

## Hardships Children Face in the United States of America by Having a Parent in Prison: How to Help Them! A Program Proposal

Cupe, Jamillah H.Z.

Indiana University of Pennsylvania, USA

### Abstract

This is a qualitative study examining research that has previously investigated the impact the incarceration of parents has on children in the United States of America. The study will explore root causes and causality outcomes for youth behaviors, on a psychological and child development level, by examining data, results and findings from multiple journal articles related to this topic and documenting patterns, commonalities, differences and/or connections that may define why children often develop so many challenging outcomes.

The research questions are, (1) why children who have an incarcerated parent are characterized to produce so many negative outcomes, such as emotional, learning and behavioral challenges; what do developmental theories say about this? (2) What will be the best program implementation design to aid effectively in reducing negative outcomes, among youth who have a parent in prison?

The data analysis will include statistical reviews from the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) to help determine whether this issue is significantly prevalent to warrant societal or governmental intervention. The conclusion will include critical areas (on children and caregivers) any program should address, when implementing programs to help the population of youth dealing with having a parent in prison. Children of Promise, NYC, is an organization specifically designed to work with children having parents in prison and will also be evaluated.

In addition, the findings and suggestions are beneficial for social service organizations looking for possible strategies and buffers that can support healthy youth development and assist and/or minimize resulting emotional and psychological hurdles.

**Keywords:** Incarceration; Men and women; Strict sentencing laws; Characteristics of children; Attachment theory; Bonding theory; Psychological disorders; Youth symptoms; Anxiety; Children of Promise; Ganization; Program model

### Purpose of Research

#### Introduction

This research intends to discover how youth are impacted by having one or both parents incarcerated; and identify consequential outcomes youth incur, in their attempt to cope with parental separation. Perusing this issue, may reveal that as a parent walks into prison, their children simultaneously walk into a revolving door of multiple dilemmas linked to psychological challenges, behavioral difficulties, and emotional/cognitive issues. Researchers have revealed that children who have a parent in prison are linked to many negative outcomes unfortunately [1-8]. This highlights the importance of the ripple effect of having an incarcerated parent. Strategies and approaches to creating a network of effective support and amelioration services, to aid this population of youth, cannot be determined without first having this knowledge as part of the needs assessment.

Understanding the impact and operational dynamics of youth with a parent or parents in prison is critical to implement a successful program with the goals and objectives of addressing the needs of these youth and decreasing negative outcomes. Murray and Farrington [9] and other researchers support the ideology that programs for children of prisoners should be based on a clear understanding of the mechanisms linking parental imprisonment and children's psychopathology [10,11]. This investigator will use research findings to develop and propose recommendations for social service programs focused on preventing arrest and prosecution and/or reducing recidivism among youth experiencing parental incarceration.

An examination and qualitative analysis of the historical context of this issue will help identify the challenges these youth are most likely to face. Further exploration of psychological concepts may also provide explanation for the development of negative behavioral outcomes experienced by youth dealing with parental incarceration. The variables for this study are parental separation (predictor) and behavior (outcome). The research questions for the basis of this study are as follows:

- 1) What do developmental theories say about why children of incarcerated parents are characterized with so many negative outcomes, such as emotional, learning and behavioral challenges?
- 2) What best practice(s) and program design(s) can be implemented to effectively serve in reducing negative outcomes among youth who have a parent in prison?

### The Statistical Rate of Men and Women in Prison

The most recent Bureau of Justices Statistics report shows that between 2000 and 2009, the number of inmates in state and federal prisons rose up to 788,400 [12]. However, this increase is much smaller

**\*Corresponding author:** Cupe, Jamillah H.Z., Indiana University of Pennsylvania, USA, Tel: +2674757075; E-mail: [jhc4311success@gmail.com](mailto:jhc4311success@gmail.com)

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than the dramatic fluctuation that occurred during the implementation of strict sentencing laws. Significantly, during the 1990s state and federal incarceration rose to 1,696,000; and there was an even greater escalation in the prison population in the 1980s, reaching 2,215,200 [12]. Between the years of 1986 and 1999, there was an increase of 888% for the number of women incarcerated for exclusively drug offenses and 120% for non-drug charges. From 1991 until 2007 the number of children with a mother in prison rose by 131%, while the number of youth with a father in prison grew 77% within this time frame [12]. This shows that the rate of mother imprisonment outweighs that of the fathers [10,13]. Table 1 below is from the Bureau of Justices Statistics, 2008 report that provides information about incarcerated parents and their children. It significantly shows the growth of parental imprisonment and the rate of youth experiencing this issue.

### Strict Sentencing Laws and the Rise in Paternal Incarceration

Many researchers link the swift increase of parental incarceration with the onset of stricter sentencing laws, implemented in response to “America’s War on Drugs” issue and addressing repeated offenders [9,10,12-21]. The more stringent sentencing laws consisted of: mandatory minimum sentencing statutes, “three strikes and you’re out” law and “truth-in-sentencing” laws. With the goal of ensuring fairness in sentencing, state and federal legislations of the 80s put restrictions on judge’s ability to utilize discretion that prohibited them from having the ability to consider maternal-linked parenting responsibilities [19].

The outcome of strict sentencing legislation largely populated the US prison with minority offenders who committed drug offenses, while concurrently, the rate of women becoming incarcerated began to outnumber men like never before [10,13,15-20]. For example, from 1986 until 1999 as more women were charged with drug offenses, out of home placements for children living with a relative or entering the foster care system was enormously elevated [10,13,15,16,20]. Strict sentencing laws were created for the purpose of deterring drug distributions and violent criminals.

Number of parents	Total	State	Federal
2007 <sup>b</sup>	809,800	686,000	123,800
2004 <sup>c</sup>	754,900	644,100	110,800
1999	721,500	642,300	79,200
1997	649,500	578,100	62,500
1991	452,500	413,100	39,400
Number of Children			
2007 <sup>b</sup>	1,706,600	1,427,500	279,100
2004 <sup>c</sup>	1,590,100	1,340,300	249,800
1999 <sup>d</sup>	1,515,200	1,338,900	176,300
1997 <sup>d</sup>	1,362,900	1,223,800	139,100
1991 <sup>d</sup>	945,600	860,300	85,100

Note: see methodology for details about estimation methods. see appendix table 1 for estimates by gender.

<sup>a</sup>Estimates were based on the prisoner custody population in each year, the total custody population included inmates held in privately operated facilities and community corrections centers (30,379 in 2007; 24,768 in 2004; and 3,828 inmates in privately operated facilities in 1999)in 1991 and 1997, the number of inmates in these facilities was not known.

<sup>b</sup>The 2007 estimates were based on the distribution of parents from the 2004 SISFCF.

<sup>c</sup>Numbers were estimated based on the custody population in state (1,241,034) and federal (176,156) prisons on June 30, 2004.

<sup>d</sup>Estimates may not be comparable to previously published BJS reports.

**Table 1:** Estimated number of parents in state and federal prisons and their minor children.

### Strict Sentencing Laws

These laws resulted from: The Crime Control Act of 1984, The Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986, The Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1988, and The Violent Crime and Law Enforcement Act of 1994. The Crime Control Act of 1984 applied a 5 year mandatory minimum sentence for drug offences, improper use of firearm and a 1 year minimum sentence for distributing drugs near schools or playgrounds. The Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986 employed 5-, 10-, and 20-year minimum sentences (depending on the type of drug and its quantity) for those who trafficked drugs, sold to a minor or pregnant woman or tried to employ a minor.

The Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1988 directed a 5 year minimum sentence for 5 grams of cocaine or any amount that can lead to death; also a 20 year minimum sentence with the possibility of life in prison for those who repeatedly engage in criminal activity. The Violent Crime and Law Enforcement Act 1994 was a bill signed by President Clinton. This bill initiated a life sentence in prison without the possibility of parole for persons who committed two or more serious offenses. Governor Pete Wilson introduced it as a slogan “three strikes and you’re out!” as California Assembly Bill 971 came into effect in 1994. This law requires a minimum of 25years or more for those convicted of certain categorized violent and non-violent crimes. Furthermore, it allows early release and exempts certain first time nonviolent drug offenders from minimum sentences, if they provide truthful evidence to government officials [22].

It is the Violent Crime and Law Enforcement Act of 1994, aka “three strikes law,” and habitual offender law, that is taking a toll on the increase of non-violent men and women offenders [13,15,16,18,19,23]. Even though laws were already being utilized in states, it was perceived by the public and elected officials that additional sentencing policies/laws were needed to strengthen the ones that already existed by minimizing sentencing discrimination [18,19]. This belief was further influenced by highly recognized cases such as, Polly Klaas and Kimber Reynolds; in which both women were killed by a repeat offender [22]. These cases became the grass roots for “three strikes” and affirmed to the public that repeated offenders cannot adequately be rehabilitated and for this reason should remain excluded from mainstream society for life.

### Issue with Mandatory-Minimum Sentencing and Three Strikes Laws

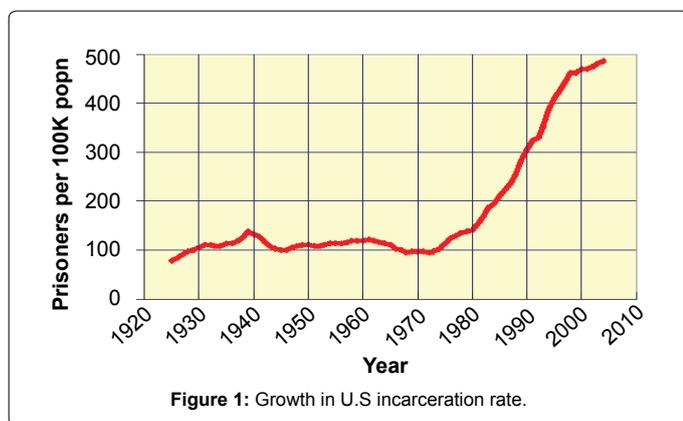
Subsequent to the establishment of “Three Strikes,” many researchers have identified various challenges with this law and view it as culpable for overcrowding prisons with non-violent offenders [10,12-19,20,23-25].

Figure 1 shows the ‘Growth in U.S incarceration rate’, and is taken from Alfred Blumstein’s empirical research that examines a historical view to the prison population growth in the United States. The table shows that incarceration rates started to incline dramatically during the 80s. Blumstein identified that strict sentencing policies (‘get tough on crime’ laws) effectively influenced a dramatic spike in the prison population from 1970 until present; it’s a sign that before 1970, the rate of incarceration remained at a steady peak [12,14,17-19]. It was additionally documented that 1% of the US adult population was in prison or jail or any given day [14]. The significant escalation in prison population growth is further associated with: a mixture of prosecutorial and judicial sentencing decisions leading to an increase in commitment to person per arrest and time served, including time served as a result of parole violation [14].

## How Incarceration Rates Reflects Children

Another contributing factor in high incarceration rates is sentencing disparities [10,13,20]. In comparison to drug and property crimes, studies show that prosecutors are more likely to apply mandatory terms and sentencing enhancements to Blacks and Latino men than any other group (Blumstein, 2011). Prosecutors are more likely to offer pretrial divergence to Caucasian defendants than they are to African-American, Latinos, Asians or Native Americans ethnic groups, with similar legal characteristics. However Blacks and Latinos outnumber other ethnic groups where African-American men rates of rejection remains the highest. Among drug defendants with no prior records African-Americans and Latinos have odds of receiving a pretrial diversion that are 43% and 34% lower in comparison to the odds of Caucasian defendants with similar legal characteristics. Among drug defendants with a prior arrest but no drug convictions, African-American and Latino defendants have odds of receiving a pretrial diversion that is 34% and 39% lower, retrospectively, then that of Caucasian defendants with similar legal characteristics.

Table 2 shows the rate of youth impacted by ethnicity. Mirroring how African American and Latino rates of incarceration supersede other ethnic groups, the population of African American and Latino youth under age 18 are similarly experiencing parental incarceration, greater than other ethnic peer groups [9,10,13,18,24]. In 2007, the ratio of 1 in 15 African Americans, 1 in 42 Hispanics and 1 in 111 Caucasian youth were dealing with parental incarceration. This equates to African American children experiencing this dynamic 7 ½ times more than Caucasian youth and 2 ½ times more than Latino children as well [10,17,18,20,24,25]. Racial disparities in sentencing appear to



	Estimated number of minor children with a parent in prison	percent of all minor children in the U.S. Resident population
U.S. Total	1,706,600	2.30%
White, Non-Hispanic	484,100	0.90%
Black, non-hispanic	767,400	6.7
hispanic	362,800	2.4

Note: Children were assumed to have the same race/ethnicity as the incarcerated parent. Percentages were calculated based on the U.S. resident population under age 18 as of July 1, 2007.

<sup>1</sup>Includes children of other races. Other races include American Indians, Alaska natives, Asians, native hawaiians, other Pacific islanders, and persons identifying two or more races.

**Table 2:** Minor children in the U.S resident population with a parent in state or federal prison, by race and hispanic origin, 2007.

have increased even more after discretion was shifted from judges to prosecutors with the Sentencing Reform Act of 1984. Before this law transitioned, African Americans received 1/3 fewer sentencing disparities than Caucasians and 10% longer sentences than whites.

Besides limiting judges' discretion and shifting it to prosecutors, these reforms have caused confusion in interpreting and applying fair sentencing [3,14-16,23,26-28]. Prior to mandatory minimum sentencing and the three strike laws, judges were able to take all facts and extenuating circumstances into consideration, when determining appropriate punishment, but this limitation adds an aspect that makes many case rulings appear unfair [10,16,29]. This is evident in the following cases.

### Court Cases

The Ewing v. California<sup>2003</sup> case is one example in which the court's ruling was petitioned to the Court of Appeals of California for evaluation of fairness. From 1984 to 1993, the defendant received ten arrests and fourteen criminal convictions. Additionally, in 1992 he was arrested five more times and convicted of: battery, theft, burglary, possession of drug paraphernalia, appropriation of lost property, possession of a firearm, trespassing, robbery and three additional counts of burglary. Sentenced to nine years for these crimes, he served five years. Nine months after his release, he stole three golf clubs that were worth \$400 each.

A California jury found Ewing guilty of grand theft of personal property and acquitted him of burglary. Because Ewing had prior charges the prosecutor wanted to apply the three strikes law. Even with trying to avoid a 'three strike' sentence, the court concluded that because of his recidivism he posed a threat to the community and condemned Ewing to a sentence of twenty-five years to life. In the process of this court proceeding, several other interesting cases were reviewed and used in Ewing's argument, to demonstrate that using a three strikes policy towards his case was unfair.

One case reviewed, Rummel v. Estelle 1980, went to the United States Courts of Appeals. In this case a twenty-five year to life sentence was imposed for falsely obtaining \$120.75. Prior to this offense Rummel had been charged with fraudulent use of a credit card and writing bad checks. He wanted to petition this ruling based on the grounds of the Eighth Amendment. Another case is Hutto v. Davis 1982; where two consecutive terms of twenty years was given for possession with intent to distribute nine ounces of marijuana and distribution of marijuana. In the Lockyer v. Andrade 2003 case, Leandro Andrade had a prior criminal record that included misdemeanors and nonviolent crimes.

