impact of incarceration on children were key to the beginning of a series of research projects intended to inform prison reform efforts. First, a project conducted from 2007 to 2010 focused on how the children of incarcerated parents were treated by the state representatives who they encountered during their parent’s incarceration. A second project suggested that while prison experiences can

largely vary from place to place, the problems that children of incarcerated parents experienced are all very similar, which created a platform for a dialogue of reform. The third project focused on alleviating some of the problems that children of incarcerated parents experience, such as training children’s officers to anchor the child’s perspective in the prisons. Over the past few years, Danish prisons have adopted key recommendations from these projects, including training children’s officers, creating child-friendly visiting facilities, and funding the transportation of children who would like to visit.

The prison or jail is a centuries-old institution which has become an integral part of our modern societies. Today, few question that we deprive people of their liberty as a punishment, even during pretrial when those detained are still presumed innocent. Indeed, places of detention have been used for these purposes for centuries, even with significant and increasing knowledge over time of how detention often affects those imprisoned negatively. Nevertheless, reforming such institutions has proven difficult, and in many jurisdictions, the use of incarceration has increased significantly in recent decades, with the phenomenon of mass incarceration in the USA being the most striking example. However, and very surprisingly, the degree to which prisons influence the families, and especially the children, of those imprisoned is a relatively recent

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“discovery,” which calls for significant penal reforms. In this chapter, I will provide a brief history of research on prisoners’ families and a brief overview of how they are affected by incarceration. I will then ask the question of how we should implement this knowledge and reform the way we punish in order to cause less harm to the children and families of the incarcerated. Following that, I will provide a case study of how this has been attempted in Denmark, partly by adopting a children’s rights approach, and partly by engaging in dialogue and concrete reform projects with authorities, non-governmental organizations (NGO’s), incarcerated individuals’ relatives, and other stakeholders. Finally, I will suggest a model for how to approach reforming prisons and jails and related institutions in order to take the experience and situation of families into account.

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## Bright Colors and Prisons

I remember visiting a prison in southeastern Italy during the spring of 2008. As part of a project about child-friendly prison visits done together with a local NGO, the walls of the visiting area had been painted in bright colors with images of Donald Duck and other familiar characters from comics and children’s books. When you come as a visitor to a prison in a foreign country for a couple of hours, there is much you do not know, and a number of things were a bit unclear to me, such as how much the visiting area was actually used. After all, it is very difficult to establish exactly what is going on when you engage in what has been termed “prison tourism”—a practice that stretches back at least to the 18<sup>th</sup> century when Christian philanthropists began visiting prisons with the hope of improving conditions for the incarcerated (Smith, 2016). There is no doubt that for participants such visits can be very inspirational at the least, and, under the right circumstances and with the right kind of follow up, they have the potential to spark actions that lead to reform in prison systems in the involved countries.

Seeing the colorful visiting area in the Italian institution was a striking experience for me, and was the first time I had seen such images and so many colors inside a prison. On the one hand, it was a completely natural thing—painting an area where children visit in such a way. Such displays are common in other areas where children regularly visit, such as a public library or a play area in a shopping mall. On the other hand, this was a prison, an institution where such an area had been completely unthinkable for centuries. At the time, I was working intensively on a research project about the children of imprisoned parents in Denmark, so I had full focus on questions concerning families, children, visiting, contact, and so on. Some changes had begun in Denmark around that time as well, and a few prisons were experimenting with liberal and child-friendly visiting procedures. However, these practices were isolated cases of local progressive initiatives. Incredibly, in a relatively short time span historically speaking, we were able to turn these things around in Denmark and reform significant parts of the prison system based on a children’s rights perspective—a story that I will return to toward the end of this article. However, we did not know anything about that in 2008, and the images on the Italian prison walls stood in stark contrast to the lack of attention the families and children of prisoners had experienced throughout the long and troublesome history of prisons (Smith, 2014).

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## Prison Research and the Families of Prisoners—A Brief History

According to historians, prisons have existed since the sixteenth century as institutions specifically established to incarcerate a significant number of people for prolonged periods of time (Morris and Rothman, 1998). The purpose of these institutions has been debated intensely, and especially during the last two centuries. While research related to prisons has generally focused on the effects of imprisonment on the individual prisoner (i.e., individual deterrence

and rehabilitation) and the possible preventive effect on society at large (i.e., general deterrence), the question of the fate and experience of the families of the incarcerated did not surface fully until late in the twentieth century. Apart from a few path-breaking studies such as that of Pauline Morris on “Prisoners and their Families” (published in 1965), very little was written on such topics during the first four hundred years of the history of prisons (Morris, 1965). As recently as 2005, two internationally leading criminologists, Alison Lieblich and Shadd Maruna, agreed that the families and children of prisoners were still a neglected area of research and one that was in great need of attention (Lieblich & Maruna, 2005). When in 2007, my colleague Janne Jakobsen and I began a large-scale study in Denmark on the children of imprisoned parents and their human rights, the only previous Danish research we could identify was a small-scale interview study (Christensen, 1999).

Like me, each of the researchers and practitioners I know from Europe, North America, and elsewhere who began working in this field during the past decade or so had the same sense of being “pioneers.” We might have had prisons or jails for centuries, but it was not until now that we were finally going to do something about the way these institutions affected the families and children of the incarcerated—that, I think, was how many of us felt. Indeed, we could all agree that this issue had generally been neglected and apparently simply forgotten. There were few signs that policymakers, researchers, and practitioners had paid serious attention to the way the use of imprisonment affects the people outside of the prison walls, although family members far outnumber the incarcerated individuals themselves. Given that incarceration has been a key sanction in Western penal practice in the last two centuries, this fact is simply astounding. Within the field of sociology of law, Norwegian Professor Thomas Mathiesen distinguishes between how, on the one hand, the law and its institutions influence and shape society, while on the other hand, the law and its institutions themselves are heavily influenced and shaped by society.

Following this logic, we can certainly conclude that while the plight and fate of prisoners’ families have been heavily influenced by the legal and penal system especially during the last couple of centuries, their experience of being caught up in the turmoil of these institutions has until recently had minimal influence the other way around (Mathiesen, 2011).

Fortunately, surveying the situation now, we have to say that the situation is changing. As far as research goes, a dramatic development has set in. During the last ten years or so, a remarkable and quickly expanding wave of new research has been produced internationally focusing on the families and children of prisoners, and numerous publications have appeared, especially in Europe, Australia, and North America. A review done in 2012 by Elizabeth Johnson and Beth Easterling counted 187 articles on the children of prisoners published between 1987 and 2011, three of which appeared in the 1980s, 40 during the 1990s, and 144 during the 2000s (Johnson & Easterling, 2012). A more recent search for literature revealed that more than 260 new publications on prisoners’ families, including on parental incarceration and children of imprisoned parents, appeared between 2012 and September 2016 (Condry & Smith, 2018). In terms of research, the families and children of the incarcerated are, in other words, no longer forgotten or neglected. As a result, we now know the numerous ways in which families and children are often affected when a parent, partner, or other family member is incarcerated.

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## The Effects of Incarceration on Families and Children

When looking broadly at the impressive amount of research which has been done in recent years (see Chaps. 3 through 6, this volume), there appear to be extensive effects of incarceration on families and children in different jurisdictions (Hagan & Dinovitzer, 1999; Murray, Bijleveld, Farrington, and Loeber, 2014; Murray & Farrington, 2008; Smith, 2014). Some effects can be

positive for partners and children, for example, when violent and abusive family members are incarcerated, but much more often, the effects are negative. Many families and children are affected in important and very substantial ways (Condry & Smith, 2018). A variety of different kinds of effects have been documented. These include:

- (1) Economic and other material effects (e.g., financial hardship, employment, homelessness, residential instability, and homelessness)
- (2) Changes in family relationships and their quality (e.g., changes in family structure, lack of contact, and the effects on parenting)
- (3) Health problems (e.g., mental health, physical health, and infant mortality)
- (4) Behavioral changes among children (e.g., antisocial behavior and aggression)
- (5) Effects in relation to a child's schooling and education
- (6) Social exclusion, inequality and citizenship (e.g., broader social effects and questions of democracy, rights, and legitimacy).

Many issues can exacerbate or alleviate the above effects (often called moderators), and are sometimes in themselves very important co-producers of these effects (often called mediators). Some important potential mediators of effects which, to a greater or lesser extent, have been discussed in research are: stigma, guilt, and shame (including secrecy, lies, ambivalent emotions, etc.); type of offense (the reason for the incarceration); police practices (during arrests and pretrial detention); prison regimes, programs, and prison culture/conditions (including travel distances); and the duration of imprisonment. As far as moderators go, some of the obvious issues are: family and individual resilience (e.g., family situation, economic/social status, networks/support); gender, race, ethnicity and age; welfare policies and social services; and the work of NGOs and other service providers (i.e., support from civil society) (Condry & Smith, 2018).

It is obvious that state actors can work with several of these issues from a legal point of view and in terms of practice and culture in the relevant institutions. Questions concerning stigma,

prison regimes, the duration of imprisonment, police practices, and welfare policies are good examples. Indeed, many of the reports on research describing the above effects and their mediators and moderators contain suggestions for policy changes and good practice. But how, then, do we translate all this knowledge into reforms and concrete and enduring practice? As I argued in 2014 in the final paragraph in a book about the children of imprisoned parents, the basic challenge we face today "is that we need to reform our systems of justice and punishment in order to take innocent children's needs, situations and rights into account. Although we have had prisons and prisoners' children for centuries, this is still a novel and daunting challenge considering the way imprisonment is practiced in most nations today" (Smith, 2014).

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### **From Research to Practice: A Children's Rights Approach**

Based on my own experience working on issues related to prisoner's children and families in Europe and on visiting prisons in different European countries, I would say that when it comes to reform, the prison and probation services in a number of countries have begun to accept the challenge of changing their practices and cultures in this area. We see this especially in terms of how a number of prisons begin to introduce more child-friendly policies and practices surrounding visits and other forms of contact. Often, though, these efforts are relatively localized initiatives, and there is still a very long way to go. Furthermore, the degree to which the police and social services are becoming more aware of their role and responsibilities with regard to prisoners' families seems less certain. Similarly, there are few signs that national laws are generally being aligned more toward the needs and rights of prisoners' families, although there is considerable variation from one jurisdiction to another, and there are some particularly positive developments worth mentioning. For example, Norwegian prison law now stipulates that "children's right to contact with their

parents shall receive special attention” during the implementation of the imprisonment.<sup>1</sup> This is, however, a relatively recent addition and not at all the norm if we look at penal law across different nations.

Nevertheless, some very recent major developments have taken place in this area if we look at the international human rights standards and especially with regard to children’s rights and associated soft law. These developments have helped spur and direct concrete reforms in some jurisdictions. For example, as late as in 2006, a legal analysis concluded that the best interest of the child had “rarely been even a consideration in the final decisions” in European Court of Human Rights (ECHR; Strasbourg, France) cases concerning prisoners and their right to maintain family life (Ayre, Philbrick, and Reiss, 2006). Similarly, if we look at the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), they did not have a general policy or general recommendations in this area even ten years ago. Part of the reason is, undoubtedly, that children’s rights are a relatively recent addition to the international human rights “family.” The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) was adopted in 1989 and entered into force the year after in 1990. It is actually the UN human rights convention with the broadest international support, although with the important omission of the USA, which has not yet ratified the CRC.

Despite international support, few arguably knew in 1990, or indeed know today, what the actual implications of the CRC are or will be around the world. For example, it can have broad implications when the CRC states that “In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration” (Article 3.1). Another of the many CRC articles, which potentially has huge relevance for prisoners’ children, is Article 9, which emphasizes that children have the right

to regular and direct contact with parents from whom they are separated: “States parties shall respect the right of the child who is separated from one or both parents to maintain personal relations and direct contact with both parents on a regular basis, except if it is contrary to the child’s best interests” (Article 9.3).

These and other statements in human rights law were a starting point for our own research on the children of imprisoned parents when we began looking into this area in Denmark in 2005. We thought that such rights should not only be “law in the books” (Pound, 1910) but should be transformed into action on the part of these children—into actual standards and practice on concrete issues such as visiting times and visiting conditions in prisons. Others around that time took a similar approach. On a European level, “Children of Prisoners Europe” (at that time under the name EUROCHIPS) pioneered the application of human rights standards in this area and inspired the work of NGO’s all over Europe. For example, together with “Children of Prisoners Europe” and others I worked on a project about prisoners’ children which was based on case studies in Italy, Poland, Northern Ireland, and Denmark. In our final report, in 2011, we identified one overall recommendation when we urged states to:

Incorporate the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in relation to children of imprisoned parents into European standards, national laws, and practice so as to ensure that children of imprisoned parents are able to maintain contact with them; are consulted and receive timely information regarding what has happened to their parent; are free from discrimination on the grounds of the acts of their parent; have their views taken into account. (Smith & Gampell, 2011)

Around the time of this work, the UNCRC joined in the consideration of these issues. In the same year, 2011, they dedicated one of their yearly “Days of Discussion” to the children of prisoners. This became a landmark event with contributors from all over the world. Afterward, the Committee produced a detailed set of recommendations and urged “that States parties ensure that the rights of children with a parent in prison are taken into account from the moment of

<sup>1</sup>Lov om gjennomføring av straff mv. (lov-2001-05-18-21) § 3.

the arrest of their parent(s) and by all actors involved in the process and at all its stages, including law enforcement, prison service professionals, and the judiciary” (Smith, 2014).

It is difficult to say exactly what these developments in soft law have initiated, supported, and brought with them in terms of concrete reforms in different jurisdictions. In some countries, children’s rights have been positively impacted, although there is still a long way to go. When it comes to human rights hard law, the changes have not been as clear-cut as in the case of soft law, but still, things have improved during the last decade. As previously touched upon, it is noteworthy how the human rights court in Strasbourg, in most of the cases concerning prisoners and their families and children, has refrained from considering the child’s best interest. This is likely to be a product of the way in which cases regarding prisons and human rights have traditionally focused on prisoners and *their* rights and not the rights of third parties such as relatives (Smith, 2016).

Nevertheless, the recent ECHR judgment in *Horych v. Poland* from 2015, along with a few other cases, point in a new direction. Here, the applicant, who had a wife and three daughters, was detained under a regime of solitary confinement within a special high-security prison unit for offenders considered dangerous (ECHR, 2012). The applicant was allowed a one-hour visit with his family each month, and from August 2004 to January 2008 was granted permission to have 32 visits in all (out of which 11 were open visits, the rest, closed). During that period, the applicant was normally visited by his wife and received only two visits from his oldest daughter. He was visited once by the two young daughters, which he claimed was caused by the visiting conditions, which were not satisfactory “for visits by children or minor persons.” According to the applicant “a visitor, including a child, in order to reach the visiting area in the ward for dangerous detainees, had to walk through the entire prison, past prison cells situated on both sides of the corridor. This exposed his daughters to the gaze of inmates and their reaction to the girls’ presence constituted an

exceptionally traumatic experience for them. During the meeting, they were separated by a window and bars from their father, which was very stressful for them and made it impossible for them to have any normal contact. For that reason, considering that the conditions in which he was allowed to see his family in prison caused too much distress and suffering for his daughters, the applicant had to give up receiving visits from his daughters” (ECHR, 2012).

When making a decision, the ECHR aimed at striking a fair balance “between the requirements of the applicant’s detention under the ‘dangerous detainee’ regime and his right to respect for his family life” (ECHR, 2012). But interestingly, the court explicitly included the applicant’s children and their situation in its argument: “The Court would note that, by the nature of things, visits from children or, more generally, minors in prison require special arrangements and may be subjected to specific conditions depending on their age, possible effects on their emotional state or well-being and on the personal circumstances of the person visited.” According to the Court, the State had “positive obligations (...) to secure the appropriate, as stress-free for visitors as possible, conditions for receiving visits from his children, regard being had to the practical consequences of imprisonment.” The Court found that such a duty had not been “discharged properly in situations where, as in the present case, the visits from children are organized in a manner exposing them to the view of prison cells and inmates and, as a result, to an inevitably traumatic, exceptionally stressful experience.” The Court furthermore found that “exposure to prison life can be shocking even for an adult and, indeed, it must have caused inordinate distress and emotional suffering for his daughters (...) It further notes that, owing to the authorities’ failure to make adequate visiting arrangements, the applicant, having seen the deeply adverse effects on his daughters, had to desist from seeing them in prison” (ECHR, 2012). Accordingly, the ECHR ruled that there had been a violation of Article 8, the right to respect for private and family life.

Needless to say, the described developments in human rights soft law and hard law far from

guarantee that these standards are put into action in national jurisdictions. From a legal point of view, it is, of course, important what specific jurisdictions we are talking about here. The USA, for example, is outside the jurisdiction of both the CRC and the ECHR. Nevertheless, there is some reason to believe that we are dealing with a broader international trend toward recognizing the needs and rights of children who as relatives are exposed to the criminal justice system. For example, some states and jurisdictions in the USA have developed and implemented “child-sensitive arrest protocols” that “include detailed guidance for arresting officers to minimize trauma for children who are present.” The good practices these protocols promote include “not handcuffing parents in front of their children whenever possible, allowing parents to reassure their children, waiting for a designated caregiver, not using the siren when leaving, and allowing the parent an additional phone call to arrange childcare. They also include guidance for looking for signs of children who may not be present but may be dependent on the arrested person for care and supervision” (Krupat, Gaynes, & Lincroft, 2011).

In the following section, I briefly describe how we approached this area in Denmark in an attempt to create reforms based on research and guided by a human rights approach. Importantly, this was not a legal project in a narrow sense. On the contrary, it was a multidisciplinary project in several stages where we used children’s rights as a general normative platform and engaged with stakeholders on that basis without ever going through courts or complaints’ mechanisms.

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### **From Research to Reform: The Case of Children’s Officers in Denmark**

In 2005, as a young researcher at the Danish Institute for Human Rights in Copenhagen, I was approached by my director about a new project: to do something about prisons. The case of prisoners’ children appealed to us for three basic reasons. First, it was clearly an important area, as it involved a large number of vulnerable and more or less forgotten children. Second, it was a

new area of research, both from a criminological and a human rights perspective. Finally, it was an area where it seemed plausible that we could make an impact.

At that time, the Danish political agenda was heavily influenced by penal populism. When taking office in 2002, the Danish Minister of Justice Lene Espersen explained that she wanted to govern with her “inner sense of justice,” which she claimed to share with “ordinary citizens,” while she clearly regarded criminological advice and research as less important (Smith & Jakobsen, 2010). The general influence of penal populism meant that it was difficult to seriously discuss prisons and punishment. But perhaps serious research on prisoners’ children would produce a different result? What would happen, for example, if the public sense of justice was informed about these children, their situation and *their* sense of justice?

I decided to focus on the perspective of these children and on the rights of the child, and began some pilot research. Based on my initial findings, we decided to see what a dialogue among key stakeholders could bring to the arena. Accordingly, I arranged two meetings that included representatives of the Danish Prison and Probation Service, the National Council for Children, the police, the social authorities, the Danish Red Cross, associations for prisoners’ relatives, inmate spokespersons, and previously imprisoned parents, among others. There were some heated arguments, and it was clear that not everyone agreed on everything. However, it was striking that all participants were willing to do something for these children. My colleague Janne Jakobsen and I, therefore, drew up a research project, and ultimately we were granted funding from the Danish Egmont Foundation. This became the first of three projects focused on the children of imprisoned parents.

The first project was carried out from 2007 to 2010 and comprised data collection and analysis with regard to the children of imprisoned parents in Denmark. The focus was on how these children were met and treated by the state representatives they encountered throughout the whole process—from their parents’ arrest to their



imprisonment and subsequent release. Empirical data were generated through interviews with more than 80 practitioners from various institutions and representatives from NGOs; prison visits in Denmark, Italy, the United Kingdom, and Sweden; and a countrywide survey of all prisons, police districts, and local social services in Denmark. A study of the relevant human rights standards and Danish law was also carried out. By consciously focusing on the relevant state actors—including their working methods, culture, and the legal frameworks within which they take action—we hoped to generate information that could be used in practice.

The second project on children of imprisoned parents was the previously mentioned European study (funded by the European Union) which was based on the model from our first Danish study. Four studies of varying scale and scope were conducted in Northern Ireland, Denmark, Italy, and Poland. The research uncovered both problems and good practices and demonstrated that although prison conditions and economic and legal situations varied substantially in the selected countries, the problems experienced by the children of prisoners were remarkably similar. By this time in Denmark, we sensed that we had an opportunity to do much more than simply hand over recommendations, which we did by both engaging with the media and meeting personally with the Danish Minister of Justice. Through continuous dialogue with the various relevant actors over the course of the program of research, we knew that we had brought the various relevant parties close and secured a more or less common platform that was based on the results of our research as well as on the process of dialogue itself. Hence, we had, in fact, created a basis for reform.

This was the starting point for our third project, which was funded by Ole Kirk's Foundation (i.e., established in memory of the founder of the LEGO Group toy company). The project constituted a concrete attempt to implement children's rights and alleviate some of the problems that children of imprisoned parents faced in Denmark. We trained selected prison staff as *children's officers* who worked in their respective

institutions to firmly anchor the child's perspective in the individual prisons. The project ran for two years (2010 and 2011) in four prisons. We focused on introducing simple and reliable procedures to improve children's contact with their parents as well as the child's experience when visiting in prison. Activities included improving visiting facilities and procedures, running parenting study groups for imprisoned parents, and arranging child-friendly events (Hendriksen, Jakobsen, & Smith, 2012).

When the project was over, a phase followed in which awareness-raising and timing were key factors if we wanted to influence both the bureaucratic and political process around the children and families of prisoners. We, therefore, engaged specific NGOs, state officials, and politicians and made efforts to put the issue into the national media. By November 2012, these efforts came to fruition when the Danish government and parliament decided to implement the children's officers' scheme on a national basis. As a result, all Danish prisons (remand and sentenced) now have children's officers. In line with our recommendations, further government initiatives have since followed introducing, among other things, parenting study groups for imprisoned parents and funding for the transportation of visiting children. One of the many outcomes of this series of projects is that almost all prisons in Denmark now have new child-friendly visiting facilities and procedures—a stark contrast to the situation in former times. In addition, I think it is fair to say that these reforms have instigated further cultural changes within the Danish Prison Service in terms of how the various institutions and their staff perceive themselves and their role in society. Essentially, it is my hope that these events have helped break down some of the otherwise massive barriers between prison and society.

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## A Model for Research and Reform

The field of project planning, organizational development, and reform planning is densely populated with “theories of change,” “logical

frameworks,” “human rights based approaches,” and countless other theories and practices. The brief model that I present here is to some extent inspired by such thinking but is primarily based on my own experience from working in the field of research and implementation projects. I think that our work went through a number of phases. I have tried to describe these in more general terms below as a possible model for working on ameliorating human rights violations, but hopefully, the model can be used as inspiration for anyone working at the intersection of research and reform. The various phases are, to some extent, overlapping, but can for the sake of clarity be described in the following stages.

1. *Identify a problem*, which has resulted or potentially will result in the oppression of individuals and the violation of their human rights.
2. *Bring together the relevant actors* dealing with, experiencing, or influencing the human rights problem in question and engage them in a dialogue on the basis of preliminary research into the issue.
3. Conduct thorough multidisciplinary *research* to identify relevant laws, practices, institutions, stakeholder motives, and so on, and examine these from a human rights point of view.
4. Throughout the research process, maintain a *dialogue*, to the extent possible, with all relevant actors—from state representatives to civil society, from the violated to possible violators—and discuss preliminary research and possible recommendations with each actor on an ongoing basis.
5. Identify *recommendations* and preferred outcome. If you have done your work properly you now have a very strong platform for approaching politicians and other decision-makers, since your recommendations are likely to be supported by a number of the central actors who you know well from the previous project stages and with whom you have cooperated and with whom you now may have an alliance.
6. Decide upon an *advocacy, dissemination and implementation strategy* for convincing, utilizing, overcoming, and/or cooperating with other powers (e.g., states, media, institutions) in order to produce the preferred outcome—empowerment of those subjected to human rights violations and the end of such violations—that is, human rights implementation.

One of the key issues throughout the above process is obviously dialogue. As described by Greg Berman “there is no substitute for facetime” when working with criminal justice innovation and “it is impossible to build meaningful relationships without investing significant time and energy” (Berman, 2014). Establishing and maintaining a dialogue while also conducting thorough empirical research is time-consuming, but it can certainly ease the process toward identifying both useful and realistic recommendations as well as implementing them. Another key issue is doing multidisciplinary research—typically through working together with other organizations and researchers with different backgrounds, skills, and talents than your own—in order to adequately capture the complexity of the issue in question and discover ways to enhance the chance of achieving reform. In turn, this will also help you better relate to the agendas of the various organizations and key actors.

For example, the current importance in some jurisdictions of “what works” and “evidence-based interventions” was sometimes utilized in the Danish case by citing research that maintained family relations can lower recidivism. At the same time, this was done in a way which never made rehabilitation and recidivism a central priority as this could have taken the focus away from the problems and rights of prisoners’ children. In other words, the key focus remained the rights of the children of imprisoned parents. Additionally, researchers and their colleagues need to exhibit some level of professionalism with regard to planning and carrying out advocacy, dissemination, and implementation strategies in the final stage, which is perhaps less complicated in local settings and in smaller

countries like Denmark where access to the media, politicians, and other decisionmakers is likely to be easier.

Another important point to make is that when we took on the role as implementers carrying out concrete reform work inside government agencies, we did not become what Loader and Sparks have referred to as “observers turned players”—i.e., researchers who join the institutions they have previously studied (Loader & Sparks, 2011). Not only were we not employed by the prison service, but we took the initiative as researchers and secured and administered external funding with which we paid all project participants from the prison service, the Danish Institute for Human Rights, and elsewhere. We thereby maintained complete autonomy, managed the project, and did this as independent researchers implementing a reform project in prisons.

Finally, the above model is of course not a blueprint, which can simply be followed regardless of circumstances. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to go into all the possible challenges which working in different jurisdictions can pose—including the ever-present question of when and where working with government institutions becomes too big a problem, and when reforms turn out to be more a question of sustaining unhealthy institutions than actually empowering marginalized groups. Nevertheless, I sincerely hope that this description of our experience in Denmark can be inspirational for anyone who has ambitions toward creating reforms based on research in general, and anyone who wants to help and support prisoners’ children and families in particular.

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# The Interface of Child Welfare and Parental Criminal Justice Involvement: Policy and Practice Implications for the Children of Incarcerated Parents

Benjamin de Haan, Joseph A. Mienko and J. Mark Eddy

## Abstract

There is a significant interplay between the adult corrections system and the child welfare system in the USA through the families involved in both systems. Perspectives on the interaction between these two systems and the implications of this interaction for children with incarcerated parents are provided by three authors who have collective experience in administration, practice, and research in both systems. Issues related to policies and practices in both child welfare and corrections are discussed, including monitoring parental incarceration, interagency communication and collaboration, parent–child visits, and the termination of parental rights. Recommendations are made for future research, policy, and practice. New approaches within child welfare and corrections are needed that are in the best interests of the child, his or her family, and society at large.

The increased use of incarceration in the USA has led to dramatic, unintended consequences for children and families (Eddy and Poehlmann, 2010; Travis and Waul, 2003). As discussed in Chap. 2 of this volume, the most recent estimates indicate that over 2 million adults are incarcerated on any given day in US prisons or jails, and another 5 million adults are under criminal justice supervision (e.g., Kaeble and Glaze, 2016). A significant number of these children and their families are also involved with the child welfare system. In this chapter, we discuss the interface between these two systems from our collective perspective. The first author is a former caseworker and later director of the state child welfare system, a former director of the state adult corrections system in Oregon, and in recent years has worked with various state child welfare and corrections systems throughout the USA in the areas of policy and research. The second author worked as a caseworker in child welfare systems in Michigan and Washington State and has been engaged in research relevant to both systems for a number of years. The third is a licensed psychologist and research scientist who has worked with child welfare-involved clients, taught parenting in prisons, and been involved in the development and testing of interventions for incarcerated parents for almost two decades.

While parents are in prison or jail, their children and other family members may be involved with a myriad of other social service systems (Sykes and Pettit, 2018). According to a 2008

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study conducted in Washington State, 80% of young people born to parents who had served time in the state prison system received some service from the state Department of Social and Health Services, which at that time included the child welfare system. However, little is known about the scope and breadth of services offered to incarcerated individuals' families because police departments still do not routinely collect information about the children of those they arrest, and correctional agencies have historically requested little information about the families of incarcerated individuals or the services they receive (Seymour, 1998). In terms of child welfare involvement, the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS, 2017) reported that 8% of children in foster care were there because of parental incarceration. Estimates from national surveys on the percentage of incarcerated parents with a child in foster care are within a similar range (e.g., 2% of fathers and 11% of mothers; Glaze and Maruschak, 2008).

It is likely that both estimates of the interface between the two systems are low. AFCARS is designed simply to count children in foster care, not to document the relation between parental incarceration and being in foster care. When information regarding parental incarceration is captured, it is in reference to the reason for which a child was removed. However, numerous situations exist in which children of incarcerated parents are placed in foster care but for which parental incarceration was not, per se, the reason that the child was removed. Thus, AFCARS data will tend to underreport the overlap of foster care and parental incarceration. Surveys of incarcerated men and women—such as those cited by Seymour (1998) or that conducted by Glaze and Maruschak (2008)—are potentially an improvement on the numbers reported by AFCARS, but they often suffer from problems common to cross-sectional designs. Unless questions in such surveys are carefully worded, with anchors to clearly identifiable timepoints, these surveys also tend to underreport the overlap between the populations involved in these two systems.

In 2000, 2002, and 2008, during the first author's tenure with the Oregon Department of Corrections, researchers invited parents in prison to complete surveys in the hopes of developing a greater understanding of the needs of incarcerated parents and their children. Similar to the national estimates noted above, the results suggested that 6% of incarcerated fathers and 10% of incarcerated mothers had at least one child in foster care. However, in a subsequent study using a different methodology, all women entering the state prison system in Oregon over a four-month period were interviewed about their children, and a more substantial estimate emerged: For every 100 women incarcerated in the state, approximately 38 children were involved in either temporary shelter care or long-term foster care. Similarly, if one broadly considers each of the various types of potential parental contact with the justice system (i.e., arrest, conviction, jail time, and parole) rather than just long-term incarceration, criminal justice may have intervened in as many as one of every three families served by public child welfare systems across the USA (Phillips and Detlaff, 2009).

Although state agencies may have been slow to respond to the increasing number of incarcerated individuals who are parents of minor children, numerous jurisdictions have more recently been taking steps to engage this population. Indeed, in our home state of Washington, the child welfare and corrections systems have partnered in the creation of primary prevention programs focused on preventing the separation of parents from their minor children. Most notably, the *Parent Sentencing Alternative* program and the *Family and Offender Sentencing Alternative* program, where parents convicted of certain crimes serve all or part of their sentences outside of prison, have both demonstrated promising initial results at keeping families together with no increased risk of recidivism (Aguilar and Leavell, 2018; see also Chap. 16, this volume). More recently, from a tertiary prevention perspective, the *Strength in Families* initiative of the Washington State Department of Corrections (Eddy, Kjellstrand, Harris, House-Higgins, Goff, and



McElravy, 2018; see also Chap. 15, this volume) provides incarcerated parents with skills, knowledge, and support to help them create safe and stable environments for their children and families after they leave prison. The program starts before release and continues in a parent's home community after release.

While such efforts are promising, many child welfare services are still delivered through systems which do not anticipate the complexities of working with family members who are also simultaneously involved with the criminal justice system. These complexities go beyond the normal requirements of coordinating services. Child welfare services and criminal justice services are largely non-voluntary and stigmatizing, and they combine in ways that can negatively affect or even permanently sever parent-child relationships. Creating more positive outcomes for children, parents, and families requires constant innovation. Key areas within which such innovation is particularly needed are highlighted below.

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## Practices and Policies in Need of Attention from Both Systems

### Monitoring Parental Incarceration

Just as most criminal justice agencies do not track whether or not the men and women under their supervision have children, most child welfare agencies do not consistently track parental incarceration. Consequently, little is known about the children in child welfare who have a parent in prison or jail. In an effort to fill this gap, the Child Welfare League of America conducted a survey of state agencies in 1998 (Harnhill, Petit, and Woodruff, 1998). CWLA found that, of the 38 responding states, 35 did not know the number of children with an incarcerated parent. Only five states were able to provide estimates of the number of children in foster care who had an incarcerated parent. Determining whether a child had an incarcerated parent during the intake process was

standard practice in fewer than eleven states, and many of those states did so only on a conditional basis (i.e., when having an incarcerated parent directly affected the child's involvement in the foster care system). Although this situation has begun to change in a growing number of states (see recent resources offered by the Administration for Children and Families Children's Bureau <https://cantasd.acf.hhs.gov/explore-topics/incarceration/policies/>), such changes are still in their early adoption phases.

Further contributing to the information gap, many children of incarcerated parents who are admitted to foster care are there for reasons other than parental incarceration (Seymour and Hairston, 2001). In these cases, foster care placement may have preceded parental incarceration (Ehrensaft, Khashu, Ross, and Wamsley, 2003), or the courts may have established jurisdiction based upon child maltreatment, abandonment, threat of harm, or many other reasons unrelated to parental incarceration. Many child welfare systems do not enter information about parental incarceration unless it is the primary reason for placement, making it difficult to track the true number of children with an incarcerated parent who are receiving child welfare services.

