

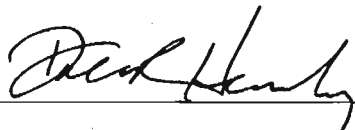
What are the Implications of Parental
Incarceration on Families?

By

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Abstract

In 2000 the number of minor children who had an incarcerated parent was 1.5 million and that number continues to rise. This research paper examines the demographic background of incarcerated parents, child characteristics, effects of visitation and its benefits, parenting, programs for incarcerated parents, public policies and what these families can look forward to. It examines and analyzes the literature as it relates to issues families are faced with when a parent is sentenced to prison. Results of this review indicate that children tend to respond negatively to being separated from their parents, and that these children are five to six times more at-risk to become involved in the criminal justice system and tend to show signs of cognitive, development delays, regression in behaviors, and inappropriate coping methods. With the growing number of parents being incarcerated and children living without a parent, more research needs to take place to get a better understanding on what policies need to be reformed and put in place to help this growing population.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

This is a story about Ricky and his baby brother. When Ricky was nine and his brother was one, the police came into the home they shared with their mother, and handcuffed and took her away without any explanation. Ricky tried to ask the police what was happening and no one would answer him. “Everything happened so fast, they just ran in the house took my mother and left,” said Ricky (Bernstein, 2005 p. 24).

Ricky was left alone in the house with his baby brother. He tried his best by changing his brother’s diapers, and cooking for both of them. Ricky did this for about two weeks before a neighbor called the Child Protective Services. “Social workers came and took Ricky’s brother from him just as police had his mother. The boys were sent to separate foster homes” (Bernstein 2005, p.25). Years later, Ricky saw his mother on the street and she told him that she was trying to get him back. However a year after that, he received a letter from a stranger telling him that his mother had died.

There are many more stories like Ricky’s. Children who have not committed a crime but they are forced to pay deeply for crimes their parents have done. They lose their homes, their safety, their public status, their self-image, and their source of comfort and affection.

Statement of the Problem

In 2000, 721,500 parents with 1.5 million minor children were incarcerated in the United States (Mumola, 2000). The number of minor children who have a parent in prison has risen over 500,000 from 936,508 in 1991 to 1,498,800 in 1999. “Of the nation’s 72.3 million minor children in 1999, 2.1% had a parent in state or federal prison” (Mumola, p. 34).

When considering the age of children who have a parent in prison, Mumola (2000) reported that 22% of all minor children were under the age of five years old, and 58% were

under the age of 10. The average age of minor children with a parent in prison was 8 years old. Among state prisoners, 65 % of women were more likely to have a minor child. In federal prisons, 59 % of women and 63 % of men in prison have a minor child. Of all state prisoners 32% of the male/female inmates had more than one child. Federal inmates 39% were more likely than state inmates (32%) to have multiple children.

An estimated 44% of parents in state prison were violent offenders, and 13% were charged with drug trafficking. However, 77% of incarcerated parents had prior convictions (Mumola, 2000).

The question becomes who takes care of the children while their parent is in prison? Research done by Mumola (2000) states that 80 % of inmates who were parents (mostly fathers) said that their child or children were living with the other parent. However 53% of mothers named grandparents as the primary caregiver, 26 % indicated other relatives were the current caregivers of their child or children, and 10% of those surveyed indicated that their children were living in a foster home, agency, or institution. For fathers, 13% said their child or children lived with grandparents, five percent with other relatives and two percent were living in a foster care.

Fathers make up about 90% of all incarcerated parents but between the years of 1991 and 2000, mothers entered prison increased at a faster rate than for fathers. There was an increase of 87% for mothers and only 61% increase for fathers. Yet, fathers made up about 90% of all incarcerated parents during this time period.

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human (2002, p. 4), “There are more African American parents (47% and 49% in state and federal prisons respectively) than either Hispanic parents (19% and 30%) or white non-Hispanic parents (29% and 22%).” In terms of racial disparity among minor children, of the total population of children in the United States

who had an incarcerated parent, seven percent of the children were African American, three percent were Hispanic, and one% were white (Mumola, 2000).

Purpose of the Study

Incarceration affects the whole family in a variety of ways. The purpose of this paper is to explore the literature as it relates to issues families are faced with when a parent is sentenced to prison. This research will examine demographic and background characteristics of incarcerated parents, child characteristics, visitation and its benefits, parenting, programs for incarcerated parents, public policies and what these families can look forward to. Another important area this research will examine includes the effects that parental incarceration has on children's well-being and development. It is anticipated the literature will reveal that parental incarceration has a significant negative impact on children's well-being and development.

Assumptions of the Study

Several assumptions guided my examination of this problem. First, I assumed that the child is located in a family structure. In order to fully understand the impact of incarceration on children, the relationship of the family structure needs to be considered. Second, I assumed that the quality of the relationship and the level of attachment the child had developed with the incarcerated parent need to be considered. Third, the gender of the parent needs to be examined, because separation from one parent may affect children differently than separation from the other parent. Fourth, the implications of public policies need to be examined, as well as how they affect the family of incarcerated parents and their ability and/or rights to parent their children behind bars. Finally, the structure and accessibility for supporting the family of the incarcerated parent from formal institutions and the obligations of the state to these parents need to be given attention.

Methodology

This research paper examines the literature as it relates to issues families are faced with when a parent is sentenced to prison. Secondary data will be used to review empirical and theoretical findings, and will serve to address the topic of parenting in prison and how incarceration affects the whole family. This information will come from accredited journals and reputable Internet sources including those set up by the United States Government

During this paper I will include information about how having a parent in prison impacts children. Questions such as how parental incarceration will affect them in the short long term, who they may end up living with, and what may lead to the problems these children end up having will be considered. In the next chapter I will include information about how having a parent in prison impacts the family as whole. In Chapter 2, I will include information about what type of theoretical framework (Attachment Theory) experts talk about that effects the children. In the next chapter I will include information about the government policies affect children and families when a parent is in prison.