In 1995 he was arrested for stealing two video tapes worth approximately \$150. Because he had prior offenses, Andrade was sentenced to two consecutive terms of twenty-five years to life, however after providing a review to the court of appeals his sentence was later overturned. The United States Court of Appeals for the 9<sup>th</sup> Circuit, determined that his original sentence was in violation of Eighth Amendment. A final example is the case of Crosby v. Sate, where the Delaware Supreme Court implemented a 45 year sentence to a repeat offender for forgery and criminal impersonation. Because he had five prior felonies he was given a life sentence.

These cases demonstrate that when a three strike law is utilized by the courts, the number of prior offenses can be considered as a more important factor than the severity of the crime(s). Ideally, any applied punishment should be fair and equivalent to the type of crime committed. Should someone be locked up for life for a nonviolent

offense like petty stealing or forgery? This is especially heinous when you consider that the purpose of the three strikes law was to send only violent criminals and chronic drug offender/dealers to life in prison. It appears the initial goal of this type of sentencing has rarely been achieved [10,16,18,19,29,30].

Fellow researchers evaluating this empirical data hold a common belief that the three strikes law is not clear, and should not be used as an independent sentencing principle [30]. Depending on the specifics of the situation, it can be viewed as an unfair policy that exhibits cruel and unusual punishment, especially because it lacks consistency [30]. It is imperative that the punishment (sentencing) should not outweigh the crime. The inability of strict sentencing laws to achieve their initial goals and objectives remains a factor that may be a significant contribution to the breakdown of many family units by locking up nonviolent offenders without considering their roles as mothers; who were often primary caring takers for their children prior to incarceration [13,18,31]. Limiting judges' discretion places further limits on the judge's ability to consider any explanatory circumstances when providing a sentencing term for the offender.

### Summary of How This Law Impacts Families and Society

It is understood that one of the reasons the Sentencing Reform Act of 1986 was put into practice was to provide a better structure that would make sentencing more fair and decrease disparities among minorities. However, sentencing disparities are still a concern minority's face. This act influenced other sentencing policies including the three strikes law given the dubious clarity of this law by those who interpret [30] and the manner in which it is constructed, judicial discretion restrictions should not have excluded judges. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, between 1990 and 2008, the number of Hispanic jail inmates increased at a faster average annual rate of growth (4.5%) than white (3.8%) and black inmates (3.3%). Figure 2 below is from BJS, it shows the prison expansion by race and ethnicity from 1990 until 2008.

Weakening the judges' power of discretion also makes current sentencing policies very weak. "Judges are guided by three focal concerns in the process of decision making: (1) the fault of the offender and the degree of harm caused to the victim (2) protection of the community (3) the practical implication of sentencing decisions." Under the current limitations, judges cannot take extenuating circumstances into account. Restructuring this salient aspect of the policies should be promptly addressed.

Returning the power of discretion to judges is a seemingly effortless way to address the flaws associated with habitual offender laws and minimize their devastation on the disenfranchised members of society and the criminal justice system. Elected officials failed to consider the

importance of assessing unique differences in diverse criminal cases. It seems the three strikes law is structured to respond to every case in a 'cookie cutter' manner, causing systemic multidimensional challenges for the United States and its citizens [13,16].

The strict sentencing laws have been clearly identified as a primary reason why the United States prison system is currently overcrowded with mothers and fathers; and predicted to get worse (The negative impact of these strict sentencing laws, especially three strikes, continues to plague the United States on a micro and macro level [15,32,33]. On the micro level, these laws facilitate the continued breakdown of family structures and hinder the personal progression of individuals (i.e., mothers, children and their family support circle), at an enormous rate. On the macro level, tough sentencing policies are stripping funds from social service agencies, community programs and education, as funds are being diverted to fuel the criminal justice system and its huge increase in the prison population. Most communities and social service programs aim to help those who are in need of food, shelter, clothing, counseling, financial aid and basic employment skills [16].

Removing funds from these programs and placing it in the criminal justice system creates more victims, destroys communities and reduces services to those who have basic needs. These laws appear to be making situations worse for individual Americans and costing society more than originally intended. Research has identified that strict sentencing laws have contributed to overcrowded prisons, an increase in nonviolent offender and homicide rates, reduced funds for communities and education, and greater numbers of disadvantaged children and those in the foster care system.

Researchers have known for years that the policies and procedures of strict sentencing laws have contributed to more harm than good, are not fair and are not organized in a way that will accomplish its primary goals and objectives [24,26]. The American Law Institute opposes these types of laws for some of these reasons. Some have recognized the link between these laws and current problems and determined that more consistency is needed with this policy. As a possible solution, some researchers realized that the sentencing commission could develop a scale that would rank offenses in accordance with democratic judgments about their relative severity).

### The Crime Control Act of 1984, The Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986, The Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1988, and The Violent Crime and Law Enforcement Act of 1994: Effects on Men and Women

Empirical data strongly link these laws to the escalation of men and women in prison, especially women. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, in 1986 the population of women in prison was 19,812; during 1991 it was 38,796; in 2000 it reached 91,612 and for 2006 the total was 112,498. Most women in prison are mothers or grandmothers and not classified as violent offenders [10,24,34]. Women were much more likely to be the primary care takers of their children before incarceration than fathers were. As female incarceration rates began to parallel men, children have been impacted by this disruption [20] from 1991 to 2007 alone, the rate of incarceration increased by a percentage of 122% for mothers and 76% for fathers.

### Introduction of the Problem

Youth in today's world are faced with vast challenges regarding: family issues, education, community resources, crime, gangs, peer pressure, identity, drugs, low self-esteem and sexuality, to name a few.

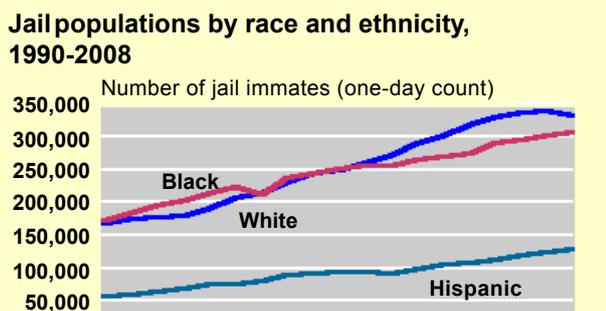


Figure 2: Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics (2010).

One issue that could be more readily explored is how the breakdown of the family unit, due to parental incarceration, impacts children on a massive level. From 1991 through 2007 there has been an 80% increase of youth experiencing one or both parents in prison [12]. The Bureau of Justice Statistics stated that in 2007, 52 percent of state inmates and 63 percent of federal inmates, combined had approximately 1,706,600 children under the age of 18. This number represents 2.3 percent of the 74 million children in the United States, in which African American and Hispanic youth are impacted by this issue at a rate greater than any other race. Figure 3 reveals that there are more children impacted by incarceration than parents in prison. This table is taken from the Bureau of Justice Statistics that graph parents in state prison and their children under the age of 18 (BJS, 2008).

Because of this issue youth are at greater risk for becoming involved in juvenile crimes, experiencing school related challenges and having their living arrangements interrupted [35]. Concurrent with the increase in parental incarceration has been out of home placement for children; this has become another issue for them. Approximately 63% of children that have an incarcerated mother live with a relative, most likely their grandmother. While 40% of children with an incarcerated mother enter foster care, 60% of boys with their mom in prison are prone to enter the prison system themselves [35].