### Interagency Communication

Child welfare agencies and criminal justice agencies do not routinely collaborate to provide services to families involved with both systems. An early documented attempt to assess the need for cross-agency services was a small study conducted in 1955 in California (Zietz, 1963). The study revealed an acute need for child welfare service provision inside the California women's correctional institution. Many years later, professionals in the field are still challenged by barriers to collaboration across disciplines. A more recent study continued to find very little coordination and communication between law enforcement and child welfare agencies in California (Nieto, 2002). Child protective agencies reported that they were only notified by law enforcement one-quarter of the time when a

mother with a minor child was arrested. Further, only one-quarter of law enforcement agencies assumed responsibility of a child when arresting his or her mother. Of these, approximately one-half of subsequent placements occurred without involving child protective services.

Similar to the findings in California, the Harnhill, Petit, and Woodruff (1998) national survey found that only two states provided child welfare and law enforcement staff with training focusing on identified areas of need specific to this population. Of these, only one used a specific curriculum; the other relied on ad hoc workshops and conferences planned by others. Fortunately, in recent years, a number of states have used the legislative process as a vehicle to encourage a consideration of the children of incarcerated parents, mostly through interagency sharing of data and joint planning. For example, in 2001, the Oregon legislature passed SB 133 which directed key agencies to work in concert to better meet the needs of children with incarcerated parents. In Oregon, state statute now requires the Department of Corrections to gather information about incarcerated parents' children as a part of the intake process. Other outcomes that occurred as a direct result of this legislation include the development and implementation of statewide arrest protocols, the provision of training for law enforcement officers in child sensitive interviewing techniques, the provision of training for court personnel on relevant federal laws and the implications of such for incarcerated parents, the creation of adequate child visitation space, the release of information to incarcerated individuals at intake to facilitate work with families, and the initiation of collaborative reentry planning.

Washington State pursued a similar approach with the passage of HB 1426 in 2005 and SB 1422 in 2007. Both bills specified a coordinated approach as well as the gathering of information about outcomes for children served by multiple agencies. The resulting statutes require the sharing of information between the state departments of health and human services and corrections. By linking administrative data, Washington researchers subsequently determined that 80% of

children who had a parent in prison at some point in their life ultimately required services from the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS), ranging from mental health services to child protection services, including foster care; economic services, including food stamps, TANF payments, and subsidized child care; and medical assistance services, alcohol and drug treatment services, and/or juvenile justice services (Washington DSHS, 2008). The greatest use of services occurred among children who experienced the incarceration of both parents. For example, children who had both parents involved with the Department of Corrections were 16 times more likely to need DSHS services compared to children with no parental involvement in the criminal justice system. It should be noted that the approach in Washington did not include children of offenders housed in county jails or on community supervision, the largest criminal justice populations; therefore, the estimates of service use may be conservative.

Other states also have begun to address the interface between adult corrections and human services agencies, including child welfare. Recent work in Oregon in this regard is discussed in Chap. 20 of this volume. In Hawaii, the state government has strongly encouraged (but does not require by statute), cooperation among the agencies serving children of incarcerated parents. This cooperation requires systematic collection of information about children to help tailor programs as alternatives to incarceration for women convicted of drug crimes. In California, legislation directed the California Research Bureau to conduct a study of women with children in the California prison system. New York State focused attention on the need to preserve parent-child contact through structured visitation and transportation programs, and Virginia designated a lead agency in the statute to coordinate research and training for key agency personnel in both the corrections and human services agencies. Many of these state efforts have been focused on identifying families served by multiple agencies, setting up structures for sharing information, and identifying opportunities for coordinating services.

## Interagency Collaboration

In most jurisdictions, child welfare and law enforcement agencies are required by statute to coordinate their activities in the investigation of child maltreatment. Nevertheless, when a parent is arrested for a crime unrelated to the child, the child's needs are often not the highest priority. Smith and Elstein (1994) found that few child welfare agencies had specific policies or guidelines for placing children whose mothers were arrested. Similarly, few states have a written policy guiding law enforcement in meeting the needs of these children (Harnhill, Petit, and Woodruff, 1998). In California, one-half of the child welfare agencies did not have written policies for placing children when their mother was arrested. Likewise, almost two-thirds of law enforcement agencies did not have specific policies dictating how officers are to respond in situations where a small child is present and the offender is the child's primary caregiver (Nieto, 2002).

The absence of clear policy in this regard is reflected in the practices of both child welfare and criminal justice agencies. At the time the Nieto study was conducted, only 7% of responding law enforcement agencies in California reported taking responsibility for minor children every time the sole caregiver was arrested, whereas 11% reported never taking responsibility for minor children when the sole caretaker was arrested. There is no question that parental incarceration has gained visibility in recent years, but many law enforcement practices may not have kept pace. In the aforementioned survey of women entering Oregon's prison system, a significant number of respondents reported that their children were present during their arrest and many women also reported that it appeared to them that their children were left at the scene to make their own living arrangements (including staying with friends, relatives, or alone) while the parent was incarcerated. It is well known that witnessing the arrest of a parent can be traumatizing for children (e.g., Dallaire and Wilson, 2010).

## Parent-Child Visits

Frequent visits between foster children and parents are essential to successful reunification (Davis, Landsverk, Newton, and Ganger, 1996; Howing et al., 1992; Norman, 1995). There is a growing literature on the benefits and challenges of various types of visits for incarcerated parents and their children, and emerging evidence-based practices on how to increase the likelihood that parent-child contact will be positive (see Chap. 10, this volume). One of the most pressing problems for parents who are incarcerated and who are also involved with public child welfare systems is the lack of communication with caseworkers, especially about visits and other forms of parent-child communication (Beckerman, 1994; Johnson and Waldfogel, 2002). Unfortunately, this is all too common for several reasons: Caseworkers tend to have large caseloads; prisons are often located in remote locations; and correctional facilities can be intimidating and unforgiving to those unfamiliar with the rules and stringent security procedures. Furthermore, caseworkers often lack adequate training on the value of visits with an incarcerated parent, particularly when reunification is an ultimate goal.

Compounding these limiting factors, prison and jail administrators have traditionally restricted their role to operating safe and secure institutions, with little consideration given to issues affecting prisoners' post-release outcomes, or how positive visitation experiences might lead to greater safety. As a result, many policies and practices in prison and jail facilities actively discourage contact between incarcerated parents and their families, and some prison and jail administrators view the relationship between incarcerated persons and their families as beyond the scope of their mission. Professionals in both corrections and social services have expressed concerns about whether child-parent contact during incarceration is constructive. At times, concerns are based upon preconceived and untested notions of the value of visiting a parent in prison or jail (see Hairston, 2003). At other times, concerns center around visitation environments that may be

stressful to children because they are not child-friendly. Certainly, a wide variety of difficulties related to visits are possible, from the cancellation of a visit after a long trip to a prison, to children being frisked, to having to conduct visits behind plexiglass, to the possibility of the premature termination of a visit, to name but a few. Both sets of concerns are worthy of consideration, and the amelioration of problematic situations is needed (see Chap. 10, this volume).

While some professional opinions about risk to children related to visitation result from lack of information and training specific to the needs of children with incarcerated parents (Seymour, 1998), there are hints that class and racial bias also may play a role. For example, in 2002, a focus group comprising stakeholders from the New York's child welfare system and the criminal justice system explored this attitude in depth (Women's Prison Association, 2003). A common point of discussion was that child welfare workers in New York were often cynical about the intentions of the mother (most often the pre-incarceration caregiver, as opposed to fathers) who did "not place their children's needs above their addiction" (p. 14) prior to incarceration. Consequently, these professionals may have been less motivated to support the parent-child relationship during the mother's incarceration. Participants felt that criminal justice policies and practices put "apprehension, custody, conviction, and punishment of lawbreakers" (p. 9) foremost in consideration during an individual's incarceration, and that the relationship between offenders and their children was rarely addressed (Women's Prison Association, 2003). More work is needed in this area, including how to help decision makers minimize bias related to demographic characteristics (e.g., Benbow and Sturmer, 2016).

### Termination of Parental Rights

The Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (ASFA) provides an important policy framework for understanding the interface between child welfare and corrections. As President Bill

Clinton signed ASFA into law, he indicated that the primary goal of the legislation was to increase the number of adoptions in the USA. He specifically sought to "... double the number of children we move from foster care to adoptive homes by the year 2002." He went on to state that "[w]e know that foster parents provide safe and caring families for children, but the children should not be trapped in them forever, especially when there are open arms waiting to welcome them into permanent homes." This was the basic, ostensibly well-meaning, sentiment surrounding the development and passage of ASFA. In essence, ASFA shifted the focus of child welfare policy in the USA from family preservation to securing permanent placement for children.

The notion that children should not linger in foster care was not new. This concern had been a feature of the child welfare system since at least the early 1980s (as embodied by the predecessor to ASFA, the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Funding Act of 1980). ASFA, however, essentially put teeth into the idea that state child welfare agencies needed to avoid what Hartley (1984) referred to as "foster-care drift"—the notion that children were languishing in foster homes with no real permanent home and no clear plan to find such a home. Subsequent to ASFA, the child welfare system has come to view foster care as synonymous with short-term placements which represent a parent's last, time-limited chance to remain in the life of their child. As interpreted by most states and child welfare professionals, if a parent cannot successfully remedy the issues which brought their children into foster care within the timelines prescribed by ASFA, then the state has an obligation to petition the court to terminate the relationship between the child and the parent(s) from whom they were removed and make the child "legally free" for adoption.

While the country fell short of Clinton's 2002 goal, ASFA undoubtedly changed the landscape of the child welfare system. From 1984 until the passage of ASFA in 1997, the USA had a system in which foster care and adoption caseloads were growing at roughly the same rate. Subsequent to the passage of ASFA, however, the growth rate

of adoption caseloads began to increase while foster care caseloads plummeted. More recently, these growth rates have begun to stabilize and (as of 2015) the child welfare system had nearly three times as many open IV-E-funded adoption cases as it did IV-E-funded foster care cases (Green Book, 2016). These numbers paint a troubling picture for the incarcerated parent with a child placed in state custody. The child welfare system has evolved from a situation in the 1980s in which the state had the flexibility to maintain parent–child relationships depending on the needs of the *family*, to one in which the hands of the state are forced to meet the assumed needs of the *child* by moving the majority of cases to termination after fifteen months in state custody.

The biggest barrier to maintain a relationship between incarcerated parents and their children in the custody of the state is time. ASFA requires that states initiate proceedings to terminate parental rights when children have been in foster care for “15 of the most recent 22 months.” In other words, parents have 15 months to prove to the court that they have remedied whatever troubles originally brought their children into foster care. In the context of felony sentences, the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) reports that the average sentence duration in state facilities is 4 years and eleven months (BJS, 2008). Indeed, BJS notes that felonies are frequently defined in research and practice settings as “... crimes with the potential of being punished for more than 1 year in prison.” Thus, even at the low end of the felony sentence distribution, a parent would only be left with 3 months to prove to the court that are ready to have their children placed back in their care before ASFA timelines were triggered.

There are two basic mechanisms through which parental incarceration can intersect with the child welfare system: (1) The child can be *removed before parental incarceration*, and (2) The child can be removed *concurrently to parental incarceration*. In the first pathway, the child is placed into foster care due to child maltreatment or another high-risk issue with their living situation (e.g., the presence of domestic violence placing the child at imminent risk of

serious harm). Subsequent to the placement, one or both of the parents are incarcerated. The second pathway involves the child being placed into foster care concurrently with parental incarceration. In many circumstances involving this pathway, the incarceration (independent of the crime) is the proximal cause of the placement in foster care. In other words, the parental crime may not have *per se* placed the child at risk of harm (e.g., incarceration due to check fraud) but the parental incarceration has left the child without a caretaker and thus the state has placed the child into its custody.

In most cases, the first pathway is going to be the most problematic for an incarcerated parent. In this scenario, the parent has an established case plan and is presumably working toward reunification with their child. Becoming incarcerated in the middle of this process will likely send a strong message to decision makers in the child welfare system (e.g., judges and case managers) that reunification is not a viable strategy for the case. In such situations, even sentence durations less than 1 year may cause these decision makers to opt for adoption or another non-reunification permanency option. For sentence durations in close proximity to the ASFA fifteen-month benchmark, the second pathway will likely yield a higher likelihood of reunification than the first pathway. This is due primarily to the increased time that an incarcerated parent has to complete their sentence. A parent in this scenario also benefits from the fact that their incarceration is not a surprise to child welfare decision makers as in the first pathway; it is a feature of the case from the start of the case. In such scenarios, the parent may have also had an opportunity to secure placement with a relative caregiver. Such placements tend to be less inclined to adopt a child (Courtney and Hook, 2012).

Thus, as long as the underlying crime does not generate persistent inherent risk to the child (e.g., murder in the first degree and criminal sexual conduct) or they have demonstrably mitigated such risk during their incarceration (e.g., completion of substance abuse treatment, mood stabilization via psychotropic medication, and

parenting education), the child welfare system can more easily implement a reunification plan under the second path providing that the sentence is not excessively long relative to the age of the child. To be clear, recent research related to this second pathway demonstrates that this pathway decreases the likelihood of reunification relative to the general foster care population (Shaw, Bright, and Sharpe, 2015). It should also be noted that ASFA does allow the state and jurists some individualization of the 15-month guideline. Some states have made specific exemptions for incarcerated parents in their ASFA implementation plans (Genty, 2012), especially when incarceration is the sole reason for a child being in state custody (e.g., New York State and Washington State). Cases of kinship placements and cases in which the state established that termination is contrary to the best interests of the child are both situations in which the filing of a termination petition can be delayed beyond the 15-month standard. Nonetheless, among children with incarcerated parents, we would expect that this pathway would be favorable to reunification as compared with the first.

ASFA was intended to improve outcomes for children involved in the foster care system. However, ASFA neglected to accommodate the unique needs of children whose parents are in prison and has potentially increased damage to families affected by parental incarceration. ASFA became law in the midst of the explosion of US prison and jail populations. As can be seen in Fig. 19.1, growth in the prevalence of adoptions maps closely with growth in the prevalence of the US corrections population. Indeed, the rate of adoptions surpasses the rate of incarceration at approximately 2005. While we make no causal argument between these two trends, it is clear that the policy context which ASFA presents for incarcerated parents was implemented during a period in which the US incarcerated population was at its highest. Furthermore, the time series is consistent with the trends that one might expect if a causal relationship did exist between the explosion in the numbers of incarcerated adults in the USA and the prevalence of adoptions from foster care.

## Recommendations

From the discussion above, it is clear that families involved with both child welfare and criminal justice are at risk for dissolution. There are variety of approaches in the realms of research, policy, and practice that have the potential, collectively, to not only decrease this risk but to strengthen families and improve outcomes for children.

## Research

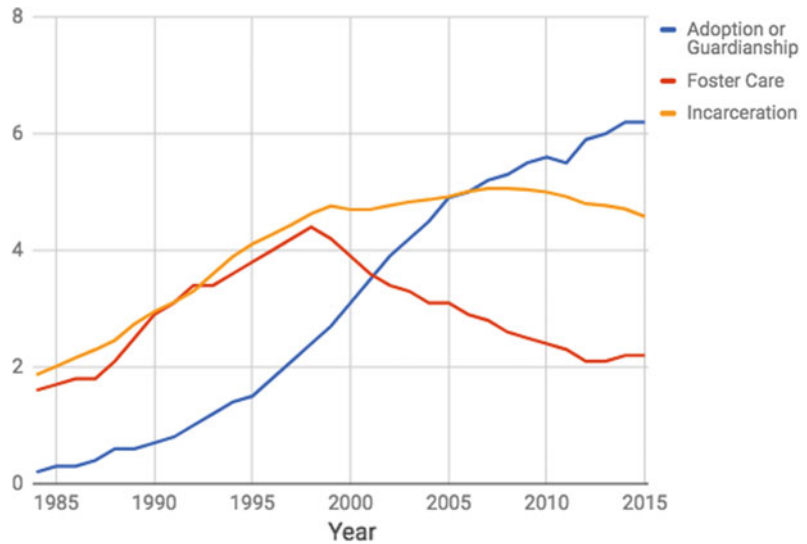
As discussed above, it is clear that there are many questions that related to the interface between child welfare and corrections that have not been answered. Research work in this area has been slow, and rigorous studies are few. Many of the more recent publications in this area present reviews of past work and opinions, but do not contribute findings from new samples. Further, change in both systems can be glacial (in the historical sense of the word), and changes that do occur can be difficult to maintain (e.g., Pridmore, Levy, and McArthur, 2017). One place to start moving forward quickly is in new studies of basic demography. Most notably, an understanding of the prevalence and incidence of joint involvement in these systems, and how these indices vary across states and time as federal and state policies change, is lacking. Even more vital, however, is the need for randomized controlled trials of interventions that focus on improving outcomes for children involved with child welfare who have incarcerated parents. Such interventions seem most promising if they include components that address not only children, but their incarcerated parents, their caregivers, including foster parents, and their caseworkers.

## Policy

**Prevent parental incarceration.** If the suggested relationship between the growth of the numbers of incarcerated adults in the USA and the rate of adoptions is more than just



**Fig. 19.1** Rate of IV-E cases and incarceration (per 1000 children or US resident, respectively)



correlational, then a reasonable strategy for family preservation would be to simply prevent incarceration when it is acceptable and appropriate to do so. Recent examinations of the impact of alternative sentencing on children and families are discussed in Chapter 16 in this volume. Further, Pfaff (2017) recently suggested that one underlying cause for the current size of the incarcerated population is the growth in the relative power of prosecutors over the last several decades. If so, the establishment of clear and enforceable standards for prosecution might serve to decrease the prison population. Such a strategy may be particularly relevant to the sentencing of parents who may have special programs available to them such as the Parenting Alternative Sentencing program in Washington State (Aguilar and Leavell, 2017).

**Provide additional statutory guidance regarding ASFA.** The federal guidelines for implementing ASFA provide little procedural direction regarding “reasonable efforts” and termination of parental rights when the parent is incarcerated. Current guidelines encourage states to consider termination of parental rights within the context of sentence length and the age of the child. As noted above, some states have circumvented the reasonable effort requirements by passing statutes that make incarceration alone

grounds for termination of parental rights (Halprin and Harris, 2004). Further federal clarification of what must be done to make a reasonable effort could significantly change what happens during a period of incarceration.

**Revise policies that reduce post-release parental success.** In addition to the constraints imposed on non-custodial parents by ASFA, there are a number of other restrictions that have their roots in federal policy but are subject to interpretation at the state level. For example, Public Law 104-93 (the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act) bans people with parole violations from receiving food stamps. The same law bans people with certain drug offenses from receiving Temporary Aid to Needy Families benefits for life. Many parents are banned from public housing because of drug convictions, and many relatives cannot provide kinship care (or cannot receive financial support for providing kinship care) because of previous criminal convictions that do not relate to child safety. In many instances, local jurisdictions have the authority to choose a different policy or eliminate state-level statutory bans, although federal funding restrictions may result. These types of policies need to be reconsidered carefully within the context of parental incarceration. They may have multiple unintended

and undesirable side effects, weaken family bonds and functioning, and decrease post-release success.

**Create scaffolding that supports cross-disciplinary policy coordination.** As discussed throughout this chapter, child welfare, law enforcement, and adult corrections have overlapping target populations, yet their policies are often poorly coordinated at the state and local levels. Recognizing this, many state legislatures have enacted statutes and commissioned reports to encourage or direct agencies to share information and to coordinate their services. An increasing number of states have assigned overall responsibility for children of incarcerated parents to a single agency in order to establish clear expectations of them in the statute. These high-level policy directives could be more effective if they include the following: (1) the creation of a planning entity sponsored by the Governor and legislative leaders and charged with defining and organizing services and policies affecting children of incarcerated parents; and (2) formal written agreements among child welfare, law enforcement, and corrections agencies that specify service standards for children of incarcerated parents. These standards should emphasize not only the family's role in offender reentry, but also address issues of class and racial disparity. More specifically, standards should address the frequency and quality of parent-child visitation, effectiveness of prison and community-based family programs, and the alignment of parental release plans with child welfare service agreements; and (3) statutory requirements defining what information will be collected to guide future policy and program development and under what conditions this information can be shared across agencies. These statutes should explicitly require written reports to the Governor and legislature regarding outcomes for prisoners' children.

## Practice

**Disseminate high-quality information to practitioners and lay people about the intersection of child welfare and criminal justice.**

While information has been slow to accrue, there is a growing knowledge base, but one that is difficult to tap. Fortunately, there have been efforts in recent years to bring together knowledge relevant to this intersection and make it easily accessible to practitioners as well as the general public. One of the best examples of this is the information "hub" Web site *youth.gov*, a product of the federal Interagency Working Group on Youth Programs. A more recent example is the work of the National Institute of Corrections, Bureau of Justice Assistance, the Department of Health and Human Services, and the Urban Institute to bring together policymakers, practitioners, researchers, and advocates to advise on high impact, low-cost policies targeting family strengthening within the context of jails and prisons, and then disseminate these ideas to the field. Multiple efforts are underway in this regard, including a process, outcome, and cost-effectiveness evaluation of family strengthening policies in multiple jurisdictions around the USA (see Chap. 22, this volume).

**Modify arrest practices and system coordination standards with the protection of children in mind.** For many children with incarcerated parents, watching the arrest of family members is their first exposure to the criminal justice system. Children often exhibit a variety of long-term effects after the arrest of a parent including emotional and behavioral problems, depression, and delinquency (Nieto, 2002). Because law enforcement officers are not well-equipped to deal with children whose custodial parents are arrested, children are often left alone, and they may subsequently enter inappropriate living arrangements. Most law enforcement agencies have no formal protocols for how officers should respond to children who have contact with police. Historically, few states have a written policy guiding law enforcement in meeting the needs of these children (Harnhill, Petit, and Woodruff, 1998). Smith and Elstein (1994) found that few child welfare agencies have specific policies or guidelines for placing children whose mothers are arrested. Almost two-thirds of law enforcement agencies in California were found not to have specific policies

dictating how officers must respond in situations where a small child is present and the offender is the child's primary caregiver (Nieto, 2002). Only 7% of law enforcement agencies reported taking responsibility for minor children every time the sole caregiver was arrested, whereas 11% reported never taking responsibility for minor children when the sole caretaker was arrested. To better address the needs of children during arrest and its immediate aftermath, state and local law enforcement and child welfare jurisdictions should consider: (1) implementing joint training protocols for law enforcement officers and child welfare workers regarding the impact of arrest on children and child-sensitive arrest procedures; (2) developing written working agreements between law enforcement and child welfare agencies which adopt a standard policy about placement and disposition of the case when a child is involved; and (3) including material regarding the children of incarcerated parents in preservice training curricula at police academies and IV-E funded university-based social work programs and related training activities. Recommendations such as these have been made in recent years by police officer organizations, including by the International Association of Chiefs of Police (2014).

**Improve case communication and coordination.** One of the most pressing problems for parents who are incarcerated and who are also involved with public child welfare systems is the lack of communication with caseworkers (Beckerman, 1994; Johnson and Waldfogel, 2002). Unfortunately, this is all too common for several reasons: Caseworkers tend to have large caseloads; prisons are often located in remote locations; and correctional facilities can be intimidating and unforgiving to those unfamiliar with the rules and stringent security procedures. Further, caseworkers often lack adequate training on the value of visitation with an incarcerated parent, particularly when reunification is the ultimate goal. In addition, prison administrators have traditionally limited their role to operating safe and secure institutions, with little consideration given to issues affecting prisoners' post-release outcomes. As a result, many prison

policies and practices actively discourage contact between incarcerated parents and their families, and some prison administrators view the relationship between incarcerated persons and their families as beyond the scope of their mission. Developing, implementing, and monitoring adherence to communication policies regarding the types and frequency of communication between all applicable parties in a case that involves an incarcerated parent and his or her child would be a start to improvements in this area.

**Provide parental legal assistance.** Incarcerated parents are frequently not well-educated about their legal rights (Johnson and Waldfogel, 2002; Norman, 1995; Smith and Elstein, 1994). Often, this lack of knowledge, coupled with barriers presented by both the child welfare and corrections agencies, can lead to circumstances that are considered grounds for termination under state and/or federal statute. Smith and Elstein (1994) note that foster care agencies commonly exclude mothers from initial planning, as well as from ongoing assessments of how well the plan is working. Beckerman (1994) found that almost half of the incarcerated mothers receive no correspondence from their children's caseworker, over a quarter are not informed of their child's custody hearing, and two-thirds do not receive a copy of their child's case plan. Information on communication with incarcerated fathers on these topics is almost nonexistent. Education and timely assistance on these matters for parents could make the difference in terms of their maintenance of parental rights.

**Increase positive parent-child contact during incarceration.** A number of studies underscore the need to increase opportunities for positive contacts in particular between incarcerated parents and their children and within child-friendly settings. A lack of positive interaction leaves parents and their children unprepared for restructuring a relationship upon release (Hairston, 2003). Some key areas of concern to us based on our joint experiences in administration, practice, and/or research in corrections and child welfare include the following. These echo ideas discussed in this volume in Chap. 10.

One of the most obvious recommendations would be to increase contact between incarcerated parents and their children by locating prisons in closer geographic proximity to the families of incarcerated individuals. In fact, during the tenure of the first author within the Oregon Department of Corrections, this was one of the primary considerations for locating the new Coffee Creek Correctional Facility for women in an urban area rather than in one of the proposed rural sites. Beyond this, there is a great deal that can be done to improve visitation facilities, regardless of location, and to make visitation policies and procedures more humane and respectful. Most visitation facilities are chaotic and noisy, and from the corrections perspective, difficult to control. One way of taking pressure off the visitation facilities is to make better use of video technology to augment, but not replace, face-to-face visits. As new facilities are constructed, they should include dedicated video visiting as well as dedicated space for face-to-face visits. These spaces should include comfortable furniture, items for children to play with, and freedom from intrusion by other visitors. During family visits, incarcerated men and women should be allowed to wear civilian clothing and security should refrain from the use of shackles and restraints. *Great* sensitivity must be used when children must be searched for contraband, and all family members and prisoners must be treated with the utmost respect at all times.

In this regard, the security staff assigned to visitation facilities should be carefully screened and well-trained in security techniques that are not frightening to children and intimidating to visitors. Not all correctional officers have the temperament and the values necessary for supervising family visits. Visitation normally occurs during the day shift, a desirable work schedule for most correctional officers. In states with collective bargaining agreements, seniority determines shifts, not necessarily an interest in or an aptitude for the specific duties required. Departments of Corrections should consider sidebar agreements with unions exempting visitation from the post-bidding process (competition

for specific assignments guaranteed by contract), and in return, the provision of additional training and other incentives could be considered for those opting for visitation duty. Finally, an additional key consideration is the issue of special family visitation privileges. These can serve as significant incentives for incarcerated individuals who live in an incentive-poor environment. Incarcerated parents who complete parent training or engage in other prosocial, family-oriented activities should be allowed greater access to family visits.

**Provide support services for kinship care providers.** Many children are cared for by the other parent when one parent goes to prison, although this differs dramatically by gender. According to Glaze and Maruschak (2008), during incarceration, 88% of fathers relied on the mother for the primary care of their children. On the other hand, only 37% of incarcerated mothers relied on fathers as the primary caregivers for the children. Approximately, 20% of children whose parents are incarcerated reside with relatives, most frequently grandmothers (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008). The frequency of placements with relatives varies for mothers and fathers. According to Glaze and Maruschak, about half of incarcerated mothers rely on grandmothers to provide care, and only one-third of incarcerated fathers rely on the child's grandparents. When parents are able to provide care, children placed with relatives as opposed to foster care tend to have better outcomes including fewer placement disruptions and more regular contact with their parents and siblings (Gleeson, 2012). However, kinship providers face a variety of significant challenges that threaten children's placement stability. Most notably, kin caregivers are often older, poor, single, and have unmet medical needs (Ehrle and Geen, 2002).

Given this context, there is a real need for the development of formal supports for kinship care providers, including: (1) providing guardianship subsidies to related caregivers regardless of financial eligibility (some states provide guardianship subsidies only to those kinship providers who are eligible for federal Title IV-E reimbursement); (2) funding of kinship

“navigator” programs to help kinship providers better access services and to better understand the complexities of working within multiple systems when a parent is incarcerated; (3) requiring notification of family members when a related child enters foster care; (4) funding community-based support services specifically geared to meeting the needs of kinship providers caring for a relative whose parents are in prison; (5) requiring that when a child welfare agency is involved, kinship providers be involved in every aspect of case planning; (6) requiring that kinship providers be involved in release planning by the Department of Corrections; and (7) revising statutes to allow kinship providers to enroll children in school and to authorize medical care. In terms of the latter recommendation, the State Child Health Insurance Program and Medicaid are two federally funded medical programs that are based upon the child’s eligibility rather than the parent’s eligibility. In theory, these programs would be readily available to children of incarcerated parents, but in actuality, many kinship care providers face obstacles in registering children for whom they may not have legal custody.

**Expand corrections-based parent skills training and support programs.** Fortunately, improving opportunities for family contact is one of the most inexpensive services institutions can provide incarcerated persons and their families. There are a variety of programs that have been designed to enhance parents’ interactions with their children given the circumstances of incarceration and to help prepare parents for their return home, and there is a small but growing scientifically rigorous literature on their outcomes (see Chap. 13). Programs that not only are grounded in the existing research base on effective parenting but also have been found to produce beneficial effects for parents, children, and families during and after incarceration are particularly appealing. While many prisons, in particular, try parent programs from time to time and offer them to a limited number of incarcerated parents, maintaining and expanding these programs over the long run requires ongoing and creative efforts from multiple quarters, including prison administrative staff and the members of

both the legislative and the executive branches. For example, initial funding for prison-based parenting programs in Oregon came from the state legislature with the support of the Governor. After a few years, a large portion of the funding to continue these programs, as well as to deliver similar community-based parenting programs after release, came from the Title IV-E portion of the Social Security Act that is normally reserved for supporting children who have been placed in foster care and over whom the courts have established jurisdiction. In this example, federal funding was made available through a IV-E waiver program designed to prevent children from entering the foster care system. Parenting programs are also very much needed within jails and community corrections, but in our experience have been few and far between. More work is needed in the development, testing, and refinement of such programs to operate optimally within these unique and challenging contexts (e.g., Eddy, Powell, Szubka, McCool, and Kuntz, 2001).

**Coordinate child welfare case plans with institutional release planning.** Each day across our nation, hundreds of prisoners who have children are released from jails and prisons. The majority will, at some point, resume or assume the role of parent, regardless of their skill, mental condition, problems, or attitude at the time (Travis and Waul, 2003). Without a doubt, some of these parents represent a serious threat to the welfare of their children, and great care should be taken when considering reunification. However, for the majority of families, parental reunification with appropriate supports is the most constructive approach. Maintaining strong family ties during incarceration and post-incarceration is a critical component for successful reintegration for the offender and better in the long run for children.

When appropriate, family members should be included in planning for the release of an incarcerated parent. Including families in transition planning can alleviate both family members’ and incarcerated parent’s fears and concerns, correct unrealistic expectations, and prepare children and parents for new roles. Although prisons are

absolutely necessary to protect the public from dangerous individuals, they are the bluntest of social instruments, and their use often has serious side effects. To mitigate these effects, reentry efforts must focus on the needs of the entire family. In the case of child welfare-involved families that include incarcerated parents, enhanced training and supervision of child welfare workers may be beneficial. Key training issues include: (1) how to use model service agreements that take into account the unique aspects faced by parents in prison; (2) how to assist families in overcoming the difficulties associated with prison visitation protocols; (3) how to utilize prison visitation to help families successfully meet their goals during the family reunification process; and (4) how to take maximum advantage of prison- and community-based resources to assist a parent in successfully reuniting with their child. Unfortunately, creativity in funding such activities is also needed if such an effort is to be maintained over time. Typically, a mix of state and federal funds is needed. For example, the state of Oregon has used IV-E Waiver funds to support their family-based transition services beginning during incarceration and continuing in the community post-release.

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## Conclusions

Our understanding of the effects of American criminal justice policies on children and families is at the early stage of development. As states struggle to learn how child welfare and criminal justice policies combine to affect families, a number of questions remain unanswered. Do children enter foster care as a result of parental incarceration or are child foster care placement and parental incarceration simply two discreet results of issues such as poverty and substance abuse? How does parental incarceration affect intergenerational patterns of crime? What are the best strategies for increasing parental success post-release? In the USA, these and other questions involving the two systems particularly affect families of color (Western and Wildeman,

2009). Research needs to take issues of race, ethnicity, and culture into consideration, and take to task related issues such as potential bias, discrimination, and racism at each step along the way in each system (see Chap. 4, this volume).

While answers to questions such as these are not immediately at hand, it is clear that in the meantime, a new level of collaboration between and within systems is necessary. The correctional officer in the cell block will need to think about the incarcerated individual's return to being a parent in his or her community; the police officer will need to think about who will care for a child left behind after the parent's arrest; the child's social worker will have to think about how to maintain visits with an incarcerated mother, rather than filing a petition to terminate parental rights. A broader consideration of how each system affects not only the individuals involved but their family relations is vital to achieving better outcomes. Complimenting such an approach would be a new level of collaboration between corrections and child welfare systems and researchers so that over the long run, policymakers in both systems will have higher-quality information to aid them in their decision making, including information on alternatives to current practices (see Chap. 16, this volume). A key step toward establishing and maintaining these types of collaborations is for elected officials to require a new approach within both child welfare and corrections, one that is truly in the best interests of the child, his or her family, and society at large.

