



Parental Incarceration: Negative Impacts and How to Find Reform

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Definitions

Incarceration: Any form of elongated incarceration, meaning jail (maximum amount of time is up to one year) and prison (minimum amount of time spent is one year)

Prison Nursery Programs: A program that allows a mother to be the primary care giver to her infant while incarcerated in the facility.

Research Question

Considering and analyzing the negative impacts of parental incarceration and all that parental incarceration encompasses, the question of if there is any possibility of diminishing these negative impacts on children by way of reforming the systems or programs implemented to protect the well being of children.

Research included: Information gathered from systems across the United States from 2000 to 2021

Behavioral Impact

- Children of incarcerated parents are 6x more likely to become incarcerated themselves. (Martin)
- Children who have both parents that are incarcerated exhibited an increase of depression. (Martin)
- Anti-social behavior as a result of parental incarceration may diminish a child's adaptability while facing other negative situations. This can cause a compound effect of problems for the child. (Martin)
- Compound exposure to negative situations without the resilience needed throughout development can heighten the risk for not only severe depression but other problems that can persist into adulthood, including substance abuse, sexually transmitted diseases, and suicide attempts. (Martin)

A Mothers Impact

- It has been shown that mothers who are incarcerated have a more disruptive impact on the child(ren) than fathers. (Simmons)
- In one study when fathers were asked where their child(ren) reside, 89% of fathers reported that their child is living with their non-incarcerated parent. (The Sentencing Project)

Socioeconomic Impact

- Far too many children with incarcerated parents suffer from a lack of economic resources for support. One study stated that family's income was 22% lower than normal during time of incarceration, while it was 15% lower after the incarcerated parent returned to the home. (Martin)
- It was also found that more often than not, a mother's incarceration had lower financial stability, especially in instances where the fathers did not live in the household. (Martin)

Stigma Creates Barriers

- "increased risk of future law breaking behavior [that] may contribute to the stigmas associated with being a child of an incarcerated parent. In particular, their stigmas may result from the assumption that they will become delinquent or criminal "just like their parents"" (Luther 2016).
- This language "just like their parents" may create a labeling theory effect, or even a self fulfilling prophecy type situation.

Impact of Placement

- A court system has the ability to terminate parental rights regarding custody of a child depending on the situation (Legal Resources). The assumption is that the child would then be placed with a family member or the other parent if the court deems them acceptable to care for said child.

This assumption is not always a correct one.

- On any given day there are 424,000 children (Children's Rights) in the foster system. **30,000** because of parental incarceration (Council of State Governments).



- Median length of stay in foster care that are exiting the foster system increased from 13.7 months to 15.5 months (Child Welfare).
- Children with incarcerated parents are 4x more likely than other children to remain in foster care until they "age out" (Legal Resources).
- In 2019, there were more than 20,000 new young adults aging out of the system (Children's Rights).
- Research indicates that individuals who leave the system without any form of family has a higher likelihood than the general population of youth to experience homelessness, unemployment, and incarceration as adults (Children's Rights).



National Programs

- Alliance for Children and Families
- Angel Tree
- Children of Incarcerated Parents Mentoring
- KidsMates Inc.
- WE GOT US NOW
- Parent Education Courses
- Special Parent-Child Visits
- Prison Nursery Programs (Rutgers) (Ferro) and (DeBoer)

Problems Found

- Multiple articles were found (including one from 2000 and one from 2021) that maintain that more research is needed on sides of this kind of research.

Future Research

- Would research needed even be considered ethical?
- What would research on these programs even look like?
- What is the likelihood that these programs that are implemented only work for some children but not for all?

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