Most children with an incarcerated father already reside with their mother. To the contrary, when mothers are incarcerated, 1/3 of children live with their father, while the remaining may live with a maternal grandmother, other family member or foster care. It is no surprise parental incarceration has been linked to amplified negative outcomes for their offspring [10,36].

It has been identified that more than 70% of the female population in prison are mothers [3]. The more mothers become incarcerated the more their children will face adversities in life. Studies have shown that children face a greater hardship by losing a mother to incarceration than a father, because mothers were traditionally the primary caretakers before prison. For this reason, children have been impacted far more by maternal incarceration than paternal. To better understand the population of mothers in prison and how their children are impacted, we must first examine studies regarding women in prison and women in prison who have children.

### Traits of Women Prisoners

According to the 1991 Bureau of Justice Statistics, Special Report of Women in Prison, women in prison can be categorized within the following characteristics: (1) predominately of African American descent (2) between the ages of 25-34 years old (3) unemployed (4) low

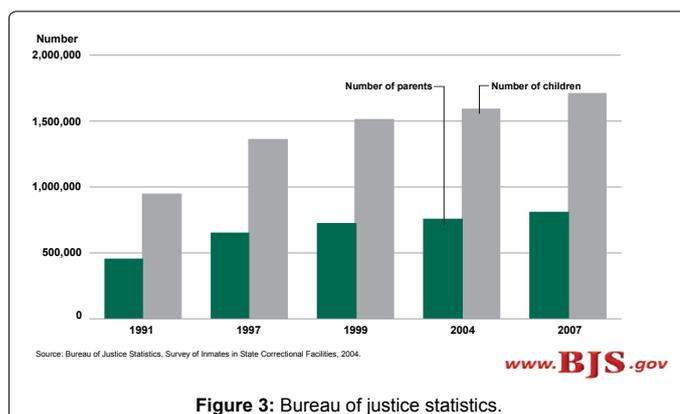


Figure 3: Bureau of justice statistics.

level of education (5) grew up in single parent household; 39% lived with mothers, 3% reported living with their father, 16 % lived without both parents, 17 % lived in a foster care home or similar agency (6) 47 % of women described having an immediate close family member in jail during childhood (7) 32% of women had a parent that engaged in drug abuse activities (8) 34% of women stated that they experienced physical and sexual abuse; approximately 32% reported that this abuse took place while they were still a minor (9) women are more prevalent than men to be charged with a drug or non-violent offense and as a drug user. This study reveals patterns female offenders' experience in their youth, as well as adulthood. Of all the characteristics quantified, having a family member in prison reflected the highest percentages.

### Profile of Incarcerated Mothers and Fathers

Another study performed by the Bureau of Justice Statistics was the Special Report of Incarcerated Parents and Their Children. This study identified a combination of characteristics associated more commonly for parents in prison. Mumola [37] described the profile and facts regarding most parents in prison to be: (1) from 1991-1999 the population having a parent in prison increased more than 500,000 (2) prior to being incarcerated 64% of mothers and 44% of fathers lived with their child (3) 55% of state and 63% of federal inmates reported having a child (4) in 1999, 1,372,700 minors had a father in prison, an additional 126,100 children had a mother in prison (5) predominately half of all incarcerated parents were of African American descent, while a quarter were white (6) fathers in prison stated that their child was living with the mother, while imprisoned mothers confirmed their child was living with a grandparent (7) prior to incarceration mothers were primarily living with their children (8) majority of parents were identified as nonviolent offenders or drug traffickers (9) a greater number of mothers reported drug use than fathers (10) 23% of mothers and 13% of fathers reported having a mental illness (11) 53% of parents informed that they maintained an income of less than \$1,000 a month (12) many were never married (13) the average time for a parent in State prison was 80 months and in Federal prison 103 months (14) 75% of state prisoners admitted to prior convictions (15) 1 in 3 mothers' criminal actions were drug related.

The characteristics profile developed by the Bureau of Justice Statistics reveals that parents in prison, especially mothers have endured many adverse experiences as adults and unfortunately, during their upbringing. Juxtaposed to their children, intergenerational youth problems have been passed down, and replications of negative behaviors and consequences will continue to impact them for the majority of their lives. Christopher Mumola [37], Bureau of Justice Statistics Policy Analyst, conducted a study that examined the history of inmates in both state and federal institutions who are parents. The data for this study were collected by conducting personal interviews from the 1997 survey of inmates in state and federal correctional facilities. His results revealed that parents in prison have undergone many adverse experiences, and that the rate of mothers in prisons has continuously increased. Their children are not only inheriting intergenerational offending, but also repeating cycles of family dysfunction, residential displacement, abuse/neglect and other damaging exposures.

### How Children Are Affected

Children are innocent victims impacted by strict sentencing laws, driving higher rates of parental incarceration, especially for the population of women. There are many children who are mentally and emotionally wounded by the traumatic experience of having a mother, father or both parents in prison. Child development researchers

agree that attachment and the foundation of a healthy parent-child relationship is extremely important, particularly the bond to mothers. The separation process is devastating for all parties but really devastating for the children involved [27,38,39]. The disruption of the familiar family unit for children leads them to face further aggravation in their lives; effects are comparable to the already documented trauma associated with youth who experience parental divorce or death of a primary care taker. This insight is significant and reflects journal articles perused regarding women in prison, which acknowledge the complications facing children with incarcerated parents (that includes chronic anger issues, negative behaviors and learning difficulties), but do not provide much explanation for how this situation relates to developmental difficulties for children) [27,40,41]. In order to sufficiently assist this population of children, we need to hear what they are saying, and analyze their actions from a developmental standpoint. All associated dynamics of how they are impacted need to be explored and understood in order to gather program content and approaches for altering negative outcomes.

Researchers support the belief that children with an incarcerated parent are more at risk for developing personal and economic setbacks [4,6]. It is reported that they may experience behavioral and emotional problems: learning challenges, fear, anxiety, anger, low-self-esteem, social withdrawal, confusion, separation anxiety, sadness, guilt, hyperactivity and sleeping and eating problems. They are more prone to: running away, using illegal drugs, engaging in sexual activities, becoming pregnant at an early age, and in addition experiencing truancy, school-related problems, depression, aggression, juvenile delinquency and social stigma [25,31,38,42-44].

### **Youth Symptoms Linked to Psychological Disorders**

Considering that youth are inclined to experience so many side-effects related to parental incarceration, investigating the connections between the traumatic exposures and psychological event is significant. Anxiety, emotional rage and instability, disruptive behavior, oppositional disorders, depressive disorders, attention disorders, prolonged grief reactions, reactive attachment disorders, traumatic stress disorders, gender and identity disorders and adjustment disorders are all known symptoms of children impacted by parental incarceration [4,31,45]. In addition, these behaviors fall under the classification of interactive disorders, according to The Psychodynamic Diagnostic Manual (PDM), used to make mental and behavior diagnosis and treatment plans for both adult and children experiencing challenges. The aforementioned afflictions reveal an assortment of behavioral and emotional challenges over which youth of incarcerated parents must prevail to be successful.

Significantly, the Psychodynamic Diagnostic Manual (PDM) states that interactive disorders are characterized by the problematic way a child perceives an experience, his or her emotional world and/or by a particular maladaptive child-caregiver interaction pattern. It identifies that interactive disorders among youth can have multiple factors: how children process regulatory-sensory skills and face environmental stressors; along with family influential factors. Prolonged grief that children incur from parental incarceration can take the form of separation anxiety, which can be induced by a loss of a parent or caregiver due to: death, divorce or extended separation [46]. Their immediate grief reactions center around constant thoughts of the lost parent. Children who experience prolonged grief can become withdrawn, avoid pleasurable activities, experience anxiety, agitation, despondency, self-absorption, anger, aggression, may do well in one

environment (home) and not in another (school), suffer weight loss, sleep and eating disorders, weight gain, illness, and psychosomatic symptoms).