Chapter 2: Impact on Children

Overview

Today, more than any other time in our nation's history there are many children who are affected by the incarceration of a parent. Travis and Waul (2003) indicate "these young children (people) are already at high risk along several dimensions and tend to live in conditions characterized by poverty instability and diminished access to sources of support" (p.13). However, it has not been until recently, that the criminal justice system and human and health services have paid attention to how parental incarceration impacts the needs of children's services.

Effects of parental incarceration on children

So what is the impact of parental incarceration on the children's welfare and development? Just what is happening to these children? And how many children are impacted by parental incarceration?

According to research done by Mumola, (2000) an estimated 1.1 million parents in the United States are incarcerated in federal or state prisons or in local jails. About 2.6 percent of these parents are under some other form of correctional supervision, which includes parole or probation. This suggests an estimated 2.3 million children who have a parent in prison or jail.

According to Reed and Reed (1997), there are approximately 10 million children in the United States who at some point in their young life had one or both parents incarcerated. These children are concerned with who will care for them while their parent is gone or if they will be allowed to communicate or visit his/her parent in prison or jail. These children "have no voice because they are invisible to the larger society" (p. 152).

To fully understand the impact parental incarceration has on children, it is important to independently consider the short-term effects of the parent's arrest and separation from the child, the impact of the parent's unavailability to the child during his/her period of incarceration, and the positive and negative effects of being reunited after a period of incarceration. It is also important to think about whether the child was living in the same house as the parent at the time of incarceration, whether the household is a single or two-parent household, and, in the instance of a two parent household, which parent is incarcerated. The most recent figure in 2000 indicates that 36% of state and 16% of federal incarcerated mothers were not living with their children at the time of incarceration. In contrast, 56% of state and 45% of federal incarcerated fathers were not living with their children at the time of their incarceration (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2002).

Short Term Effects

Some of the short term effects on children happen in what is called the arrest phase. This phase is characterized by children becoming afraid of the police and is accompanied by behavioral emotional problems. "One in five children are present at the time of the arrest and witnesses the parent being taken away by authorities" (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2002 p. 5). "An estimated 40% of children who witness this traumatic event are under 7 years of age, and are in the sole care of their mother" (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2002 p. 5). Many of these children suffer from nightmares and flashbacks of the arrest (Parke, Clarke-Stewart & Alison, 2002; Travis & Waul, 2003).

There is controversy surrounding what to tell children about their parent's arrest and the reasons behind their incarceration. Some suggest that keeping this knowledge from the children will minimize the trauma associated with being separated from their parents while others argue

that children will suffer more emotional distress if other family members do not discuss their parents' incarceration (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2002). Some evidence suggests that, when not informed or given too little information about their parents' incarceration, children are less able to cope and may experience more anxiety and fear. Nolen-Hoeksema and Larson argue, "Children need honest, factual information, and they need to have their experience validated" (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2002 p. 6). Providing these children with this information gives them a chance to deal with what is happening, to grieve the loss of their parent, and to cope with the changes in their new life situation (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services).

Long Term Effects

Incarceration of a parent can have a significant effect on infants. A small percentage of women (6%) are pregnant at the time of their incarceration. However, there are only a few prisons in the United States that allow the mother to keep their infant with them during their time of incarceration. In most of these cases, the mother of the newborn is only permitted a few days of interaction with the newborn before they must give up their child and return to prison. As a result, there is little possibility for the mother and the infant to develop an attachment bond with each other. This is a very "critical developmental task for both mothers and infants" (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2002 p. 6). Incarceration of a parent also has significant effects on young children. The first nine to twelve months of a child's life are very important in the development of attachment to his or her parents and this disruption can affect the quality of attachment.

Even when faced with less dramatic changes harmful effects can impact the quality of the infant or toddler child-parent attachment. "Insecure attachments—a consequence of adverse

shifts in life-circumstances—in turn, have been linked to a variety of child outcomes, including poorer peer relationships and diminished cognitive abilities” (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2002 p. 6). In light of the results of this research, young children between the ages of two and six have suffered from a variety of harmful outcomes that are “consistent with the research on the effects of insecure attachment” (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, p. 7).

Research has found that 70% of young children whose mother has been incarcerated suffer from emotional or psychological problems which may include anxiety, withdrawal, hypervigilance, depression, shame and guilt. These children also can show internal problems such as eating disorders. Some external behaviors young children typically show are anger, aggression, and hostility toward caregivers and siblings (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2002).

School age children of incarcerated parents often exhibit school-related problems and problems with peer relationships. Over 59% of these children have shown problems with issues such as poor grades or cases of aggression, although many of these problems were temporary. Among the younger children between the ages of six and eight, 16% displayed temporary school phobias and “refused to go to school for a priority four to six weeks after their parents were incarceration” (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2002 p. 6). Another problem these children face at school is that they are sometimes teased or not liked by the other children because of their parent’s incarceration. Furthermore, when some of these children reach adolescence they have higher occurrences of suspension and dropout rates than other children (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services).

Children of incarcerated parents respond in a variety of different ways. They often encounter psychological and emotional problems including depression and feelings of sadness, withdrawal from others, and low-self-esteem. They also tend to experience aggressive behavior problems which are related to reduction in school performance, truancy, disciplinary problems, alcohol and other drug use, and running away (Reed & Reed, 1997; Travis & Waul, 2003). These children may also blame themselves for their parent being absent from the home.

There are a number of different variables that may determine how a child is affected by his/her parent's incarceration including the age the child when separated from their parent, the length of the separation, the presence of deception around the separation, the number of times the parent and child have been separated, and the outcomes of previous separation experiences. Some other important variables include instability in the home, poverty, inadequate care in the home, or the type of neighborhoods these families are living in (Travis & Waul, 2003).

