

**Responding to the Needs of Children and
Families of the Incarcerated:
Surveying the Landscape of Promising Practices
and Emerging Issues**



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**1 in 100
In Case You Hadn't Heard!**

of people in the USA who are in prison or jail
Pew Report 2008



The number of people incarcerated in state and federal prisons was 1,479,179 in 2006. An additional 766,010 were held in local jails, for a total of more than 2.2 million.

By The Numbers

In 2007, 1.7 million minor children had a parent in prison, an 82% increase since 1991

One in 43 American children has a parent in prison.

One in 15 black children and 1 in 42 Latino children has a parent in prison, compared to 1 in 111 white children.

The Sentencing Project 2009

By the Numbers

In 2007, there were 809,800 parents incarcerated in U.S. state and federal prisons, an increase of 79% since 1991.

In 2007, half (52%) of all incarcerated men and women were parents.

The Sentencing Project 2009

What We See



From 1991 to 2007, the number of incarcerated mothers increased by 122%, compared to a rise of 76% for incarcerated fathers.

The Sentencing Project 2009

But, And

92% of prison inmates are male, 8% female. The Sentencing project 2009

***Still, most children of incarcerated
parents have a father in prison or jail***

BJS, 2007 and Sentencing Project 2009

Emerging Issues Assumptions and Programming

Gender Specific Initiatives
vs.
“Low hanging fruit”

Programs focused on children and families of the incarcerated must be designed for children of incarcerated Mothers and Fathers

More Data

An estimated 7-10 million children have or have had a parent under some form of correctional supervision in their lifetime.

(BJS, 2007)



More Data



Eighty-six percent of prisoners' minor children were under 10 years of age

22 percent were under five
Hairston (2008)

The Parent-Child Relationships

- **Making** : Parent-Child Relationships that begin during incarceration
- **Mending**: Parent-Child Relationships that need to heal during incarceration
- **Maintaining**: Parent-Child Relationships that support to keep the connection
- **Managing** in the Absence: Parent-Child relationships that cannot be

Emerging Issues Assumptions and Programming

- To date, funding initiatives focus on helping children to manage in the absence of a relationship with the parents .CHALLENGE THIS
 - Mentoring is a popular program focus EVALUATE THIS
 - Mentoring best helps children 8-14 with moderate risks CONNECT THIS
- We must advocate for programs that strengthen families and make, mend or maintain parent-child relationships

What We Know

Two-thirds of the incarcerated parent population is non-white.

The Sentencing Project 2009



Children & Families of the Incarcerated

“Distorted in the telling & buried in the untelling”

Randall Robinson on the legacy of slavery

- Assumptions and generalizations
- Stigma and Shame
- Conspiracy of Silence
- Loyalty Conflicts
- Trauma of/and Separation
- Avoiding the issue of structural racism

Distorted in the Telling

“Those who say that the families of the incarcerated suffer no shame or stigma because they are used to it, have spent no time in the community with these families.”

“Doing Time On The Outside” Donald Bramen 2007

Buried in the Un-telling

“Relatives ...feel forced to hide from the shaming gaze of others...” Leading them to withhold information and avoid connections that may help them.

“Families Shamed” Rachel Condry 2007

Responding to the Needs Framing the Issues

- The need for information beyond numbers
On the themes and variations in the lives of children and families of the incarcerated. Where do they fall on the continuum of stress?

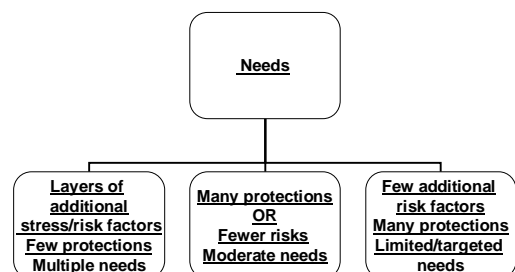
Challenge: As interest in this research grows, how can we advocate for recognizing parental incarceration as a risk factor without creating automatic labels of pathology and further stigmatizing the children and their families?

Children of the Incarcerated: A Broader Context

- Brain Development Research
- Trauma Research
- Temperament Research
- Attachment Theory Debates



Children of the Incarcerated: A Continuum of Need?



Trauma

- An incident is traumatic if it carries a threat against life, physical well being or personal security
- Children always experience the loss of a parent as traumatic
- Trauma changes brain architecture
- Children can be re-traumatized by situations characterized by additional threats or **simple uncertainty**

(Mc Allister-Groves, Child Witness to Violence Project 2002)

The Impact of Trauma

- The presence of parents or other adult attachment figures lowers the dangerous levels of cortisol
(Dozier, 2005)
- Prolonged anxiety and excessive stress disrupts the architecture of the developing
(National Scientific Council on the Developing Brain, Harvard University 2006)

Responding to the Needs Framing the Issues

- In order to gather accurate data, there is a need for an atmosphere of safety and trust for children and families of the incarcerated in programs, practices and policies.

Challenge: How can we encourage families to recognize the impact of parental incarceration on child health and development and seek appropriate support and services without demoralizing them with images of neglect and projections of criminality?