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# Addressing the Needs of Parents in Juvenile Justice: Systems Change from the Perspectives of Two Change Leaders

# 20

Fariborz Pakseresht and Paul Bellatty

## Abstract

Although there is a growing literature focused on children with parents who are incarcerated in adult corrections facilities, much less is known about the children of youth involved with the juvenile justice system. In this chapter, the two authors, who are leaders in the Oregon Youth Authority (OYA), describe their respective journeys toward the creation of a new way of learning about the youth within their care, including those who are parents, and then using this information to make decisions within the state of Oregon's juvenile justice agency. Transforming a state agency, and the broader juvenile justice continuum of which it is a part, to employ data-informed decision making requires a comprehensive and sustained effort. In addition to asking the right research questions, knowing how to employ appropriate research methods and to use research-derived tools are both crucial to converting research into practice. With new processes in place, the OYA

has been able to address questions not only about how to better serve the juvenile justice population at large, but also how to serve subpopulations, such as incarcerated parents. Although other agencies will need to address different questions, the logic and research methodologies and tools used by the OYA are applicable to other social service systems that intersect with juvenile justice, such as child welfare and adult corrections.

Although there is a growing literature focused on children with parents incarcerated in adult corrections facilities, much less is known about the children of youth involved with juvenile justice. The myriad of juvenile justice systems in the USA serves youth who have committed criminal acts before reaching adulthood. Between 1997 and 2002, there were more than 100,000 youth incarcerated in state systems; in 2015, there were 48,000 (US Department of Justice, 1997–2015). On any given day, many more youth are in the custody of city and county systems. The primary goals of each of these correctional and rehabilitative systems, some of which hold individuals up to the age of 25 years, are both to protect the public and to reduce crime by holding the youth and adults in their custody accountable for their behaviors. Although the intentions of these systems are clearly defined for those in custody, there may be unintended negative consequences for their relations. Responding in the best possible ways to those involved in juvenile justice and to

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their children and families depends to a significant degree on what is known about each and how decisions are made based on that knowledge.

The mission of the Oregon Youth Authority (OYA), our state-level juvenile justice system, as well as the mission of juvenile justice in general, is to help each youth and young adult in our custody to go on to lead a crime-free life *and* become a productive member of their community. This mission is accomplished through treatment, education, and job training services that provide youth and young adults the opportunity to learn personal responsibility and develop the skills and behaviors they need to make positive choices for themselves and their families. Inherent to becoming a productive member of their community includes fulfilling their role as a parent, both now and in the future. Accomplishing these goals is challenging. The needs of the young men and women served by our agency are not only significant, but complex, and the resources available to meet these needs are limited. Thus, one of the primary questions that we have the responsibility to answer on any given day and in any given budget cycle is how to use our limited resources to maximize positive outcomes for each and every youth and young adult in our care.

In this regard, we have found predictive analytic procedures to be useful tools for generating the information that we need to know when making important decisions. Having a data-driven process of decision making coupled with juvenile justice settings and processes that mimic those in the community that young people will return to can be a powerful combination in terms of making a real difference in outcomes. This combination, for example, can be effective for youth who are parents and who are often strongly motivated to change the trajectories of their lives on behalf of their children.

Youth facilities can look, feel, and be like correctional facilities that concentrate primarily on accountability and on preventing escapes. However, from experience, we know they can also look, feel, and be like a college campus, where individuals are focusing their efforts on improving themselves. Over the past few years, OYA has

been reconstructing and re-envisioning our facilities to support improvement through the promotion of personal growth and prosocial success.

In this chapter, we discuss our work to improve decision making with our juvenile justice system. The first author, Fariborz, is a long-time state administrator and the current director of OYA. The second author, Paul, is a doctoral-level scientist who has spent his career working as a researcher within state government and who is the director of research within the agency. We describe the development of a data-informed, research-based approach now used within OYA called the Youth Reformation System (YRS). The driver of the YRS is predictive analytics. The results of ongoing analyses are intended to inform decision making, enhance professional discretion, reduce future victimization, and maximize the benefits of existing resources. This includes decisions about the population in our system as a whole, as well as decisions about subpopulations, such as the parents who are in our custody. The YRS enables us as an agency to better understand where we are, where we need to go, and how we get there. On the pages that follow, we first provide context for our work by describing the population of young men and women that we serve. We then share perspectives on our respective journeys.

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## The Youth Served by the Oregon Youth Authority

The OYA currently serves about 1375 youth, including 810 (59%) in the community and another 565 (41%) in eight close custody facilities (OYA, 2017). Most youth in close custody live within a fenced facility, but some reside in transition camps which may not be fenced. Of the youth confined in an OYA facility or in a transition camp, about 45% have been convicted in adult court and have mandatory minimum sentences, with the shortest of these being 70 months.

In terms of demographics, more than half of OYA youth are White, about 25% are Hispanic, 11% are African American, and 5% are Native American. Only about 14% of OYA youth are young women, specifically about 19% of paroled youth, 13% of probation youth, 15% of non-determinant sentenced youth, and 4% of determinant sentenced youth. Oregon's OYA age profile differs significantly from many other US state juvenile justice profiles. Although only 1% of the youth are 12 or 13 years of age, 10% are 14–15 years, 37% are 16–17 years, 41% are 18–20 years, and 10% are 21–24 years. Many states do not serve older youth and young adults within their juvenile justice system. All close custody youth must leave OYA and move to the adult corrections system before their twenty-fifth birthday to complete their determinant sentences.

Many OYA youth have life histories that include being traumatized (e.g., 45% of female youth and 15% of male youth have been sexually abused), having spent time in foster care (approximately 20%), having been diagnosed with a conduct disorder (approximately 50%), having been diagnosed with another mental health disorder (88% for females and 75% for males), having been diagnosed with a substance abuse or dependency issue (73% for females and 63% for males), or having exhibited suicidal behavior (33% for females and 11% for males). Most of the youth under the care of our agency have parents who use alcohol or drugs (79% for females and 63% for males). Many of our youth also have educational challenges, including between 25 and 33% who are currently receiving special education programming.

Some of the young men and women in our care are parents. Nine percent of male OYA youth and 9% of female OYA youth are the biological parent of a child. At any given time, this translates to about 15–20 young women and 105–110 young men being parents. Of the 560 individuals released from OYA close custody each year, about 50 are biological parents. Beyond these individuals, other youth may have served in parent roles prior to coming to OYA, such a co-parenting the child of their partner.

Being a young parent is difficult and includes a variety of challenges on a daily basis. Being a young parent who is involved with juvenile justice adds an additional layer of challenges. Helping the young men and women in our care, including those who are parents, successfully meet their specific challenges and move forward on a positive trajectory was the motivation behind the development of the YRS.

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## Fariborz's Journey

### Introduction to the Juvenile Justice System

In the fall of 2008, I was working in the Oregon Department of Human Services (DHS) as Special Assistant to the Director, leading organizational transformation for an agency of 10,000 staff working within seven distinct program areas. At the request of a former Director who had been appointed as the Interim Director of OYA, I agreed to temporarily move to OYA and serve as the Interim Deputy Director with the explicit purpose of establishing systems and processes intended to improve practices and outcomes. The primary goal was to assist the agency in recovering from several recent setbacks in order to help OYA better meet their mission.

DHS was substantially larger than OYA, which at that time included only 1100 staff members. The size of the agency and its unified purpose and mission allowed me to develop a more in-depth knowledge of the programs. Additionally, it allowed me to have contact with frontline staff who worked with youth. I soon formed a deep appreciation for the work and found what was taking place within OYA to be more meaningful than anything I had experienced during my 19 years of service with state government. For the first time, I felt I was in a position where I could directly influence the future of a population in need—delinquent youth—while simultaneously contributing to safer communities within my state. This work appealed to me greatly.

One of my early experiences in OYA was learning about the intricacies of a statewide data system—the Juvenile Justice Information System (JJIS)—that connected OYA to every local juvenile department. JJIS was originally developed as a partnership between OYA and the various Oregon counties when in 1996, OYA was removed from the Children Services Department (i.e., child welfare) within DHS and established as its own independent agency. JJIS archived historical and demographic information on every youth who had contact with the system since its inception. Few other states at that time had a unified system similar to JJIS. Given this wealth of information, finding a way to optimally leverage the extensive data in JJIS to assist in decision making that would best serve OYA youth seemed like a vital task. The long-term ramification of a significant change in the relationship between juvenile justice and adult corrections in Oregon was the impetus needed to do so.

Just before OYA was established, in 1995, a state ballot initiative known as Measure 11 was approved by the voters that allowed for youth as young as 15 years of age to be tried as adults. Measure 11 crimes were reserved for the most serious crimes, and the minimum sentence for a Measure 11 conviction was 70 months. Measure 11 also raised the age of jurisdiction of the state juvenile justice system to 25 years and allowed youth who committed severe crimes prior to their eighteenth birthday to finish their sentence in juvenile justice rather than with the Oregon Department of Corrections (DOC). Youth who had longer sentences would be transferred to DOC to serve the remainder of their sentence after their twenty-fifth birthday. Measure 11 status was to be determined by the charging crime and not the conviction crime. Further, youth charged with a Measure 11 offense and convicted of a lesser crime could be “waived.” Although still considered a Measure 11 conviction, the sentence could be less than 70 months. Prosecutors were also given discretion to waive some youth to limit the length of each sentence. Thus, although the Measure 11 determinant

sentencing legislation extended the sentences for some youth, many affected youth could be waived and serve shorter sentences.

The introduction of Measure 11 statutes into law changed the approach of the state juvenile justice system in regard to youth reformation. An early change was to the physical environment of facilities in the new OYA. Fences were erected around OYA facilities, and the agency at large began to adopt a more traditional correctional approach. Though the agency did an admirable job in avoiding two tiers of clients (i.e., juveniles and adults) related to services and treatment, the change impacted both populations negatively. Youth committed as adults now could be transferred to DOC for fights, assaults, misbehaving, and not responding to or refusing treatment. Youth who were committed as juveniles now had to live in a more corrections-oriented environment. For example, previously, youth could go on outings, fishing trips and even overnight trips. All of that ended with the passage of Measure 11. New challenges were ahead, and new solutions were needed to face those challenges.

Early on, OYA had a small research unit that used JJIS data to generate reports and conduct analyses. However, the data were not fully mined to inform decisions and improve outcomes for youth and communities. Shortly after I started in OYA, a research analyst named Dr. Shannon Myrick, who had recently joined the agency, suggested to me that we had untapped potential in research and were not taking full advantage of both our data system and the talent on our research team. She encouraged me to reach out to longtime DOC Research Director, Dr. Paul Bellatty, and seek his opinion about how OYA could better use its research capacity. In talking with Paul, he affirmed that OYA had an abundance of untapped data and a great potential for conducting helpful research. He felt that the development of better internal research tools could lead to better outcomes for youth, families, and communities. Subsequently, a shared services alliance was created with DOC, and Paul was appointed as the Director of Research for both agencies. He and Shannon began developing a



research agenda and associated tools that could help inform OYA decision making.

### **Creation of a New System**

With an expanded data team in place, the work started. One of the first issues that the team addressed related to the connections between the OYA and DOC populations. At that time, youth who were committed to OYA through adult court were in the physical custody of OYA but in the legal custody of DOC. Due to the ease of moving DOC youth into the adult system, the first set of analyses quantified the increase in recidivism for youth transferred from OYA to DOC. The analyses revealed that youth who were transferred to DOC recidivated at twice the rate as identical youth who finished their time in OYA. The fundamental idea was that having data-based information like this in hand set us up to make better decisions. An opportunity to try out this idea arose soon after.

The process of transferring a youth from OYA to DOC was initiated by a recommendation from the correctional and treatment professionals who worked with the youth, approved by the superintendent of the facility, and sent to the OYA Director or Deputy Director for approval. Following this process, in mid-2010, I received a request from the superintendent of one of our largest facilities to approve the transfer of six youth to the DOC for behavioral issues. I had no background in treatment or corrections and therefore no competency to evaluate the request. By that time, fortunately, the research team had extended their initial work on transfers and developed some basic predictive tools. For assistance in my decision making, I sent the list of names to research and asked if they could estimate the expected change in recidivism for individual youth if we transferred them to DOC. What came back was eye-opening and forever changed OYA's practice of transferring youth to DOC for behavior. The answer was delivered to me quickly: a transfer to DOC would increase the probability of recidivism by as much as 138% for five of the six youth. Only one youth was likely

to benefit from being transferred to DOC, but our research department was not convinced we had done our best work with him. I denied all six requests.

With this act, a new era had started in OYA. As an agency, we began not just to realize but to embrace the importance of data and analytics. Managers and staff began to pay closer attention to data and started asking questions before they sent transfer requests to the administration. One result was that transfers to DOC dropped from 41 in 2009 to 3 in 2016. This degree of shift in practice piqued the interest across the agency in data and the possibilities now present for us to actively serve in the role of scientists, to ask and to answer questions. On a broad scale, agency leadership began to engage with our research team in exploring key questions whose answers were vital to us fulfilling our agency mission, including: What should be the capacity of our system today and in the future? Are we serving each youth in the best environment? What should the length of stay be in each part of the juvenile justice continuum? What interventions do youth need to maximize their opportunities to be successful? How do we hire and support staff to work effectively with youth? How do we create environments where youth can be viewed as assets? How do we integrate youth into their communities in ways that support success? How do we know our investments are effective and are achieving the desired results? Seeking and finding answers to these and other questions led to decisions that changed our agency so that we could better meet our mission.

### **Components of the Youth Reformation System**

The search for answers led us to develop what came to be known as the YRS, a data-informed, research-based system that uses predictive analytics to inform decision making, support professional discretion, reduce future victimization, and maximize resources. The YRS has four components that collectively provide answers to questions of import to our particular agency,

namely population forecast, placement and treatment, the program evaluation continuum, and the community context.

The population forecasting component was developed to estimate the number of close custody beds (i.e., confinement beds), the number of residential beds (i.e., out-of-home community beds), and the number of youth best served in the community. The forecasting system estimates the number of youth that should be served in each environment to generate the best youth outcomes. Essentially the forecasting system attempts to associate the proper amount of programming (i.e., dose) with youth needs. For example, this component has generated results that consistently suggest that a limited number of youth benefit from incarceration (i.e., close custody), many youth benefit from residential treatment, and many youth are best served in their own communities.

The placement and treatment component uses service matching to identify the most effective programs and other services for each youth. The intent is to place the right youth in the right bed with the right services for the right amount of time. The placement and treatment component also is used to identify gaps in the existing service delivery system. Youth with low estimates of success for each program or service being offered currently in our system are not served well. Describing who young men and women are and engaging experts to design appropriate programs and services for them is the first step to filling gaps.

The program evaluation continuum component quantifies the effectiveness of each of the programs and services offered to youth in the OYA. The effectiveness of each program or service is assessed using propensity score matching and recognizes the reduction in recidivism attributable to that particular program or service. For example, these estimates can be generated using historical data to quantify a program's effectiveness or can be estimated as though service matching had been used through the use of simulations. Generating different estimates of effects, and exploring and understanding why effect estimates vary across techniques, can be helpful in the decision-making process.

The community context component uses all of the information in Oregon's social service dataset to identify the social determinants that influence risk of coming to OYA. Since 90% of OYA youth have previous social service involvement, each previous social service contact should be considered an opportunity to divert youth from coming to OYA. In addition to identifying the social determinants, the community context component can also identify what happens to youth after leaving OYA: do they graduate from high school, do they earn college degrees, do they earn family wage salaries, and do they become parents on a child welfare caseload? Lastly, the community context component can also be used to identify the particular communities with the poorest and the best outcomes. Within a particular community, social service, education, employment, arrest, and other data can be used to assist in identifying new geographically focused avenues to improve youth outcomes. In our experience, some of the best solutions are developed by local groups to address their own particular needs and problems. Thus, one intent of this component is to translate data into useable information that will support local leaders in making data-informed decisions.

Implementation of new ideas such as those that arise through the application of the YRS required a shift in mindset within the agency. To encourage this shift, OYA leadership launched the Positive Human Development initiative. The intention behind this initiative was to create a culture of success by focusing on multiple targets simultaneously. This starts with a focus on safety and security and then builds far beyond that, including the fostering of supportive and caring relationships, the setting of high expectations and accountability, the launching of efforts to help ensure meaningful participation, and the promotion of long-term community connections (see Fig. 20.1). We thought that changes in each of these complementary areas had the potential to fundamentally change our interactions not only with each other, but most importantly, with the youth we serve. In turn, these changes were hypothesized to improve both the short- and long-term outcomes for these youth, for their children and families, and for our state at large.



**Fig. 20.1** Elements for creating a culture of success

In our experience, supportive contexts at all levels relevant to the work of an agency—for leaders, for staff, for clients, for their families—are vital for success. Missions are met with planning and execution. The ultimate goal of the OYA is to provide a productive environment for change for youth, marked by access to opportunities, the chance to develop new skills, and encouragement and motivation to succeed. Meeting this goal requires an agency-wide, moment-to-moment focus on what is important for success, and the YRS has been a key in establishing and maintaining this focus.

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## Paul's Journey

### Introduction to the Oregon Youth Authority

Prior to my arrival at OYA, I had dedicated my career to using data to help guide state agency leaders as they made decisions. My work began in child welfare and eventually shifted to adult corrections. I helped build a data-informed and

data-driven research unit within the Oregon DOC. When I was invited to join the work of OYA, my initial goal for our team was to enhance internal research capacity by creating a research agenda. The goal then became building the infrastructure that would accomplish that agenda. The agenda focused on supporting data-informed decision making to improve outcomes for youth who have offended. Since that time, the support and openness of the leadership and staff of OYA have allowed the agency to succeed in this regard. My own work in this broader effort has focused first on developing, applying, and refining specific research tools designed specifically to accomplish the goals of each of the components of the YRS and then on working with agency leadership to use tool-generated results in their decision-making processes.

### Keeping Research Tools in Perspective

OYA research tools were developed using Oregon data. Most of the tools provide an

individualized assessment that represents a probability or “risk,” such as the likelihood an individual will be successful, the likelihood an individual will recidivate, or the likelihood someone will be associated with a particular outcome (e.g., revocation). The “risk” estimate for an individual is generated by looking at many similar individuals and asking how many succeeded, how many recidivated, or how many had a particular outcome. With most tools, the score for any given youth approximates a value between zero and one hundred; this implies the likelihood that an individual may or may not succeed, may or may not recidivate, or may or may not be revoked.

In practice, since most recidivism risk estimates are lower than 50%, providing effective treatment and support should prevent a negative outcome. Since most youth have low risk estimates, a negative influence is often a prerequisite to a negative outcome. Estimates of risk can vary substantially for a given individual and are only approximations. Thus, an estimate of 50% may actually range from 40–60%. Research tools can be useful, but will never perfectly “predict” an outcome since all potentially influencing variables are not included in any one equation. For example, situations like positive involvement with sports and the ongoing effects of trauma are often not captured and thus not included in equations, yet both of these factors may influence certain outcomes of interest.

Most good equations represent only about half the story; the other half reflects things not included. In interpreting findings, these missing pieces should be recognized, and professional experience and discretion are required. Thus, given the statistical limitations of the equations, risk estimates should be considered information and should not be considered prescriptive. The use of actuarial risk estimates, which are fundamental in the YRS, represents a significant improvement over traditional risk assessments used in juvenile justice and corrections. These assessments often classify youth into categories, such as “high,” “moderate,” or “low” risk. For example, one problem is that youth near the cut points for each category are more similar to each other than the youth who are at the

opposite ends within a category. More precise risk estimates eliminate the need for categorization. In short, although information generated from equations can minimize bias and be useful when combined with other information, statistically generated estimates should not solely determine any decision.

### **Illustrative Examples of Applying the Youth Reformation System**

In the years since our team started work on research tools for OYA, the YRS has been used to answer a wide variety of questions of importance to the agency and the young people we serve. Implementation of the tools has occurred across the juvenile justice system—at both the state and county levels—and is informing decisions on a variety of levels, from early intervention to prevent youth from escalating to OYA, to identifying the best placement option that would maximize opportunities for youth to succeed, to identifying service gaps and addressing them through new and innovative programs. Some tools enable access to data from partner agencies, including human services and education. With this information, data sets are created that assist in the development of data-informed prevention and intervention strategies. For example, a first step is to identify correlates at various points in the lifespan that increase the risk of youth coming into the juvenile justice system. The bottom line is to find ways to decrease this likelihood and to maximize opportunities for youth to succeed. While most of the work on these tools was done internally, some tools were developed in collaboration with researchers from across the USA. Examples of problems that we have addressed through the YRS are described below.

#### **Where Should Each Youth Be Served?**

Most justice systems assess the risk and needs of those they serve. Risk level is often a key to determining who is incarcerated and who remains in the community. For example, in adult corrections, to avoid overcrowding, jails triage individuals by incarcerating the highest risk individuals

and returning the lower risk individuals back to the community. In theory, incapacitating the highest risk individuals will minimize the number of crimes in the community and reduce the number of victims. In contrast, the Oregon juvenile justice system does not incarcerate the highest risk and allow the lowest risk to remain in the community. Rather OYA asks the question “Where is a youth best served to minimize recidivism?”

For any given youth entering the juvenile justice system, there have been hundreds of similar youth who already have passed through the system—in a sense, each youth has a statistical “identical twin” who shares at least some demographic and social characteristics. Over time, some of these twins were served in the community, some went to residential treatment, and some went to close custody. Better, data-informed placement decisions on the front end can be made when the recidivism rates for specific types of youth in each setting are identified. That is, what is the recidivism rate for youth with certain qualities in each of these settings? By comparing outcomes for similar youth across settings, the state of Oregon can better use available resources to minimize recidivism and hopefully reduce the number of victims. Critics may suggest that the highest risk individuals should be confined. Of note, however, is that nearly all OYA youth will eventually return to the community, even those who are high risk, and most will return within a few months or a few years. If the confinement merely delays the risk to the community and fails to significantly reduce risk, the approach actually may be counterproductive.

Currently, three equations influence individual placement decisions in Oregon. The first equation estimates the likelihood of success in the community; the second equation estimates the likelihood of success if served in residential treatment; and the third equation estimates the likelihood of success if sent to a close custody facility. Every youth being considered for placement receives three estimates—one for the community, one for residential treatment, and one for close custody. At present, each of these equations includes three variables—risk to recidivate, typology (a youth’s profile of needs), and age. Most statistical equations that estimate

the probability of an outcome use many variables to improve the predictive accuracy. Although the additional variables may improve predictive accuracy, we feel the additional variables detract from professional discretion. Predictive accuracy is important but must be balanced with the importance of professional discretion.

Although the simplicity of the equations is beneficial, given the question at hand, agencies can add other variables that improve predictive accuracy and assist with professional discretion regarding that question. For example, trauma is one variable which might be added to identify the best placement environment for each youth. The amount and types of trauma impacting a youth may influence numerous outcomes and may be an important consideration when evaluating certain placement or treatment options. Placing a highly traumatized individual in close custody may actually increase risk. If a youth has similar success estimates for residential treatment and close custody, the preferred placement may be residential treatment. While these decisions must take into account a variety of considerations, quantifying the likelihood of success coupled with professional discretion should maximize the use of the resources to minimize subsequent criminal activity.

### **Typology**

Most risk equations are dominated by static factors that influence a youth’s risk. The static factors dominate because often the best indication of future risk reflects the individual’s prior behavior. Although equations may differ among jurisdictions, similar variables tend to appear in equations with the same outcomes. Despite this, often the “weight” of each factor tends to differ. Those differences reflect such issues as variability in the populations of interest, the reliability of the data, and the scaling of variables. In our experience, the most common “dynamic” factors entering risk equations actually could be considered both dynamic and static. For example, a drug or alcohol problem that has persisted for a decade might be considered more static than dynamic. However, although such a problem may be considered a recurring theme in the life of an individual, the opportunity to change still exists—there is hope that change is possible.

The Oregon risk/needs assessment used in our system includes static and dynamic variables. The major variables of interest are focused on risk. In our analyses across the years, the needs, at least as measured in this assessment, tend to add little to the predictive accuracy of the equation. However, the information of needs provides a wealth of data that are necessary to develop an appropriate case plan for each youth. We talked with researchers around the country about the best way to use the needs data we were collecting. One such researcher, Brad Bogue, used needs data collected in Colorado jurisdictions to generate information that policymakers have found particularly helpful. In this regard, Brad suggested we conduct a cluster analysis with our data to identify particular “types” of youth. We took his suggestion to heart and conducted a set of analyses.

Our analyses identified six typologies for young men and four typologies for young women in OYA. Of note, the analyses we conducted empirically group similar youth together and differentiates those youth from youth in other typologies. To illustrate, much like planets differ in size and distance from other planets, typologies do the same. Thus, the youth on “Earth” are similar, but differ from youth on “Mars” or “Saturn.” Although some youth may be in the space between two planets, most youth are associated with only one planet. The fundamental idea is that knowing a youth’s typology can assist practitioners in making decisions that better serve youth on each “planet.”

The typology we currently employ in our decision making is illustrated in Fig. 20.2. The vertical axis identifies the dynamic domains; the suffix identifies the historical issues (H) and the current issues (C). The red horizontal bars identify risk factors, and the green bars identify protective factors. The length of each horizontal bar recognizes the relative influence of that factor when compared to the other factors. The narrative below the schematic explains the assessment considerations, identifies important information about the case plan, and suggests the treatment approach. Although the narrative is not empirically derived, the experts validating the

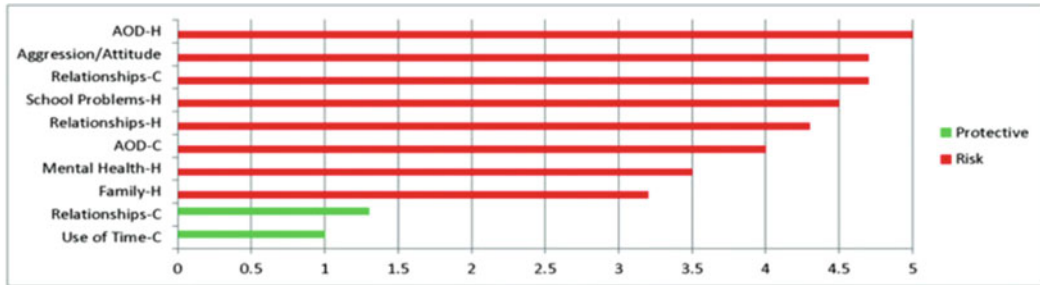
typologies and agency clinicians suggested the best approaches to serving each typology. As with our other examples, when making decisions for the youth in our system, we consider both empirically based findings and professional discretion.

### Service Matching

Connecting resources to outcomes can be expanded beyond the choice of serving a youth in the community, in residential treatment, or close custody. Currently, there are about 30 residential treatment programs that serve youth in OYA. Some programs serve a particular youth subpopulation, and others serve a diverse group representing a variety of youth subpopulations. Historically, parole and probation offices have considered youth needs and characteristics before referring a youth to a residential program. Although this informal decision-making system did appear to improve youth outcomes, quantifying the likelihood of success for each youth in each program was thought to be a strategy that ultimately would lead to further improvements in terms of the appropriate matching of a youth to services, which in turn would improve youth outcomes.

In this work, we decided to apply a similar methodology to that used in our prior work on close custody. After the decision to place a youth in residential treatment, the resulting series of equations (i.e., one equation per program) can identify the best programs for each youth. The equations estimate the likelihood of success for each program for a particular youth. Essentially, the equations ask “How did identical twins do in each of the 30 programs?” Although each program estimate for each youth contains considerable variability, the better programs for each youth can be identified. Again, each estimate should be considered informational and should not dictate the actual placement. The estimates for the residential treatment programs use many variables and identify the youth subpopulations best served by a program. The ability to differentiate between many programs is difficult with a limited number of variables. Further, the eligibility criteria for each program limit the program choices for every youth.





**ASSESSMENT CONSIDERATIONS:** For males with typology A, the most intense needs center on current and historical drug and alcohol use. Refer for alcohol and drug assessment to determine intervention and treatment needs. These youth should also be referred for a mental health assessment to clarify mental health need and/or further assessment. Assessment areas may include but are not limited to trauma, possible underlying factors triggering behavior, current diagnoses, intellectual functioning (IQ), and medication. Initial treatment/service should focus on stabilization based on the assessed needs of the identified youth.

**CASE PLAN ESSENTIALS:** Typology A youth are likely to react negatively to being told what to do. Case planning requires a collaborative approach, however, when developing a case plan, one must be direct and honest with the youth about limits to flexibility in planning and clear about why expectations exist. Once the youth understands these, the youth will be better equipped to assist in developing STGs, LTGs, and interventions that he believes will help him successfully achieve these goals. This increases the likelihood of active participation in case plan activities.

**TREATMENT APPROACH:** These youth tend to respond to punitive interventions with further escalation, reducing the likelihood of positive rapport with staff or desired skill development. These youth can be impulsive and reactive, and are typically skeptical about trusting or relying on others to get their needs met because, from their perspective, they have not been able to rely on others in the past. These youth are frequently angry due to their frustration at not knowing how to get their needs met effectively and/or appropriately and not believing that others are sincere in their willingness to assist. Typology A youth tend to perceive that they have been, and will likely be, treated unfairly. Developing relationships built on trust and respect will be a challenge, but necessary in order for the youth to stabilize and to move forward in treatment. Persons with whom a trusting relationship has been established will be in the best position to model cognitive flexibility and pro social thinking patterns to establish a pattern for positive change.

**Fig. 20.2** Typology A: Male

The implementation of the residential program estimates identified a number of programs who serve two distinct subpopulations—one that is served successfully and one that is not so served. Focusing each residential program on the subpopulation(s) they currently serve well can improve youth outcomes with no new investment of resources. Another by-product of the residential estimates is the highlighting of gaps in program options for some youth. Although most youth have numerous residential programs that can successfully serve their needs, there are some youth where the best estimate of outcomes is much lower than desired. In short, these young men and women do not have preferred residential treatment options within the current system. Identifying who these youth are is the first step to creating options to optimally address their needs.

### Revocation

Some statistical analyses reveal underlying patterns not recognized when generating risk equations. One example is with revocations of parole in the juvenile justice system. Parole revocations are

common for OYA youth. Revocations are intended to reduce recidivism. About half of those revoked to a youth correctional facility are returned for a new offense, and about half are revoked for a technical violation. Knowing who is likely to be revoked may change how youth are served during their confinement. This is particularly true if past revocations increase the risk of future revocations or increase the risk of recidivism.

The development of the revocation risk tool revealed that those who are revoked have, on average, a ten percentage point *increase* in their risk to recidivate. Of course, not all youth are the same. For some youth, the revocation may actually reduce the likelihood of subsequent recidivism; for other youth, the revocation may have no effect on the likelihood of subsequent recidivism. However, for a segment of the youth population, there is clearly a notable increase in recidivism attributable to a revocation. Knowing the change in the likelihood of recidivism for a given youth attributable to a revocation is important. This information may lead parole officers to make different decisions regarding

revocation as well as to provide different services to a particular youth. These decisions may lead to better achieving reductions in recidivism within the population of OYA youth. Revocations and other actions that may increase recidivism must be thoroughly monitored and reviewed. Being proactive by having alternative plans to prevent revocations is an important consideration when serving populations with large increases in recidivism attributable to a revocation.

### **Expanding the Usefulness of the YRS: Applications to the Social Service Continuum**

The Oregon social service continuum includes many silos representing different agencies, including the OYA and the DOC. Although there have been efforts to create a seamless social service system, each agency measures its success using different metrics. Often, child welfare looks at subsequent maltreatment; schools look at graduation rates; criminal justice looks at recidivism; the medical community looks at emergency room visits. Although each agency attempts to change their particular metrics of interest, many of the same families and children are served by multiple agencies. The metrics actually apply across the agencies. Knowing if foster care impacts graduation rate, if being arrested influences income, or if graduating from high school reduces the likelihood of being on welfare might change how each part of the social service system does their work. For example, the criminal justice system could provide parenting skills training to reduce the likelihood of being a parent on a child welfare caseload; the foster care system might limit moves during the school year to improve graduation rates; and simultaneously, schools might devote more time to physical activity to reduce the number of emergency room visits later in life.

With these ideas in mind, the state of Oregon has matched the records of individuals who accessed the social service, education, and criminal justice systems during the past decade. Specifically, data from the school system, child

welfare, welfare, employment, adult and juvenile corrections, the local juvenile departments, alcohol and drug treatment, mental health, and Medicaid have been merged. The resulting “big data” set can then be used to identify the pathways for families and children through the various state agencies. In addition, these data can be employed to discover which characteristics of individuals increase the likelihood of both positive and negative outcomes of keen interest to public health (e.g., felony arrest, complete high school, have a family wage job).

Analyses of the merged data found that the key variables associated with an increased risk of coming to the OYA are previous alcohol and drug treatment, previous mental health treatment, time in foster care, and receiving medical assistance (Braun, 2014). Further, involvement with self-sufficiency was found to decrease the risk of subsequent OYA involvement. Farther along the development spectrum, the key variables associated with increased risk of being convicted of a felony as an adult include involvement with the OYA, involvement in alcohol and drug treatment, and to a lesser extent, indicators of self-sufficiency, mental health, medical assistance, and a history of foster care (Racer, 2015).

Knowing the variables associated with a negative outcome can influence how families and individuals are served. The ability to recognize trajectories toward negative outcomes early in life, or early in the involvement in one system, can then be used to help divert individuals from getting involved with other systems, such as the criminal justice system. Since most individuals (i.e., greater than 80%) involved with the criminal justice system access social services prior to their convictions, each time someone is served by a state social service system represents an opportunity to change that individual’s trajectory in a more positive direction.