Depression in children is linked to sadness and irritability. Girls are more likely than boys to experience depression. Loss of interest in activities, low self-esteem (guilt or worthlessness), difficulty concentrating, suicidal thoughts, appetite and weight changes, and sleep and psychomotor activity are symptoms mostly associated with depression. Youth experiencing depression are prone to drug abuse, eating disorders, suicide, and early sexual activities [46].

Traumatic stress disorder (versus posttraumatic stress disorder) in the PDM states that infants and young children can respond to severe trauma and stress immediately. This disorder is known to severely disrupt children's emotional, social, language, and intellectual development. Stresses that relate to witnessing a terrifying event (accidents, animal attacks, fires, war, and natural disasters) or overwhelming stresses that are linked to frightening personal events (severe abuse of self or a loved one, witnessing a parent's arrest, witnessing the murder of a parent, witnessing rape of a caregiver, or sexual activity of a drug addicted parent) can lead to traumatic stress disorders among youth. Traumatized children are known to suffer disruption in basic routine functioning in the areas of sleep, elimination, attention, impulse control, and mood, and have difficulty focusing.

Consequently, the nurturing role of the present parent and/or caregiver has been recognized as having the most powerful influence on impacting how children cope with and handle their parent's incarceration, out of home placement and/or being separated from their siblings) [34,38,41]. Children are more likely to successfully recover if they are able to develop a trust relationship and healthy attachment with the present caregiver in a manner that centers on emotional security, emotional support and the ability to freely express their feelings [46].

Without supportive/effective buffers, researchers have identified that girls and boys often respond in different ways to parental incarceration. It appears boys are more prone to express their emotions externally through demonstrations of delinquent behavior and anger. Girls appear to internalize their feelings exhibiting emotional problems such as depression, grief and stigmatization. Older youth with an incarcerated parent, especially if there is recidivism, face higher risks of developing coping mechanisms related to gang activity, drug use, sexual promiscuity and crime [11]. Researchers have associated theories of insecure attachment, economic strain, stigma, and social learning as attributes to explain these poor outcomes. For this reason, ameliorating the negative outcomes for this population of youth is salient.

Parental incarceration impacts youth differently. Age, living arrangements before incarceration and the quality of relationship they had with their parents have a major influence on how youth react to this experience. The nature of the parent-child relationship before incarceration correlates with how children will adjust to their parent being in prison). Most mothers report that they were living with their children prior to becoming incarcerated and were the primary caretaker of their family. On the other hand more fathers reported never living with their children before being incarcerated [21].

Even taking into consideration that these children may have been pre-exposed to unhealthy conditions such as poverty, parental substance abuse or violence, prior to the arrest of the parent, having a parent in prison exponentially multiplies grief and challenges in the area of emotional and behavioral development. Additional emotional

challenges can be created if youth are separated from their siblings. This dynamic increases anxieties and worries beyond the existing primary dilemma [47]. To make matters worse, youth dealing with a pattern of recidivism are known to experience even more difficult emotional challenges.

## Parental Incarceration and Children Development

One of the first important relationships established between a parent and a child is that of attachment [46,48]. Attachment is formed when a mother responds to the needs of her baby/child and creates a bond between them. How the mother responds to emotional and physical needs through comforting, consoling, bathing, clothing, touching, and verbal communication; determines whether the baby/child begins to develop a sense of trust, security and safety. These actions formulate the foundations of a healthy relationship. Researchers have identified that early childhood attachments impact cognitive and social-emotional development throughout the child's life [49].

## Explored Developmental Theories

John Bowlby began exploring attachment out of a desire to study factors that affected children exposed to negative family experiences. He selected families in which a strong parent-child relationship was present. Secondly, he observed the reaction, of infants 15-30 months of age, to being separated from their mother. The results of this study constructed what is known as the attachment theory. Data also supports that attachment relationships established in infancy continue to shape interactions throughout the lifespan [49].

The bond of the parent-child relationship is interrupted by prison and it makes sense to explore the Attachment Theory to examine the effects. Literature supports there are differences in how boys and girls attach to their mom and dad) [49]. For example secure attachment to father has been linked to lower levels of externalizing and/ or behavioral problems, less experiences of anxiety, and withdrawn behaviors, especially for girls [18]. Contrarily, secure attachment with a mother relationship has been associated with high self-esteem, popularity and low levels of antisocial behaviors [49].

Unfortunately, insecure attachment relationships lead to negative social-emotional, cognitive, physical and mental health consequences. Research shows children who are affected by parental incarceration experience anxiety, depression, fear and guilt) [4-8,31,44,50]. Furthermore these problems are linked to low self-esteem, learning difficulties and disruptive behavior.

Attachment theory explores how connection tides occur with others. Characteristics of attachment are [48,49]:

- Safe haven - the child can return to the care giver for comforting (securing a sense of safety) when feeling threatened or afraid.
- Secure Base - the caregiver provides the foundational security for children to feel safe while exploring the world.
- Proximity Maintenance - the child feels safe and secure by remaining in close proximity to the care giver.
- Separation Distress - the child shows signs of distress and despair by being separated from the caregiver.

From observing the signs of grief and suffering that infants and toddlers display in response to being separated from a parent, the following might be concluded:

1. The older the child is and the longer they have with the parent to develop strong bonds of attachment prior to incarceration, the greater the grief, internal distress and anguish.
2. Separation anxiety is less intense when the parent-child relationship has only been established for a couple of years. This could increase the likelihood that the child can develop a healthy attachment relationship with another caregiver.
3. Infants in the study demonstrated signs of turmoil, distress and suffering when separated from their primary caregivers, providing some evidence that both emotional and physical discomfort can occur under separation conditions.

If researchers can make analyses and draw conclusions from a childhood population (0-30 months old), it ought to be feasible to study this paper's target population and how this theory relates to separation through incarceration.

Additionally, Bowlby's research expresses the significance of secure attachment relationships between youth and caregivers, conveying that secure attachments encourage one to have courage or be optimistic about facing life's challenges with confidence, knowing they have someone to support them and providing a sense of self-worth, giving them greater ability to adapt. Bowlby believed childhood relationships play a key role in determining the outcome of therapeutic relationships (which could be a caregiver) [38,46].

Shay Bilchik [11] a professor at Georgetown University includes in her research Erikson's stages of development theory and relates how parental incarceration shifts developmental stages among youth:

- The development of trust and attachment for infants (0-2) is effected by impaired parenting-bonding;
- The development stage of autonomy, independence and imitative for 2-6 years old is negatively impacted, resulting in inappropriate separation anxiety, impaired social-emotional development and acute stress reactions;
- The development of a sense of industry and ability to work productively for 7-10 year olds is instead a period reflective of developmental regression, poor self-concept, acute traumatic stress reactions, and an impaired ability to overcome future trauma;
- The development of the ability to work productively with others and to control the expression of emotions that occur for early adolescents between the ages of 11-14 years, instead is characterized by a rejection of limits on behavior and trauma-reactive behaviors;
- The development of a cohesive identity, resolution of conflicts with family and society, and the ability to engage in adult work and relationships that is usually accomplished during adolescence (15-18) years is diminished, negatively impacted by premature termination of the dependency relationship with the parent and the greater likelihood of intergenerational crime and incarceration.