7to 10 times more likely? We Need to Stop Saying This

- Children experience the stigma of having a parent in prison
- They experience this in the context of poverty, racism and trauma.
- Those in child and family serving systems are inadequately trained to provide support
- They are at risk for a cycle of trauma, addictions, rage & labeling, judgments and blaming
- They feel further stigmatized by this message
Could “we” be causing the intergenerational pattern?

Responding to the Needs Framing the Issues

- The need for public awareness campaigns

Challenge: How can we increase the interest in and support for this population without demonizing the incarcerated parents and increasing the anxiety and loyalty conflicts for the children?

Advocacy that Hurts?

- “Kids of Cons”
- “ Their parents are prostitutes and drug addicts but they want to do better.”
- “These children have no one to give them affection or guidance.”
- “ Would you want your child to be parented by a thug?”

Responding to the Needs Framing the Issues

- The need for collaboration in the field

Challenge: Now that children of the incarcerated are being focused on in many and varied settings how can we work together to combat the obstacles that interfere with effective program and policy development?

Children and Families of the Incarcerated: A Developing Field

- Decades of programs leading the way
- Pioneer programs still guiding practice
- Recent Federal Initiatives opening doors
- Constantly shifting focal points:
 - The child: Mentoring
 - The incarcerated parent: Reentry and Healthy Marriage
 - The programs: Federal Resource Center
 - The caregiver: MCP Caregiver's Choice

NRCCFI at FCN

- Disseminating accurate data
- Training, inspiring, preparing and connecting those working in and around the field
- Guiding family strengthening policy and practice
- Including the families in defining the problem and designing solutions

The Landscape Now

Federal Initiatives

- Mentoring, Mentoring, Mentoring???
- Second Chance Act
- National Economic Recovery Act
- Embedded funds: Early Childhood Education, White House Focus on Women and Girls, White House Conference on Children 2010

The Landscape Now

The NEW YORK Initiative as a Beacon



Bill of Rights for Children of the Incarcerated

- Focuses on the child
- In the context of family
- Honoring the significance of the incarcerated parent
- Respecting the needs of caregivers
- Advocacy for policy change
- Increased public awareness
- Impacting programs and practices

I Have the Right...

- ❖ To be kept safe and informed at the time of my parent's arrest



Policy Implications

- Develop arrest protocols that support and protect arrestees' children – those that are present and those that are not
- Require training for Law Enforcement in understanding and responding to children at crime and arrest scenes.

Expanding the Conversation

- Professional Training for Child Care Providers, Teachers and Health Care Providers
- Follow up for parents, caregivers and children

I Have the Right...

- To be heard when decisions are made about me
- To be considered when decisions are made about my parent



Implications for Programs

- Create a voice for children in court proceedings that will affect their lives.
- Advocate for family impact statements as part of sentencing.
- Nurture collaboration and comfort between caregivers and incarcerated parents about telling children the truth about the incarceration in age appropriate ways.

I Have the Right...

- To be well cared for in my parent's absence.



Policy Implications

- **Consider subsidized guardianship for children whose parents are serving long sentences.**
- **Provide supports and helpful information for caregivers from Departments of Corrections and Child Welfare Agencies**

Expand the Conversation

- **Well cared for includes being parented well from prison**
- **Well cared for includes parents that can communicate with each other**
- **Well cared for means family strengthening policies and practices**

I Have the Right...

- **To speak with, see and touch my parent**



What We Know

In 2004, 59% of parents in a state correctional facility and 45% of parents in a federal correctional facility reported never having had a personal visit from their child(ren).

Policy Implications

- **Encourage social services departments to facilitate contact between children in their care and incarcerated parents.**
- **Advocate for programs that support caregivers to facilitate parent child interaction when appropriate.**
- **Consider the merits and disadvantages of video visitation and non-contact visit preparation for young children.**
- **Implement trauma informed training**

I Have the Right...

- **To support as I struggle with my parent's incarceration**
- **Not to be blamed, judged or labeled because of my parent's incarceration**

Policy Implications

- Train staff at institutions whose constituency includes children of incarcerated parents to recognize and address the needs and concerns of these children and their caregivers
- Advocate for services for children of incarcerated fathers as well as mothers

I Have the Right...

- To a lifelong relationship with my parent.



Policy Implications

- Re-examine the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) as it applies to incarcerated parents (including fathers!) to ensure that viable families are not dissolved because of rigid timelines for termination of parental rights.

Policy Implications

- Effective Parenting and Reentry programming in prisons and jails
- Informing incarcerated parents: implications for school districts and health care providers

More Emerging Issues

Caregiver Support



Emerging Issues

Juvenile vs. Adult Corrections



Emerging Issues

Immigration and Corrections



Emerging Issues

Universal vs. Targeted Outreach



Emerging Issues

Runaway and Homeless



RESOURCES

National Resource Center on Children and Families of the
Incarcerated at FCN

- New Web Site
- Directory of Programs
- Children of incarcerated parents Library
- Responding To Children and Families of incarcerated parents: A Community Guide by Ann Adalist-Estrin and Jim Mustin(2003)
- Telephone Trainings, Conferences and Technical Assistance

www.fcnetwork.org

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