According to Reed and Reed, (1997 p. 15), there are a number of cumulative effects of parental incarceration on children:

- Parental incarceration in the first year of a child's life may prevent the development of parent-child bonding
- The development of autonomy and initiative in children aged two to six may be compromised by the trauma of witnessing parental arrest and the loss of a parent due to incarceration.
- Children ages seven to ten may have a hard time achieving in school and getting along with others, precipitating aggressive behavior in reaction to experienced trauma
- While some young adolescents 11 to 14 may overcome their parent's absence, poverty, stigma, and multiple placements, many of these children may act out

- The cumulative effects of parental involvement in the criminal justice system appear in 15 to 18 year olds. The experiences these children have faced have left them with negative attitudes towards law enforcement and the criminal justice system. It is also known that a large proportion of these children will take part in criminal activity themselves.

Denise Johnston has studied the impact of parental crime, arrest and incarceration on children's developmental characteristics. In particular, she considered developmental tasks, factors influencing developmental lags, and effects on children whose parents are incarcerated. She found that when children were separated from their parents they experienced different problems depending on their age of separation from their parent and that these problems influence development. The separation also causes the child anxiety and trauma. The children have even shown greater rates of behavioral problems, and a tendency toward becoming criminals themselves. Johnston's work is summarized in Table 1 (cited in Simmons, 2000 p. 5).

Table 1. Effects on Children of Parental Crime, Arrest, and Incarceration.

Developmental Stage	Developmental Characteristics	Developmental Tasks	Influencing Factors	Effects
Infancy (0-2 years)	Total dependency	Attachment and trust	Parent-child separation	Impaired parent-child bonding
Early childhood (2-6 years)	Increased perception and mobility; incomplete individuation from parent	Sense of autonomy, independence and initiative	Parent-child separation; Trauma	Anxiety, developmental regression, acute traumatic stress, survivor guilt
Middle childhood (7-10 years)	Increased independence, ability to reason, importance of peers	Sense of industry, ability to work productively	Parent-child separation, enduring trauma	Acute traumatic stress and reactive behaviors
Early adolescence (11-14 years)	Increasing abstract thinking, future-orientated behavior, aggression, puberty	Ability to work productively with others, control of emotions	Parent-child separation, enduring trauma	Rejection of limits on behavior, trauma-reactive behaviors
Late adolescence (15-18 years)	Emotional crisis and confusion, adult sexual development, abstract thinking, independence	Achieves identity, engages in adult work and relationships, resolves conflicts with family and society	Parent-child separation, enduring trauma	Premature termination of parent-child relationship; intergenerational crime and incarceration

Source: Dr. Denise Johnston, "Effects of Parental Incarceration," in Simmons, 2000 p. 5.

Johnston found that if a child is separated from the parent during infancy it will affect parent-child bonding. Between the ages of two and six the separation of a parent is related to an increase in anxiety, developmental regression, acute traumatic stress, and survivor guilt. Between the ages of seven and then the separation of a parent is associated with behavior problems such as rejection of limits on behavior, and trauma reactive behaviors. Between the ages of 15 and 18

the separation of a parent is linked to evidence of increased signs of intergenerational crime and incarceration on the part of the child.

Wright and Seymour, (2000 p. 23) found that some of the children's reactions to parental incarceration may have some negative emotional and social effects which include:

- Identification with incarcerated parents, awareness of social stigma
- Change in future orientation and intrusive thoughts about their parents
- Concerned about outcomes of case, unsure and worried about how to live without mother, concern about an uncertain future
- Flashbacks to traumatic events related to arrests
- Embarrassment and anger
- Fear, anxiety, anger, sadness, loneliness, guilt, low self-esteem, depression, emotional withdrawal from friends and family
- Separation anxiety, emotional withdrawal, guilt
- Depression
- Abandonment, loneliness, sadness, anger, resentment
- Eating and sleeping disorders
- Aggression, anxiety and hyperarousal, attention disorders and developmental regression
- Physical aggression, withdrawal, acting out, academic and classroom behavior difficulties, truancy
- Acting out inappropriately, disruptive in class, other antisocial behaviors
- Diminished academic performance, disruptive behavior at home and school
- Aggressive and trauma-reactive behavior leading to early crime involvement

What Leads to these Problems?

The U.S. Department of Health and Human services, (2002) asks this question: What leads to these problems? It appears that incarceration often causes the family to experience periods of “instability, poverty, child abuse or neglect, marital discord and conflict, or father absence” (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2002 p. 7).

It is difficult to determine whether these problems are directly related to parental incarceration. One of the most important predictors to children facing problems is the quality of relationship the parent and the child possess prior to incarceration. In theory, higher quality parent-child relationships will help shield children from the difficulty of temporarily losing a parent (Parke & Clarke, 2002). However, many of the parents who do end up incarcerated have limited parenting skills or abilities, and thus the shield of protection is not there for their children. Another predictor that indicates how well children will adjust to parental incarceration is the quality of relationship with extended family and other social networks. There are many problems for children of incarcerated parents, however not all of the problems these children face are from having an incarcerated parent. A lot of the problems these children face can also be a factor their life circumstances even before their parent goes to prison.

If a child has a good relationship with a parent before they are incarcerated the child will have a better chance of not facing as many problems as a child who does not have a good relationship with their parent. In addition, if the child has a good relationship with their extended family or other social networks they also will have a better chance of not facing as many problems as a child that does not.

Living with Whom?

Another important factor in determining the child's adjustment during the period of parental incarceration is the nature and quality of alternate care giving arrangements and the opportunity for the child to stay in contact with the absent parent. When fathers are incarcerated the mother generally takes on the sole caregiver responsibilities. When mothers are incarcerated grandmothers assume that responsibility 53 percent of the time (Parke & Clarke, 2002).