## Caregivers as Buffers

Attachment theory and other research suggests that children can successfully cope with parental separation and interactive disorders (e.g. depression, anxiety, traumatic stress, attention problems, adjustment difficulties, sleep and eating complications, emotional and behavioral

challenges) if they have stable and supportive care arrangements during the separation [4,41,46]. Therapeutically, clinicians consider the infant/child caregiver relationship as an important influence on increasing emotional development capabilities among challenged youth. Taking steps toward making a child feel safe again can counteract the development of insecure attachment (insecurity). A combination of the caregiver, family and environmental patterns should be structured in a way that fully supports the child. With the aforementioned data in mind, it appears: the pre-environmental living status, which parent is in prison (mother, father or both), the pre-existing parent-child bond (attachment) relationship before incarceration and present caregiver are dynamic forces associated with youth outcomes.

### **Research Studies: Impact Parental Incarceration Has On Youth**

Researchers who have studied women in prison and analyzed the parent-child relationship, developmental and environmental factors that impact these children agree that there is not much data that explores the obstacles they face on a personal level and suggests that there is a great need to do so [13,23,44].

Harris stated that a study was done by the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) to determine the adequacy of services being provided to children with a parent in prison. They concluded first, most child welfare agencies fail to initiate support groups for children that have a parent in prison and their caregivers. Secondly, almost no state agencies offered specific programs that cater to the population of these children.

Johnson [28] included several studies in her article. The first study was by Robins et al. Johnson recognizes that the importance of this study is the intergenerational offending relationship identified between parent and children. Robins et al. study emphasized that the arrest frequency of parents (mother or father) was a stronger factor connecting criminal behavior among juveniles than the isolated view of just having a parent in prison.

Another study is the Cambridge Study of Delinquent Development, conducted in Great Britain in 1990 and 2005; a longitudinal study of 400 males between the ages of 14 and 40. The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of parental imprisonment on boys' antisocial behavior, mental health and delinquency, while controlling for parental criminality, family poverty, poor parenting and low IQ. The results showed that 48% of boys who were separated because of parental incarceration within their first 10 years of life were convicted as adults in comparison with 14% of boys whose parents were not in prison. This study determined parent incarceration contributes to adverse outcomes for children. It is a single factor that influenced aggression, violence among children (boys) and antisocial behavior; and-additionally linked parental incarceration with mental health issues. Boys who had a mother in prison experienced more behavioral difficulties than those who had a father incarcerated.

The third study is one that Johnson [28] played a personal role in creating, The Children of Criminal Offenders Study. "In this study, 628 children were monitored for over a six year period by interviewing children, their caregivers and teachers [28]." The significance of this study showed that children who never lived with their incarcerated parent prior to arrest demonstrated similar emotional and behavioral characteristics, school performance, gang involvement and delinquency than children that had.

In the follow up of this study the results showed that 40% of

children that had a father in prison never lived with their father, 20% of children never lived with their mother, out of 13% of children who had a parent in prison 50% of children with a mother in prison had lived with their "parents" prior to incarceration. This indicates that parental incarceration is not an absolute value and that this situation has very little impact on their outcomes [28].

In 2011, Wildeman and Wakefield [18] conducted a study to explore how parental incarceration affects the well-being of children. The researchers used longitudinal data sets that included children and adolescents, from the Fragile Families and Children and Child Wellbeing Study (FFCW) and Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods (PHDCN) and used a propensity scores model to distinguish the differences between fathers who experienced imprisonment and fathers who did not. The results of their study show that parental incarceration was linked to mental health issues and behavioral outcomes. In questioning how much these effects may contribute to racial disparities for the future generation, they analyzed the research of Foster and Hagan [19]. Foster and Hagan's study revealed that parental incarceration, devastatingly impacts minority youth at a disproportionate rate in the area of educational attainment, mirroring the imbalances currently represented in the prison population.

The Great Smoky Mountain Study (GSMS) and The Caring of Children in Community Study (CCCS), conducted by Phillips et al in 2006, evaluated the role of parental criminology in combination with other factors, in determining a child's psychiatric status. Using a latent analysis on the data from GSMS and CCC, Copland and his colleagues identified that youth in their sample fell into five different replicable groups (2 low/no risk, 2 moderate risks and 1 high risks) each with a different composition of risk factors. Parental imprisonment appear in one of the moderate risk groups and in high risk groups, but it affects for children was different depending on the presence and nature of other risks factors.

For example, parental criminality in combination with poverty was connected to a moderate risk (poverty and single parenthood) but when criminality of the parent was combined with mental illness, parent-child conflict and inter-parental conflict show proneness of high risk for the development of psychiatric illnesses. This study linked parental incarceration in association with damaging children's family structure environment, contributing to antisocial behavior and adverse effects throughout life [24].

Project Metropolitan was a Swedish longitudinal study that consisted of 15,000 children (a combination of girls and boys). The purpose of the study was to explore how parental incarceration in a child's first six years of life could predict offending as adults. The results in Sweden showed that among children with imprisoned parents, 25% offended between the ages of 19 and 30, in comparison with 12% of children without convicted parents, revealing that parental incarceration was a risk factor for influencing criminal behavior [31]. This study shed light on the significance of proving protective buffers from adverse effects for youth; having a supportive family structure, friendly prison policies, a welfare-oriented juvenile justice system and more sympathetic attitudes towards crime and punishment may decrease negative outcomes for youth with parents in prison [31].

Miller [13] included a study that questioned whether both the parent-child separation and forced silences would lead to greater trauma among children with a parent in prison. The results of the study confirmed that 75% of the children included in the study stated that they had very little or no social support and exhibited signs of emotional trauma-related stress.

Kjellstrand and Eddy [34] conducted a study using perspective, longitudinal, population-based data to make a comparison analysis between youth who experienced parental incarceration and youth who did not. The primary focus was in the areas of family risk (social disadvantage, parents' health and parenting strategies) and comparable youth behavior (externalizing behavior and serious delinquency). The results of this study revealed youth with a history of parental incarceration were not only more likely than other youth to be exposed to many parenting and family risk factors but were also at higher risk for poor adjustment across adolescence. It was also significantly reported that parents who themselves experienced past parental incarceration, was associated with: lower family income, parental education, parental social economic status, and with higher levels of parental depression, inappropriate and inconsistent discipline, youth problem behaviors and serious delinquency.

### Synopsis of Aforementioned Studies

Parental incarceration can be a traumatic experience for youth and the suffering associated with this event causes youth to experience interactive disorders, which explains the origins and effects of symptomatic behaviors. The reviewed studies show that youth exposed to parental incarceration is a population experiencing multiple disadvantages and challenges. They are a category of troubled youth in need of additional buffers and support opportunities to overcome the odds stacked against them. An understanding of their background experiences, family structures and parental neglects and issues, along with parental incarceration, can realistically explain why they are prone to experience so many negative emotional, cognitive and behavioral impediments. They are in a situation where they need positive mentors, teachers (relationships) and organizations (programs) that will take interest in placing them under their wing and making the tools and resources needed to end the cycle of their parents' mistakes.

### Benefits of Youth Programs

Research has shown that afterschool programs can help produce many positive outcomes among youth, such as increasing self-esteem, creating positive relationships with appropriate role models, encouraging good behavior, assisting with learning, providing additional avenues to the arts, music and science, fostering positive peer relationships, decreasing delinquency, providing youth with a safe environment and more [36,51,52]. For example, Hall, William and Daniel conducted a study in 2010, which centered on how parents, program staff and students felt about their experience involving after school tutoring and enrichment programs. Their study population came from an economically disadvantaged area in Northeast Florida.

