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Emotional, Psychological, and Behavioral Challenges of Children with Incarcerated Parents

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METHODOLOGY

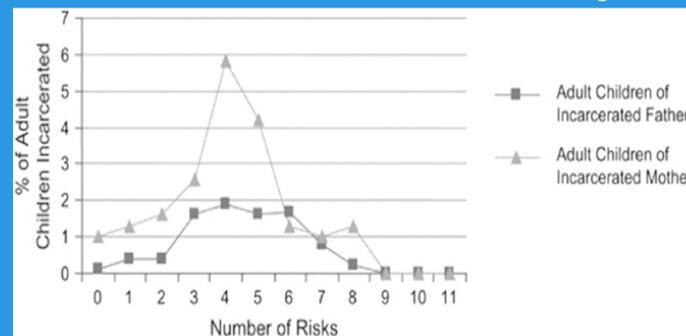
- For the purpose of this research project, this study was selected to discuss the emotional, psychological, and behavioral issues in relation to parental imprisonment. Participants in the current study were inmates of state and federal correctional facilities who self-identified as a parent of at least one child. Of the 18,326 total participants who identified as being a parent, 7,245 participants were used in a survey.

- The research design was a comparative analysis of the similarities and differences of maternal incarceration and paternal incarceration, family incarceration, and living situation for the children of incarcerated parents. The author's hypothesis was a mother's incarceration was a greater risk factor for children to also become incarcerated. Guiding questions for this research were as follows: Do mothers and fathers report a history of family incarceration and other risk factors? Do mothers and fathers report that their adult children have been through the penal system? Are there different predictors of risk for the mothers and for the fathers? Is there a link between high risk and high incarceration rates? How do minor children's living situations differ?

RESULTS

Intergenerational incarceration was another finding from this research. Incarceration had become a common part of families' lives. There was a high probability that there will be generations of parent and child incarceration. In this study 8.5 % of incarcerated fathers reported that their adult children was incarcerated, compared to the 21% of incarcerated mothers that reported their children was incarcerated. Four or more risk factors were identified for two-thirds of these mothers and three-fourths of the fathers. According to the chart, adult children of incarcerated mothers had a much higher percentage rate of adult children who were incarcerated.

Adult children of Incarcerated mothers and fathers. Percentage and Risk



- Another data result was that it was likely that if a mother had been taken to prison, other family members may have also been incarcerated, leaving fewer relatives to take responsibility for the children.

- Other contributions that lead to her child's incarceration were the mother's consistent drug use. When there was a disruption within the mother-child relationship, it seemed to be extreme and could be a cause for more children of mothers to be incarcerated than the children of fathers.

- Prevention factors were also included in the research study. Early intervention programs were encouraged as a way to enhance parenting skills, support groups to help the parents discontinue using alcohol, or other nonprescription drugs. Another part of the intervention programs were assisting the parental inmate in finding and keeping a job once released from prison.

CONCLUSION OR FURTHER RESULTS

- This study examined the emotional, psychological, and behavioral characteristics of the children with incarcerated parents to provide a better understanding of the family dynamics of children of incarcerated parents from a human service perspective. Although they are exposed to multiple risk factors, little attention has been given to this issue, yet it has effected many generations of people. Programs that address relationships between incarcerated parents and their children can increase a better understanding of the emotional, psychological, and behavioral issues and lessen the shame and stigma of being a child with an incarcerated parent.

- More research is needed in the area of parent-child visitations to keep the lines of communication open, help reduce anxiety in children, and reduce stress in the mother. Studies tend to be limited by small convenient samples, cross sectional and short term designs.

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ABSTRACT

Children of incarcerated mothers and fathers are at a high risk of developing emotional, psychological, and behavioral problems (Dallaire, 2000; Lotze, Ravindran, & Myers, 2010; Nurse, 2004). The literature review conducted for this study noted several problematic behaviors. Some children were at a high risk for delinquency and criminal activity. Others experienced several home displacements which led to foster care or grand parenting responsibilities (Belknap, 2006). Further, mental health issues and school behavior problems were directly linked to parental incarceration (Arditti, 2012). Four main problems in children were identified, which included aggression, anxiety, poor concentration, and social withdrawal. Some children of incarcerated parents demonstrated destructive attributes such as depression, predictive behaviors related to unsuccessful school achievement, and greater risk for intergenerational incarceration (Wildeman, 2010).

INTRODUCTION

- Over 10 million minor children in the United States have experienced parental incarceration, including at least 2.3 million children with a currently incarcerated parent (Johnson, 2012, p. 91). The purpose of this study was to identify the emotional, psychological, and behavioral difficulties that children have when their parents are incarcerated.
- A common theme for children of incarcerated parents was reactive attachment disorder. Reactive attachment disorder developed because the basic needs for comfort, affection, and nurturing were not met and loving, caring attachments with others were never established.
- Some sons and daughters suffered academic setbacks. The literature noted that the children with mothers in correctional facilities evidenced a greater risk for disruption in their school academic progress in comparison to their peer group.
- From an educational perspective, one significant factor that affected IQ test scores and achievement in boys was the imprisonment of the father. Additionally, teachers observed that students of incarcerated parents often sought medical attention from the school nurse to reduce high levels of anxiety although the physical appearance seemed intact (Dallaire, Ciccone, & Wilson, 2010).

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The importance of this research proposal was to take a closer look at the harmful consequences to children as a result of parental incarceration. Through my research, the goal was to bring greater awareness to the behaviors that continue to promote an increase in the generational incarceration rate and the cycle of crime. This information is vital to promote the development of programs to give greater support to children of incarcerated parents, provide greater access and more meaningful contact during incarceration, and demonstrate the need for greater support services upon release and assist in a more effective family reunification.