An additional factor in determining the child's adjustment is having regular contact with the incarcerated parent. However, there are barriers that can make this difficult for the parents or children to stay in contact. These include policies regarding visitation and phone use as well as transportation barriers when parents are incarcerated in facilities located in remote or distant areas. These barriers make it difficult for families who have limited resources. Other barriers include visiting rooms that are not child friendly, lack of privacy, and increased anxiety on the part of the visiting child. Many of these barriers stem from beliefs that incarcerated individuals, including parents, do not deserve privileges such as family visitation (Parke & Clarke, 2002 p. 7). Table 2 displays the percentage of state inmate parents who report contact with their children within the United State's state prisons (Mumola, 2000).

Table 2. Percentage of State Inmate Parents Reporting Monthly Contact with Their Children in 1997.

Type of contact	Male	Female
Any	62.4 %	78.4 %
Mail	49.9%	65.8%
Phone	42.0%	53.6%
Visits	21.0 %	23.8 %

Chapter 3: Effects on the Family

Why should society care about the relationship between incarcerated parents and their children? Because when society supports the relationship between incarcerated parents and their children everyone benefits. First, it is good for the children. The involvement and attention of the incarcerated parents contributes to healthy infants. Also, strong family relationships have positive outcomes on rates of delinquency for children of incarcerated parents. In addition, effects of parental criminality are mediated by parental attachment, and frequent contact with children while incarcerated facilitates future reunification (Simmons, 2000).

Supporting the relationship between inmates their children is also good for the community. Male inmates who maintain strong family ties have much better post-release successes and, for those who resume responsible husband and parenting roles, there are higher rates of success. Also, family relationships are a key indicator of success for females and a preventive factor for returning to crime or drugs (Simmons, 2000).

Effects Incarceration on Mothers

Incarcerated women struggle to maintain meaningful relationships with their children. The most common concerns voiced from mothers are related to what is happening to their children when they are incarcerated. From birth, it is mothers who often are the ones who encourage the first smiles, words and steps from their babies (Mortaon and Williams, 1998).

According to Mortaon and Williams, (1998), studies have shown that the effects of maternal deprivation are prevalent. Young children who are removed from their mother's hospitalization or other reasons display immediate distress, followed by depression and lethargy. Other, much more serious effect of maternal deprivation includes developmental retardation and other impairments related to development. However, the longer the period of separation a child experiences from its mother the greater the disruption on the child's life. "The quality of the

mother/child relationship sets the stage for all other relationships that the child will have” (Mortaon & Williams, p. 10). Young children learn values and social norms from positive interactions with their parents.

With the number of women incarcerated in state and federal prisons approaching 80,000, and with the number of women in the nation’s jail reaching ten percent of that number, it is important that correctional administrators recognize and understand the importance of bonding between mothers and children. Over time some correctional administrators have developed programs for mothers to help maintain and strengthen their relationships with their children.

Mortaon and Williams, (1998) provide a number of reasons why women inmates need programs to help them maintain and strengthen ties with their children.

- 25% of women admitted to prison are pregnant or have recently delivered a child
- 74% of women in prison have children, compared to 64% of men
- Incarceration of a mother disrupts the family considerably more than incarceration of a father
- 25% of incarcerated women’s children live with their fathers, compared to 90% of incarcerated men whose children lives with their mothers
- 65% of incarcerated women’s children live with grandparents and ten percent are in foster care
- 90% of incarcerated women have contact with their children while in prison, compared to 80% of incarcerated men
- More than 50% of incarcerated women with children under 18 never have visits from their children

- The majority of women believe they will have responsibility for their children upon release.

Claudia Dowling, eloquently summarized the issue: “A mother may be guilty, but a child is always innocent” (as cited in Mortaon & Williams, 1998 p. 14).

Houck and Booker Loer, (2002) examined stress among a sample of incarcerated women as it related to self-perceived levels of anxiety, depression, somatication and institutional misconduct. They discovered mothers in prison are faced with many stressors while behind bars. Some of the concerns these mothers have include how to best guide their children while in prison, how to stay close to their children, and how to react to disagreements and problems with their children. Nevertheless, these families are faced with additional stressors because they are separated (Houck & Booker Loer). Incarcerated mothers are confronted with issues of “infrequent visitations and limited contact with children, custody issues, loss of identity as a mother, loss of control of the parenting process, worry about the care their children are receiving, concerns regarding being truthful with children about themselves and their criminal behavior, and thoughts of eventual reunification with their children. Being faced with these factors not only have a great impact on a woman’s emotional states, but also on her sense of self-esteem, self-definition, and identity as a woman” (Houck & Booker Loer, p. 549)

This study found that the typical incarcerated mother experiences a great amount of stress and has many concerns about her children. These experiences include the dramatic shift in the amount of face to face contact they parents and children have with each other. The contact they experience after incarceration sometimes consists of less than monthly visitations with each other (Houck & Booker Loer, 2002). However, most women make other efforts to keep in contact with their children by letters, telephone calls, or contact with other relatives. Houck and

Booker Loer state that the majority of the mothers in the study intended to regain custody after incarceration but a significant number they doubted they would succeed. The study found that many of the mothers suffered from some form of psychological distress like anxiety, depression, and somatization. This is consistent with results from several investigations that point to high levels of emotional distress among incarcerated women in general.