Due to the YRS, and the application of tools from the YRS to the various types of state agency datasets available in Oregon, the OYA now has the ability to recognize the optimal environment (i.e., served at home, served in residential treatment, or confined to close custody) for every youth being served by the juvenile justice

system. For example, it turns out that the youth best served in the community have a social service history—a history that is different than youth best served in residential treatment and different than youth best served in close custody. In turn, researchers can use population level information, such as the best placement settings for youth currently served today, and the social service histories of these youth, to estimate the number of beds that will be needed in OYA in the future. For example, if child welfare is a common pathway for many OYA youth, all else being equal, an expanding child welfare population today implies that more juvenile justice beds will be necessary in the future. Knowing the risk of needing a future residential or close custody bed for children younger than 12 years can help the juvenile justice system prepare for the future, but more importantly, this information challenges each of the other service systems in the state to find ways to change the expected future and generate outcomes for youth that do not include involvement in OYA.

### **Identifying When Prevention Programs Should be Offered**

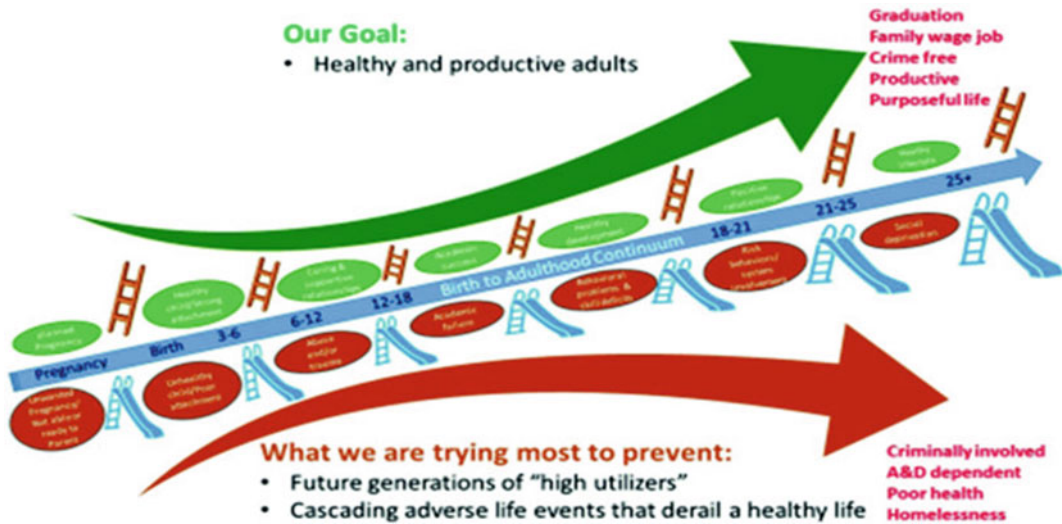
To find ways so that the predicted future does not come true, data from social services, criminal justice, and education can be used to identify when prevention programming should first begin for children and families (see Fig. 20.3). For example, there are many jurisdictions which provide services to limit the number of youth who become gang affiliates. To help understand the phenomena of gangs in Oregon better, individualized data from numerous agencies were merged with data recognizing gang affiliation. The data were analyzed by grade level—all tenth graders were analyzed together, all eighth graders were analyzed together, and all sixth graders were analyzed together. Models for tenth graders easily differentiated gang affiliates from non-gang affiliates; the analyses also identified the variables associated with gang membership. The analysis for eighth graders also differentiated gang and non-gang affiliates. However, as we examined younger and younger cohorts, the ability to separate gang affiliates from non-gang affiliates became more

difficult. Predicting which ten year olds will become gang affiliates is not as accurate as is possible when using data on 15-year old youths. If the third-grade analysis can differentiate gang and non-gang affiliates, yet the second-grade analysis cannot differentiate the two groups, prevention programming to minimize the number of youth joining gangs should begin around the second grade or earlier.

### **Identifying Programs with the Greatest Impact**

Multiagency datasets can be used to identify the social and demographic variables associated with negative outcomes. Knowledge of these variables can then inform decision making about how to best serve families and children. Findings from these datasets also can be used to assist in focusing the efforts of a state on those factors that influence multiple outcomes. If one dataset includes multiple negative outcomes (e.g., correctional involvement, child welfare involvement, multiple emergency room visits) and if one variable is associated with each outcome, making changes to improve that one variable may have a positive effect on each outcome. For example, if the Head Start program significantly decreases negative outcomes in terms of child welfare contacts, parental involvement with the criminal justice system, and child emergency room visits for “high-risk” families, increasing the enrollment of such families into Head Start seems like a very promising state investment.

There are other potential benefits of merging data from multiple social service systems. For example, OYA has historically concentrated on recidivism as an agency metric. However, the agency wants the youth who come to their attention to become productive citizens, not just crime-free citizens. Thus, knowing how youth do in multiple domains after leaving OYA is important, such as whether youth access the welfare system, whether they become parents on a child welfare caseload, whether they earn adequate incomes, and whether they complete college. Each of these is an important indicator of success given the mission of OYA. If a large percentage of OYA youth become parents on a child welfare caseload, evidence-based parenting



**Fig. 20.3** Birth to adulthood continuum

classes may be an important service to provide. If many successful OYA youth ultimately become plumbers or carpenters, expanding the vocational training program within the agency to include more youth might be beneficial. Answering these questions is possible with existing data if the data are made accessible and if expertise in and resources for data management and analyses are available within the agency.

### Using Analytics Locally

Beyond population-level questions for the agency at large, big datasets can also be used to generate information that can benefit specific communities in the state. In our experience, some of the best programs we have seen are grassroots efforts that cater a particular service to a particular subpopulation. Unfortunately, such programs are often unstudied and thus are not "evidence-based." Finding the expertise and resource to conduct research on their outcomes is difficult, if not impossible, and even if a study is conducted, the length of time it takes for results to become available can be years. Decisions need to be made in the meantime about youth.

For example, many constituents in a particular neighborhood were rotating between the community and prison. Although there were programs available to those transitioning back to the community, the portfolio of programs provided by the state did not address the most important issue that community leaders had identified for stemming the tide: employment. Local leaders focused their efforts on creating such a program and, through their own research, found that many who returned to the community from prison and who learned a trade did not recidivate. With this information in hand, they were able to advocate with state leaders to change the state-supported services portfolio and improve local outcomes.

Providing local leaders with the data they need to recognize issues, develop solutions, and investigate outcomes complements the efforts at the state level to improve services for individual young men and women. Although many issues impacting communities are well known by local leaders, a research-based analysis of available data from relevant systems can provide clarity to complex issues. Persistent issues which have not been resolved with previous efforts are difficult to

solve without quality data and research and research; leveraging state resources like multi-agency datasets and YRS-like analytical tools can help.

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## Closing Comments

Over the past decade, the data-informed and research-based Youth Reformation System has led to positive impacts for the youth served by Oregon's juvenile justice system. It has contributed to creating a positive culture that supports both employees and youth. It has been used to assist leaders in making informed decisions. It has helped to shape professional discretion to be an evidence-informed process rather than simply an anecdotal one. However, while each of these efforts has helped to transform OYA for the better, some youth subpopulations have yet to fully benefit. The current YRS tools were developed for crucial decisions relevant to the population at large; they are designed to benefit the "average" youth in OYA. In contrast, specific youth subpopulations may differ from the "average" youth accessing the system, and the further youth are from the average, the less likely they may be to benefit from current juvenile justice efforts. Notably, since many empirically derived tools allow practitioners to generate information about individuals, future efforts must also recognize and focus on questions relevant to unique youth subpopulations and how such subpopulations access multiple systems. Key new areas of interest given the foci in this volume are the intergenerational effects of incarceration on OYA youth and outcomes for incarcerated parents and their children during and following OYA involvement. Consideration of parenthood with the various YRS predictive analytic tools can be used to improve outcomes for this and other subpopulations.

The juvenile justice continuum is just one part of a larger continuum that reflects the path from birth to adulthood (see Fig. 20.3). Some individuals will become involved in the juvenile

justice system during their development from childhood to adulthood; some will become parents while involved with the juvenile justice system. If the juvenile justice system can identify the best programs and services for every youth and family along the continuum, the opportunity to exit the juvenile justice continuum and become a productive citizen is maximized. If the juvenile justice system can improve outcomes for the children of incarcerated parents, the system can prevent more than one recidivist. If all agencies used research tools to improve the likelihood of success, the safety net system could be used to better focus resources on individuals during their time of need for the amount of time that is needed. The goal is to move individuals as quickly as possible toward more productive lives.

The judicial system utilizes incarceration to promote community safety and promote accountability for the individuals involved. However, the effects of incarceration influence more than those confined. Incarceration also changes the lives of families and changes the lives of the children of incarcerated parents. While we have been employing the Youth Reformation System to help improve our system for many years now, one subgroup we have not focused on to date is incarcerated parents. In the future, the inclusion of birth and death certificates within our existing multiagency dataset can help us to begin to quantify the effects of parental incarceration. Tools with the various components of the YRS can be brought to bear to identify and improve service needs specifically for incarcerated parents and then examine outcomes of the programs that are attempted.

In closing, there is no doubt that incarceration can have numerous detrimental effects on some individuals. However, incarceration can also provide opportunities for introspection, change, and growth. We believe the numerous initiatives that are active now within OYA because of the Youth Reformation System provide the opportunity for all youth for personal growth and advancement. For youth with powerful reasons to change their trajectory in particular,



incarceration can provide the opportunity to step back and reevaluate their choices and consider different options. For youth with children, these opportunities—coupled with the life-changing impact that becoming a parent can have on a young man or woman—can help negate the effects of incarceration, and may set an individual on a new and more productive path toward adulthood. We believe that a positive agency culture combined with the provision of opportunity and support for change can dramatically influence the trajectory of parents who are incarcerated. Data-informed decision making is a key part of that culture and is one way that state agencies can make a more positive difference in the lives of the people they have the responsibility to serve. As our state develops the capability and capacity to be data-informed, eventually every crucial decision point along the developmental continuum will have a group of research tools that support practitioners and

policymakers in making decisions that will result in significantly better outcomes for youth, adults, families, communities, and society at large.

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# About Us, for Us, with Us: Collaboration as the Key to Progress in Research, Practice, and Policy

# 21

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## Abstract

While much of the previous research on incarceration focused on demographics, recidivism, and other important topics, the devastating effects of mass incarceration on children and families were largely overlooked for the first decades of this phenomenon. Recently, however, there has been an increased focus on the loved ones of those who are incarcerated, especially their minor children, yielding a growing body of research on and about children with incarcerated parents, much of it drawing from large data sets to study the effects of a parent's incarceration. This chapter aims to demonstrate that while much of this research is tremendously valuable and has advanced both a national attention to and an initial examination of the many facets of this crisis, in order to fully understand, serve and support these children, we must consult the true experts—those who have experienced being the child of an incarcerated parent. Arguing for an inclu-

sive, respectful, humane, and humble approach, we assert that researchers, practitioners, and policymakers must regard collaboration as a vital piece to any undertaking concerning children with incarcerated parents. In essence, we argue for research, practice, and policymaking that honors and practices the tenet: “nothing about us, without us.”

It is now well known (or at minimum, well-written about) that the USA has the highest rate of incarceration in the world, with more than two million people currently incarcerated, and close to an additional five million people under some form of correctional supervision (US Department of Justice, 2018). Millions more have a past criminal conviction (Brennan Center for Justice, 2016) and have spent some time under the supervision of the criminal justice system. Because of this wide-scale reach, it is becoming more and more challenging to find someone who has not been touched in some way by incarceration, although as Davis (2003) points out, “we tend to think of the prison system as disconnected from our own lives because the alternative (realizing how close any of us are to becoming incarcerated) would be too agonizing” (p. 15).

As we all live in and attempt to distance ourselves from this unprecedented and unparalleled carceral state, language becomes another way to create space between ourselves and those in the justice system. Words such as “inmate,”

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“ex-offender,” and “criminal” serve to otherize, even though the lines are becoming increasingly blurred. As the chapters in this book demonstrate, it also is widely acknowledged that mass incarceration is not just about those who are incarcerated, but also about the children and families who are left behind. As Wakefield and Wildeman (2014) observed, “Decades of research, in part motivated by the prison boom in the United States, tells us the image of the inmate as an isolated loner is simply false” (p. 6). Yet despite shifts in focus and in understanding that in large part have been driven by the sheer and unsustainable magnitude of mass incarceration, the growing recognition that incarceration has a ripple effect on children, families, and communities has not yet led to the widespread inclusion of those directly affected in public conversations about incarceration. These critical voices and their expertise are often absent from the framing of the issues, the research, the recommendations, and the program and policy development related to both the incarcerated and their children and families. Here, we argue for the inclusion of those directly affected by incarceration, including the perspectives of parents, children, and caregivers, through an increase in partnerships with researchers, policymakers, and practitioners who are interested in or play a role in their lives. While there is overlap in these two groups, researchers and policymakers who have firsthand experience of parental incarceration or justice involvement themselves may choose not to disclose this experience nor to bring their personal insights and expertise to inform the work. We hope that this situation, too, will change.

Our work together on this chapter exemplifies what we are advocating. One author is an educator and researcher who is also the child of a formerly incarcerated parent. Currently, she is using her own life experience as a base from which to conduct research with children of parents who are incarcerated, and she hopes that the information gathered will be useful to adults who work with these children, particularly teachers, guidance counselors, and social workers. Another author is the child of an incarcerated

father who has been in federal prison for nearly 30 years. Her personal story, coupled with her professional research experiences as a Soros Justice Fellow ultimately led her to start her own non-profit, *We Got Us Now*, an organization which seeks to engage, educate, elevate, and empower children and young adults impacted by parental incarceration as well as their supporters and allies. The third author is a practitioner who has spent the past two decades working with children, their parents, and their caregivers within the context of incarceration. Now, as part of the *Osborne Association*, a New York-based organization which seeks to transform lives, communities, and the criminal justice system, she works with those directly impacted by incarceration to change and improve policies that affect their lives.

Experiences with parental incarceration and its aftermath connected us as authors. This connection enabled the opportunity for a rich variety of experiences and perspectives to be shared. Through our advocacy and passion for this topic, we have not just built a rapport, but relationships that allow for this chapter to be written with mutual respect, love, authenticity, and hope. Through our combined lenses, this chapter will address what we see as pressing issues for researchers, practitioners, and policymakers who are connected to children directly affected by incarceration. In short, this chapter examines what it means to be *about us, for us, and with us*.

The previous chapters in this volume attest to the fact that we can no longer ignore the effects of incarceration that go beyond the walls of prisons and jails and into families, communities, and the network of interpersonal relationships that form our society. Part of the collateral damage of mass incarceration is that it has irreparably harmed families. When an individual receives a sentence, they are not the only one being “punished.” Everyone who loves or depends on that individual is also penalized. As Travis and Wall (2005) assert, “one impact is clear – prisons separate people from their families. Prisoners are the children, parents, siblings, and kin of untold numbers of individuals who are

affected in different ways when family members are arrested, removed, incarcerated, and ultimately returned home from prison” (p. 119).

Although the majority of those who are incarcerated are parents of minor children, invisibility continues to characterize family experiences related to prison and jail. The trauma, stigma, and shame associated with the topic of incarceration in general, and having an incarcerated parent in particular, contribute to this silent, hidden epidemic. The statistics, as discussed throughout this book, are alarming. According to the National Resource Center on Children and Families of the Incarcerated, around 10 million children in the current US population have experienced parental incarceration (Rutgers University—Camden, 2014). Notably, Turney and Goodsell (2018) comment that this epidemic is experienced to significantly different degrees within different populations:

Recent estimates suggest that by age 17, 24.2 percent of non-Hispanic black children and 10.7 percent of Hispanic children—but only 3.9 percent of non-Hispanic white children—will experience parental incarceration. When we add social class to the mix, we see even more striking disparities. For example, among children of parents without a high school diploma, 62.1 percent of non-Hispanic blacks are exposed to parental incarceration, compared to 17.4 percent of Hispanics and 14.6 percent of non-Hispanic whites. Parental incarceration is also concentrated among children in rural areas, children with unmarried parents, children living in disadvantaged neighborhoods, and children whose parents have been previously incarcerated or have a history of substance abuse or violence. (p. 149)

These findings add important nuance to work that has drawn attention to the racial disparities within the criminal justice system and how the effects of such get transferred to children (Chap. 4, this volume). They also illustrate how analyses that examine the interaction of factors such as race, class, and geography can uncover an even deeper degree of disparity among certain subpopulations in our country. Yet as haunting as these statistics are, they are underestimates of the impact. Notably, they do not include “children” who are no longer under age 18 years. These individuals stop being “counted” as children

although their parents may remain incarcerated into their own adulthoods. Due to the lengthy sentences that are part of the US mass incarceration landscape, this situation is not uncommon. For example, the Bureau of Justice Statistics estimated that in recent years, more than one-third of minor children with incarcerated parents, or 700,000 boys and girls, will reach the age of 18 years while their parent is incarcerated (Glaze & Maruschak, 2010). Two of the authors of this chapter continued to have incarcerated parents well into their own adulthoods.

When parents are incarcerated, they can no longer provide the care nor fulfill all of the parenting responsibilities they fulfilled while they were physically free. Frequently, fathers who are incarcerated have children who are raised by single mothers, while mothers who are incarcerated have children who are raised by a grandparent, aunt, or extended relative and/or may be in or may enter foster care. A 2015 report by the US Department of Health and Human Services found that “Children with mothers who are incarcerated in state prisons are more than five times as likely to reside in a foster home or agency than children with fathers who are incarcerated in state prisons” (Glaze & Maruschak, 2015; p. 5). These arrangements are to be expected, as 77% of incarcerated mothers reported that they provided the daily care for their children prior to incarceration, while 26% of fathers reported the same (Elmalak, 2015).

To illustrate, when her father was incarcerated, one of the authors remained living with her mother, which was the arrangement prior to his incarceration. However, she is aware through her own research that it is not always the case that living situations remain the same after incarceration. Not only do a diverse set of care arrangements exist in the beginning of a parent’s incarceration, but they often shift over time. For example, while interviewing children with an incarcerated parent, this author encountered one set of siblings who had been in various living arrangements due to parental incarceration. At one point, all four siblings were in foster care because both their mother and their father were incarcerated. However, this did not remain

consistent. One sibling was adopted. Another sibling remained in foster care. A third moved in with her aunt locally and the fourth sibling left to live with another aunt several states away. Today, while their father is still incarcerated, their mother is not, yet the siblings remain separated. Regardless of the caregiving situation, for a child, incarceration can remove a variety of valuable and close family members from their family equation, beginning with their parent but extending to other caregivers, siblings, and close relatives.

Once a parent is incarcerated, it becomes increasingly difficult to participate in family life in many ways, both obvious and subtle. The parent can no longer be present for special events and milestones such as birthdays, graduations, or weddings. Even funerals require special permission and one that is often not given. Two of the authors experienced this firsthand. One author's aunt died unexpectedly. Her father requested permission to attend his sister's funeral, but his request was denied. Although seemingly just a bureaucratic decision from the standpoint of the prison, it was heartbreaking for her father and the rest of their family. In addition, he was also denied permission to attend either of his grandparents' funerals.

Another author experienced her paternal grandmother becoming very ill with cancer and eventually dying. Her father requested a furlough to attend his mother's funeral. His request was approved, but with two significant conditions: (1) he had to pay for the travel of two correctional officer escorts for the day, and (2) he had to wear a high-voltage electrical belt around his waist and neck that would be set off if the escorts perceived that he made a "false" move. Already overcome with grief from the loss of her grandmother and not wanting her father to appear—after nearly 30 years away—at their family gathering in shackles, and coupled with the fear that her father's life could be in jeopardy through electrical shock, the author was rightly concerned about his presence. Ultimately, her family jointly decided with her father that he would not join them at his own mother's funeral.

Unfortunately, stories such as these are not unusual. Many families are forced to grieve without their incarcerated loved ones. In turn, our loved ones who are incarcerated are forced to grieve alone. The failure to be present for meaningful events can lead to feelings of disappointment, loneliness, and resentment for both the parent and the child, regardless of age and into adulthood.

Beyond missing out on significant life events such as these, incarcerated parents also miss out on the day-to-day events of parenthood, a situation that can profoundly affect the parent-child relationship. Those of us who have the opportunity to live with our children may take for granted the daily shared moments that foster a bond between parents and children, such as giving children hugs when they cry, caring for them when they are sick, sharing laughs over silly moments, tucking them into bed at night, checking homework, and making breakfast or dinner. For some people, it is not until these experiences are gone that their true importance is recognized.

Certainly, the profound experience of "missing out" is not unique to incarcerated parents. There are a variety of family situations (e.g., divorce) and jobs (e.g., military, long haul trucking, fire fighter) that physically separate parents and their children and sometimes for lengthy periods of time. The difference for the children in these situations is that society recognizes the loss of the parent's daily presence and establishes mechanisms to ameliorate the child's grief, support their well-being, and maintain their attachment and relationships. For example, many schools and communities have support groups for children of divorced parents and trained therapists and literature abound in this area. The Department of Defense invests significantly in programs designed to help maintain parent-child relationships when parents are deployed (US Department of Defense, 2015). In contrast to children of deployed parents, children of incarcerated parents are left by society to fend for themselves and in the shadows, for fear of judgment and lowered expectations of

their own prospects should someone discover the kind of parental separation they are experiencing. The release of Sesame Street Workshop's *Toolkit for Children of Incarcerated Parents* in 2013 was groundbreaking for just this reason: There had not previously been a mainstream, positive, non-judgmental acknowledgment that the children were out there and in need of support (Sesame Street Workshop, 2013).

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## The Parent–Child Bond

While the nature of jails and prisons makes it impossible for an incarcerated parent to be present physically, there are steps that can be taken to promote the relationship between the parent and child. One of the best ways is through in-person parent–child visits (see Chap. 10, this volume). Public discussion and research often highlight the “trauma” of visiting, with this usually being attributed to a child seeing their parent incarcerated. However, from our perspective, much of the actual trauma that is experienced comes from what surrounds the visit: the ways that visiting policies and protocols are typically carried out in prisons and jails and the amount of contact and quality interaction (or lack thereof) that is allowed during visits. In most jails and many prisons in the USA, visits are non-contact and seeing your parent through a glass and not being able to touch or hug them are traumatic for a child. This perspective—that what is traumatic are the policies and practices related to visiting—is increasingly being supported by research. As stated in a 2017 report on parent–child visiting by the Urban Institute (Cramer, Goff, Peterson, & Sandstrom, 2017): “Research indicates that parent–child visits are most beneficial when they allow for physical contact, are offered in a child-friendly setting, are part of a family strengthening program, and provide proper emotional preparation and debriefing before and after (Sack & Seidler, 1978).”

There are many factors that limit or prevent visits in the USA. A key issue across most states is the distance from home to prison. Parents who

are incarcerated often serve time in jails or prisons that are either far away and/or are not easily accessible by public transportation. According to most recently available data from the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) on parent–child distance, 62% of incarcerated parents in state prisons and 84% of parents in the federal system live more than 100 miles away from their children (Mumola, 2000). The Bureau of Prisons considers someone to be “proximate” to family if they are within 500 miles (Federal BOP Program Statement No. 5100.08, Chap. 7, p. 4). For families with limited resources, these distances are immense, adding to the emotional toll that visits take. In one author’s experience, her father was incarcerated in more than nine separate facilities during his 20-year sentence. One of the facilities was over ten hours away from his hometown and family. Another author also experienced this type of inconsistency in residential location, compounded by distance. Her father has been incarcerated in eight different federal prison facilities located in various places across the USA. This was not because of his behavior, as he never received any infractions for misconduct, but rather due to the sheer length of his sentence.

Examinations of the effects of parent–child visits on children should also consider the grueling process required to make a visit happen. The time the child is actually with the parent during a visit may be quite positive, but the process of getting there and back may be what is not in the child’s “best interest.” The various aspects of visiting, such as the effects of traveling long distances to visit an incarcerated parent should be closely examined by researchers and policymakers, including through the collection of qualitative data from children themselves. Despite all of this, while visits can be physically, emotionally, and mentally draining on a child, many children unequivocally choose to visit over not having the chance to see their parent in person.

While travel distance clearly invokes higher costs to a family, the related financial costs of visits are often not discussed. Wakefield and

Wildeman (2018) state, “Maintaining family contact with incarcerated parents leads to additional and significant costs. One study found that families of inmates may spend up to one-third of their income on cards, letters, and visits” (p. 2). When there are limited or no public transportation options to and from a facility, which may be the case for prisons in remote rural locations, families may spend hours traveling and use all the extra money they have available as a family on gas and/or tolls (not to mention the possibility of having to rent a car in the first place). Once they arrive at the prison, they may then find out that visiting hours have recently been changed or that the facility is on lockdown and will remain that way until further notice or that they are not wearing correctly colored clothing. In addition to the intense disappointment and emotional hurt and pain these types of circumstances cause, they also send the message to children that they are not important, that those who are keeping their parent away from them really do not care about them, their parent, or their family. This realization can have deep and lasting effects.

Even when a family does not encounter any problems that prohibit a visit, other hurdles may arise. Long lines, extended wait times, and degrading treatment, such as requiring girls and women to remove their “contraband” underwire bra, can make visiting an unpleasant experience. One author recalls having to sit in a room prior to being able to visit her loved one while dogs were brought into sniff her and her hands were swiped so a chemical check could be made to see if she had recently handled drugs. Of course, she could have refused this treatment, but then she would not be allowed to enter the facility. On another occasion, one author was almost refused admittance to a facility after a seven-hour drive because her tan sweater was too close in color to the khaki jumpsuits people incarcerated in the prison were required to wear. Luckily, she had an extra sweatshirt in her car. Over time, difficult circumstances such as these may deter caregivers and children from visiting because they do not want to feel as if they, too, are being incarcerated or policed. The result may be detrimental to the well-being of a child, limit or eliminate in-person

parent–child contact, and further the destruction of the parent–child bond.

There are other options. In contrast to the norms in the USA, some other countries exert more effort and emphasis on making visits a pleasing experience for all involved (see Chap. 18, this volume). In Sweden, for example, visits take place in living room-like settings where the parent who is incarcerated is free to move about the room and interact with their family as they would in the free world. Furnished apartments are available where incarcerated individuals can have overnight and weekend visits with their loved ones, incarcerated parents are entitled to a free weekly phone call with each child, and there are other services within the facilities that are directly focused on helping incarcerated parents maintain relationships with their children (Mulready-Jones, 2011). In some jurisdictions outside of the USA, some services are unavailable unless the child is directly informed about his or her parent’s incarceration. Access to these types of experiences seems to promote the idea that honesty is a key in parent–child relationships. In other countries, additional practices have been adopted that further encourage family interaction. In the UK, for example, there is a national effort to ensure that parents who are incarcerated are placed within 50 miles of their home, and there are play areas within most correctional facilities designed to help keep children entertained during visits (Mulready-Jones, 2011).

While neither Sweden nor the UK has a “perfect” correctional system and their systems and geography are admittedly much smaller, attempts to employ family-friendly strategies on a broad scale highlight the idea that maintaining the parent-child relationship within the context of parental incarceration can be viewed as important by a nation or a state and that there are other more humane ways to approach the experience of incarceration. Within the USA in New York State, where all three authors reside, in-person contact visits are the standard within the 54 state prisons (although not within most county jails). This longstanding practice in New York supports the notion that no child should have to visit their



parent through a barrier where they cannot see or touch their parent or be hugged by them. Unfortunately, New York has yet to include living in proximity to children in its prison assignment calculus. Given the large geographic area of the state, this means that a parent may end up in a prison that is inaccessible by public transportation and 10 h away from their children.

Currently, there are a number of efforts underway in various US states to change situations such as this and to safeguard parent–child visiting. For example, the New York Initiative for Children of Incarcerated Parents, a statewide collaborative of government and community-based organizations that is coordinated by The Osborne Association, is working with policymakers on a number of legislative bills. One bill, introduced by Assemblymember David Weprin and sponsored by Senator Velmanette Montgomery, would require that in-person visits are available to all people incarcerated in New York State prisons (codifying this practice into state law) and increase visits at medium security prisons within the state to 7 days per week. Another bill introduced by Assemblymember Carmen De La Rosa and sponsored again by Senator Montgomery would reinstate the prison visiting bus program, which provided free transportation for visitors to prisons statewide from 1973 to 2011. Additional bills are in process to implement proximity, ensuring that parents would be placed in the prison within their required security level that is closest to their children, including one that focuses on proximity for incarcerated women and another that establishes a proximity pilot before rolling this practice out system-wide. These bills are critical to pass into law at a time when the opportunity for parent–child physical connection through in-person visiting is threatened by private prisons and technology companies who offer video visiting as a replacement for in-person visiting.

As the largest incarcerator in the world, the USA would do well to follow the examples of other developed countries and their approaches to maintaining parent–child contact throughout a term of incarceration. One good start would be to formally recognize visiting as a human right.

Indeed, the right of a child to visit his or her parent is claimed as fundamental in the *Children of Incarcerated Parents' Bill of Rights*, a declaration developed by young people with incarcerated parents in San Francisco in 2005, namely “I have the right to speak with, see, and touch my parent” (SFCIPP, 2005). Maintaining the parent–child relationship during incarceration can be a protective factor, helping to minimize the harm that may be caused by the numerous risks that often arise while a parent is in prison or jail (see Chap. 10, this volume).

The meaning of visits for children of incarcerated parents can be multilayered and complex. For example, many years ago, one of the authors worked as the coordinator of a visiting program that brought children in foster care to visit their incarcerated parents. During this time, a 9-year-old girl who was in foster care—and who happened to have a supportive caseworker, a supportive foster mother, and a supportive therapist—went to visit her father in jail. When she boarded the bus that would take her to the facility, the author noticed that the child was serious and exuded none of the typical joy or lightness of her 9-year-old self. The author dropped her and her caseworker off for the visit and then came back two hours later. With the visit ended, this little girl was now skipping high and happy as she approached the van. When asked how the visit went, she said joyfully, “He’s not mad at me!” It turns out that in her mind, her father’s incarceration was her fault. Although everyone else in her life had told her she was not to blame, it was only when her father told her this directly that she believed it. Only her own father could relieve her of this burden of thinking his absence and incarceration were somehow her fault. This speaks deeply to the powerful connection between children and their parents and the opportunities that visiting can present to reassure children and enable them to return to focusing on being children.

For some children, visiting is not an option because they do not know where their parent is. In a protective response to the many negative assumptions that are typically heaped on entire families because of one of their members being

incarcerated, children are often lied to about the incarceration of their parent. Well-meaning caregivers may decide that the children are not emotionally ready to handle the truth or want to spare them the pain of social judgment. They may lie about the parent's circumstance in an effort to prevent or ease the child's trauma. Sometimes, the child is told that the parent is away on vacation, at work, in the military, or at college (see Poehlmann, 2005). While the intention may be well-meaning, the deception often backfires. The lie, when revealed, erodes trust and can foster shame, and it can separate the children and their families from valuable resources and a supportive community of people who are there to help. Fortunately, there are a growing number of organizations, programs, and services across the country that provide support for families dealing with incarceration. However, they cannot be utilized unless the child knows that she/he is affected by incarceration and if families feel safe to disclose their circumstances and reach out. These organizations can connect children with other children, or caregivers with other caregivers, in similar situations who can provide support.

Deceit about where the incarcerated parent resides can also affect the child's relationship with the parent who is incarcerated. If a child believes their parent is away due to a situation where visiting is not possible, he or she may become angry at the parent for not taking them along as well (e.g., on vacation) or for not coming home for visits (e.g., from college or work). During one of her research projects, one author met a young woman who experienced both of her parents being incarcerated simultaneously. She was raised by her grandmother and was told that her parents were in college. Growing up, she despised school and never wanted to go to college because she believed that when you go away to college you can never come back home again to see your family. If her grandmother (i.e., her caregiver) had access to a supportive organization, she would have been given the proper language, information, resources, tools and support to address the truth with her granddaughter. If this had happened, years

later, perhaps the thought of college would not have frightened her granddaughter.

Beyond such unintended side effects, a lie about parental incarceration, once discovered, may have a severe impact on the child-caregiver relationship. The child may feel betrayed by their caregiver for failing to be honest with them. This may lead a child to have long-lasting feelings of resentment, anger, and mistrust, even into adulthood; in other words, such deception may erode children's attachment relationships (Poehlmann, 2005). In contrast, when a child is told an age-appropriate truth and is able to maintain a connection from the onset of a parent's incarceration, these experiences may lessen the feelings of abandonment, depression, and confusion a child feels when a parent is removed from the home.

It is possible to have a connection with a parent while he or she is incarcerated in prison or jail. For example, despite currently serving a life sentence, the father of one of the authors has been adamant about maintaining the parent-child bond. Despite the prison walls, he has consistently maintained a connection with all four of his children through phone calls, letters, birthday cards, holiday cards, emails, and visits. In her words:

Our parent-child bond was solidified each time we visited him. It enabled us to see Dad, touch, hug and kiss Dad and talk to Dad for longer than the 15 min he is allotted for calls. Although it was extremely painful having to leave Dad – it often did take a day or two to emotionally cope with the experience of leaving – being connected to him was a necessary and vital component to my siblings and I successfully thriving in the world. We are now all adults and unfortunately, our father continues to remain incarcerated. Nonetheless, Dad maintaining the parent-child bond relationship did not stop with just his children, it has trickled down into his grandchildren's lives and they all know and love him immensely. It is Dad's consistent determination to remain connected that has built a generational parent-child-grandchild bond that is unbreakable.