The researchers determined that afterschool programs can have many benefits such as: decreasing the number of children who are unsupervised during after school hours, aiding in producing positive emotional and academic outcomes, providing a safe environment, deterring juvenile delinquency, drug use, school dropouts and teen pregnancy, and strengthening positive bonds and relationships among staff and peers. Youth that have a parent in prison face needs and have the same adjustments in their outcomes [4,34]. It has also been noted that parental incarceration is not likely the initial starting point of youth difficulties. Some of the youth population dealing with a parent in prison, already come from economically disadvantaged areas, and have been pre-exposed to other challenging conditions, such as poverty, trauma and community violence.

Daud and Carruthers, in 2008 [52], conducted a qualitative study

with the purpose of gaining insight on the impact of afterschool programs for youth living in high risk neighborhoods. They additionally wanted to identify elements in these programs that contributed to or undermined programmatic outcomes. The results of this study, indicated by youth and after school members, demonstrated that positive values and behaviors were learned, kids were open minded about learning new things and trying different activities, developed self-confidence and planned for the future. Therefore, the study showed afterschool programs are associated with positive outcomes among youth who have socio economic hardships, such as poverty and poor neighborhoods. A large number of youth who experience parental incarceration are from minority ethnic group populations (African American and Latinos) and experience living in high risk neighborhoods as well [27,53].

Stepp, Pardini, Loeber and Morris [36] conducted a study and determined social competence may provide an explanation for reducing criminal offending and increasing academic achievement amongst high risk youth over time. They perceive that as youth develop skills necessary for adulthood, they may be less likely to associate with delinquent peers or engage in criminal behavior. They link social competency to positive interactions between adults and peers and determined this as a contributing factor for being academically motivated. The researchers examined different paths of adolescent's social competences as a resilient factor among disadvantage youth. They wanted to focus on the effects of peer delinquency and the relation between adolescent social competence, the seriousness of delinquency and educational achievement.

The researchers conducted a longitudinal study in Pittsburg obtaining 257 boys at risk for antisocial behaviors. The boys were monitored for delinquent and antisocial behavior from the ages of 13 to 25.5 years old. The study showed that the boys with high levels of social competence had decreased relationships with deviant peers during their adolescent years. The research also determined that social competency had a direct influence on educational achievement during adulthood and these individuals achieved further than their delinquent peers. The researcher's conclusion was that social competency has a strong influence on reducing negative peer association and acts of delinquency. In addition, social competence helps with educational achievements. This shows that providing resources, mentorship and a supportive caregiver will elicit similar results to youth dealing with parental incarceration by encouraging the development of trust, social bonds and fostering positive relationships with others.

The commonalities of the aforementioned research reveals that in general youth who participate in afterschool programs increase internal and external rewards, that enhance their educational skills, foster positive peer and adults relations, strengthen bonds, encourage positive behavior, increase academic attainment, and most importantly, decrease the rate of youth crime engagement. Backgrounds of child abuse, school failure, unsupported family, social rejection are risk factors that increase violent and /or criminal behavior among youth [54,55]. Since after school programs have been shown to have so many rewards and benefits, it is crucial to understand which approaches are effective in encouraging positive behavior among youth, especially those dealing with parental incarceration [56-62].

### The Impact of Mentorship

Studies show that the inclusion of mentoring children of high risk groups (prisoners) can have positive outcomes [11]. It has been documented that youth with mentors are less likely to use drugs and

alcohol, engage in truancy and exhibit violent behavior with their peers. In addition they are more likely to have better attitudes toward school, fewer absences, reduction in aggressive behavior, improve relationship with parents/caregivers and have increased chances of attending college. Du Bois et al, in 2002 conducted a meta-analysis study of 55 mentoring programs relevant to children of prisoners. He discovered that the beneficial effects mentoring had on average youth, were only modest and on the other hand, more effective with high risk groups. Mentorship addresses three key areas with at risk youth: educational, emotional and behavioral successes.

## Facts and Findings

Children that experience parental incarceration often develop mental, emotional and psychological problems. They may have been exposed to adverse risk factors and dysfunctional family circumstances while living with their parent, prior to the incarceration, which may heighten negative outcomes during parental incarceration. This youth population is plagued with so many emotional and behavioral problems that finding an effective remedy to ameliorate and support their coping skills remains a challenge. The issues they are facing are broad and their behavior can be linked to a background of poor family structure (poverty, social economic status, and poor parenting) as well parental incarceration [63-69]. After analyzing and understanding the multiple factors researchers have explored and tested, the evidence reveals the following consistent pattern:

1. Traumatic life-changing events such as parental incarceration are directly linked to youth behavior, emotions and developmental challenges.
2. Parental incarceration negatively impacts natural developmental milestones, weakens secure attachment, and increases the risk of anxiety, sadness and traumatic stress disorders; contributing to their inability to process and address the effects of grief and loss that parental incarceration brings.
3. Girls are known to express emotions internally while boys externalize their feelings.
4. Children in a supportive (understanding, caring, nurturing, comfortable) environment, with a clear understanding of their circumstances, can openly express their feelings and accomplish better outcomes than youth with the opposite experience. The quality of support and parenting skills of the remaining caregiver can have a positive influence on helping children better cope. In situations where caregivers are able to make children feel adequately safe and secure, negative risk factors are diminished, mitigating negative outcomes and fostering positive adjustment.
5. Mentoring services and after school programs beneficially encourage positive relationships and reduce delinquent behavior among youth.
6. More focus, support and resources should be directed towards the remaining parent, caregiver and/or foster parent. Research shows that caregivers play a significant role in minimizing negative effects.

## Program Recommendations

An intervention program for this population of children should center around strategies related to effective communication, measurable evaluation of child's adjustment to placement, counseling

to initiate or promote positive contact with the incarcerated parent (regardless of the status of their preexisting relationship), tutoring, mentorship and therapeutic play. Services should be adjusted appropriately for age, gender, specific behavioral problems, coping mechanisms and learning difficulties.

Research shows that caregivers as well as youth have unmet needs. Providing direction and support for the caregiver will play a vital role in the child's ability to cope during difficult times. Most programs offer services specifically for children. This program proposal is unique in that it provides caregivers with comparable services in an effort to rebuild families and reduce behavior problems.

## Intervention Proposal: After School and Weekend Program

### Purpose

To provide effective support services catered to children impacted by parental incarceration and their alternate caregiver(s).

### Mission

To reduce intergenerational recidivism and strengthen family units.

### Goals

To utilize a holistic approach to design and implement after school and weekend intervention activities providing at risk youth and their caregivers the coping techniques and proper tools to foster positive outcomes.

### Services for youth and Approach Strategies

The program components are intended to inspire positive changes in behaviors by creating quality relationships and opportunities to acquire and apply effective coping skills.

### Counseling for Youth

- a) Access will help youth process any life altering changes associated with parental incarceration.
- b) Make services apropos to the child's age level, comprehension and capabilities.
- c) Focus on helping children cope with and communicate their feelings.
- d) Group therapy will be segregated by age groups (8-10, 11-14, and 15-18), providing a 'safer space' for peer group discussion about experiences, feelings and behaviors; relating to common issues and sharing beneficial coping strategies.
- e) Note: A psychological assessment will be conducted prior to counseling services, with a quarterly reassessment each year). This periodic examination will provide a measureable demonstration of counseling success by revealing any emotional and behavioral modifications made by youth.

### After School Tutoring

- a) After school tutoring would provide supportive strategies and tactics to ameliorate learning challenges, resulting from or increased by parental incarceration.
- b) Service will include homework assistance as well as a supplemental review of the most challenging academic subject areas.

- c) Services will be tailored according to the individual student needs and support.
- d) Note: academic performance will be assessed at the onset of the program, and re-evaluated every three months to document progress. This will determine the success rate of afterschool tutoring and its impact on academic achievement.