Effects Incarceration on Fathers

Arditti, Smock, and Parkman (2005), investigated the experiences of incarcerated fathers, their perceptions of fatherhood, and the nature of their involvement with their children. Recent data from a study called Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study research project suggests that incarcerated fathers differ from the general population of fathers and are “more likely to be violent, African American, less educated, and prone to drug and alcohol abuse and have poor relationship skills” (Arditti, Smock, and Parkman, p. 222)

Past research has found that a variety of incarcerated fathers come from underprivileged backgrounds and have some history of past crimes. The constraints imposed by being in a prison setting make it difficult for fathers to have a meaningful contact with their children. For a variety of reasons including geographic distance, transportation and financial barriers on the families, the lack of child-friendly visiting environment, the harsh and disrespectful treatment by the correctional officers, and the emotional demanding stress that comes from such visitations for both children and parents, “fifty-eight percent of fathers in state prisons report never receiving visits at all from their children” (Arditti, Smock, and Parkman, p. 224)

Overall, children whose fathers are incarcerated are fragile and come with a set of difficulties connected to their parent’s imprisonment. These difficulties include traumatic separation and negative child outcomes, such as poor academic performance, emotional

suffering, alcohol and drug abuse, and involvement with crime themselves (Arditti, Smock, and Parkman, 2005).

Arditti, Smock, and Parkman, (2005) explored the experiences of a group of imprisoned fathers' prior to their reentry into family and community life. They were interested in how incarceration had influenced their roles in fatherhood or how they identified being a father, and their involvement as fathers while in prison. The fathers in their study had hopeful expectations about returning to their children and families after incarceration. "Men's hopes and wishes went beyond simply returning but reflected their rebirth as a 'good father' or, at the very least a 'better father'" (Arditti, Smock, and Parkman, p. 226). These fathers have learned that their children are an important part of their life and want to make changes as a father to better their children's lives.

Depending on which parent is incarcerated, there are many emotional and social effects in a child's life. Many times having a mother incarcerated has a bigger impact on children than having a father incarcerated.

Chapter 4: Attachment Theory

The small body of literature found on children of incarcerated parents suggests that children of incarcerated parents are more likely to have poorer emotional, behavior, and psychological development than children whose parents have not been incarcerated. Problems such as aggressive behavior, withdrawal, criminal involvement, depression, and concentration have been observed among children of incarcerated parents. However, the most important issue research literature agrees on is that disruption of the attachment process has important consequences on the development of these children (Pattiol, Weiman, & Western).

“Attachment is the strong, emotional tie we feel for special people in our lives that leads us to feel pleasure and joy when we interact with them and to be comforted by their nearness during times of stress” (Papalia & Wendkos-Olds, 1996 p. 272). Bowlby’s attachment theory is the most widely accepted view of the infant’s emotional tie to the caregiver. Bowlby suggests, that by the time an infant is one year of age, he or she will have developed some form of attachment to familiar people who have cared for the infant and responded to his or her needs for survival (physical care and emotional needs). Over time, a true emotional bond develops between the infant and the parent(s). The development of attachment takes place in four phases (Papalia & Wendkos-Olds, 1996 p. 272):

1. The pre-attachment phase (birth to 6 weeks). A variety of built-in signals---grasping, smiling, crying, and gazing into the adult’s eyes—help bring newborn babies into close contact with other humans. Once an adult responds, infants encourage her or him to remain nearby, since they are comforted when picked up, stroked, and talked to softly. Babies of this age can recognize their own mother’s smell and voice.

2. The “attachment in the making” phase (6 weeks to 6-8 months). During this phase, infants start to respond differently to a familiar caregiver than to a stranger. For example, at four months, they begin to develop a sense of trust—the expectation that the caregiver will respond when signaled. But babies still do not protest when separated from the parent, despite the fact that they can recognize and distinguish her from unfamiliar people.
3. The phase of “clear-cut” attachment (6-8 months to 18 months-2 years). Attachment to the familiar caregivers is evident. Babies of this phase display separation anxiety, in that they become upset when the adult whom they have come to rely on leaves.
4. Formation of a reciprocal relationship (18 months-2 years and on). By the end of the second year, rapid growth in representation and language permits toddlers to understand some of the factors that influence the parent’s coming and going and to predict her return. As a result, separation protest declines.

Parents are the first people that infants know and thus create their first emotional bonds with. Parents provide, with a few exceptions, shelter, security, love, and nourishment. However, society is forever changing and there is an “increasing probability that children will live without adequate adult supervision and in a home that is unstable and violent” (Papalia & Wendkos-Olds, 1996 p. 272). Furthermore, children are more likely to be disconnected from other family members and often have little contact with their grandparents or other extended family. Also, parents could have fewer social supports within the community. Children learn how to build and foster relationships by observing how their parents and family interact with each other and society. In addition, children who are securely attached are observed as being more socially competent with their peers and parents, and better able to control their impulses and feelings.

Belonging to a family helps develop a sense of identity and self-esteem. “Family cohesion and harmony have been determined to be significant variables in the development of positive self-esteem in children” (Papalia & Wendkos-Olds, 1996 p. 272).

Psychoanalytic and ethological theories both suggest the feelings that come with affection and security that an infant feels from a healthy attachment relationship supports their psychological development. Furthermore, the quality of attachment that is formed between the mother and the infant is an important part of their cognitive and social development (Papalia & Wendkos-Olds, 1996).

Given that attachment is important in a child’s life there is no greater danger than the interference of a parent-child relationship (Dozier & Bick, 2007). According to Dozier and Bick, children experience disruptions in their bonding when a parent is incarcerated and the child subsequently enters foster care. These disruptions could cause different reactions in their behavior and their emotional development depending on their age (Dozier & Beck). Infants who are 12 months or younger seem to be able to trust new caregivers fairly quickly and are able to seek out these new caregivers when they are distressed. This process can take longer for infants and toddlers who enter into foster care after a year of age. Even two months after placement, the study found that toddlers still reject and turn away from their new caregivers or are hard to console when distressed (Dozier & Beck). The transition into foster care can have long term effects for children on a behavioral and emotional level.

When children turn away from new caregivers who feel that they cannot soothe them, the caregivers may react as if children do not need any nurturance from them. Another reason that some caregivers fail to act in a nurturing way was with foster care children is because nurturance may not come easily or naturally to them. However, “without nurturing care, foster children are

at greatly increased risk for developing what are known as 'disorganized attachments'" (Dozier & Beck, 2007 p. 413). Children who develop disorganized attachments are at risk for some long term troublesome outcomes, which include internalizing and externalizing disorders, and dissociation from society.