Often the desire to sustain a parent-child relationship is strong on both sides. Parents who are incarcerated frequently seek creative ways to stay involved in their children's lives. This includes calling and emailing when possible, but also sending small tokens of affection such as hand-drawn cards. Even when the child acts like

these objects are insignificant, they are important and deeply meaningful in the present and far into the future. Ashley, a 13-year-old who resides in New York City, has a dad who is serving a 15-year sentence. Although she feels that her dad is somewhat of a stranger to her since he was sentenced when she was so young, she still saves everything he sends her. He often sends his drawings, and Ashley frequently jokes about how it seems that everyone in jail or prison is an artist. Ashley has kept every single card her father has sent her.

The desire of parents who are incarcerated to be and to serve as parents is truly tested by the various school and social service systems in which their children are involved. Unfortunately, workers in these systems may not be well-versed in navigating the criminal justice system. When children are in foster care, for example, the stakes are very high for parents as their parental rights are in jeopardy. For a family, navigating the Family Court and child welfare systems while incarcerated can be difficult to insurmountable. Incarcerated parents are completely dependent on gatekeepers to bring their children for visits and to “produce” them to the court. Many mothers and fathers who are incarcerated may want to participate in their children’s educational experiences by being present via telephone for parent teacher conferences or Individualized Education Plan meetings. However, their participation may be hindered by a lack of knowledge about their rights, compounded by an inability to take action due to jail or prison restrictions and/or the lack of an advocate on the outside who can assist them. Limited resources or lack of supportive and cooperative personnel at schools may make contact seemingly impossible.

As discussed in Chap. 12 of this book, the dedication to parenting can be observed in many mothers’ desires to have their infants live with them when possible during incarceration, although this option is extremely limited in the USA and restricted to very young children. Elmalak (2015) states:

The number of prison nurseries is growing, but such programs are still relatively rare. Although every state has seen a dramatic rise in its women’s

prison population over the past three decades, only nine states have prison nursery programs in operation or under development, namely California, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Nebraska, New York, South Dakota, Washington, and West Virginia (p. 1087).

Elmalak notes that the average maximum stay for children in US prison nurseries is 12–18 months. In contrast, in Sweden, mothers can apply to the Ministry of Justice for approval to have their children live with them until the age of 5 years, which coincides with the beginning of primary school.

In our own experience, we have known many parents who are incarcerated who have made a concerted effort to maintain a connection to their children despite prison walls. The value of this connection is widely recognized. Ann Adalist-Estrin, the Director of the National Resource Center on Children and Families of the Incarcerated, emphasizes that supporting the parent–child relationship through incarceration “can be a valuable part of healing” (Adalist-Estrin, 2014). This is true not only for the child but for the parent as well. The US Congress stated in the context of re-enacting the Second Chance Act of 2007 that “there is evidence to suggest that inmates who are connected to their children and families are more likely to avoid negative incidents and have reduced sentences.” There is also evidence that parents are less likely to recidivate when connected with their children and families (Harris & Gilhuly, 2017; Chap. 10, this volume). In short, the value and importance of having a parent–child connection cannot be overstated.

Given this, we must work to shift the prevailing and limited perspective on parental incarceration and children toward the notions that most incarcerated individuals want to parent their children and that every child has a right to have a relationship with his or her parent, incarcerated or otherwise. In this regard, visiting is not the only area in need of reform relevant to the parent–child bond. Fortunately, there are a variety of efforts underway to adjust policies and practices within the criminal justice system to minimize the potentially harmful effects on children. These include efforts to implement child-sensitive arrest

protocols such as is happening in Albany, New York, and is recommended by the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP, 2014). This also includes efforts to implement the use of family impact/responsibility statements which would take into consideration the parent's (defendant's) parental role and responsibilities at sentencing (Cramer, Peterson, Kurs, & Fontaine, 2015). Other areas in need of attention and reform include recognizing the emotional roller coaster that the parole process is for children and how their needs are seldom considered and creating re-entry policies and practices that support the reunification or reconnecting of parents and children and minimize the enormous stressors that can accompany this particular aspect of re-entry on top of all other stressors during this period.

In short, the ability to maintain the parent-child bond is vital, but is currently challenged at each of the stages of the criminal justice system. Certainly, phone calls, letters, emails, and video conferencing assist in this regard, but most important in our view is the ability to have in-person visits which serve as a reassuring aid to the anxiety associated with parental incarceration and can, in many ways, be beneficial to the emotional well-being of a child. Thus, as unpleasant as it may be for caregivers and the incarcerated parent to be honest about the broader circumstances, from the onset and in an age-appropriate way, it is vital to help the child successfully navigate parental separation due to incarceration. We must honor and respect a child's rights and view each child as a capable and deserving human being, including ensuring that they have supportive opportunities to connect with their parent and providing them with the tools to navigate the stigma and bias they are bound to encounter in their daily lives as a child of an incarcerated parent.

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## Stigma

Although stigma or "disgrace" is experienced by those incarcerated, it is of the utmost importance to understand the negative connotations that

engulf incarceration for all involved. The stigma of incarceration extends to and is shared by the child and family. In one author's experience, she finds that people often marvel at her accomplishments once they find out she has a parent who is incarcerated. They are amazed by her ability to "overcome" her "situation," which is presumed to be that she has both an absentee parent and that she had a chaotic home life during her growing up years. While she appreciates the acknowledgment of her accomplishments, she does not view herself as a victim or overcomer of great personal obstacles and wishes her accomplishments to be celebrated on their own merit and not tainted with sympathy or pity.

Similarly, in the research of one of the authors, she found that a commonality among children and young adults with incarcerated parents is resilience. Contrary to the prevailing discussion in the popular media, children and young adults who have been impacted by parental incarceration are extremely resilient. Often, they have had to grow up quickly and to assume roles and responsibilities beyond their years, including the caretaking of other family members. They also may be closed emotionally as a way to cope with the trauma, stigma, and shame of parental incarceration.

The experiences they have because of their situation may lead them to develop certain beliefs that serve to limit them further. One author experienced this firsthand when a 16-year-old girl in The Osborne Association's youth leadership program was asked about her future aspirations. She said that she did not know what she wanted to be because she now had to think of another career. When asked what she meant, she shared that she wanted to be a foreign language interpreter for the government, but that her teacher told her that because her father was incarcerated, she would not be allowed to work for the government. The Osborne staff were able to correct this damaging falsehood and to support her in aspiring once again toward her goal. We wonder how often this happens to other children of incarcerated parents, who, in contrast, have no one in their lives to correct potentially goal-destroying and inaccurate responses from certain

adults who serve in positions of authority. While children with incarcerated parents are resilient, experiences such as this also tax or drain this resilience unnecessarily.

Since many children are encouraged not to share with others that their parent is incarcerated, they must deal with many issues on their own. Keeping secrets from important people in their daily lives, such as teachers and friends, can be stressful. Events such as upcoming parent–teacher conferences which their parent cannot attend can produce panic and anxiety. Even meeting the parents of their new boyfriend or girlfriend can cause an awkward situation if the seemingly harmless question “What do your parents do?” happens to arise. Language can also increase the stigma and isolation that children feel. If they hear their parent being referred to as an “inmate,” “convict,” or “offender,” it further distances them from feeling safe to talk about their feelings about their mom or dad. Ultimately, the stigma that a child faces when a parent is incarcerated is not their own, but instead is an inheritance from their parent’s situation, an unwelcomed and unwarranted response from those around them. Shame and fear are understandable feelings for children, but more productive ways to respond must be found, and children may need help in discovering these. Combating the stigma of incarceration is extremely important not only for those who are incarcerated, but for those who love them, including their children.

An issue much less discussed is that the trauma, stigma, and shame of parental incarceration do not magically disappear once a child turns 18 or 21 years old. The emotional, mental, and traumatizing impacts of parental incarceration during childhood can continue into adulthood. In one of the authors’ experiences conducting national outreach to highlight the insights of children and young adults with incarcerated parents on her digital platform, *We Got Us Now*, she found that some young adults continue to feel alone, shamed, and stigmatized by their parent’s incarceration. This finding has been reported elsewhere but is not often discussed (e.g., Urban Institute, 2008). While young adults impacted by parental incarceration are

often able to lead outwardly successful lives, the lack of community or resources to support them with their unique struggles has caused many of them to bury the trauma, stigma, and shame deep within.

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### **Research: Shaping Opinions, Paradigms, and Policies**

While relationships among researchers, policy-makers, and practitioners are not linear but symbiotic, we share our thoughts on research first because it is an extremely powerful tool for generating information that can make a difference in the lives of the children of incarcerated parents and among those who care for and work with them. The findings from research often inform the decisions of policymakers and practitioners. Research findings can serve as the foundation for a call for action or, at minimum, begin to help coalesce a framework for change. However, research findings can also reinforce and perpetuate previously held notions and existing practices that are not ultimately productive. In this regard, research, despite its mission to be objective, factual, and truthful, is not immune to the subjectivity of humans, prevailing paradigms, and politics. This is true at all stages of the research process. Similar to a Rorschach test card, two researchers may look at the same set of findings and come to radically different conclusions. Therefore, it is imperative that researchers, from the outset, have a clear understanding of their goals as well as the possible implications of the framing of their research designs and the generated results prior to publishing their work. It is important that they articulate transparently and clearly the background, methods, and findings from their work so that others can understand what they did, and did not do, over the course of their investigation.

While some researchers seek to investigate brand new questions through new approaches, many researchers often build upon previously existing research. A key essence of research is the replication of methods and findings. While it makes sense to avoid “reinventing the wheel,”



and existing research can provide valuable information, it is also important to evolve and ask new questions. The approaches and findings of the past must be thoroughly examined for their limitations as well as their strengths. Early research on children with incarcerated parents was groundbreaking. The pioneering researchers who conducted this work are to be commended for their desire and willingness to analyze a seemingly “new” and growing issue that affected a significant number of children. However, now that there is a significant body of literature, past findings and the framing of contemporary studies should be examined not only within changing social contexts, but also within the context of new and relevant information and useful methods from other fields that have not traditionally participated in research related to the children of incarcerated parents.

A particularly promising area in this regard, and as noted in several chapters in this volume (Chaps. 17 and 18), is participatory action research (PAR). The fundamental principle in PAR—of involving those “studied” as partners in the shaping of the research questions as well as in all aspects of the research process—has important implications for future research relevant to the children of incarcerated parents. Most previous research studies in the field did not include people with the experience of being the child of an incarcerated parent as active players in any stage of study, whether that be the conception of the ideas that generated the project, the collection of data, or the analysis and interpretation of the results. Much of what we “know” about children of incarcerated parents is based on the analyses of cross-sectional, large sample, limited question surveys by researchers who may be quite removed from the phenomena they are studying. Often research questions with this population have simply been borrowed from the existing and limited set of studies that were conducted in the past. The end result is that knowledge that is generated may be quite restricted in its validity, reliability, and relevance to real life. In contrast, when researchers partner with those they seek to learn about, they may increase their potential to ask insightful and meaningful questions. In fact,

researchers would probably find ways to develop, approach, and study research questions in ways they never considered before simply because they choose to reach out and collaborate with someone with lived experience.

In academia, researchers are often considered “experts” in their field. However, there is a growing movement to challenge and shift this thinking and additionally value the expertise of those who are providing the researchers with their information. Those who have experienced being the child of an incarcerated parent are the undeniable experts on their lives. While researchers play an important part in telling aspects of their story, it is often not their own story. Without the personal experience, any individual, including a researcher, can only be an incomplete storyteller (albeit with data and training and presumed “objectivity”). Opening up to a broader set of inputs and embracing non-traditional partners and research methodologies has the potential to greatly enrich the value and relevance of the stories researchers can tell. In turn, this may deepen the meaning of these stories for others and expand their implications for future actions of significance to the children of incarcerated parents. In short, if the goal of some researchers’ work is to practically contribute to improving the well-being of children with incarcerated parents, researchers would benefit tremendously from the input of those who have experienced parental incarceration. We hypothesize this to be true at each step of the research process, from developing research questions to deciding on a research design, to analyzing and interpreting findings, and to shaping recommendations for future work.

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## **Policymakers**

An increasing number of policymakers have taken an interest in incarceration and the damage that it causes to children, families, communities, and society at large. As we discussed earlier, there are several Senators and Assemblymembers in New York State who are currently sponsoring bills to support the incarcerated and their loved



ones. This is not unique to New York: Many state representatives are drafting legislation to help ease the destruction that mass incarceration has caused. Beyond the states, the federal government at large has also seen new legislation concerning this topic. In 2017, Senators Cory Booker (D-New Jersey), Richard Durbin (D-Illinois), Kamala Harris (D-California), and Elizabeth Warren (D-Massachusetts) drafted a bill titled *The Dignity for Incarcerated Women Act*. This bill seeks to advocate for basic decency in the treatment of incarcerated women, such as the provision of menstrual tampons and pads free of charge. The bill also addresses the need for protecting and maintaining the parent-child bond, specifically as it relates to incarcerated mothers whose numbers have skyrocketed since 1980 (Carson, 2015). On a promising note, this bill was drafted with the input of women who had been incarcerated.

Our recommendation to policymakers as they develop ideas for future legislation and policies would be to do what Senators Booker, Durbin, Harris, and Warren did. Ask us. Make the choice to engage the community or communities that will be impacted. In short, if something is about us and supposedly for us, then it needs to be *with us*. Just as people mock a room full of men making decisions about the reproductive rights of women, we take equal issue with a room full of people who have never been impacted by incarceration making decisions about those who have. Policymakers should be informed, and research findings can be extremely valuable, but as we mentioned before, research should not simply be taken at face value nor seen as the only expert source. The people behind the research need to be at the table as well. Research is conducted within a context, and information is needed about that context to understand the findings. To optimize their ability to interpret research findings, policymakers must gather information from a variety of sources, including their constituents with lived experience.

As we did above with researchers, we challenge policymakers to shake up the status quo and develop new and innovative ways to

approach the problem of mass incarceration. This will require them to examine their own biases and to value incarcerated individuals and their loved ones as human beings who are worthy of both consideration and decent care. This may require them to think beyond their voter base for future elections, especially in places where formerly incarcerated individuals have been stripped of their constitutional rights to vote. Policymakers must return to carrying out their most important job—to serve the people in their district and to make the best decisions for each of their communities as a whole.

This means considering the needs of ALL people, not just some. This means recognizing that the incarcerated and the formerly incarcerated and their families and children are part of their constituency. Over the years, the essence of the statement “the greatness or health of a nation can only be determined by the way it treats its most marginalized citizens” has been attributed to a variety of world leaders, including Mahatma Gandhi and Nelson Mandela. Regardless of who originally said these particular words, what is important is the strength of their message. This aspiration to “greatness” should be of the utmost importance to all policymakers, and in our framing here, “greatness” is directly tied to how we treat and care for the children of incarcerated parents.

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## Practitioners

Working with children is a complex job. It can be fulfilling yet draining, joyful yet heartbreaking, enlightening yet overwhelming. When trauma such as parental incarceration is added into the equation, these conflicting feelings can increase tenfold. Most people who enter a profession that involves working with children initially do so with passion, empathy, and a desire to help others. Many in society view people who work with children as noble and altruistic, and while this perspective usually does not translate into higher pay, many people still choose to engage in this work. Given this, we enter our recommendations with acknowledgment that this work is

not easy and with gratitude for those who make it their career.

When working with children, one of the first things we all must do is challenge the hierarchical nature of child–adult interactions. This is an imperative to researchers, but it takes on particular importance when it comes to the role and work of practitioners. The idea that we, as adults, are somehow smarter, more insightful, and even more eloquent than children needs to be dismissed. As Tsabary (2010) writes, “to enter a state of pure connection with your child, you can achieve this by putting aside a sense of superiority” (p. 2). Practitioners should challenge themselves to view the children they work with as the experts on their own lived experience and adjust their practices both to make room for and to invite in this expertise.

Educators, especially principals and classroom teachers, must make the fact of parental incarceration a matter of importance to them. Given that at least 1 in every 14 children has experienced having an incarcerated parent (Murphey & Cooper, 2015), teachers with a roster of 30 students can expect that at least two of their students has an incarcerated parent at some point during the school year. Because mass incarceration in the USA cannot be separated from systemic racism, teachers who work in schools with a majority of Black or Latinx students, for example, may have more than two students in their classroom who are affected. Principals and teachers should seek training on anti-racist and restorative practices to ensure their own expectations of children are not lowered (Dallaire, Ciccone, & Wilson, 2010) and that their classroom management strategies do not replicate punitive systems.

The absence of a parent can impact both a child’s academic performance at school and their overall social emotional state, and educators should be well-versed in ways to help children and families who are experiencing incarceration. Unfortunately, many are not. Few teacher preparatory programs mention parental incarceration, and unless an educator has been directly impacted, they are unlikely to be knowledgeable. This is also true for foster care caseworkers and

children’s mental health providers, as well as other professions where the topic of parental incarceration remains absent or minimally mentioned. This situation must change.

Educators need to take the initiative to bring this topic to the forefront in classrooms. Assistance in this process can begin with new teacher training, extend with teacher continuing education, and be supported by school boards, superintendents, principals, fellow teachers and school counselors, and parents and students themselves. It requires not only thoughtfulness, but in some circumstances, bravery. Incarceration is still a taboo topic in many places. This is evidenced by some of the backlash Sesame Street Workshop received when they introduced a new “muppet” with an incarcerated father (e.g., Dockterman, 2013). However, as practitioners, we must fight against this sort of response, sharing information that includes children’s voices and experiences, research, and resources to counter uninformed and inaccurate biases and assumptions. Tools such as *Visiting Day* by Jacqueline Woodson (2002) as a read-aloud can open up students within a classroom to new opportunities in understanding, engagement, and conversation.

One author experienced this firsthand at a school in Brooklyn. She had written a children’s book that included a child with an incarcerated parent, and a teacher friend read it in her fourth-grade class. The author then went to the school for a “meet the author” day and was overwhelmed by the children’s reactions. Not only were the children excited and engaged, but their comments were profound. As the author shared that the inspiration for the story was her own life, one of the children shared that her teacher once told her that “if we want to see ourselves in stories, then we need to write our own.” As this young Black girl conversed with the author (who is also Black), they had a shared sense of what it means to be able to tell your own story, which is especially rare and difficult for women of color, who are largely ignored by society. After the class was over, many students crowded around the author and began sharing stories of relatives who had been incarcerated: fathers, mothers, aunts, uncles, and cousins, and

their experiences became new and acceptable topics of conversation. Students who did not even know they shared this experience joined in the discussion. The result was beautiful, and it began with a book and a conscious decision that this kind of story not only *deserved* to be but also *needed* to be heard aloud.

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## Language and Implications

One of our recommendations that applies across the board—to researchers, to policymakers, and to practitioners—is to be conscious and mindful of language choices when speaking and writing about incarceration. It is important that all people working in the fields that connect with the incarcerated and their families make a deliberate choice to use humanizing, people-first language. Instead of using the terms “inmate” or “offenders,” consider using terms like “person who is incarcerated,” “justice involved individual,” or simply “parent.” Each of these shows respect both to the person who is incarcerated and to their loved ones. Instead of “felon” or “ex-con,” consider using “formerly incarcerated individual” or “returning citizen”—these terms work just as well, and again, demonstrate respect. Similarly, replacing the word “visitation” with “visits” or “visiting” is recommended, as “visitation” only exists within systems—primarily child welfare, family or criminal court, or the juvenile or criminal justice systems. Visits or visiting are what all families do with each other. One author was told years ago by young people in foster care, “Normal people visit each other. You don’t go visitate your Grandma. Why do we get ‘visitation?’” In a 2017 report on visiting for children with incarcerated parents, the Urban Institute made the conscious choice to not use the term “visitation” explaining it this way: “By using ‘visits’ and ‘visiting,’ we hope to foster a more natural dialogue around parent-child visiting.” (p. 5)

When we use certain terms, we reinforce the connotations behind those terms. For those of us whose work is connected to children of incarcerated or their formerly incarcerated parents, it is extremely important for us to be aware of this.

When we use terms with negative connotations, we “otherize” and show disrespect, whether intentional or not, to those we wish to serve. When we show disrespect, we may lose the chance to build a relationship and bond with a parent. We then miss the opportunity to be of service to them and to their children.

We recognize that language is always evolving. In a few years, the terms we propose here may seem outdated and need to be replaced. We should be continuously aware of how we speak, and we should seek to learn the best ways to communicate, now. One way to do this is to be in communication with and continually learn from those with lived experience: “Be conscious of the language you use. Remember that each time you speak, you convey powerful word picture images” (Ellis, 2007). When researchers speak and write, they should make conscious language decisions. When policymakers speak and create bills, they should make conscious language decisions. When practitioners work with people who are directly affected by incarceration, they should make conscious language choices.

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## Shifting the Narrative

As the spotlight on children with incarcerated parents continues to grow and evolve, how the researchers, policymakers, and practitioners engage with this relatively untapped community of knowledge will be paramount. Already and encouragingly, a growing number of researchers and practitioners are focusing on resilience. They are now documenting the successes and potential of children with incarcerated parents rather than only their adverse outcomes. We know from our own life experiences as researchers, advocates, and practitioners that for every story of doom and gloom, there are many more stories of resilience and success that must be told. Tell these stories.

One surefire way to make sure that the narrative shifts is to include those who have lived experience. This is beginning to happen today in various ways. Some illustrative examples of inclusive research practice and/or researchers who are themselves directly affected are

highlighted here. Sarah Zeller-Berkman and Chesa Boudin have both conducted and published research and essays about the effects of parental incarceration on children and both also experienced their parents' incarceration. Zeller-Berkman is a firm believer in and a national expert on PAR with young people (Zeller-Berkman, Munoz-Proto, & Torre, 2016). The Ella Baker Center produced a 2015 report titled *Who Pays?: The True Cost of Incarceration on Families*, which partnered with diverse, directly affected communities and trained community partners in PAR. Research questions, processes, and analysis were conducted by families with an incarcerated loved one. *Project What!* and *The Osborne Association* have produced materials that were created in collaboration with justice-impacted individuals. One of the authors is currently conducting a study whose participants are exclusively children who currently have an incarcerated parent. She hopes to use as much of the direct language from these children as possible and use her platform as a researcher to highlight their voices. Additional researchers advocate for or practice qualitative research to highlight the experiences and voices of those directly affected, including Joyce Arditti who has made important contributions to the literature in the areas of visiting and resilience (see Chap. 9, this volume), and Donald Braman, who has conducted extensive fieldwork and interviews. On a broader scale, the editors of this book, J. Mark Eddy and Julie Poehlmann-Tynan, have worked for many years to advance understanding and bring this topic the recognition it deserves.

On other fronts, many advocacy groups are actively partnering with policymakers to work for change that will benefit children of incarcerated parents. The importance of this cannot be underestimated, as these groups bring people with lived experiences to the forefront. For many policymakers, a meeting with an advocacy group is the first time they have interacted with a justice-impacted individual. Advocacy is also reaching out to broader communities through a variety of means. For example, *We Got Us Now*, an organization founded by one of the authors, has started a movement to take the conversation

about incarceration from a local to a national discussion. Over the last two years, they have spearheaded and produced the Google-initiated #LoveLetters digital video campaign for Mother's Day and Father's Day to show the unbreakable bond between a child and their incarcerated parent. As a compliment to #LoveLetters, their 2018 Mother's Day campaign actualized the opportunity to maintain a connection for a child and their incarcerated parent by offering a free digital postcard for children to send to their incarcerated moms for Mother's Day.

Last but not least, there are many practitioners who may never see their names in print or be asked to speak at an event, but who work with the children of incarcerated parents and their family members, whether in prison or out, with authenticity and compassion, day in and day out. Creating new partnerships between such frontline workers and innovative and socially conscious educators, mental health specialists and other practitioners, and researchers and policymakers would increase the quality of the outcomes and solutions developed and change the dialogue that generates the initial questions that are asked. Expanding the people who are at the table when challenges are identified, solutions are explored, and decisions are being considered and made has the potential to improve the quality and effectiveness of those decisions, whether that be in the realm of research, practice, or policy.

We are hopeful that as the lines between those directly affected and those who are the researchers, practitioners, and policymakers blur, that change will come for the better. As new understandings disperse, the directly affected people among these groups of professionals will hopefully feel safe enough to disclose themselves as such. This will enable yet another new set of conversations. In the future, we are hopeful that resilience and assets will receive greater attention as factors that both reduce risk and promote positive outcomes and that the narrative and framing about the children of incarcerated parents will shift in positive ways. Shifts that reduce stigma, shame, and isolation and that create a safer context for children to self-identify, receive

support, and fulfill their potential are very much needed. Research generated from the premise of “nothing about us, without us” has the potential to build on the positive contributions of research to date and to take us all in innovative, effective, and meaningful directions. We conclude with hope, and we salute those who move in their professions and fields *in collaboration with* those they study, serve, and/or advocate for, and we challenge those who are not there yet to think about sharing power and consider new sources of expertise and understanding.

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**Part V**  
**Future Directions**

# Policies and Practices for Children of Incarcerated Parents: Summarizing What We Know and Do Not Know

# 22

Bryce Peterson, Lindsey Cramer and Jocelyn Fontaine

## Abstract

A growing body of research shows that a vast number of children in the USA have had a parent incarcerated in prison or jail. Numerous studies also indicate that these children may experience trauma and other detrimental outcomes that can be associated with their parents' incarceration. However, there is little empirical research on the policies, practices, and programs for children that might mitigate the harmful outcomes associated with parental incarceration. This chapter discusses the gaps in the current knowledge around policy and practice, such as the lack of evidence on the efficacy of programs for parents detained in local jails or in other stages of involvement in the criminal justice system, as well as the limited understanding of how interventions may affect children, their caregivers, and the incarcerated parents differently. This chapter then discusses some of the promising interventions for incarcerated parents and their children, such as parenting classes, visitation, and mentoring. Based on the current state of

the field, we conclude this chapter with proposed recommendations for research, policy, and practice.

Not surprisingly, the scope of parental incarceration and its impact on children are major concerns among correctional administrators, policymakers, and researchers. A large and growing body of research has examined the degree to which parental incarceration leads to negative outcomes for children (see Chaps. 5–8, this volume). Though it is difficult to isolate the effects of parental incarceration from a host of related individual and family characteristics (e.g., race, neighborhood, and socioeconomic status), the extant literature shows that losing a parent to incarceration can be traumatic and disruptive for children (Adalist-Estrin, 2006), leading to insecure attachment, behavior problems, and other negative outcomes (e.g., Poehlmann, 2005; Wakefield & Wildeman, 2013). Further, children of incarcerated parents often experience economic strain and financial hardship (Geller, Garfinkel, Cooper, & Mincy, 2009; Phillips, Erkanli, Keeler, Costello, & Angold, 2006), and residential instability and homelessness (Foster & Hagan, 2007; Wildeman, 2011) due to the loss of a resident parent or caregiver (Brazzell, 2008). Children of incarcerated parents are also at risk for major depression and attention disorders (Phillips, Burns, Wagner, Kramer, & Robbins, 2002); poor sleep and eating behaviors (Jackson & Vaughn, 2017); low academic performance

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(Murray, Farrington, & Sekol, 2012; Wright & Seymour, 2000); and antisocial, delinquent, and criminal behaviors (Murray & Farrington, 2005; Murray et al., 2012). Thus, parental incarceration can be either the cause of or can exacerbate a myriad of challenges in children's lives.

While the knowledge base on how parental incarceration affects children is growing, much of this research is focused on children with parents incarcerated in state and federal prisons or where we do not know the type of corrections facility where parents are located. Limited are studies that explore the impact of other forms of parental involvement in the justice system—such as arrest and detention in jail—on children's lives. Parental arrest, for example, poses a risk to a child's immediate physical safety and their long-term well-being. When children witness a parent's arrest, they not only see their parent (sometimes forcibly) removed, but they also witness their parent's confusion, embarrassment, and disempowerment (Poehlmann-Tynan, Burnson, Weymouth, & Runion, 2017). This can cause children to feel helpless and vulnerable (Wright & Seymour, 2000). Although there are no comprehensive estimates on the number of parents arrested or the number of children whose parents have been arrested in any given year or jurisdiction, previous studies have found that approximately one-third of parents in state and federal prisons report that their children were present at the time of their arrest (Mumola, 2000). Even if a child is not physically present during their parent's arrest, a child whose parent is arrested may still be at risk of losing their resident parent or primary caregiver.

In addition, there is limited information on whether short-term separations due to parental incarceration in jail lead to different challenges for children as compared to longer-term parental incarceration in prison. Results from one study, which partially separated the effect of jail incarceration from prison incarceration, indicate that the impact of parental jail incarceration is at least as traumatic for children as parental imprisonment (Cho, 2010). Prior research has also shown that the period of initial incarceration, which is typically when a parent is placed in a local jail

facility, and the period immediately following release are particularly stressful times for children and families, and that stress is heightened if a parent cycles in and out of jail repeatedly (Davies, Brazzell, La Vigne, & Shollenberger, 2008; Muentner et al., 2018; Wildeman & Western, 2010). Scholars have also suggested that the uncertainty and ambiguity in the relationships between justice-involved parents and children are heightened during the process of adjudication, conviction, and sentencing (Arditti, Lambert-Shute, & Joest, 2003). Notwithstanding the importance of the aforementioned evidence, additional research on the impact of a parent's involvement in the early stages of the justice process on children is warranted.

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## Implications for Policy and Practice

To mitigate the harmful effects of parental justice involvement and incarceration on children, many justice agencies and community-based organizations have developed and implemented a variety of practices and policies for parents and their children. Described in greater detail below and in Chaps. 12 through 15 of this volume, these include parenting classes, visitation, mentoring, family programs, parental arrest protocols, family impact statements, parent-child communication policies, and caregiver support. Though these interventions are not intended to eliminate the negative outcomes associated with parental incarceration, they can help remove barriers to parent-child interaction and communication; offer therapeutic services and support to parents, children, and caregivers; minimize the stress and confusion children face while they navigate their parents' incarceration; and equip caregivers and incarcerated parents with useful skills to repair or maintain their familial connections.

Despite the availability of practices and services offered to children and parents, we have identified several limitations in the current understanding of policy and practice. First, there

have been few empirical investigations into the effectiveness of these interventions, and many of the evaluations that have been conducted lack adequate data and methodological rigor. For example, several studies have relied on pretests and posttests with small sample sizes to determine the effectiveness of a program or service. Only a few studies have employed both large samples and experimental or at least quasi-experimental methods (e.g., regression or propensity score matching). Therefore, it is difficult to attribute any changes in children's or parents' outcomes in these studies to a particular intervention.

A second limitation of the existing research is the almost exclusive focus on policies and practices for parents incarcerated in prisons. Given that parents in prison are usually serving sentences of at least one year, there is a substantial amount of time to work with them in prison and offer them and their children and their caregivers services. However, practices implemented at earlier stages of involvement of the justice system (e.g., arrest and jail detention) can address some of the trauma children experience immediately after their parents' arrest and entry into the system and mitigate harms that can accumulate throughout their parents' justice involvement.

Finally, most evaluations in this field have focused on capturing parental outcomes, with fewer examining the effects on children. For example, as described in more detail below, visitation may lead to positive outcomes for parents, including improved behavior and well-being in prison (Cochran, 2012; De Claire and Dixon 2017) and reduced rates of recidivism (Mitchell, Spooner, Jia, & Zhang, 2016). However, visiting parents in a correctional facility can also cause children to feel anxious, especially when the visiting policies do not allow children to have contact with their parents (Poehlmann, 2005; Poehlmann-Tynan et al., 2015, 2017). Likewise, parenting classes offered in prisons and jails are often deemed "effective" because several evaluations have demonstrated an improvement in parents' attitudes, knowledge, or behaviors (Newman, Fowler, & Cashin, 2011),

even though there is no evidence that these programs result in positive outcomes for children (e.g., emotional adjustment, behaviors, school performance) (see Chap. 13, this volume). The current body of literature is limited in understanding how interventions are related to outcomes for children in particular, whose experiences of interventions may or may not match their incarcerated parents.

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## Promising Policies and Practices

In this section, we describe several promising policies, practices, and programs for children with justice-involved parents. In light of the research limitations described above, we will first describe the interventions with the greatest body of research on their effectiveness. This includes parenting classes, visitation policies, mentoring programs for children, and comprehensive family programs. We then briefly discuss additional interventions with fewer studies demonstrating their effectiveness, but which still hold promise for improving the lives of incarcerated parents and their children. This second group of interventions includes parental arrest protocols, family impact statements, parent-child communication policies, and caregiver support programs. In reviewing the evidence, we discuss the potential of these interventions to positively impact both children and parents, as well as their suitability for prison and jail settings.

### Interventions with Established Research Base

#### Parenting Classes

The intervention that has perhaps received the most empirical scrutiny in this area is parenting classes (see Chap. 13, this volume as well as Wildeman, Haskins, & Poehlmann-Tynan, 2018). Parenting classes are typically facilitated by a community-based organization partnering with a prison or jail. Based on a survey of nearly 1000 prisons, parenting classes were offered in over 50% of male prisons and 90% of female

prisons (Hoffman, Byrd, Kightlinger, 2010). Through the use of various different curricula, parenting classes are generally intended to provide parents with the skills to understand their child's development and to learn and practice appropriate communication, play, discipline, and problem-solving techniques (Newman et al., 2011). The logic of parenting classes is that improvement in these skills will help incarcerated and formerly incarcerated parents more effectively interact with and support their children. Parenting classes are also intended to promote a sense of self-efficacy and meaning that prevents parents from engaging in additional criminal behavior.