### Mentoring

- a) Mentorship will provide opportunities to model healthy relationships between the youth and other significant adults.
- b) Mentors will be provided with the monetary means and/or resources to plan and engage youth in recreational activities.
- c) Mentors will assist the organization in determining and disseminating rewards to youth as they accomplish goals established by both the mentee and mentor.
- d) Note: an evaluation of the youth’s social emotional skills, their capacity for attachments and academic improvements will be used to document the impact of mentoring services.

### Weekend Recreational Activities

- a) Structured recreational activities will provide youth an alternative to delinquent behaviors in a safe and secure environment with trained caring staff.
- b) More opportunities are created to increase positive emotions, strengthen relationships among peers and create healthier child-adult bonds.
- c) Recreational activities can consist of critical thinking games, arts and craft, choir practice, team sports, exercise, cooking (health and nutrition) classes, field trips, and attending shows and plays.

### Services for caregivers-Approach strategies

#### Education

- a) Will teach caregivers best practices for supporting and addressing the unique needs of at risk children who are challenged with separation from their parents and/or siblings (previous family unit).
- b) Can clarify, minimize or eliminate negative assumptions made about the child and the motivation for their behavior.
- c) Will provide suggestions and impart techniques/methods to encourage a healthy attachment relationship between the new caregiver and child and enhance; possibly increasing coping capabilities.

- d) Will help caregiver identify and support the specific needs of youth in their care.
- e) Can facilitate implementation of effective parenting techniques and behavioral management practices.

### Resources

Resources should ideally be based on the following criteria and considerations:

- Identification of the unique needs of caregivers.
- Downtime from youth.
- Support group services.
- Guidance and support with and family-inclusive communication.
- Guidance and support with achieving academic success, school transfers, high school completion requirements and college applications/funding.
- Identification of caregiver’s collective family/household needs.
- Food assistance.
- Utility assistance.
- Toys.
- Clothing.
- Technology
- Youth-related transportation services.
- School Pickup and home drop-off.
- Weekend transportation to visit prison facility upon request.
- Identification of relevant community resources and referral process.

### Desired Program Impact

Desired program impact is given in Table 3.

### Evaluation of Comparable Programs Targeted to Youth Impacted by Parental Incarceration

Children of Promise NYC (CPNYC), was founded by Sharon Content in 2006. It is a Brooklyn community-based non-profit organization, whose mission is to embrace children of incarcerated

Program efficiency measures	Social impact
High rates of school attendance.	Higher school completion rates
Improved academic performance.	Higher levels of education achieved
Increased classroom engagement.	High employment participation rates among youth.
Improved youth employment rates.	Less delinquent behavior.
Less engagement in risky behavior among youth.	Lower re-offending rates.
Strengthened family relationships.	Increased math and literacy competency.
Successful achievement of goals set in the mentor/mentee plan.	Improved social and emotional well-being.
Increased enthusiasm to participate in community activities.	Greater participation in community groups, activities and projects.
Greater access to supportive adult relationships.	Healthier family dynamics and community investment.
More consistent nurturing support from caregivers.	Lower rates of intergenerational criminality or recidivism.
High volunteer and caregiver program involvement.	

**Table 3:** Desired program impact.

parents, and to empower them to break the cycle of intergenerational involvement in the criminal justice system.

CPNYC acknowledges that intergenerational involvement in the criminal justice system can be broken if social, economic and educational inequities are addressed. They are making significant headway in de-stigmatizing parental incarceration, while creating a remedial community environment tailored specifically to the needs of their target population.

CPNYC with a 4:1 student-faculty ratio, serves children ages 6-18 years old (54% female; 46% male) by providing year-round services, that focus on addressing academic enrichment, mentoring and mental health services. It is the only organization in New York City that offers comprehensive support services in an after-school and summer day camp setting; in conjunction with counseling services.

The Program assists approximately 200 elementary and middle school children and 70 care givers in NYC annually.

#### Services:

#### **After School Program**

Focus on Academic Enrichment through educational engagement that supplements classroom learning. Accommodate over 200 youth; available from September through June, Monday-Friday, from 3:00-6:00 pm.

##### Academic Support

##### Arts and Recreation

- a) Dance, spoken word, drama and community service projects
- b) Field trips to museums, parks and local landmarks
- c) Golf, tennis, track and other sports

**Summer day camp:** Offers educational, recreational and therapeutic services from July to August, with operation hours from 8:00 am-5:00 pm.

**Mentoring: project D.R.E.A.M:** Pairs children with caring mentors who provide new experiences and career guidance.

**Therapeutic services:** Addresses the emotional trauma and profound psychological effects of having a parent in prison.

#### **Services To Caregivers And Family Members**

Support services for families and caregivers are offered to assist them in acquiring healthy coping strategies in managing the emotional, mental and financial challenges of caring for the child of an inmate.

- a) Weekend Visitation – regularly scheduled visitation trips allow children and their caregivers to travel to and from predestinated facilities.
- b) Letter Writing – children write letters monthly to their imprisoned parent.
- c) Video conference visits with family.
- d) Van Service - CPNYC's Shuttle Service facilitates critical connections between children and incarcerated parents by providing transportation to prison facilities.

#### **Parent support group services**

Offered monthly to provide a forum for caregivers to discuss any

concerns and struggles, and share best practices.

- a) Meetings.
- b) 24 hour crisis services.
- c) Empowerment Groups.
- d) Parenting Classes.
- e) Advocacy.
- f) Care Coordination Services.
- g) Recreational Activities.
- h) Social Service Referrals.

#### **Conclusion**

Youth are impacted by incarceration on many multi-dimensional levels (physically, emotional, cognitively and psychologically) therefore it is going to take a multi-dimensional approach of organizations (schools, social services agencies, justice system, after schools/ youth programs, churches) collectively, to adequately assist this populations of youth, in a manner that can first identify the distinct diversity of their situations and unique needs. Essential resources should be made available to caregivers and immediate counseling and therapeutic intervention services to children by social workers, phycologists and child development specialist, to mitigate development and psychological challenges.

The Children of Promise Program appears to reflect the most up to date research recommendations for an effective program. It addresses key areas of social-emotional development, assistance in learning support, behavioral challenges, mentorship, maintaining contact with incarcerated parent(s) and support services for caregivers. Clearly, this organization's literature, their years in existence (2006-present) and serving more than 500 children and caregivers, is associated with their success rate.

Analysis of available data reveals that most programs of this nature, specifically catering to children with incarcerated parents, are rarely evaluated for effectiveness through scientific research methods [35]. However, a review of widely accepted behavioral theories would suggest Children of Promise possesses all the necessary components that would effectively support this population of youth in increasing positive coping adjustments and behavioral outcomes.

Scientific research methods evaluating existing programs or creating new ones explicitly gratified towards children of incarcerated parents could be easily increase, if infused into the suggested program model using a state university system such as Rutgers University (or Penn State University). Its campuses are distributed throughout the state, making them geographically appealing. The student manpower (through internships and independent projects) and areas of study (i.e., education, sociology, psychology, mathematical statistics, perhaps even anthropology) lend themselves readily to the goals of the proposed intervention program, providing potential educators, mentors, curriculum development, self-reported surveys creation and dissemination, data collection and analysis, etc.

Establishing a long-term relationship with such an institution would allow for longitudinal study that can follow participants beyond direct involvement with the program, as well as serve as a potential resource for secondary educational for those who successfully obtain the necessary skill sets for academic success. The replicable of

the program model can be extremely beneficial, especially if it can collaborate with re-entry programs (national and/or local) for data analysis and implementation of strategies that are effective towards youth and adults populations impacted by incarceration.

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