Chapter 5: Policies and Implication for Families

Congress has created new laws and policies that have implications for families dealing with incarceration. One of these new laws has attempted to limit the amount of time children are placed in foster care by introducing the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980 (“Child Welfare Act”) and the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (“ASFA”). These Acts have created more problems for families facing incarceration. It creates barriers for families to stay connected as a family as well as creating more factors that these children have to face because their parent(s) have been incarcerated. In this chapter I will explain some of the barriers and factors that have been created from these acts.

“The Child Welfare Act encouraged states to reunify children in foster care with their families whenever possible by assisting them with improvement of parenting skills and other challenges, such as those stemming from poverty and substance abuse” (Allard & Lu, 2006 p. 9) However, when these children’s parent or parents are in prison how are they going to be returned to their families? If the Congress wants to limit the amount of time a child is placed in foster care why make it harder for them to be reunited?

The Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980 was created because of the dissatisfaction with the public child welfare system as well as the problems and concerns about children being placed in multiple foster homes over an extended period of time.

There are several objectives/goals of this bill:

- To prevent unnecessary separation of children from families
- To protect the autonomy of the family
- To shift support of Federal government away from foster care alone and towards placement prevention and reunification

- To promote the return of children to their families when feasible
- To encourage adoption when it is in the child's best interest
- To improve the quality of care and services
- To reduce the number of children in foster care
- To reduce the duration of a child's stay in foster care

A number of services are provided with this bill. States are required to participate in providing programs that establish reunification or preventive care for all children in foster care and the status of a child in any foster care setting is to be reviewed every six months to determine the best interest of the child with an emphasis on returning children to their homes as soon as possible. There also must be a determination of the child's future living arrangement within eighteen months of placement into foster care, whether the child returns home to their parents, are placed through adoption, or continue in foster care.

Congress viewed the Child Welfare Act as a way to help the crisis of the national child welfare system with half a million children being in foster care. Reforms were made to shift agencies to focus on keeping or moving children out of foster care and recognize the importance of reunifying families as a way to end children living in foster care. Congress stated that state agencies receiving federal child welfare funds must make reasonable efforts to prevent the removal of children from their families and if removal cannot be prevented, the agency must assist families with reunification in order to further receive funds (Allard & Lu, 2006).

According to Allard and Lu, (2006), The Child Welfare Act had two crucial weaknesses. First, states did not have adequate direction from Congress about what services represented "reasonable efforts" to preserve and reunify families. Second, Congress failed to give states sufficient financial incentives to reunify families with children in foster care. These two

weaknesses are what made the policy makers present The Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997. Nevertheless, Congress still disregarded any reunification services to families. Instead Congress focused on the length of services for families by imposing strict timelines on agencies for reunification efforts (Allard & Lu, 2006). Once the state has decided that all efforts are no longer useful, they can remove the children from foster care and place them in adoptive homes.

Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) of 1997 was created so that children in foster care do not have to wait several years for a permanent placement. This bill also focused on “reasonable efforts” for reunifying children with their families that lead to problems with placement decisions and that were not in the best interest of the child.

Also, this bill was created so that children could be moved into permanent homes in a timely manner, requiring states to have stricter guidelines when it comes to placing children and trying to reunify children within their families. This bill also had several objective/goals:

- To promote permanency for children in foster care
- To ensure safety for abused and neglected children
- To accelerate permanent placement of children
- To increase accountability of the child welfare system

The services that are provided with this bill require state agencies to have shorter time lines in making decisions about permanent placements for children. States must start the termination of parental rights after the child has been in foster care for 15 out of 22 months except if this is not in the best interest of the child or if the child is in the care of a relative. There also must be a permanency placement hearing no later than 12 months after the child has entered foster care.

Under this act, states are required to instigate joint proceedings to terminate parental rights for certain children in foster care. Termination may occur if the child has been in foster care under the responsibility of the state for 15 of the most recent 22 months or if a court with jurisdiction has determined a child to be an abandoned infant. In addition, if the court determines that the parent has committed murder, voluntary manslaughter on another child or if they aided or abetted, attempted, conspired, or solicited to commit such a murder or if they committed a felony assault that resulted in serious bodily injury to the child or to another child, the state can file a petition to terminate the parental rights of the child's parents and at the same time, to identify, recruit, process, and approve a qualified family for an adoption unless the child is being cared for by a relative.

Along with the adoption of The Adoption and Safe Families Act, Congress made several reforms to make the process of transitioning children in foster care to more permanent placements faster. "Congress (1) set forth specific circumstances in which states need not make reunification efforts. (2) required states to finalize a permanency plan for each child 12 months after entry into foster care, thereby imposing an initial time limit on states' reasonable efforts; and (3) required states to seek termination of parental rights---permanent destruction of existing families in the eyes of the law---once a child has been in foster care for 15 of the most recent 22 months" (Allard & Lu, 2006 p. 16).

Since the Adoption and Safe Families Act has been in place with strict limits on efforts to reunify families, this act has created greater stress for families where a parent is incarcerated. . According to a study overseen by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services of the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis, in 2003 over 29,000 children have been removed into permanent placement and up for adoption, because their parent parental rights have been

terminated because the child has been in foster care for longer than 15 months. “On average parents in State prison are expected to serve a total of 80 months and parents in Federal prison expected to serve at least 10 years” (Summons, 2000 p. 10).

These acts make it harder for families to be reunited and there is a lesser chance for these children to be returned to their parents. Once 15 months have passed by, the parent loses all rights to their children. Once they are released from prison their children still remain in foster care. The real question here is whether or not children are better in foster care than if they were reunited with their parents once they were released from prison.