A review of 11 articles examining parenting classes found that they vary widely in their delivery (Newman et al., 2011). The duration of classes ranged from 1 to 24 weeks, including 5–72 h of course instruction. The majority (9 of 11) of studies that examined whether parents' attitudes changed over the course of the classes reported improvements in parents' attitudes toward parental discipline among both fathers and mothers. Several studies also reported changes in parents' parenting skills and confidence (Newman et al., 2011). Despite the positive findings overall, all of the studies reviewed by Newman and colleagues were methodologically limited since they assessed change by relying entirely on parents' self-reported attitudes measured through instruments administered before and after the classes. Since this review, several additional evaluations with improved methodological rigor have been published. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to systematically review all of these additional evaluations, we discuss the key findings and implications from three studies below (other recent evaluations of parenting programs include McCrudden, Braiden, Sloan, McCormack, & Treacy, 2014; Miller et al., 2014; Urban & Burton, 2015; Wilson, Gonzalez, Romero, Henry, & Cerbana, 2010).

Eddy, Martinez, and Burraston (2013) examined the impact of the *Parenting Inside Out* (PIO) curriculum. PIO is a parenting curriculum that is used widely in prisons and jails across the

country. PIO focuses on providing incarcerated parents with motivation, knowledge, and skills to understand child development and behaviors. Eddy et al. (2013) outcome evaluation examined the degree to which PIO improved three areas: parental adjustment, parents' perceptions of their relationship with their child's caregiver, and parenting skills. The study sample included 161 fathers and 198 mothers ( $N = 359$ ) incarcerated in four Oregon prisons, who were randomized into the PIO intervention or a business-as-usual control group who did not participate in PIO classes. PIO participants received instruction over 36 sessions during a 12-week period. The authors assessed parents in groups before the intervention, after the intervention, and 6–12 months after prison release. A key finding was that PIO participation significantly reduced parents' feelings of stress and depression and resulted in positive parent–child interaction. Overall, PIO improved outcomes across the three main study areas (Eddy et al. 2013).

A commonly used parenting curriculum in correctional facilities is *InsideOut Dad* (Block et al. 2014), which was created specifically for incarcerated fathers. Consisting of 12 core sections and 26 optional sections, the curriculum focuses on improving father–child relationships and addressing fathers' criminogenic factors (e.g., antisocial attitudes, inadequate family relationships, anger and impulse control, and a lack of empathy). In their evaluation of the program, Block et al. (2014) studied 307 individuals who participated in the program across three residential correctional facilities in New Jersey. The outcomes for this group were compared with 104 fathers who were eligible for the program but did not participate. Using quasi-experimental methods, the study found that program fathers had significantly better outcomes associated with fathering confidence, knowledge, and attitudes, as well as increased phone contact with their children, compared to the eligible fathers who did not participate in the program (Block et al., 2014).

While *InsideOut Dad* was developed for fathers, *Parenting From Inside: Making the Mother Child Connection* (PFI) was developed specifically for mothers. PFI includes an

eight-session parenting class designed to equip mothers with skills for controlling the emotional reactivity and distress they experience from being separated from their children and to help them improve communication with their children and their caregivers (Loper & Tuerk, 2011). Loper and Tuerk (2011) evaluated PFI by randomly assigning mothers ( $N = 66$ ) into an immediate treatment group and a waitlist control group. At the conclusion of the program, mothers in the immediate treatment group reported reduced parenting stress, improvement in emotional adjustment, increased communication with caregivers, and fewer mental health symptoms compared to mothers in the control group (Loper & Tuerk, 2011).

With these positive findings in mind, it is important to note that recent implementation studies have found that parenting class facilitators often adapt curricula to meet the particular needs of their participants and the correctional environment (Fontaine, Cramer, & Paddock, 2017; Peterson, Cramer, Kurs, & Fontaine, 2015). This is despite the guidance from curriculum developers that curricula should be implemented with fidelity. It is not known whether adaptations, such as shortening the curriculum, omitting certain class sections, or modifying the hours, moderate the impact of any given corrections-based parenting program. A common challenge that leads to adaptations, for example, is facilitating multiple class sessions in a jail since parents are typically incarcerated for a short period of time before being released or transferred to another facility (Miller et al., 2014). Thus, parenting class facilitators often need to condense the individual class sessions or session weeks, offer multiple class sessions per week, allow parents to enroll in the class on a rolling basis, or limit classes to parents serving longer sentences in order to be implemented in jail (and some prison) settings (Fontaine et al. 2017; Peterson et al., 2015).

In short, because of their theoretical underpinnings, their potential effectiveness as demonstrated through a rather limited but growing literature, and their adaptability to prisons and jails, parenting classes hold promise as an effective intervention for incarcerated parents, at

least within certain domains. However, the jury is still out on whether these programs will similarly benefit children.

### Visitation

While there is a growing body of literature on visitation broadly (see Chap. 10, this volume), there have been very few evaluations of visitation programs or policies specifically designed to benefit incarcerated parents or their children and families. Thus, there are many gaps in understanding the ways in which visitation can be beneficial to incarcerated parents and their children. Findings from this research suggest that visitation can benefit incarcerated people—including parents—during their term of incarceration as well as after their release. For instance, visits have been shown to improve incarcerated people's adjustment to the prison environment, including a reduction in depressive symptoms (De Clair & Dixon, 2017) and misconduct (Cochran, 2012; De Clair & Dixon, 2017). Further, research has shown that individuals who receive visits have a significantly lower recidivism rate than those who do not receive visits. In a meta-analysis of 16 studies, Mitchell et al. (2016) found that visitation is associated with a 26% reduction in recidivism. These effects were larger for men (53% reduction in recidivism) and those who received special or extended visitation (e.g., furloughs or conjugal visits; 36% reduction in recidivism).

Though visitation appears to be a promising intervention for incarcerated parents, research has produced mixed findings on its impact on children. In a study with her colleagues, Poehlmann found that only 58% of the studies they reviewed indicated that visitation was beneficial for children (Poehlmann, Dallaire, Loper, & Shear, 2010). Poehlmann et al. (2010) argue that these mixed findings suggest that the context of a visit is critical for children. For example, visits in correctional rooms that are not child-friendly or visits that do not allow children to have physical contact with their parents (e.g., visits through glass or Plexiglas barriers) can promote insecure attachment, feelings of alienation, and internalizing behaviors (Dallaire, Zeman, & Thrash, 2015; Poehlmann, 2005;



Shlafer & Poehlmann, 2010; Poehlmann-Tynan et al., 2015, 2017). This is particularly important as correctional facilities consider replacing in-person visits with video visitation, which can lead to similar feelings of distress among children with incarcerated parents (Poehlmann-Tynan et al., 2015).

A recent report by the Urban Institute summarizes the research around correctional visiting practices (Cramer, Goff, Peterson, & Sandstrom, 2015a). Drawing on available evidence and recommendations from experts in the field, this report promotes visiting policies that allow parents and children to have physical contact during a visit and other, complementary child-friendly policies and practices. For instance, the report suggests equipping visiting rooms and visitor lobbies with toys, books, play mats, craft, games, and other activities to facilitate positive parent-child interaction and bonding. Likewise, prisons and jails could enact age-appropriate and minimally invasive search procedures and security protocols to minimize the stress children experience when visiting their incarcerated parent. Finally, facilities could use non-uniformed staff to interact with children and oversee the parent-child visits (Cramer et al., 2015a).

### **Mentoring Programs for Children**

A third intervention with an established research base is mentoring programs for children, which are typically offered to children in the community (see Chap. 14, this volume). A prominent mentoring framework for children of incarcerated parents is the Amachi model. Amachi-modeled programs match children with an adult mentor and are operated by a variety of independent providers across the country, such as the Big Brothers Big Sisters of America (BBBS). Mentors interact one-on-one with their mentees in the community a few times each month. The mentor-mentee relationship is intended to improve children's attitudes toward school, promote prosocial behavior and relationships, and build social competence.

Though we are focused on promising interventions, it is important to note that the findings on mentoring programs are mixed. In the flagship

study of the Amachi model, researchers at ICF International conducted a randomized controlled trial of 272 children with incarcerated parents (assigned to an Amachi-model BBBS mentoring program in Texas or to a waitlist control group) and found that mentoring improved reported relationships between the mentored children and their family members six months after the start of the program. Mentoring also increased children's feelings of self-worth and sense of the future, though it did not improve any school-related outcomes after six months (ICF International, 2011). Likewise, research shows that mentored children of incarcerated parents develop feelings of trust and closeness toward their mentors and display fewer internalizing and externalizing behaviors, though only if they remained in the mentoring relationship for at least six months (Shlafer, Poehlmann, Coffino, Hanneman, 2009).

Conversely, a more recent study found no positive changes among children of incarcerated parents who participated in a BBBS mentoring program in Connecticut—a finding that held across various age and gender groups (Conway & Keays, 2015). Likewise, a study examining the impact of mentoring programs across youth with varying profiles found that those with an incarcerated parent or close family member did not benefit from mentoring as measured by rates of depression and parental trust. However, mentored youth without an incarcerated family member significantly benefited from the program on measures of depression and parental trust. This suggests that mentoring, as evaluated in the study, may not be an appropriate or beneficial service to children of incarcerated parents (Herrera, DuBois, & Grossman, 2013).

One explanation for the mixed findings on mentoring for children experiencing parental incarceration is the difficulty matching these children with appropriate mentors. Shlafer et al. (2009) noted that a substantial number of mentor relationships (one-third) were terminated within six months. Thus, mentoring programs that work with children of incarcerated parents should focus on matching children with mentors who can cultivate feelings of trust and safety and develop meaningful, lasting relationships with

mentees (Shlafer et al., 2009). To help strengthen the mentor–mentee relationship, programs may also consider providing mentors with specialized training on the unique trauma children experience as a result of their parents’ incarceration and their related needs. If these issues are addressed in mentoring programs, they hold some promise for children of incarcerated parents. Still, more research is needed to understand the degree to which mentoring programs can lead to immediate or long-term benefits for these children (Eddy, Cearley, Bergen & Stern-Carusone, 2014).

### **Comprehensive Family Programs**

The research suggests that policies and practices for incarcerated parents and their children should not be implemented as discrete interventions. Rather, interventions can be more effective when they are implemented as part of a comprehensive set of practices focused on families. For example, parent–child visits should be a component of parenting classes (Cramer et al., 2015a; Eddy et al., 2008; Peterson et al., 2015). This provides parents with opportunities to practice the skills they are learning in class, while interacting directly with their children. Peterson et al. (2015) described two examples of comprehensive family programs being implemented in Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, and San Francisco, California. Both programs combine parenting classes with parent–child contact visits and several other services, such as free, coached telephone calls between parents and their children, post-release check-ins with case managers, family support groups, and individual counseling.

Prior research also indicates that comprehensive family programs should consider the different needs of incarcerated mothers and fathers. For instance, services for incarcerated mothers should take into account their often complex histories of substance use, mental health issues, and physical and sexual abuse. Without addressing these ancillary issues, programs that teach mothers parenting skills or provide them with opportunities to communicate and interact with their children may be less likely to be effective (Kjellstrand, Cearley, Eddy, Foney, & Martinez, 2012). In contrast, incarcerated fathers are more

likely to benefit from programs that address their lengthier histories of justice involvement and criminal behavior. Thus, providing fathers with services that help them desist from crime—such as substance and alcohol treatment, cognitive behavioral therapy, and job skills and readiness trainings—are likely to be critical for fathers seeking long-term, positive parenting experiences with their children and their children’s caregivers (Kjellstrand et al., 2012).

### **Additional Promising Interventions**

As described above, some interventions for incarcerated parents and their children have a significant research base and can be deemed at least promising. In this section, we will briefly highlight four additional policies and practices that, while not directly supported by a rich base of evidence, are rooted in established theoretical and practical frameworks (e.g., trauma-informed care, social bonding, attachment) or were developed through a research-informed approach. While we believe these interventions hold promise for yielding positive outcomes for children and their incarcerated parents, we recognize the need for further empirical studies to measure their true effectiveness.

#### **Parental Arrest Protocols**

There is little research on the practices implemented in the early stages of a parent’s justice involvement, particularly at the time of an arrest. Yet we do know that arrest practices can be distressing and traumatic for children who witness the arrest of a parent (e.g., Dallaire & Wilson, 2010; Poehlmann-Tynan et al., 2017). Police officers often do not ask for, or record, whether arrestees have minor children when they make an arrest, and many police departments do not have official policies dictating how to handle children of arrestees (Neville, 2010). However, some departments have enacted parental arrest protocols to help minimize the trauma children experience when they witness a parent’s arrest or lose a parent or caregiver after the arrest. These protocols explain and clarify the officer’s duties while making an arrest with a child present and

help ensure the safety and security of the child while the parent is detained.

As implemented in Allegheny County and San Francisco, for example, parental arrest policies provide guidance about what law enforcement officers should do before, during, and after an arrest with a child present. For instance, where feasible, officers should obtain information about the arrestee's family and children before making an arrest so officers can help determine the most preferred time and place of arrest. If officers do not have information before making an arrest, they should inquire about the presence of children during the arrest or ask whether the parent has responsibility for children who may not be present. If or when the scene is secure, the policy may encourage officers to make the arrest in an area away from the children and to allow the parent to comfort the children (Kurs, Peterson, Cramer, & Fontaine, 2015). The International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) developed training materials and a model policy for parental arrests that recommend establishing cooperative agreements with child welfare agencies, providing officer training on effective communication skills with children using developmentally appropriate language, and working with the arrested parent to identify an appropriate caregiver for the child (IACP, 2014). However, there has not been subsequent research on the uptake of these materials and recommendations in police departments across the country.

### **Family Impact Statements**

Family impact statements are another potentially promising intervention focused on the early stages of a parent's involvement in the criminal justice system. They help ensure the courts, judges, prosecutors, public defenders, and probation officers make informed decisions about a parent's sentence, based on the needs of the defendant's children. Probation departments in New York State and San Francisco, for instance, have developed and added questions to their presentence investigation reports that address the needs of the defendant's children and family members as well as his or her roles and responsibilities to the family. These questions can ask

whether the defendant is a primary caregiver; what type of relationship the child has with his or her other caregiver; whether there is an active child support case; and whether any children were at risk because of the circumstances of the offense. Asking these questions helps ensure the courts, judges, prosecutors, public defenders, and probation officers consider a parent's involvement with his or her family during the presentence investigation and make a sentencing recommendation that is the best scenario for the court, the community, and the family (Cramer, Peterson, Kurs, Fontaine, 2015b).

### **Parent–Child Communication Policies**

There are several policies in prisons and jails that create opportunities for parent–child communication and have the potential to benefit both parents and children (Shlafer et al., 2015). For example, letter writing and telephone calls between parents and children can reduce children's internalizing behaviors (Dallaire et al., 2015). Some corrections facilities are now allowing e-mails between incarcerated parents and their family members. In addition, many family programs in prisons and jails allow incarcerated parents to make and send a video or audio recording to their children so they can see and/or hear their incarcerated parents. The recordings may be a parent reading a book to the child, singing a song, or saying a personalized message (Fontaine et al. 2017). One study found that parents who were in negative moods prior to recording a message for their children were more likely to display their negative emotions in the film, which resulted in children feeling sad or depressed after viewing it (Folk, Nichols, Dallaire, & Loper, 2012). Thus, parents have the potential to affect their children's moods through recorded messages, but should focus on displaying positive emotions if they intend for the messages to be beneficial (Folk et al., 2012).

### **Caregiver Support Programs**

A final promising intervention being implemented in correctional facilities is supportive services and programs for caregivers, although there are few empirical reports of these efforts

(Wildeman et al., 2018). Caregivers—which include family members, friends, co-parents, significant others, partners, and foster parents—provide material and emotional support to children during their parent’s incarceration. This can be a stressful task on its own and is more difficult when caregivers are responsible for helping children maintain contact with their parents since it requires taking the child to visits and paying for letters and telephone calls with their parents. To reduce this burden, correctional facilities and community-based organizations may offer caregivers financial assistance, transportation services to and from a facility, and peer-led support groups. The Strengthening Families Program (SFP), which was piloted in a county jail in Michigan, provided caregivers training on various topics, including communication, child development, effective discipline, stress management, problem-solving, and limit setting, as well as alcohol and drug awareness education. An initial evaluation of SFP found that caregivers experienced positive changes in family functioning, parenting, and depression symptoms during the pre- to post-intervention period (Miller et al., 2013).

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## Conclusions

This chapter identified several programs and practices that have the potential to mitigate the harmful effects associated with parental incarceration on minor children. Some of these interventions have a growing research base that underscores their potential effectiveness (e.g., parenting classes, visitation policies, mentoring programs for children, and comprehensive family programs), while others lack a research base but are underpinned by theoretically and empirically sound frameworks (e.g., parental arrest protocols, family impact statements, parent–child communication policies, and caregiver support programs). Across these interventions, however, there are substantial gaps in the current knowledge base that limits our understanding of their effectiveness or appropriate applications.

For instance, there is limited understanding about how interventions might impact children,

parents, and caregivers and whether there are trade-offs by focusing interventions on one group instead of the others (e.g., visitation policies that may benefit parents but be detrimental to children and caregivers). Likewise, it is not clear whether similar interventions that are implemented in different correctional contexts yield different outcomes and whether there are trade-offs between adoption of a particular practice and implementation fidelity (e.g., adapting prison-based parenting curricula to jails). Finally, for these interventions to be effective, there must be more exploration into the dynamic and varying needs of incarcerated parents, their children, and caregivers. To address these limitations, we provide several recommendations below for future research. We then conclude this piece with recommendations for practice that we believe will help agencies and organizations develop and implement interventions that will benefit both children and adults.

## Recommendations for Policy-Relevant Research

More research studies that examine the impact of parenting interventions holistically are needed, focused on all of the intended beneficiaries of such interventions to include children, parents, and caregivers/family members. Research studies of this type are indeed resource- and time-intensive, but are critically important given the ubiquity of parenting interventions implemented in correctional settings. To execute these studies successfully, more consideration should first be given to the ways interventions are intended to be effective and then data collection efforts should be executed accordingly. Although there are general ideas or theories on how some of these interventions affect parents, children, and caregivers, more specificity around the causal mechanisms should be provided. For example, how do we expect parent–child contact visits in prisons to affect children, the incarcerated parent, and the caregiver? Answering this question is an important first step to designing and implementing data collection instruments that

can determine whether interventions are having the intended impacts.

The field would also benefit tremendously by a better delineation of how interventions impact children directly, not just through the incarcerated or formerly incarcerated parent. For example, we understand that parenting classes make the participating parent feel like a better or more confident parent, but we do not know whether children detect differences in their parents. Further, the extent to which any of these feelings are related to specific important behavioral outcomes for parents or children is largely unknown. To take the parenting class example, while the causal connections can be made using theory, it is wholly unclear whether parenting classes have an impact on parent's reentry and reintegration outcomes (such as reoffending, residential stability, or economic stability) and children's and caregiver's outcomes (such as academic performance, residential stability, behavior). Data collection on a broad set of child, parent, and caregiver/family outcomes could provide critical additional context around the effectiveness of a practice or intervention, such as whether it leads to family reunification and reduction in criminal/juvenile justice and public system involvement and use (e.g., foster care system, child welfare system, child support services, public assistance, homelessness, and Medicaid).

In addition to more research that documents the range of potential program effects, further evaluation research is needed. There is limited evidence about the types of interventions that are effective for parents or children. Few studies have used large samples, rigorous methods, or were replicated in subsequent research. More evaluations in this field will help the field learn more about the programs and practices that benefit children and which practices harm youth. Evaluations of these practices should include process components that can document and uncover implementation challenges. Moreover, evaluations are typically useful in helping to secure or sustain funding for various practices since funders usually want to know that a practice holds promise, and they can see that promise demonstrated through evaluation.

In addition to the illuminating the direct effects of these interventions on children and parents, researchers should generate new knowledge about the factors that mediate and moderate their effectiveness. For instance, the child's age and gender, the parent's age and gender, the quality of the parent-child relationship before incarceration, the presence of a supportive caregiver, and the stability and quality of the child's support network likely all play a role in how parental incarceration affects children and the degree to which an intervention is successful. More research is needed to account for these and other influential factors that may exacerbate the effects of parent-child separation or buffer children from the stress of their parent's incarceration. In addition to rigorous quantitative studies, qualitative studies that use interviews, focus groups, or participant observation, for example, are valuable for capturing the nuances of families' circumstances and the vagaries of program implementation and uptake that can help explain and contextualize the variations in quantitative results.

In short, the research community must continue building evidence around: (a) the types of interventions available to incarcerated parents and their children; (b) the mechanisms through which these interventions can benefit children, parents, and caregivers; (c) the effectiveness of these interventions at achieving their stated goals; and (d) the ways in which implementation in various contexts affects the efficacy of these interventions. Researchers at the Urban Institute have begun addressing these challenges by synthesizing knowledge of the policies and practices used in prisons and jails across the country, studying their implementation, and developing actionable recommendations aimed at spurring policy changes (e.g., Cramer et al., 2015a, 2015b; Fontaine et al., 2017; Kurs et al., 2015; Peterson et al., 2015). However, there is still a need for more robust research and evaluations on these issues.

## Recommendations for Practice

In addition to the recommendations for future research, we offer three recommendations for



practitioners considering interventions that can support incarcerated parents, their children, and caregivers. These practitioners may include correctional administrators, community-based organizations, lawmakers, and other stakeholders that can affect change within their correctional systems. First, the agencies and community organizations that provide these services should allow children and family members to have a voice during the planning and development process of practices that impact incarcerated parents (see Chap. 21, this volume). This allows children and families the ability to offer their relevant experiences and needs that should help inform any family-focused intervention. Corrections agencies and community organizations operating family-focused interventions should also solicit feedback from children and families once the interventions are implemented to identify ways to refine or further tailor the services.

Second, prisons and jails should collaborate with other stakeholders to guide the development and implementation of practices. These stakeholders should represent other relevant criminal justice agencies (e.g., law enforcement, departments of corrections, sheriff departments, probation departments, family courts) and government agencies (e.g., human services, child welfare, child support enforcement), as well as community-based organizations who can facilitate service provision. Collaboration builds a strong network of partners that can better serve the needs of children, parents, and caregivers. Involving multiple stakeholders can lead to more innovative, promising practices because it brings together the expertise of several agencies and organizations that too often work independently to serve a common population.

Finally, facilities should incorporate new policies and practices into their staff training. Training can help officers, program staff, and other employees understand the goals behind the new practices. Staff should also be trained to appropriately communicate and engage with incarcerated parents, their children, and the children's caregivers. For example, staff members should be cognizant of the confusion many families face when trying to navigate correctional environments

and work with them to help them understand the facility's rules and procedures. Likewise, staff members should also be trained to interact with children in an age-appropriate manner.

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## Separation and Detention of Parents and Children at the Border: Lessons from Impacts of Parental Incarceration on Children and Families

Julie Poehlmann-Tynan, Erin Sugrue, Jacquelynn Duron, Dianne Ciro and Amy Messex

### Abstract

The crisis of family separation precipitated by the Trump administration’s “zero tolerance” immigration policy on the southern border has focused the nation’s attention sharply on the negative short- and long-term consequences of separating children from their parents. The negative outcomes of separating children from

their parents have been documented through decades of rigorous research, with public awareness and subsequent action occurring to change practices around separation in children’s hospitals, military bases, orphanages, and child care settings. However, there is much less public awareness of the impacts of parental incarceration on children, although the numbers of children affected have increased dramatically over the past 30 years due to both criminal justice and immigration policies. This chapter will summarize recent research findings related to the detrimental impacts of parental incarceration on children and families, delineate factors that most directly relate to negative outcomes in children, establish the connection to detention of immigrant parents and effects on children, and conclude with recommendations for relevant policy and practice.

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The crisis of family separation precipitated by the Trump administration’s “zero tolerance” immigration policy on the southern border of the USA has focused the nation’s attention sharply on the negative short- and long-term consequences of separating children from their parents (Vera Institute of Justice, 2018). The negative outcomes of separating children from their parents have been documented through decades of rigorous research, with public awareness and subsequent action occurring to change practices around

separation in children's hospitals, military bases, orphanages, and child care settings. However, there is much less public awareness of the impacts of parental incarceration on children, although the numbers of affected children have increased dramatically over the past 30 years due to both state and federal policies, and particularly the widespread adoption of punitive criminal justice policies (National Research Council, 2014; Capps, Koball, Campetella, Perreira, Hooker, & Pedroza, 2015). Between 1991 and 2007 alone, the number of parents of minor children in federal and state prisons increased by 79% (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008). Immigration policies, separation of parents and children, and parental detention are now swelling the numbers of children impacted by incarceration even further.

Despite the large number of families impacted, children of incarcerated parents comprise a mostly invisible population for several reasons. First, government agencies often do not keep adequate records that link children with their incarcerated parents. Consequently, agencies that may be available to provide dyadic, child-, or adult-oriented services are not aware of these children or their needs, and thus do not serve them. Second, social scientists have not studied these children until recently (Eddy & Poehlmann-Tynan, 2010; Miller, 2006). In recent years, the sheer numbers of children and families affected has begun to increase the visibility of this population among public policymakers, social service providers, and academic researchers.

At year end 2016, more than 6.6 million adults were under the supervision of US correctional systems (Kaeble & Cowhig, 2018), including individuals incarcerated in prisons and jails, as well as those on probation and parole. Because most incarcerated individuals are parents (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008), it is not surprising that more than 5 million US children have experienced a co-resident parent leaving for jail or prison (Murphey & Cooper, 2015), numbers that do not include children whose non-resident parent is behind bars. Because of staggering racial disparities in incarceration, children of color experience parental incarceration to a much greater extent

than their white counterparts (i.e., 7.5 times more often, Glaze & Maruschak, 2008). Further, they face more post-incarceration challenges even when considering pre-existing risks (Wakefield & Wildeman, 2011). As discussed throughout this book, the population of children with incarcerated parents has exploded in recent years and the harm that parental incarceration causes to children and families has become much more evident. This chapter will summarize recent research findings related to the detrimental impacts of parental incarceration on children and families, delineate factors that most directly relate to negative outcomes in children, establish the connection to detention of immigrant parents and effects on children, and conclude with recommendations for relevant policy and practice.

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## The Effects of Parental Incarceration on Children

There is ample scientific evidence that family separation is harmful to children and other family members. Decades of rigorous research have shown that a stable relationship with a primary caregiver is critical to a child's safety, ability to trust others, sense of self, and capacity to thrive (Bowlby, 1982; Cassidy, 2016; Rojas-Flores, 2017; Yoshikawa, Kholoptseva, & Suarez-Orozco, 2013). Separation from parents is among the most potent traumatic stressors that a child can experience, and the adverse effects are exacerbated when separation occurs under frightening, sudden, chaotic, or prolonged circumstances (Bowlby, 1973). Such separations increase children's risk of developing depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress symptoms, and other trauma reactions (Kobak, Zajac, & Madsen, 2016; Murray, Farrington, & Sekol, 2012). Research shows that experiencing multiple stressful and unpredictable events during childhood, known as adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), is cumulative and results in stress that can negatively affect health and well-being

throughout one's own life as well as through subsequent generations (Felitti et al., 1998). Parental incarceration is an ACE. Its effects seem particularly detrimental because of the unique combination of trauma, shame, and stigma that occurs, as well as the externally enforced separation (Hairston, 2007). In addition, there are often many unknowns about the incarcerated parents' circumstances, which can lead to painful feelings of ambiguous loss for children and for other family members (Poehlmann-Tynan & Arditti, 2017).

In the past twenty years, a growing body of research has documented the specific harmful effects of parental incarceration on children's development and well-being (Wildeman, Hawkins, & Poehlmann-Tynan, 2017). The negative potential effects of parental incarceration include increases in infant mortality, child homelessness, child behavior problems (including elevated aggression and antisocial behavior), impaired academic performance, and less optimal health; these effects persist even when controlling for prior risks and other social determinants of health (Wakefield & Wildeman, 2013; Wildeman, Goldman, & Turney, 2018). Children affected by parental incarceration, compared to other children, more frequently experience trauma symptoms, residential instability, and financial insecurity as well as exposure to more ACEs (Arditti, 2012; Murphey & Cooper, 2015).

In a recent large-scale study, Bell, Bayliss, Glauert, and Ohan (2018) found that having an incarcerated parent places children at risk for experiencing challenges across multiple developmental domains, including physical, social, emotional, communicative, and cognitive. In addition to the potential adverse effects of any family separation, children who have an incarcerated parent experience additional challenges that have been referred to as "incarceration-related risk factors" (Poehlmann-Tynan, Burnson, Runion, & Weymouth, 2017). These risk factors include financial obstacles to visitation, reliance on other adults to facilitate contact between the child and parent, excessive distance between the child's location and the correctional facility (both of which may change multiple

times, often without notification to the child's caregiver), as well as children's fears about their parent's well-being within the corrections environment (Bell et al., 2018). Many children with incarcerated parents have also witnessed the parent's arrest, contributing to increased emotional and cognitive difficulties (Dallaire & Wilson, 2010) and insecure attachment (Poehlmann-Tynan et al., 2017). Younger children are particularly vulnerable to the effects of parental incarceration due to their greater attachment needs, dependence on caregivers, and less developed cognitive and coping abilities (Poehlmann-Tynan & Arditti, 2017). Indeed, increased negative outcomes have been noted for younger children with an incarcerated parent, in comparison with adolescents who also experience detrimental effects (Arditti, 2016).

Challenges in maintaining contact and family relationships during the incarceration period can also have negative effects on children and families (Hairston, 2007; Chap. 10, this volume). The obstacles to contact are many and include unaffordable collect-call charges for phone calls made from prison; unsympathetic, hostile and restrictive prison and jail visiting environments and policies; remote and hard-to-visit prison locations; and strained family relationships (Poehlmann, Dallaire, Loper, & Shear, 2010; Young & Smith, 2000). Further, the circumstances of visitation—especially non-contact barrier visitation that is common in jails—can also have negative emotional consequences. Visits tend to be brief and end abruptly, and participants are subject to highly intrusive physical searches and procedures (Poehlmann-Tynan et al., 2015).

Parental incarceration can also lead to family conflicts that do not readily heal when the parent is released from prison. Social and family pressures and social stigma and institutional policies and practices can make it difficult for parents to reintegrate and re-establish ties with their children (Hairston, 2007). Research indicates that the negative impact of incarceration-induced family separations often continues long after parents are released from jail or prison. Potential long-term consequences on children include behavioral

issues, academic issues such as dropping out of school, reliance on maladaptive coping strategies such as excessive use of illegal drugs and alcohol, and being diagnosed with chronic illnesses in adulthood, such as diabetes or heart disease (Felitti et al., 1998; Lee, Fang, & Luo, 2013; Shlafer, Poehlmann, & Donelan-McCall, 2012).

### **Factors Related to the Impact of Parental Incarceration on Families**

To understand the impact of parental incarceration, it is important to consider who is watching and caring for the child during the parental incarceration period (i.e., who are the children's caregivers; Johnson & Waldfogel, 2002). Sometimes children live with the non-incarcerated parent, especially when the father is incarcerated, whereas other children live with a non-parental relative, especially grandparents when the mother is incarcerated (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008). Additionally, when mothers are incarcerated, children are five times more likely to be placed in a foster home than when fathers are incarcerated (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2015).

The importance of caregivers in shaping a child's future trajectory "*cannot be overstated*" (Poehlmann-Tynan, 2015). Unfortunately, as noted by Arditti (2016), caregivers often experience significant increases in parenting stress subsequent to incarceration. This can be caused by multiple factors, including the need to provide emotional and financial support to the incarcerated parent (often in the face of monumental logistical challenges), the economic decline associated with the loss of one parent's income and caregiving time, and the reduced time available to spend with each individual child in the family. The mental health and well-being of a child's caregiver have a direct and significant impact on the future well-being of that child (Poehlmann, 2005; Poehlmann-Tynan et al., 2017).

Social support for children with an incarcerated parent is a significant protective factor. Social support in this context refers to the ability

to maintain stable relationships with teachers, caregivers, and peers, as well as the existence of access to prosocial activities, such as sports (Shlafer & Poehlmann, 2010). Changes in placement, schools, and regular activities contribute to negative outcomes for children experiencing the extreme disruption involved in the incarceration of a parent.

Regular contact between incarcerated parents and their children can strengthen parent-child and family relationships (Chap. 10, this volume). In a recent white paper from the Urban Institute, Cramer, Goff, Peterson, and Sandstrom (2017) reviewed research and conducted interviews with experts in the field regarding parent-child visits during parental incarceration. They concluded that face-to-face family-friendly contact visits appeared the most helpful for children, especially when such visits are embedded in family-support programs that also include elements like identifying and working through underlying issues to promote healthy parent-child and family relationships. Family-friendly visitation policies include more relaxed, child-sensitive security procedures, longer visitation periods, opportunities for families to engage in positive activities together such as playing a game and physical contact such as hugs, and conducting visits in a less stressful setting (i.e., a designated family visitation room) as opposed to the stark surroundings of most adult visitation environments (Arditti, 2016).