Chapter 6: Summary and Recommendations

The effect of having an incarcerated parent on children and families varies depending on the situation. Several assumptions guided my purpose for this study. First, I assumed that the child is located in a family structure. In order to fully understand the impact of incarceration on children, the relationship of the family structure needs to be considered. Not all children live in a secure happy home environment. Some children live with only one parent (usually the mother), oftentimes in poverty,

Research suggests that children tend to respond negatively to being separated from their parents, especially if there is a strong parent-child bond. Research also has concluded that children who have a parent in prison are five to six times more at-risk to become involved in the criminal justice system. These children also show signs of delays in their cognitive development and often exhibit deterioration in behaviors and improper methods of coping. Furthermore, these children are more likely to have difficulty in meeting developmental tasks, “such as forming attachments, developing trust, autonomy, initiative, productivity, and achieving identity” (Miller, 2006, p. 477).

According to Allard (2006), families benefit when the bonds between parent and children are preserved in spite of the parent’s incarceration. Children benefit from visiting a parent in prison and maintaining their bond. This helps improve their security and development, reducing the distress of separation, and assisting families to reunify after a parent’s release. When agencies are able to help families maintain contact while the parent is incarcerated, children are more assured of their parent’s love and it increases the chances that families can successfully reunite when the parent returns home.

When parents are able to maintain their bonds with their children, they are more likely to have better attitudes, have better interactions with staff and other inmates, have more connection to the community, and are less likely to return to prison when released. Literature also states that when families' ties are strong, the inmates are more encouraged to participate in programs in the prison and improves their behaviors.

Second, I assumed that the quality of the relationship and the level of attachment the child had developed with the incarcerated parent need to be considered. Research in attachment theory indicates that when there is not a secure attachment between a parent and children there are behavioral issues, trouble with the criminal justice systems, and emotional issues.

The lack of research literature found on children of incarcerated parents suggests that they are associated with having poorer emotional, behavioral, and psychological development than other children. These problems, such as aggressive behavior, withdrawal, criminal involvement, depression, and concentration have been observed among children of incarcerated parents. However, the most important issue research literature agrees on is that attachment has important consequences on the development of these children (Pattiol, Weiman, & Western, date).

Children who develop disorganized attachments are at risk for some long term troublesome outcomes, which include internalizing and externalizing disorders, and dissociation from society. Children also learn how to build and foster relationships by observing how their parents and family interact with each other and society. In addition to this, children who are securely attached are observed as being more socially competent with their peers and parents, and better able to control their impulses and feelings. Belonging to a family helps develop a sense of identity and self-esteem. "Family cohesion and harmony have been determined to be

significant variables in the development of positive self-esteem in children” (Papalia & Wendkos-Olds, 1996 p. 272).

Third, the gender of the parent needs to be examined, because separation from one parent may affect children differently than separation from the other parent. Literature states that when a mother is incarcerated the child is more likely to go into foster care than if the father was incarcerated. Because when a father is incarcerated there is usually a mother of some other family member that will be there to take care of the children.

Fourth, the implications of public policies need to be examined, particularly regarding how they affect the families of incarcerated parents and their ability and/or rights to parent their children while behind bars. The policies of the Adoption and Safe Families Act and The Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act set limitations of the amount of time a child can be placed into foster care. With parents being sentenced for longer than the time allowed for maintaining parental rights, more and more parents are having those rights terminated and an increasing number of children are being left without parents.

Since the Adoption and Safe Families Act has been in place with its strict limits on efforts to reunify families, greater stress has been created for families where a parent is incarcerated. According to a study overseen by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services of the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis, in 2003 over 29,000 children were removed into permanent placement and placed for adoption, because their parental rights were terminated due to the length of time the child was in foster care. “On average parents in State prison are expected to serve a total of 80 months and parents in Federal prison expected to serve at least 10 years” (Summons, 2000 p. 10).

Finally, the structure and accessibility for supporting families who have an incarcerated parent from formal institutions and state obligations need to be given attention. There are not enough services for families and children of the incarcerated, especially in smaller communities. Children and parents need services to help them maintain the parent-child bond. Incarceration often leaves a family unstable, experiencing poverty, child abuse or neglect, conflicts, and/or the absence of one or both parents.

The implications of parental incarceration can impact children and parents in a variety of ways. The literature has shown that families who have a parent incarcerated suffer economically, socially, and emotionally. The family may need to move in order to be closer to the incarcerated parent or because income is reduced and they are having a hard time making ends meet. The support network the family has may change once society or the extended family learn about the crime and imprisonment committed by the parent.

The literature also shows that if a parent with sole custody is incarcerated, the children may be sent to live with extended family members or be placed into foster care. However, despite the efforts of child welfare agencies to reunite children with parents, parental rights are at-risk of being terminated when parents have longer sentences than time limits set by the Adoption and State Families Act of 1997. This act dictates that if a child is in foster care for 15 to 22 months, parental rights are terminated (Miller, 2006 p. 475).

Recommendations to Improve the Impact of Incarceration on Parents and Children.

Give rights to children. Children should have the right to be kept safe, to know where a parent is being taken, and to receive care and support in the absence of a parent. Police officers need to be trained to understand and children's fears and how to address confusion about what is happening when a parent is being arrested. For example, they may need to be trained to take the

children into another room and explain to them what is happening and what will happen next. Allow the parent being arrested to talk with children and say good-bye, and then walk them out of sight before handcuffing them. These steps could help reduce the anxiety and fear that children may be feeling at the time of arrest.

It is also important that an officer find out any information about potential caregivers. These are important first steps in the care of the arrestee's children and in making sure that children are not being left alone or entering the welfare system unnecessarily.

Create child friendly visitation programs/rooms. Visitation should be a child's right and not an inmate's privilege for good behavior, except if there are safety concerns. Prisons and county jails should set up separate visiting programs or centers that keep the needs and sensitivities of children in mind when it comes to visiting a parent. Children should have the right to be able to touch and hug their parent during visitation even if this means having separate children's centers.

The government needs to reexamine the Adoption and Safe Families Act. Cases should be examined on an individual basis and practical ways to preserve parent-child bond should be pursued, whether or not the sentences exceed the ASFA time lines. ASFA should be amended to allow for this flexibility to preserve this bond.

Designate a family services coordinator at prison and jail facilities to help facilitate and arrange visits between parents and children. Provide parenting programs and help them with reunification efforts once the parent is released by creating a plan before the incarcerated parent is released, as well as referring them to an agency in their community that can help them with housing and employment needs upon their release.

Move towards a system that looks at other alternatives to incarceration that will rehabilitate parents and restore families rather than fragmentize them. Alternatives can include options such as drug treatment programs, restorative justice initiatives, and parenting classes as an effort to improve the lives and prospects of children whose parents have committed less offensive crimes.

The children's needs should be considered at sentencing. Judges should develop and apply sentences that make parents accountable for their children. There has been little evidence of programs or sentences to date that encourage incarcerated parents to be responsible for their children after incarceration. The truth is that it is impossible for them to take on any for these responsibilities while they are behind bars.

What steps should to be taken to improve connections between incarcerated parents and their children? Policies need to help support healthy connections between family members. Furthermore, policies to help support contact between incarcerated parents and their children should distinguish between reunions that would be positive and those that would not. Not every child will benefit from keeping in contact with their incarcerated parent, especially in cases when the incarcerated has caused harm to the child in question.

Another benefit for families would be to provide them with social and emotional support, as well as parenting guidance classes. However, one of the most critical needs is economic support to help reduce the disruptions in the child's life that are associated with residence changes and to help keep the parent that is not incarcerated out of poverty.

Travis and Waul (2003) suggest that "social services need to develop programs to promote parent-child contact during incarceration that includes providing transportation, coordination with prison officials, and working with prison personnel to develop appropriate

visitation conditions for children” (p. 223). Finally, social services need to make the commitment to help these families when the incarcerated parent returns home, by assisting them with finding employment and housing and by offer supporting for the non-incarcerated family members while the parent is incarcerated.

A number of recommendations can be made for future studies. Areas researchers could investigate include examining living conditions before incarceration, family dynamics of incarcerated families, roles of the family members of incarcerated families, and family functioning prior to the parent being incarcerated. In addition, a study on support services for families in small rural communities would be informative. An understanding of the effects on children who have a parent incarcerated will help the family, schools, and community assist these children in coping with the situation.

The American criminal justice system needs to extend research on how incarceration affects the children and family, and how the community can help these children and family members. Most of the research pertaining to children and family members of incarcerated parents has been done on a small scale, and in larger cities in the United States; there is little or no information on how incarceration affects the smaller communities where fewer programs are found. More policies need to be in place when an officer goes into a home to make an arrest when minor children are present. If these policies are in place there is less of a chance that children like Ricky and his baby brother would be left alone to fend for themselves.

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Appendix I

Directory of Programs in Wisconsin Helping Children and Families of Adult Offenders.

Calvary's Justice Ministry/Tomah Baptist Church

608-372-2071

1701 Hollister Avenue

Tomah, WI 54660

Provides families of youth and adult offenders with mentoring support, support groups, case management, counseling, family reunification support, family therapy, reentry support, and religious ministry.

Green Bay Correctional Institution

920-432-4877

2833 Riverside Drive

Green bay, WI 54301

Provides parent education for prisoners.

Kettle Moraine Correctional Institution

920-526-3244

P.O. Box 31

Plymouth, WI 53073

Provides a children's center in visiting areas, extended and special visits, parent education, self-help groups, gifts for children, and religious ministry. Provides marriage preparation and support, public education, advocacy, greeting card distribution, and information.

Oshkosh Correctional Institution

920-231-4010

1730 West Snell Road

P.O. Box 3530

Oshkosh, WI 54901

Provides the opportunity for incarcerated fathers to read to their children via videotape.

St. Rose Family Reunification Program

414-466-9450

3801 North 88th Street

Milwaukee, WI 53222

Provides a variety of services for children whose mothers are in prison. These services include gifts, scouting activities, enhanced visiting environment, transportation for prisons visits, and support groups. Provides mothers with individual and family therapy and reentry support.

Provides public information and advocacy.

Wisconsin Community Services, Inc.

414-271-2512

230 West Wells Street, Suite 500

Milwaukee, WI 53203

Provides reunification support for families, counseling, parenting activities, youth activities, gifts for children, and support groups. Provides case management, counseling, family therapy, parent education, public information and advocacy, reentry support, and information and referrals.

Appendix II

Directory of Programs in United States Helping Children and Families of Adult Offenders.

Center for Children of Incarcerated Parents

626-449-2470

Box 41-286

Eagle Rock, CA 90041

Provides services in four components: Informational, Educational, Family Reunification, and Therapeutic.

Children of Incarcerated Parents

415-586-7338

73 Arbor Street

San Francisco, CA 94131

Provides information and referrals, public information and advocacy, family reunification support, family literacy, communication between home and prisoner, parent education, and counseling.

Children's Justice Alliance

503-961-2349

506 SW Mill Street

Portland, OR 97201

Provides policy development, research, public information, advocacy, parent education, training, and consultation services on working with children of parents in the criminal justice system.

Family and Corrections Network

434-589-3036

32 Oak Grove Road

Palmyra, VA 22963

Provides information, technical assistance, and training on families of offenders, children of prisoners, parenting programs for prisoners, prison visiting, and the impact of justice system on families.

National Incarcerated Parents and families Network

717-657-0982

P.O. Box 6745

Harrisburg, PA 17112

Provides training, technical assistance, and public information on parent education programs aimed at incarcerated adults and juveniles. The program model supports positive family involvement during incarceration and after release.