### **The Detention of Parents and Children in Immigration Settings**

As a result of the "Zero Tolerance Policy for Criminal Illegal Entry," several thousand immigrant children were separated from their parents during 2018, and a significant number of these children were younger than five years old at the time of separation (Vera Institute of Justice, 2018). Parents in these cases were frequently either incarcerated or deported. Consequently, the children involved are exposed to risks associated with both family separation as well as parental incarceration, combined with the



dangers and trauma of immigration. As reported by multiple news outlets in the USA, many children remain apart from their parents; these forced separations continue despite a federal court order issued on June 26, 2018 requiring their reunification. Obstacles to reunification include incomplete recordkeeping and confusion and a lack of transparency among agencies.

Research focused on the effects of parental incarceration on children and families has implications for our understanding of parent–child separations that have occurred for immigrants, including the detention of parents and their children. When the constant dread of arrest, detention, or deportation of parents culminates in actual family separation—whether short-lived or permanent—the results are particularly detrimental and far-reaching for children’s well-being. Children of detained and deported immigrants suffer the consequences of economic instability, emotional distress, changes in daily routines, long-term financial instability, and finally, in some cases, family dissolution (Dreby, 2015; Rojas-Flores, 2017). This increased adversity is worrisome as research indicates a synergistic effect between increased stress and adverse life events. Higher levels of post-traumatic symptoms in children of detained and deported parents indicate that forced parental separation resulting from immigration enforcement is particularly detrimental to children’s mental health. Furthermore, the unpredictability and uncertainty associated with such forced parent–child separations may exacerbate trauma symptoms.

The constant fear of detection, detainment, and deportation is integrated into caregivers’ daily lives. The development of related mental health symptoms and barriers in accessing adequate healthcare places families at higher risk of poor health outcomes. Immigrant detention, as a process related to the deportation of noncitizens, is part of a larger history of global, federal, local, and individual practices that criminalize immigrants, especially non-white immigrants. The incarceration of noncitizens is related to their surveillance, punishment, and overall inequality in the areas of labor, education, public health, political representation, and everyday mobility

(Hernandez, 2008). Many immigrant families have left countries where they experienced violence or war (as witnesses, victims, and/or perpetrators); lack of food, water, shelter, or medical care; torture; forced labor; sexual assault; and loss of loved ones.

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## Recommendations

Government agencies, resettlement agencies, and service providers across sectors (e.g., child welfare, health care, corrections, education, mental health, housing, and employment) have an opportunity to lessen the long-term effects of parental incarceration on children by adopting practices that have been shown to be effective in addressing their needs (Bouchet, 2008). Of most urgency, prompt reunification of children with their parents is a top priority for children separated from their parents at the border. Parents help children regulate negative emotions, alleviate the impact of chronic stress on the nervous system, and promote connections in the brain that protect children from developing additional mental health concerns. In the face of current practices on the border, resettlement agencies and health care workers have the opportunity now to help ameliorate the potentially severe and lasting effects of separation through the provision of evidence-informed, culturally sensitive, and trauma-informed interventions and practices. At a minimum, these include the following.

- Providing culturally and linguistically appropriate mental health services to the impacted children, incarcerated parents, caregivers, and other family members throughout and following the incarceration of the parent to lessen the impacts of trauma and begin the healing process. Services for immigrant families should be sensitive to their recent experiences not only of trauma in their own countries, but of the often hostile treatment they received at the US border and subsequently.
- Offering supportive services to caregivers and formerly incarcerated parents to create stability for children, including access to safe

housing, medical and dental care, education, and food and financial aid to reduce economic strain. The importance of these issues is heightened for recent immigrants who may have no resources and access to no services.

- Refraining from unnecessarily exposing children to the arrest of a parent to protect children from trauma associated with witnessing parental arrest. The International Association of Chiefs of Police (2014) have developed a model protocol and training materials regarding safeguarding children during the arrest of parents, available for adoption by law enforcement throughout the USA. This includes arrests conducted for immigration reasons.
- Ensuring that child-friendly visitation practices are established during a parent's incarceration or detention, including regular contact with longer periods of visitation; child-appropriate security procedures; access to pre-approved family activities (such as games and coloring); providing child-friendly settings for visitation within correctional facilities; training corrections staff how to interact with children and families; fostering open communication among caregivers, children, incarcerated parents, and supportive professionals; preparing children for visits; supporting incarcerated parents in the visit process; and allowing more (appropriate) physical contact during visits.
- Facilitating additional means of contact between children and their incarcerated parents, such as letters, shared drawings, cards, or videos, e-mail and other contact through the Internet and telephone calls.
- Disseminating materials that Sesame Street recently developed for young children with an incarcerated parent, including an animated depiction of a child's visit to a corrections facility, a storybook, videos, and a caregiver guide (Little Children, Big Challenges: Incarceration, 2013; <http://www.sesamestreet.org/parents/topicsandactivities/toolkits/incarceration>).

The materials are available in both English and Spanish. The caregiver guide suggests ways for families to stay in touch with children's incarcerated parents, such as sending cards or making phone calls between visits in addition to covering topics such as how to talk to very young children about parental incarceration and how to handle common emotional reactions that children have when their parents are incarcerated. Because these materials are free (available on Sesame Street's Web site, and as a free app), corrections facilities and social service agencies can use them widely.

- Making non-contact visits more child-friendly, even though plexiglas and video visits are not inherently child-friendly (Poehlmann-Tynan et al., 2015). Suggestions include increasing privacy, decreasing wait time, giving a warning before visits end, including more information about visits on Web sites and adding links to resources for families with children, providing staff with additional training, recognizing the key role that children's caregivers play, preparing children and adults, enhancing the content of visits through establishment of routines, using positive nonverbal communication, and having caregivers prompt children to facilitate conversations.
- Decreasing stigma and shame by educating society about the vulnerability of children with incarcerated parents and encouraging members of society to engage in compassionate behavior.
- Changing policies to decrease reliance on incarceration, increase alternatives to incarceration, and decrease sentence length when incarceration is deemed necessary.
- Conducting program evaluations to determine the efficacy and effectiveness of interventions offered to families of the incarcerated and detained, including relevance to immigrants; disseminating the findings; and acting appropriately given the findings.

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# A Research and Intervention Agenda for Children with Incarcerated Parents and Their Families

# 24

Julie Poehlmann-Tynan and J. Mark Eddy

## Abstract

We had two primary goals when we embarked on assembling this second edition. First, we aimed to summarize and synthesize recent research on children with incarcerated parents and their families that have been conducted across a variety of disciplines, including promising intervention approaches, for a range of audiences. And second, we sought to stimulate high quality, collaborative, interdisciplinary research that will generate information needed by families, practitioners and policymakers to prevent the development of problems and promote the health and well-being of the children with incarcerated parents and their families and communities. With these goals in mind, in this concluding chapter we tie together and elaborate upon the suggestions for research and intervention that have emerged in the preceding chapters. We present an agenda for future research around three conceptual issues: (1) the importance of

infusing a social justice perspective that recognizes the importance of and attempts to ameliorate racial and economic disparities when investigating or intervening on the effects of mass incarceration on children and families, (2) the importance of adopting a developmental perspective in research and intervention with children with incarcerated parents, and (3) the need for interdisciplinary scholarship and intervention focusing on resilience processes not only in individuals but also in families. We suggest approaches to various challenges that arise in the areas of research, practice, and policy when working with this population that must be faced in future studies and applied work. We end by highlighting the importance of interdisciplinary collaborations for moving the field forward.

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## Introduction

Compared to prior decades, the past ten years have seen a virtual explosion of studies focusing on children with incarcerated parents and their families. As a field, we have learned much about how children with ever-incarcerated parents function compared to their peers in multiple developmental domains from early childhood to adolescence, as well as about the experiences of

incarcerated parents and children's caregivers. We know less about the effects of the timing and length of parental incarceration on child and family outcomes, as well as processes that occur during and following a parent's time in jail or prison. However, the field is beginning to realize and address the need for understanding mechanisms linking parental incarceration with individual and family outcomes, including examination of parenting quality, caregiver well-being, poverty, family relationships, stress processes, support, and other variables. We have also learned much about how mass incarceration results from and contributes to individual and family racial and economic inequality (e.g., Arditto, 2018; Wakefield & Wildeman, 2013), but less about how to break these cycles. And although we are learning about interventions designed to ameliorate the negative effects of parental incarceration, especially in the parenting domain, there is still much work to do regarding interventions for children and their caregivers.

For the field to move forward and comprehensively address the well-being of children with incarcerated parents and their families, information and approaches need to be integrated across disciplines. Because of the complexity of the issues and the numerous systems involved when parents go to jail or prison and are released back into the community, research on children with incarcerated parents and their families has been conducted by scholars from a wide variety of disciplines, including criminology, sociology, social work, nursing, psychiatry, law, public policy, family studies, and developmental, social, community, and clinical psychology. One result of not having one disciplinary "home" for this body of work is that researchers and interventionists have tended to work in isolation from one another, and the integration of findings and practices across disciplines has been rare. A key consequence is that accessing this literature has been difficult not only for newcomers to the field, but also for those who need the information the most: the policymakers and practitioners who must make decisions of practical consequence related to children and families. Because of these issues, there is a pressing need for an integrated

interdisciplinary approach to research and intervention with children whose parents are incarcerated (also see Wildeman, Haskins, & Poehlmann-Tynan, 2017). This need is reflected in the many significant gaps that remain in our knowledge base about this population and our limited understanding regarding how to most effectively help affected children and families as well as the society in which they live.

The two primary goals of this volume are: (1) to summarize and synthesize the research on children with incarcerated parents and their families that has been conducted across a variety of disciplines, including promising intervention approaches, for a range of audiences, and (2) to stimulate high quality, collaborative, interdisciplinary research that will generate the information needed by families, practitioners, and policymakers to prevent the development of problems and promote the health and well-being of children with incarcerated parents and their families and communities. With these goals in mind, in this chapter we tie together and elaborate upon the suggestions for research and intervention that have emerged in the preceding chapters. It is our hope that this summary will enhance the ability of researchers, practitioners, and policymakers to engage in more successful and comprehensive collaborative work that will ultimately improve the lives of children and families affected by parental incarceration. We present our agenda for future research around three conceptual issues: (1) the importance of infusing a social justice perspective in research and intervention that includes recognition of and attempts to ameliorate racial and economic disparities across contexts, (2) the need for adopting a developmental perspective in research and intervention with children with incarcerated parents, and (3) the value of interdisciplinary scholarship and intervention focusing on resilience processes not only in individuals but also in families. We also suggest approaches to various challenges that arise in the areas of research, practice, and policy when working with this population that must be faced in future studies and applied work. We end by highlighting the importance of interdisciplinary collaborations for moving the field forward.



## A Social Justice Perspective

A key finding in the recent literature is that mass incarceration not only reflects social and economic inequities in the USA, but it also is creating and expanding racial and economic inequalities for the next generation (see Chaps. 2 through 4, this volume). This is a tragic consequence that affects millions of children. Scholarship and intervention with children with incarcerated parents and their families need to address this issue at all contextual levels, and in our opinion, that means adopting a social justice perspective. A social justice perspective means working toward fair relations between individuals and society and also organizing and working toward solutions that benefit children, their families, and the whole community.

Multiple contexts that play a role in the development of children affected by parental incarceration can be examined through a social justice perspective. Similar to most children, family, school, and community contexts play important roles; however, law enforcement, criminal justice, and judicial processes, correction systems, and social policies also play significant roles, and for some children, the child welfare system as well. These contexts directly and indirectly affect children when their parents are incarcerated, in both positive and negative ways. Books such as *The New Jim Crow* (Alexander, 2012) and films such as *13TH* (DuVernay & Moran, 2016) explore ways in which the history of slavery, as well as racism that is now imbedded in US social systems in structural ways, are negatively affecting Black individuals and families through the criminal justice system. More research is needed that documents the effects of these contextual factors on children's development and family functioning over time. Moreover, interventions are needed that address the multiple contextual challenges that may disrupt the parenting of children with incarcerated parents (Chap. 15, this volume). Activism on all levels is needed to fight for social justice in relation to the effects of mass incarceration on children and families. One recent example of such an approach at a more

macro-level is that in Florida, about 9% of eligible voters had felony records and were prevented from exercising their voting rights, even after serving their sentences. Most affected individuals were young Black men. In November 2018, this situation changed as the result of a successfully passed referendum that restored the ability to vote to more than 1.5 million individuals with a felony record in Florida, so that they can exercise their right to vote and participate in social decision making.

We also recognize that social policies designed to fight crime or strengthen families often have unintended negative consequences for children with incarcerated parents. For example, US drug policies initiated in the 1980s that resulted in sending large numbers of people to prison may actually have perpetuated drug use and criminal behaviors rather than curbing them, impacting large numbers of children in the process. The Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 created strict time frames for how long children should remain in foster care before termination of parental rights and moving toward adoption. This policy had negative effects on many families affected by parental incarceration (Lee, Genty, & Laver, 2005) but perhaps positive effects on some. Later, the Promoting Safe and Stable Families Act Amendment of 2001 contained legislation authorizing funds for mentoring programs as a preventive intervention for children with incarcerated parents. Indeed, mentoring children of prisoners was one of the signature programs of the presidency of George W. Bush. Whereas this legislation may have resulted in positive outcomes for those children who developed a trusting and long-term mentoring relationship, it may have harmed others whose mentoring relationships failed or those who need more intensive interventions (see Chap. 14, this volume). The 2008 Second Chance Act reentry legislation in Congress may have resulted in more rapid and well-supported reentry into the community for former offenders, including reunification with family members, although it may have contributed to higher levels of revocation for non-criminal acts for individuals on probation. Recent immigration policies of the

Trump administration involving detention and separating families at the southern US border have done great harm and created a new and particularly vulnerable group of children with incarcerated parents (see Chap. 23, this volume). Research and evaluation are needed on how these and other policy decisions impact children and families, and how the negative effects of such policies can be diminished and the positive effects of future policies enhanced.

Future developmental and intervention research should consider broader contextual factors such as these in tandem with questions focusing on children's development and the efficacy and effectiveness of intervention efforts. A better understanding of the wide-reaching consequences of poverty for children, the importance of contexts of racial and ethnic inequality, including discrimination, racism, and stigma that limit economic, educational, health care and other opportunities, and the meaning of intergenerational cycles of insecure attachment, violence, substance abuse, and criminal behavior is needed, as such cycles are often seen as applicable to children with incarcerated parents and their families. Moreover, the population of incarcerated individuals has changed over time, resulting in the overrepresentation of poor and racial minority children and families with loved ones behind bars (see Chap. 4, this volume).

To better understand contextual factors and their influence on children and families in the context of the criminal justice system in the USA, it is helpful to examine these issues in other countries, where a variety of factors may be quite different—even radically so—from those in the USA. In this regard, becoming aware of the differences and similarities between our country and our many neighbors around the world regarding the issues discussed in this book is vitally important (see Chaps. 6, 16, and 18, this volume). In short, because of the wide range, complexity, and changing nature of the contextual issues involved, interdisciplinary and international research efforts are needed to assist in understanding how best to move toward social justice for all women and men, and for all boys and girls. This includes finding new ways to

practice criminal justice in the USA and other countries, including reducing incarceration (see Chap. 16, this volume). Outreach, dissemination, and intervention efforts that cross international borders are important as well, such as those promoted by the International Coalition of Children with Incarcerated Parents (INCCIP).

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## A Developmental Perspective

Because of the dramatically different needs and capacities of individuals across the lifespan, a developmental perspective is essential for an adequate understanding of children with incarcerated parents and their families. Such an understanding is also a key part of trauma-informed care approaches as well (e.g., Ko et al., 2008). Whereas peer relationships and involvement in the community may directly relate to the well-being of an adolescent whose parent is in prison or jail, these factors are less likely to have direct associations with the well-being of an infant or young child with an incarcerated parent; for the youngest children, involvement of parents, extended family, and the parents' community relationships are key. Visits and other forms of contact with incarcerated parents may have different meanings for and impacts on children depending on their ages and developmental capacities (Poehlmann, Dallaire, Loper, & Shear, 2010). Moreover, an intervention strategy that may be helpful and relevant for a 10-year old (e.g., mentoring, Chap. 14, this volume) may have little meaning for a 3-year old; for a very young child, the relationship with the child's primary caregivers would be a more appropriate target than fostering a mentoring relationship (Chap. 7, this volume). Thus, it is critical that researchers and interventionists have a basic understanding of child and family developmental processes, including what is typical and atypical development for children ranging in age from infancy to early adulthood and what are typical and atypical social interactions within families (see Chaps. 7 through 11, this volume). When professionals are aware of normative and non-normative development, such

knowledge can contribute positively to understanding risk and resilience processes in children with incarcerated parents and their families and communities (Masten, 2014; Sroufe, 1991).

A developmental approach also highlights the importance of longitudinal research (i.e., studies that follow the same group of children with incarcerated parents across time). While gaining as much information as possible from studies that were not originally designed to address the plethora of issues faced by the children with incarcerated parents and their families is vital to the field (see Chap. 5, this volume), new studies should include conceptualization and measurement strategies that are appropriate for this specific group of children, and at the different ages they are studied. There are many ways in which the criminal justice system touches the lives of incarcerated parents and their children and families (see Chap. 3, this volume). Further, there are many constructs of interest for children and families that are pertinent at one point in development but not another or aspects of development that change both qualitatively and quantitatively over time. For example, infants and toddlers do not exhibit delinquent behavior or substance abuse, whereas these variables may be of crucial importance for children in middle and high school. Another example is that although aggressive behavior can begin quite early in life, it can change in a variety of ways in expression, severity, and meaning across development. Parental supervision and monitoring have different meanings for teens relative to toddlers but are nonetheless vitally important to the safety, security, well-being, and conduct of children at all ages. Attachment relationships are critically important across the lifespan, although they are expressed and assessed in different ways depending on the age of the individual (see Chaps. 7 and 8, this volume). The effects of proximal processes and contexts of development may differ depending on a child's age, so that measurement of home environment quality is crucial for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers, whereas the measurement of school contexts and peer relationships is key once a child enters school.

Cross-sectional studies with children with incarcerated parents are also needed. Most notably, a better understanding of children's developmental competencies and challenges in the areas of cognitive, language, social-emotional development, literacy, and academic skills relative to their same age peers is important for children with incarcerated parents. Several studies have documented delays in cognitive development and academic achievement in some children affected by parental incarceration (e.g., Bell, Bayliss, Glauert, & Ohan, 2018; Hanlon, Blatchley, Bennett-Sears, O'Grady, Rose, & Callaman, 2005). Because of the overwhelming likelihood of past substance abuse in mothers who are incarcerated (James & Glaze, 2006; Siegel, 2011), their children are at risk for prenatal substance exposures, which may affect children's developmental outcomes. In addition, impoverished environments are associated with lags in development and academic achievement as well as less optimal brain development (Hanson et al., 2013). Because of these factors, many children with incarcerated parents may attain developmental milestones at a rate that is behind their peers.

More rigorous intervention research is needed as well, not only in terms of research designs, such as the use of randomized controlled trials (see Chap. 15, this volume), but also in terms of research approaches, such as participatory-based community research (see Chap. 17, this volume). The absolute necessity of engaging with family and community members who are not trained scientists as research partners in studies of the children with incarcerated parents is clear (see Chap. 21, this volume). Care should be taken to include stakeholders who have a range of experiences and expertise, including families affected by parental incarceration and researchers across disciplines. It is true that sometimes the needs of organizations, communities, and families may differ from the immediate needs of professionals or researchers seeking to help; however, there are many ways of navigating such complexities so that all voices are heard. The importance of communicating and finding win-win solutions within collaborations cannot be emphasized enough.

## Interdisciplinary Approaches to Resilience

Based on the body of work summarized in this book, it is clear that children with incarcerated parents are at risk for a variety of negative outcomes, including behavior problems, alcohol and substance abuse, depressive symptoms, attachment insecurity, academic failure, truancy, and criminal activity. Children's caregivers are at risk for experiencing parenting and financial stress, relationship dissolution, mental health concerns, and increased mobility. Incarcerated parents are at risk for a number of concerns, including substance abuse, mental health concerns, and recidivism. Given these many challenges, extended families and communities may be strained in attempting to support affected families. Yet not all individuals, families, and communities affected by parental incarceration develop negative outcomes. Indeed, across many risk experiences and contexts, individuals and families do not exhibit uniform responses to adversity (Werner, 2000; Cicchetti, Rogosch, & Toth, 1998). However, we are only beginning to learn about the factors and processes that promote positive adaptation, over time, in the presence of risk (i.e., resilience; Masten, 2014) in children, families, and communities affected by parental incarceration.

The next generation of research should identify mechanisms that link parental incarceration with child, family, and community well-being, including factors and processes that foster resilience processes at the proximal level (e.g., individual characteristics or skills, dyadic interaction patterns, quality of the home environment) and at more distal levels (e.g., quality of family supports and resources, characteristics of extended family, friends, and neighborhoods, school quality). Figure 24.1 presents a conceptual model of the domains of resilience that are often exhibited by children and the contextual levels that influence them. Both protective and promotive factors should be identified for children with incarcerated parents and their families and communities. Protective factors have a positive effect under stressful conditions, similar to a seat belt

that is activated during a car's sudden stop or impact, and they are often conceptualized in research as moderators, statistical interactions, or indirect effects. In contrast, promotive factors have consistently positive effects on development, even under non-stress conditions, and they are often detected as main or direct effects on children's outcomes or as mediators. Promotive and protective factors at different contextual levels may work together as means of fostering resilience processes in children and families. Moreover, interventions can target such factors once they are identified.

When conceptualizing potential resilience processes in children and families affected by parental incarceration, previous resilience-focused research that has been conducted with other high-risk children can serve as a guide, in addition to relevant theoretical models. For example, attachment theory suggests that the establishment of trusting and supportive relationships with alternative caregivers can ameliorate the negative effects of disrupted attachments for children (e.g., Poehlmann, 2003). Although secure attachments alone are not sufficient to protect children under conditions of multiple risk, security is an important component of resilience. Studies are needed that focus on the degree to which such relationships can modify the impacts on children that may result from parental incarceration. Arditti's (2016) family stress-proximal process model, that was developed to help understand the effects of parental incarceration on youth, points to a variety of processes that could be examined as targets of intervention, including experiences of ambiguous loss and stress at the individual and family levels.

Given the popularity of youth mentoring as an intervention for this population, it is of particular interest whether, when, and how mentoring relationships impact children with incarcerated parents (Chap. 14, this volume). Alternatively, previous research has found that social support, positive school experiences, and adequate supervision and disciplinary practices in the home are associated with resilience in children (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998). Studies focusing on these types of factors in the lives of children with incarcerated parents are needed, including



**Fig. 24.1** Contextual factors and processes that significantly influence domains of child resilience when parents are incarcerated

how the absence and reintegration of a parent due to incarceration may uniquely impact children in the home, school, and community domains. The identification of promotive and protective factors for the development of children affected by parental incarceration is crucial for the design of innovative and effective interventions, including preventive interventions. In turn, the results from experimental research on interventions provide information needed to improve our understanding of development and resilience processes and can point to gaps in our knowledge that can then

be addressed in further developmental epidemiological work.

For children with incarcerated parents, the next generation of research should consider how risks, promotive, and protective factors, and other variables operate to facilitate resilience processes at different points in the development of individuals and families. When studying infants and toddlers affected by parental incarceration, researchers may want to examine processes that lead to secure attachment with one or more caregivers, the attainment of normative developmental milestones,



predictors of health, and the consolidation of healthy sleep patterns as examples of positive outcomes in the context of risk. Protective and promotive factors that are particularly relevant for infants and toddlers include sensitive caregiving, safe, stimulating and supportive home environments, and positive relationships and co-parenting strategies between caregivers and incarcerated parents. Potent risks for poor infant or toddler outcomes may include lack of stability in the caregiving or living situation, challenges related to living in poverty, and prenatal or postnatal substance exposures (Poehlmann, 2005a).

Relations of interest that could be examined for somewhat older children with incarcerated parents include the presence of one or more additional risk factors that are hypothesized to decrease the chance of positive outcomes for a child, with higher levels of risk related to more problematic outcomes. An example of an additional risk factor that, unfortunately, is relatively common in this population is trauma associated with witnessing the parent's arrest (Dallaire & Wilson, 2010). Certain protective or promotive factors, such as caregiver sensitivity, are hypothesized to mediate (or in some cases, moderate) the influence of such risk factors on children's outcomes. If sufficient protection is present, the impact of risk on child outcomes is likely to decrease substantially. For example, if a child witnesses the parent's arrest but then receives consistently sensitive, responsive care from a parent with whom the child is securely attached, the effects of the traumatic event are likely attenuated (Poehlmann-Tynan, Burnson, Weymouth, & Runion, 2017). The relations between risk, protective and promotive processes, and positive outcomes are hypothesized to differ in the presence of key moderating factors, such as certain characteristics of the child, his or her parents and caregivers, and his or her environment.

As children reach school age, variables that are viewed as positive outcomes for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers may be conceptualized as different components of the developmental process. For example, a secure attachment to a caregiver may be viewed as a positive outcome for an infant; however, a secure attachment may be viewed as a promotive factor for school-age children because

of its likely association with other important developmental competencies (e.g., self-regulation, positive peer relations, prosocial behaviors, conscience development; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998; Masten, 2014). Because of children's normative gains in cognitive, language, and social skills and regular exposure to environments outside the family context, additional risks may be present for school-age children whose parents are in jail or prison, such as exposure to social stigma (Shlafer & Poehlmann, 2010), witnessing the parent's crime (Dallaire & Wilson, 2010), or violence or drug dealing in the neighborhood. Additional protective factors that emerge with increasing age include specific parenting practices, such as supervision, monitoring, and discipline, non-parental social supports originating from within or outside the extended family, peer influences, cultural strengths and practices, and a range of emerging coping strategies.

During adolescence, the interaction between parenting and peers becomes even more important (Chap. 8, this volume). Deviant peer association becomes one of the strongest risk factors for poor adolescent adjustment and problem behaviors, and parental monitoring and supervision takes on a new and critically important meaning. Empirical examinations of conceptual models such as these are needed to enhance our understanding of how the various factors in the lives of children interact. Information is sorely needed on both the moderators and mediators of changes in the behavior, affect, and cognition in the children with incarcerated parents over time, not only across the course of development, but also over the course of child- and family-focused interventions.

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## Meeting Challenges

### Research

Some of the most methodologically rigorous studies focusing on children with incarcerated parents published in the past decade have relied on secondary data analysis of existing large, longitudinal datasets collected in the USA and other countries (e.g., Huebner & Gustafson,



2007; Murray & Farrington, 2005). These studies have moved the field forward and addressed important and long-standing questions such as whether children with parents who are or were incarcerated experience increased risk for negative outcomes as they grow older, or whether or not such outcomes are related to incarceration per se or other risks, including those involving parent-child separation. However, because these studies were not designed to focus on children and families affected by parental incarceration, they tell us little or nothing about the specific processes and experiences linking parental arrest and incarceration with children's outcomes (e.g., children witnessing the parent's crime or arrest, issues related to visits and other forms of contact with the incarcerated parent, social stigma that may occur as the result of the parent's criminal behavior or incarceration, changes in caregiving that occur over time because of the parent's incarceration). Smaller-scale studies that have purposively sampled incarcerated parents, their children, and their children's caregivers have begun to shed light on some of these processes, although many methodological limitations are often present. A number of intervention studies have been conducted, but many of these also have suffered from a variety of design problems.

The most pressing need in the field at this point in time is high-quality studies at all levels of inquiry. We simply do not know the answer to certain key questions such as: how do visits and other forms of contact with incarcerated parents impact children of various ages? What family processes are important in facilitating resilience processes in infants, children, and adolescents with parents in prison or jail? Does traumatization or modeling that occurs as the result of children witnessing parental crime or arrest have long-term effects on children's development? What types of interventions are most effective for children of different ages and their families with an incarcerated parent? How do stress processes operate in children with incarcerated parents and their families? Answering these and the many other important questions relevant to this population will require rigorous longitudinal and cross-sectional studies. Both large-scale and small-scale studies

are needed to gain an adequate understanding of both resilience and vulnerability and how developmental and familial processes may link parental incarceration with children's outcomes. Here we offer suggestions for research approach, design, sampling, measurement, and analysis that can be achieved through collaborative interdisciplinary efforts and that have the potential to move the field forward during the next decade of research.

### **Approach**

Studies that are fully informed, shaped, and co-led by collaborators who are not researchers have the potential to greatly increase the depth of knowledge in the field about children with incarcerated parents and their families. The rigor of our science can only be increased by taking seriously the importance of the people who are involved with the criminal justice system, whether that be incarcerated parents, their children (minors and adults), their other family members; the men and women who work each day in jails, prisons, and community corrections; and policymakers and administrators who serve in roles in the criminal justice or closely related systems (see Chaps. 19 and 20, this volume). Engaging in new approaches to research, such as community-based participatory methods, is vital to improving the quality of the work done in the field and the relevance of the findings generated for real life.

### **Design**

Studies using prospective longitudinal designs are needed to understand the developmental trajectories of children with incarcerated parents. Previous studies have been unable to examine children's development and relationships prior to parental arrest or incarceration. This would be feasible if well-funded large-scale prospective longitudinal studies focused on children living in neighborhoods with high rates of adult incarceration. To achieve this end, it may be necessary for researchers to interface with an ongoing study designed to follow children prenatally to adulthood. In the previous version of this volume, we suggested interfacing with the National Children's Study (2003), although that is not possible now because the study was canceled. Within the

context of a different prospective study, there could be multiple key transitions experienced by children and families affected by parental incarceration that might be examined, including the events surrounding the parent's arrest, sentencing, incarceration, release into the community, and reunification with family members. Adequately assessing the impacts of these transitions on children would likely require ongoing assessments of the occurrence of such events, followed by additional assessments that would be conducted soon after an event was detected. The same type of strategy could be used within the context of smaller-scale longitudinal studies, such as the approach used by ECHO (Environmental Influences on Child Health Outcomes) via the National Institutes of Health. While the goals of ECHO are similar to those of the former National Children's Study, ECHO takes a different approach. It capitalizes on existing participant populations instead of creating its own group of participants, with attempts to create overlapping measures in different studies so that data can be pooled.

Analyses of large, population-based datasets that include measures of parental incarceration, such as the NLSY79, AddHealth, Fragile Families and Child Well-being, and the National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being studies, have contributed greatly to our understanding of how parental incarceration relates to child outcomes. Although we have learned about how general family mechanisms link parental incarceration with child outcomes, including lack of material resources, parenting stress, and poor caregiver mental health, processes that are uniquely associated with a parent's incarceration have not been assessed in such datasets (see Poehlmann-Tynan, Cuthrell, Weymouth, & Burnson, 2018, for a summary). In families affected by parental incarceration, it is particularly important to assess trauma that may occur when children witness the parent's crime or arrest; the frequency and quality of children's visits with their parents in prison or jail; what children know about their parent's incarceration; and how children think and feel about the incarceration of their parents (Poehlmann-Tynan et al., 2018).

New interdisciplinary longitudinal studies are sorely needed, but they can be challenging to conduct. Even short-term longitudinal research with this population can be difficult (e.g., Eddy, Powell, Szuba, McCool, & Kuntz, 2001). Families affected by incarceration tend to move frequently (Muentner et al., 2018) and often have disconnected phones (Shlafer & Poehlmann, 2010) and lack of access to the Internet. A wide variety of strategies are needed to keep close track of children with incarcerated parents, such as giving families' phone cards or cell phones to call researchers, offering Internet services, attempting frequent contacts with families, offering prorated compensation to families based on the number of contacts completed over time, and implementing culturally sensitive practices.

A limited number of intervention studies have been conducted with children with incarcerated parents and their families, and most have used designs that are not well-suited for determining whether or not a program was effective. The majority have examined pre-intervention to post-intervention changes only in a sample that received an intervention of interest or have compared an intervention group to a non-randomized comparison group. These studies tend to overestimate treatment effects (Shadish, Cook, & Campbell, 2002). Rather than more of these types of studies, new intervention studies should employ designs that minimize bias and control for threats to the validity of the findings.

In particular, randomized controlled trials, where participants are assigned to two or more groups, such as an intervention and a "services as usual" group or active control group, and then followed over time, are very much needed. Randomized trials can be challenging to conduct within corrections settings, but they are facilitated when time is taken to develop close collaborations not only with corrections departments and specific institutions but also with service delivery partners with experience and skill working within the system (e.g., Eddy et al., 2008). Such trials are also needed within community settings, as caregiving contexts and schools function as children's proximal environments during a parent's incarceration. Although propensity score matching

can create a quasi-experimental design, the approach is complementary to (rather than a replacement for) randomized trials.

Small-scale cross-sectional studies have been the norm in research with this population and will likely continue to be so in the near future. These types of studies have and will provide valuable information to the field, and they will provide an opportunity to develop hypotheses that can be examined in the context of longitudinal and intervention studies. However, key in the future conduct of these studies will be a new rigor in terms of sampling, and a reconsideration of issues related to measurement and analysis.

### Sampling

In many previous studies focusing on children with incarcerated parents, small convenience samples have been the norm. This has often resulted from limited funding, difficulties in overcoming challenges in accessing the population (including collaborating with corrections systems), and/or the difficulty in overcoming challenges inherent in working with high-risk families and their children (e.g., frequent moves, disconnected phones). Samples must be large enough to establish adequate statistical power to conduct planned tests, especially when examining moderating factors (i.e., statistical interactions), mediating variables, or complex conceptual models. Further, samples must be related back to a population of interest, including how common it is for children with incarcerated parents to live in urban versus rural areas or to spend time in foster care (e.g., Murphey & Cooper, 2015). Although probability sampling is ideal, purposive sampling strategies are also important to consider. The latter approach is characterized by deliberate efforts to include presumably typical groups in the sample if probability sampling is not possible. The goal of these sampling strategies is to create representative samples in order to enhance the generalizability and relevance of the findings that emerge from the research.

With any sampling strategy, thought should be given to the ages of the children sampled and what age is appropriate for the research question under consideration. Collaborating with systems that allow and encourage access to incarcerated

parents, children, and children's caregivers are important as well, including corrections departments, jails, schools, hospitals, child welfare systems, extension and community programs, and relevant intervention programs. Indeed, a key problem plaguing much of the research focusing on children with incarcerated parents is how to identify affected children. Schools, corrections systems, and other institutions still do not routinely keep a record of these children, causing a variety of scholars over the years to refer to children with incarcerated parents as a population that is "invisible." Of course, a sampling strategy is only one part of the problem; the other is having a recruitment strategy that is successful in enrolling participants, and a retention strategy that yields high participation rates over time. Strategies developed over the past several decades in work with other at risk and high-risk populations should be helpful in this regard (Capaldi & Patterson, 1987).

A key consideration for samples in future studies is the inclusion of both incarcerated mothers and fathers and their children. About 10 times more men are incarcerated than women in the USA (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008), although the number of incarcerated women is growing at a faster rate than incarcerated men, especially in jails (Zeng, 2018). Still, children are much more likely to experience the incarceration of their fathers than their mothers. However, it is important to include children affected by maternal incarceration as well because they are more likely to experience changes in caregivers, non-parental caregivers, poverty, and other risk factors than children of incarcerated fathers (e.g., Murray & Farrington, 2008; Poehlmann, 2005b; Siegel, 2011). Previous research has often combined data from children of incarcerated mothers and fathers (e.g., Murray & Farrington, 2005) or only focused on one group (e.g., Hanlon et al., 2005). Although there are no large-scale definitive studies examining differences between children with incarcerated mothers and fathers, there are several reasons that one might expect such differences (e.g., Dallaire, 2007), and careful work is needed to understand processes and outcomes within families

affected by paternal incarceration, maternal incarceration, and the incarceration of both parents.

Past studies have often combined data from samples of children of jailed and imprisoned parents, even though these populations may differ in a number of important ways (e.g., length of separation, severity of crime, family contact with the incarcerated individual, involvement of alcohol and other substances). Studies of children with jailed parents in the USA are particularly important, because the vast majority of US incarceration occurs at local levels (Wagner & Sawyer, 2018). Careful specification is needed in future studies regarding the details of parental incarceration. Differences and similarities between children who have parents who are locked up for brief or more lengthy jail stays, or shorter versus longer prison stays, for example, need to be delineated. Issues unique to these contexts are important to consider and should not be ignored.

For example, some incarcerated parents spend repeated, relatively brief stays in jail, followed by rapid reunification with families and communities (e.g., Muentner et al., 2018). Within this context, there may be more reciprocity and overlap in the social networks of these incarcerated parents, affected children, and children's caregivers compared to individuals who serve longer jail or prison sentences. Further, there may be a greater likelihood that such an individual's behaviors might place a child at greater risk for harm and might more strongly influence the child's subsequent behaviors (e.g., through increased exposure at home to illegal substances and substance abuse and to deviant associates, less stable situation at home).

A large proportion of those convicted with a felony who spend time in prison have a history of prior arrest and jail time. Thus, accessing children and families during a parent's jail stay is potentially catching some families early in the process that may eventually result in longer-term parental incarceration. Further, because jails tend to be locally operated and located, they may be more accessible for community prevention efforts compared to prisons, which are often

located far from affected families and may have more restrictive policies regarding frequency of contact with family members compared to jails.

### Measurement

Is it important that the perspectives of children, incarcerated parents, caregivers, and staff members within the various relevant systems (e.g., schools, child welfare, corrections, home) are assessed, depending on the research questions at hand. For example, parenting interventions for incarcerated parents should measure parenting behaviors and child outcomes as primary indications of success, rather than continuing to focus mostly on changes in parental attitudes (Chap. 13, this volume). In such studies, researchers also should assess key process-related variables relevant to intervention efforts, such as caregiver-child interaction patterns and ongoing contact with incarcerated parents, in addition to static factors such as the parent's pre-incarceration socioeconomic status or gender. The use of multiple methods (interviews, questionnaires, direct observations, standardized assessments) and multiple informants (caregivers, parents, children, teachers) is important to minimize the chance of obtaining spurious significant findings because of within-method or within-respondent shared variance and to obtain the perspectives of as many relevant people to the child and family as possible. Although it is important to document children's behavior problems, we must move beyond primary reliance on measures such as child behavior checklists to document the myriad potential effects of parental incarceration on children (see Poehlmann-Tynan & Arditto, 2018, for a more detailed discussion of child and family measurement when a parent is incarcerated).

Observational approaches per se have been underutilized in previous research focusing on children affected by parental incarceration but are important for the examination of key proximal processes that may be associated with resilience as well as maladjustment (Snyder et al., 2006). However, new research focusing on quality of visits between incarcerated parents and their children has used observational methods (see Chap. 10, this volume). When using interviews

and observational approaches, application of both quantitative and qualitative coding schemes is possible, depending on the goals of the study. Qualitative analysis of data has enriched our understanding of the hardships experienced by families following parental incarceration (e.g., Siegel, 2011), including challenging experiences with jail visits (e.g., Arditti, 2003) and children's behavioral and emotional reactions to the loss of their imprisoned mothers (e.g., Poehlmann, 2005a), and has contributed to theory building. In the future, mixed method approaches that combine qualitative and quantitative analyses will be useful, especially as the field begins to test the theories that have been developed.

The reliable and valid measurement of parenting, visit quality, and other family processes is vital to quantitative analysis in studies focused on children with incarcerated parents, but little work has been done in this area that is particular to the unique issues in this population. Most notably, it is unclear how parenting should be measured for parents behind bars. Typical parenting questionnaires are generally not appropriate because they are intended to provide summary information about the day-to-day, in person interactions that occur between a parent and child. Except in the case of prison nurseries (see Chap. 12, this volume) or other unique contact visit experiences, such interactions do not occur. Basic measurement development work is needed on questionnaires that are relevant to the type of parenting that does happen from behind bars.

Another option for measuring parenting that is used in community-based research is observed parent-child interaction (Reid, Patterson & Snyder, 2002). Such interactions are usually videotaped. While it is possible to conduct this type of assessment within a prison or jail, even within the best of collaborations between researchers and correction systems, it is difficult. Further, it is unclear how behaviors during such interactions, which are indexing something that generally occurs quite infrequently under very

unusual conditions, would compare to parent-child interactions on the outside. Again, basic measurement development work is needed.

Finally, another option is to either describe or show a videotaped scenario to parents and ask how they would respond (e.g., Conduct Problems Prevention Research Group, 2002). The difficulty here again is that the existing measures of this type have not been developed for use with this population, and more information is needed. This is just one example of how reliable and valid measures of key constructs are not yet available for important research relevant to children with incarcerated parents, and very much need to be developed.

In addition to measuring parenting from behind bars and quality of visits with incarcerated parents, it is also crucial to assess children's caregiving environments in the community. Caregivers are the adults responsible for day-to-day interactions with children, including supporting children's growth and development at home, school and community contexts, providing supervision and discipline, and often regulating contact between children and incarcerated parents (see Chap. 10, this volume). The nature of the co-parenting system that often arises between caregivers and incarcerated parents is an important consideration (Cecil, McHale, Strozier, & Pietsch, 2008), as is the reliable and valid assessment of the caregiver's parenting.

A highly valued outcome for corrections systems is to impact recidivism, and this is of particular interest in studies of not only parenting programs but more comprehensive multimodal programs that target incarcerated parents and their families. Whereas the impact of programs on recidivism and related variables such as self-report of criminal behavior, official arrest, lock up in jail, are important to examine, the most important outcome variables in terms of pushing our knowledge forward is whether or not intervention programs impact the proximal, more immediate targets that they are supposed to be changing. If these variables are not measured and



recidivism is impacted, it is unclear why; indeed, information about *why* change happens, not just *whether* it happens, is very much needed.

Information is also needed on the mechanisms of change within the intervention process itself, for incarcerated parents, their children, and children's caregivers. In this regard, intervention studies related to children with incarcerated parents often have not described the intended content and process of the intervention well enough to enable replication, and then further, have rarely reported on whether or not the actual intervention that was delivered met the stated standard (i.e., fidelity to the model).

### Analysis

Data should be analyzed with appropriately sophisticated techniques that are designed to address the key questions of interest (Kjellstrand, Yu, Eddy, & Martinez, 2018; MacKinnon & Lockwood, 2004). The use of causal modeling strategies such as longitudinal growth modeling or structural equation modeling in particular may assist in the identification of underlying developmental processes. A variety of multilevel modeling techniques could be used to examine questions such as whether children's behavior problems covary with visits of incarcerated parents over time (including the examination of intraindividual differences in these patterns); to examine the development of siblings nested within families affected by parental incarceration; or to determine whether or not certain contextual variables predict children's increasing or decreasing problem behavior or prosocial behavior trajectories over time. Techniques such as event history analysis, which allow the joint examination of the occurrence of an event and the time to that event, should be employed when appropriate. Clustering in the data, such as when parents, families, or children are brought together in groups for treatment, or when incarcerated parents reside together in a prison or treatment unit, should be accounted for in the analyses.

Propensity score matching has been used to contrast children with ever-incarcerated parents to children with never-incarcerated parents, particularly among sociologists (e.g., Foster &

Hagen, 2009; Turney & Wildeman, 2015). Although this technique has been important in moving the field forward, it has its limitations and is sensitive to many choices made by researchers (e.g., Copp, Giordano, Manning, & Longmore, 2018).

Missing data should no longer be ignored (e.g., such as occurs when listwise deletion is employed), and one of the many techniques now available to deal with missing data should be used instead, such as full maximum information likelihood estimation or multiple imputation (Abraham & Russell, 2004). It will be important for future research efforts to move beyond mere group comparisons designed to determine children's risk level or document children's outcomes relative to other groups. Rather, the focus should be on identifying developmental, familial, and contextual processes in relation to children's outcomes and trajectories, and to do this, larger, more rigorous studies need to be conducted, and data need to be analyzed using more advanced methods.

### Practice

The information available for practitioners working in this area is limited, particularly when working individually with the children with incarcerated parents, or when working with incarcerated parents themselves. However, there is a wealth of knowledge available on interventions appropriate for caregivers in the community (although it is not specific to issues regarding parental incarceration). The parenting skills and support provided in the evidence-based family interventions that are available (e.g., Webster-Stratton & Hammond, 1997; Webster-Stratton & Hammond, 1998) may be just as relevant and useful for the caregivers of children with incarcerated parents as to the caregivers of other children. Because these interventions generally do not address issues of special relevance to families with incarcerated parents, such as co-parenting from a distance, visits issues, or cultural factors in parenting, supplementing these interventions with additional group or individual sessions with



clinicians knowledgeable in these areas should be considered.

Practitioners can play a key role in pushing the field forward by joining with researchers and people with lived experience to conduct the studies needed to adequately inform practice. Rigorous intervention research uniquely relevant to children with incarcerated parents and their families is only just beginning. Most of the existing studies have been conducted on institution-based parenting programs, and still a minority of studies have employed a rigorous randomized comparison group design (Chap. 13, this volume). Only a few studies have been conducted on any of the other interventions discussed in this volume; many interventions used in the field do not have published evaluations or any evaluations completed. The areas that have been examined to date are reviewed in this volume (i.e., parenting, youth mentoring, prison nurseries) and provide an entry point into the literature for new researchers. Clearly, this situation needs to be improved.

Further high-quality research focusing on each of these general types of intervention is needed. Evaluation studies of already existing, innovative programs are needed, such as some of the interventions presented at the annual conference on children with incarcerated parents hosted by the Center for Child Well-Being at Arizona State University. The development of a new and second generation of interventions is also needed, followed by rigorous studies of such interventions. The multimodal intervention approach discussed in Chap. 15 of this volume is an example of the type of more comprehensive intervention that seems worthy of consideration. Such interventions do not just attempt to work with incarcerated parents or with children alone; rather, they bring families, including children's current caregivers, into the process, and thus try to effect change at the family systems level. Through partnerships with researchers and advocates, practitioners can play important roles in initiating and conducting each of these types of studies as well as in disseminating information on what is known to be helpful for children with

incarcerated parents and their families (see Chap. 22, this volume).

## Policy

For policymakers and practitioners alike, the limited number of rigorous developmental and intervention studies in this area is frustrating. Policymakers need to know what interventions are truly "evidence-based" and relevant to children with incarcerated parents, and thus which interventions are particularly worthy of funding. Advocates need answers that will help them engage community interest and action. Practitioners need access to interventions that work for children of a range of ages. The high stakes pressures generated by these needs can lead to the proliferation of myths, such as the myth that children with incarcerated parents are five, six, or seven times more likely to be incarcerated than their peers. In terms of interventions, the most common myths today revolve around whether particular programs are "evidence-based." Often this label is applied inappropriately, at least from the perspective of the scientific community.

To illustrate the problem, a colleague recently was conducting a search for programs relevant to the children with incarcerated parents and their families and asked program developers whether their program was "evidence-based." The reply was "yes" because the program addressed individual and family factors that were considered important in reducing recidivism, and a third-party evaluator had examined outcomes that resulted from the program. Within the scientific community at large, these criteria generally are not sufficient in and of themselves to make such a designation. If policymakers desire to have research shape practice, clear, consistent and meaningful standards must be generated for what is and what is not, evidence-based practice.

Fortunately, a variety of professional organizations, governmental agencies, and research groups have developed clear definitions of what "evidence-based" means, and in all cases, a fundamental part of the definition is that positive outcomes have been found in a study that used at

least one of the more rigorous comparison group designs (e.g., Flay et al., 2005). Most frequently, the results of these studies must have been published in peer-reviewed journals, and thus submitted to close inspection by knowledgeable colleagues who have agreed that the study appears to have been theoretically based, well-conducted, and the findings have some degree of validity. Many groups require that at least two such studies have been conducted and published, and some go a step further and require that at least one study be conducted by researchers who do not have an inherent conflict of interest in finding positive results (such as a program developer who is seeking to market the program). Consistency in definitions such as “evidence-based practice” is needed across the worlds of research, policy, and practice.

Given the research available to date, there are three key steps that policymakers could make relevant to children with incarcerated parents. The first step is to formally recognize that most incarcerated parents have children. In particular, when legislation leads to higher rates of incarceration, this results in real impacts on children and families, particularly within impoverished, minority communities. This fact can no longer be ignored. When policies and practices are created within the organizations and systems that interact with incarcerated parents and their families, children cannot be forgotten. The potential impacts on children should be documented and discussed as a matter of course as legislation, policies, and practices are being developed, before they are implemented.

The second step that can be taken by policymakers is to find ways to ensure that children with incarcerated parents are safe and protected. Policies and practices should be designed in such a way as to minimize the potential for further trauma or harm to these children. To do this, one must carefully consider the context and recognize that most incarcerated parents have children and many lived with their children prior to incarceration. The third step is to foster resilience processes in children and families. Policies, practices, and interventions that clearly strengthen families and foster positive

developmental outcomes, as demonstrated through rigorous science, should be favored. Current standards for how things are done should be re-evaluated with a consideration of child development and context in mind. Not only should the potential for child harm be reduced, but the probability for child success should be increased and documented.

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## Closing Thoughts

It is a tragedy that so many children have a parent in jail or prison in the USA and around the world and that there are many more children who have experienced this in the past or soon will in the future. In this edited volume, we have brought together key scholars from various disciplines who are experts regarding children, parents, caregivers, and systems associated with parental incarceration. The current empirical base relevant to children with incarcerated parents is summarized here, and it is clear that there are many gaps in our knowledge, both at the developmental science level and at the intervention science level. These gaps limit our ability to effectively intervene with these children and families. More studies are needed, and thus funding for such work is greatly needed.

Because of the complexities involved in the lives of people impacted by criminality and incarceration, further studies in this area would be most revealing if conducted in the context of collaborative, interdisciplinary teams that pool their skills, knowledge, and experience. While researchers from multiple academic fields are an important component of such teams, so are corrections administrators, practitioners, and policymakers. Each profession has much to bring to this work, and the inclusion of their voices, as well as the voices of the children and families involved, is important in moving the field forward.

Perusal of this volume indicates a pressing need for policy changes so that, in the future, fewer children will have parents in jail or prison, and those that do will get the support they need to be safe and to thrive. In the meantime,

however, we need to act to help vulnerable children and their families, schools, and other involved systems (e.g., child welfare) cope with the consequences of our nation's reliance on incarceration at historically unprecedented levels. The best approaches for such work are evidence-based interventions that are sensitive to context and development and that promote child and family resilience. Rigorous interdisciplinary developmental and intervention research, that is conducted from a social justice perspective, is needed to broaden the evidence base and to provide guidance to parents, practitioners, and policymakers so that children with incarcerated parents are given the opportunity to succeed in a civil and hopefully increasingly just society.

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**Abstract**

Personal reflections on the chapters in this book and the field at large are offered by the author, who has worked with parents involved in the criminal justice system and their children for the past thirty years. In the decades since publishing her first article on the children of incarcerated parents, the US correctional population has grown significantly. Prisons and jails are now a major industry, housing millions of individuals each year, consuming billions of taxpayers' dollars while also generating billions of dollars for private firms that now provide prison-based products and services. Studies about crime, criminals, and criminal justice institutions abound. Annual statistics on correctional populations, crime mapping tools, criminal risk assessment instruments, recidivism studies, and the like are all now readily available and accessible. Though not nearly as prolific or as well-funded, studies about the children, families, and communities of the incarcerated have grown in number as well. As documented in this book, there has been a significant progress in the development of scientific knowledge about the impact of incarceration on families and children and a growing

acceptance of policies and programs to prevent negative outcomes for the children of incarcerated parents. Major points from the diverse set of chapters in this volume are summarized, and recommendations are made for future work in the field.

More than thirty years have passed since I submitted my first manuscript on incarcerated parents and their children to a professional journal for consideration for publication. At the time, a colleague and I were providing consultation and parent education classes to men incarcerated in a Tennessee prison, and I thought that an article about the program and the men's experiences would be of interest and value to social workers. The manuscript was promptly rejected. While there were some compliments about my writing and presentation of the information, the editor informed me that the article would be of limited interest to social work audiences. In addition, one of the reviewers questioned the very premise of my article, i.e., my promotion of a program that allowed imprisoned parents to have contact with their children. The reviewer reasoned that children, for their own good, should be kept away from their "criminal" parents.

I was disappointed that my manuscript was rejected. As a newly promoted associate professor, I had finally learned the intricacies of journal publishing and took pride in the fact that several of my articles had been published in prominent academic journals. The fact that those articles

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were on organizational management, rather than incarceration or parenting, and that I was perhaps “out of my league” in moving into this new area, did not enter into my thinking. The editor’s and reviewer’s comments affected me far beyond the rejection itself. I found the idea that an article on incarcerated parents and their children would be of interest to only a few members of a profession at the forefront of providing social services for children and families living in poverty to be quite unsettling. Of greater concern was the idea that social services providers might be actively promoting severing parent–child relationships solely on the basis of a parent’s involvement in the criminal justice system. I knew parents who had been arrested and served time and they were not “just criminals” to me. In addition, I was seeing on a weekly basis incarcerated fathers who were concerned about the well-being of their children and who were engaging in efforts to be better parents while in prison and when returning home. I decided to find another outlet for publication of that paper and resolved to commit more time and energy to research and practice that might make a positive difference in the lives of families involved in the criminal justice system. Although I have held several different professional positions since then, incarcerated parents and their children and families always have been at the center of my research and practice.

I eventually did find another journal that was interested in publishing that first article. In the decades since, the US correctional population has grown tremendously, much more so than anyone even imagined back then. Prisons and jails are now a major industry, housing millions of individuals each year, consuming billions of taxpayers’ dollars while also generating billions of dollars for private firms that now provide prison-based products and services. Studies about crime, criminals, and criminal justice institutions abound. Annual statistics on correctional populations, crime mapping tools, criminal risk assessment instruments, recidivism studies, and the like are all now readily available and accessible.

Though not nearly as prolific or as well-funded, studies about the children, families,

and communities of the incarcerated have grown in number as well. In addition to technical research reports and articles in refereed journals, publications on incarcerated parents and their children include books by popular presses, edited texts, and editorial opinions in major newspapers. The authors of these publications come from a variety of disciplines and professions and have different backgrounds and areas of expertise. Some have limited interest in the topic, write one or two articles, and move on to other subjects. Others have made the matter as the focus of their academic and research careers. Examples of the latter include J. Mark Eddy and Julie Poehlmann-Tynan, the editors of this handbook, as well as several other authors of the chapters in this book.

Programs providing services to support incarcerated parents, their children and children’s caregivers have also grown and become more accepted by both corrections authorities and community services providers. Although parenting programs for fathers in prison were questioned as relevant back then, parent education classes for fathers are now common in prisons and jails. Similar to authors, service programs often have short lives. Some last only for the length of a funded grant. Others are terminated because of inadequate resources and infrastructures, the death of a program founder or charismatic leader, or changes in correctional policies and administrators. In contrast, family-oriented correctional programs provided by organizations such as New York State’s Osborne Association and Hope House’s services for incarcerated fathers in Washington, DC have weathered many changes and been around for more than twenty years. These diverse studies and program experiences, long- and short-lived, sustained and one shot, have laid a foundation for what is now an important area of study and practice.

This handbook provides a comprehensive overview of the current state of the field. The chapters are written by experts, all of whom, in their professional roles and work, have given serious attention to the matter of children whose parents are incarcerated. The authors represent different disciplines and use a variety of research

methods and ways of knowing to enhance understanding and promote the well-being of children and families. The chapters, while all on a common theme, cover a broad range of empirical research, conceptual models, and program and policy implementation. In addition to summaries of the research literature, commentary on findings is provided and areas for future research and policy agendas are discussed. Major points from these diverse chapters are summarized here.

First, the number of children affected by parental incarceration and criminal justice system involvement is staggering. Surveys of parents in US federal and state prisons indicate that the annual number of children who have a parent in prison is more than a million. Including children whose parents are in jail increases this annual number by millions, given the size and turnover nature of jail populations. Data from national studies of children's well-being indicate that the number of children affected by parental incarceration is considerably larger than these combined numbers. Unlike studies of parents who are in prison, the child well-being studies frequently ask if a child's parent or parents have ever been incarcerated at any point during the child's growing up years. These survey numbers do not typically include children whose parents are arrested but not convicted or are convicted and placed on probation rather than being incarcerated. Although the actual number of children affected by parental incarceration vary based on the question that is asked and the source of data (see Chap. 2, this volume), the enormity of the situation is evident across different measures.

Children whose parents are, or have been, incarcerated are at risk of having several negative experiences and outcomes. National surveys of adolescent and child health and fragile families and child well-being indicate that children in families with a history of parental incarceration are at higher risk than other children of experiencing several negative outcomes (see Chap. 5, this volume). Among these are higher rates of school failure, delinquent behavior, and substance use. Scholars, however, pose numerous questions about what, beyond the big picture,

these types of surveys really tell us about how parental incarceration affects children. The large surveys were conducted for other purposes than answering this question, and the different methods used, including measures of incarceration and points in time, influence the findings. More importantly, the surveys do not address critical incarceration issues such as parent-child contact during a parent's imprisonment or how the parent's absence affects other domains of family life. A national survey that employs the same research rigor as other surveys on children's well-being but poses questions more relevant to parents' criminal justice system involvement, family responses, and children's needs is research that would be more relevant and useful in terms of guiding future courses of action in policy and practice.

The United States prison and jail populations are disproportionately people of color, but children and parental incarceration studies that explicitly engage the dynamics of race with the criminal justice system are rare (Chap. 4, this volume). Research studies often use race as a demographic variable to compare findings for Black, White, and Latinx children. These studies show racial and ethnic disparities in children's risks of having an incarcerated parent and in their experiences and outcomes. For example, one study found that a higher percentage of Black families than White families enroll in government assistance programs and become homeless following parental incarceration. Another study found that children of color are more likely to be living in under-resourced neighborhoods than White children. A third study showed lower school dropout rates for Black children than White children if their mothers were incarcerated. Various theoretical orientations have been used to explain differences such as these across studies. As in any field, the theoretical orientations and the deductive or inductive thinking underlying them require further thought and exploration when they are applied to a new area, such as research on the children of incarcerated parents. This may help explain how a conclusion that incarceration may be less harmful to Black children than White children has been reached by some.

How children whose parents are incarcerated fare is affected by their developmental stage, family dynamics, and parent–child connections (Chaps. 7–11, this volume). Infants, preschoolers, middle school children, and adolescents have different emotional and cognitive capacities and skills and different social connections and skills as well. These all affect how they experience, respond to, and manage separations from their parents. Caregiving and the family context are likewise important in determining children’s outcomes and designing interventions. The adequacy of family resources, the quality of care arrangements, caregiver and family stability, and relationships and contact between parents and children all affect children. There may be collateral consequences, as well as cumulative disadvantages, associated with parental incarceration. Visits and other forms of contact between parents and children, though viewed as positive and desired by most children and families, are not wanted by others. The latter happens more often when there has not been a positive relationship between children’s parents or other caregivers and between children and their incarcerated parents prior to incarceration. Humiliating visit conditions, prison locations, and burdensome financial costs to families also influence parent–child contact, family relationships, and children’s well-being. The how and why of children’s outcomes and how best to support families when parents are incarcerated or involved in other criminal justice contexts are topics in need of further research.

Programs for those incarcerated in prison and jail, especially parent education classes, are provided with a goal of preventing negative outcomes for incarcerated parents’ children (Chaps. 13 and 15, this volume). Measures of success, however, have often focused on parent’s self-reports of attitudinal changes rather than on changes in parents’ behaviors or children’s outcomes. Randomized trials using experimental designs and measures other than parents’ self-reports are rare. These research designs may not be practical, however, within many correctional settings and present a variety of difficulties, including those related to tracking the

children and families of incarcerated parents and assessing children’s outcomes over the long run. Future studies can be enhanced by using child development theory, culturally responsive approaches, and knowledge of the day-to-day reality of prison life and family matters to guide program development, courses, and program evaluation.

Different research methods are needed to understand a topic as broad as incarcerated parents and their children and to generate data that informs social policies, programs, and practices. Quantitative studies, both cross-sectional and longitudinal, provide numbers and demographics, and associations between variables. They can be used to track trends and patterns and to make within- and between-group comparisons. Qualitative studies are viewed as having the potential to give “voice to the lived experiences of children and parents.” A quantitative researcher may conduct secondary analysis of survey data to examine the effects of incarceration and never speak to a child or a prisoner. In contrast, talking with research participants and exploring their daily lives and experiences is a fundamental part of qualitative inquiry (Chap. 11, this volume). Participatory research models provide yet another avenue for generating meaningful research (Chaps. 17 and 21, this volume). Participatory research involves community agencies that provide services to families and family members themselves in all phases of a study. Participatory research approaches, though promising avenues for generating useful data, are rarely visible in the literature on families and incarceration.

Perspectives of practitioners are seldom provided in books on family-focused criminal justice research studies. Child welfare systems and legal services have critical roles, however, in facilitating or hindering parent–child communication during and after incarceration (Chap. 19, this volume). There are certainly major differences among state-level juvenile justice organizations, legal aid services, and child welfare systems. There are, at the same time, similarities in the overall strategies that contribute to program success within each system. Having clarity of purpose and goals, identifying a conceptual

framework to guide program content and service models, and engaging partners who have a vested interest in the program's purpose and outcomes are important in that regard (Chaps. 15 and 20, this volume).

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## Conclusions

On a personal level, I am moved to reflect on what, after a lifetime of work in this area, I now know or have learned from research about children whose parents are incarcerated. In doing so, I am reminded of an article that I wrote more than ten years ago for a publication on social work management (Hairston, 2007). My lead statement was "Everything I know about management I did not learn in kindergarten, but I sure learned a lot in grade school." I have learned a lot from reading and analyzing the literature, attending academic and professional conferences, and participating as a research investigator or consultant. In reading the chapters in this book, much of what I have learned was confirmed—both the things that are consistently documented as well as conflicting findings. My reading of these chapters has also exposed me to new data and different ways of thinking about research findings and topics. There are clearly new methods for selecting samples, compiling data sets, and analyzing data than those that existed three decades ago. Many of my most compelling lessons over time, however, have not come from reading and studying but rather from engaging with the persons whose lives are directly affected by incarceration (Chap. 21, this volume).

Talking with (as opposed to talking to), seeing, and being with individuals and families affected by incarceration in their natural, day-to-day environments has given me deep exposure to what it really means to be a part of the carceral population. Knowing and understanding how people manage, think about, and react to their different life challenges and routines help shape appropriate research designs, questions, analysis, and interpretation of research results. This is the case whether the proposed study

methods are quantitative or qualitative. Riding the bus to the prison on visiting day, being processed as a corrections visitor, and engaging in conversations, as opposed to interviews, about a family activity or a child's day provide valuable insight about the lives and experiences of the people impacted by incarceration. Today, it is possible to study the association between parental incarceration and children's outcomes without ever having talked with an incarcerated parent or the child of an incarcerated parent. The understanding of any findings generated through this situation is quite limited, just as it would be if I conducted a study of freshman college success factors without ever having been on a college campus, without ever having talked with college students or professors, or without attending an information session on college life and student expectations.

Providing spaces and opportunities for individuals and families with criminal histories to participate in research as researchers add value to our research and practice (Chap. 21, this volume). The emphasis here may need to be on "safe" spaces. There is a stigma attached to having been incarcerated and to being the family member of a person who is incarcerated. This stigma is as pronounced on college campuses, where much research is developed and housed, as it is in other public places. On many college campuses, students and staff who indicate they have criminal records are not accepted for admission or jobs and individuals find it best to keep such histories and connections a secret. This affects what many individuals with experience that could contribute to research and advocacy projects are willing to convey.

For example, in one of my class discussions about prison visits, several students made erroneous statements about how prison visits worked. Though the descriptions bore little resemblance to another student's actual visits with an incarcerated relative, she did not say anything. When I later asked her why not, she said that her saying something would have led to classmates asking her how she knew about prison visits. This she clearly did not want to tell. In other instances, students and staff in my classes

dismissed their experiences with incarceration as being irrelevant because they did not appear in textbooks and assigned readings. One student who had first-hand knowledge of the incarceration, return home, and reintegration experiences of several relatives declined to share any of that knowledge in shaping a study on family matters and reentry. At his dissertation hearing, in response to a question from me, he indicated that I knew as well as he knew that there was no information on family roles during reentry. Another person conducting research on intimate relationships during and following men's incarceration had to be reminded on a regular basis that her own experience living with a man on parole could help inform the study's development, even if she could find little about that type of experience in the research literature.

"We know very little" about a particular topic is a statement frequently found in the literature. It usually means that few research studies have been conducted on the topic, or more recently, that the practice or program is not "evidence-based," referring to consistent findings generated through rigorous experimental designs and through (hopefully) unbiased, positive reviews by independent researchers. After this statement was made by several presenters at a conference on families and corrections a few years ago, a seasoned program administrator who was also an imprisoned individual's spouse stood and said, "What do you mean? We (meaning she, other family members, people providing services) know a lot about what it means to have a family member in prison." She went on to relay how families experience this every day.

There are obviously different ways of knowing. Researchers would be remiss to take one or even a few families' statements and promote them as indicative of the state of knowledge in the field. We know that such statements may not be generalizable and they may not be valid or reliable. However, we are equally remiss in not engaging people with different experiences and ways of knowing in developing our research agendas and protocols. One way to do that is to include people with different roles and perspectives as equals in research and policy

development discussions. The object of these discussions is not to prove one group right and the other wrong or even to reach consensus on an issue. It is, rather, to inform each other about what is known from research studies and different experiences and to use these understandings to design better studies, policies, and programs.

The Jane Addams Center for Social Policy and Research, which I direct, has used a dialogs model to examine diverse justice topics including parental incarceration and children, older adults leaving prison, police accountability, and human trafficking (Jane Addams College of Social Work, 2017). Dialogs typically include corrections administrators, former prisoners, families of the incarcerated, faculty, and community service providers. Research emanating from these discussions use participatory research models within which persons whose lives are directly affected are engaged as partners in research design, implementation, and interpretation. Approaches such as these broaden the membership in a local research community, enrich the thinking within the community, and improve the quality of the questions that are investigated and the conclusions that are drawn from the data collected.

The incarcerated population has grown significantly since my initial work in the field, with the annual number of children impacted by parental incarceration now in the millions. Through the same time period, there has been significant progress in the development of scientific knowledge about the impact of incarceration on families and children and a growing acceptance of policies and programs to prevent negative outcomes for the children of incarcerated parents. As demonstrated in this handbook, there now have been many studies of parental incarceration and children, conducted by scholars from diverse disciplines. Advocates have engaged in actions to make families of incarcerated individuals a more visible population, and many programs have emerged to help children and families. The research summaries, commentaries, perspectives, and personal reflections presented in this handbook provide resources for agencies, groups, and individuals looking to better understand the issues at hand, what matters, and ways they

might use research to promote and advance positive policies, programs, and services for the children and families of incarcerated parents. The handbook is a testament to the knowledge, expertise, and caring that exists and to the empirical base of knowledge on which we can now build.

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