

## Children of Incarcerated Parents: Maintaining Connections and Promoting Positive Outcomes

*Place Matters In Maryland: Achieving  
Outcomes Through Data-Driven Best Practices*

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## Agenda

- Extent of the problem
  - US Incarceration Rates
  - Parents in Prison
  - Children in Out-of-Home Care
- Review of research
  - Effects of Parental Incarceration on Children
  - Findings from Administrative Foster Care Data
  - Intervention research – What Works?
- Best Practices & Local Programs
- Looking forward:
  - Research
  - Practice

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## Extent of the Problem: Incarceration in the US - 2006



- US Dept. of Justice stats (Sabol, Coutuere, & Harrison, 2007)
  - Over 1.5 million state and Federal prisoners at year end – 2.8% increase
  - Over 112,500 women – **4.5% increase**
  - Total all correctional facilities – over 2.3 million inmates

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## Extent of the Problem: Incarcerated Parents

- 80% of women were primary caregivers of children prior to incarceration (Ehrensaft, Khashu, Ross, & Wamsley, 2003).
- 1999 US Department of Justice Special Report (Mumola, 2000)
  - More than 50% of prisoners had one or more child
  - Over 1.5 million children with a parent in prison
- Maryland (Report to the Joint Committee on Children, Youth and Families on Programs and Initiatives in Maryland for Children of Incarcerated Parents, 2007)
  - Approximately 12,600 incarcerated parents of 26,000 children

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## Extent of the Problem: Incarcerated Parents with Children in Foster Care

- Children in care with an incarcerated parent:
  - 4.5% (Mumola, 2003)
  - 5% (Maryland Commission for Women, 1998)
  - 10% (Johnston, 1995a)
- Foster care population (2003) with parental incarceration identified at removal:
  - 6% (Hayward & DePanfilis, 2007)
- Increased criminal activity *after* child welfare involvement (Ross, Khashu, & Wamsley, 2004)



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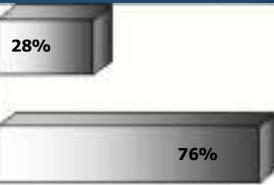
## Maryland Correctional Institution for Women (MCIW) – Jessup MD Commission for Women Report (1998)

Mothers	80%
Primary caregiver to child prior to arrest	68%
No visit from children	28%
Children in foster care during incarceration	5%
Plan to reunify with children after release	90%

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## Racial Disparity in the Criminal Justice System - Maryland

African Americans  
as Proportion of  
Population:



African Americans  
as Proportion of  
State Prison  
Population:

Source: Schiraldi & Ziedenberg (2003). *Race & Incarceration in Maryland*. Washington DC: Justice Policy Institute.

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## Effects of Parental Incarceration on Children

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## After Parental Incarceration...



- Disrupted living situation
- Loss of bread-winner
- Sudden loss of primary or other caregiver
- Sibling separation
- Out of home placement

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## Potential Psychosocial Effects

(Johnston, 1995b; Murray & Farrington, 2005; Parke & Clarke-Stewart, 2003)



- Attachment
- Grief
- Shame - stigma
- Trauma reactions
- Anti-social behavior
- Delinquency or later criminal behavior
- Intergenerational – 70% will be incarcerated

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## Study of Post-Traumatic Stress Reactions in Children

(Kampfner, 1995)

- Compared to children with similar backgrounds, children with incarcerated mothers (N=36) reported:
  - Symptoms of traumatic stress including:
    - Vivid memories of arrest and incarceration
    - Flashbacks and fear
    - Symptoms of anxiety and depression
  - Fewer emotional supports and resources

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## Children in Out-of-Home Care



- Restricted reunification options
- Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) timeline conflicts  
(Lee, Genty, & Laver, 2005)
- Visitation challenges

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## Administrative Foster Care Data

- Adoption and Foster Care Administrative Reporting System (AFCARS)
  - 804,580 children served in foster care in 2002 (DHHS, 2005)
- Study explored predictors of reunification for children with identified parental incarceration
  - 45,312 children (6%) (Hayward & DePanfilis, 2007).

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## Characteristics of Children

(Hayward & DePanfilis, 2007)

	Identified Incarcerated Parent (6%, N=45,284)	No Identified Incarcerated Parent (94%, N=698,506)	T value (p value)
<i>Age at removal (mean age)</i>	6.3	7.4	46.04 ( $<.001$ )
<i>African American</i>	34% (n=15,841)	36% (248,211)	5.78 ( $<.001$ )
<i>Child Behavior Problem</i>	17% (n=7038)	19% (n=134,525)	21.54 ( $<.001$ )
<i>Diagnosed Disability</i>	19% (n=8158)	25% (n=168,001)	32.17 ( $<.001$ )

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## Characteristics of Parents

(Hayward & DePanfilis, 2007)

	Identified Incarcerated Parent (6%, N=45,284)	No Identified Incarcerated Parent (94%, N=698,506)	T value (p value)
<i>Single Female</i>	<b>51%</b> (22,843)	47% (321,313)	-18.73 ( $<.001$ )
<i>Substance Abuse</i>	<b>50%</b> (22,697)	21% (144,584)	-122.73 ( $<.001$ )
<i>Total Family Problems</i>	M=2.38 SD:2.39 (0-7)	M=1.65 SD:1.18 (0-7)	-64.67 ( $<.001$ )

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## Placement & Discharge Characteristics

(Hayward & DePanfilis, 2007)

	Identified Incarcerated Parent (6%, N=45,284)	No Identified Incarcerated Parent (94%, N=698,506)	T value (p value)
<i>Placed with Kin</i>	<b>25%</b> (11,250)	22% (156,583)	11.67 ( $<.001$ )
<i>Length of Time in Care</i>	M= 1.89 SD 2.36	M=2.16 SD 2.82	23.387 ( $<.001$ )
<i>Discharge to Reunification</i>	<b>27%</b> (9,353)	<b>27%</b> (144,713)	ns

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## Likelihood of Reunification from Foster Care

### Foster Care Reunification

(CLWA, 2003; Courtney, 1994; Harris & Courtney, 2003; Wells & Guo, 1999; Wulczyn, 2004)

#### More likely to reunify:

- Middle childhood years
- Girls
- Two parent families

#### Less Likely to reunify:

- African American
- Health or psychological problems
- Housing problems
- Parental substance abuse**
- Placement with kin
- Longer time in care

### Children of Incarcerated Parents

(Hayward & DePanfilis, 2007)

#### More likely to reunify:

- Children age 6-12
- Two parent families
- Child behavior problems**

#### Less Likely to reunify:

- African American
- Child disability
- Housing problems
- Placement with kin
- Longer time in care

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## Implications and Discussion

- Limitations of this study:
  - Missing data
  - Missing information
    - Visitation
    - Nature of crime
    - Relationship to incarcerated parent
- Use of administrative data to understand dynamics of certain population groups
- Tailored interventions for populations if trends are identified

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## Intervention Research

### Girl Scout Behind Bars Program (Block & Potthast, 1998)

- Increased visitation compared to non-participants
- Improved mother-daughter bond & relationship
- Girls had fewer school and behavior problems
- Big Brothers Big Sisters (Tierney, Grossman, & Resch, 2000)
  - Less drug use and aggressive behaviors
  - Improved school attendance and performance
  - Improved peer and family relationships
- Visitation Program with Parenting Skills
  - More positive parenting attitudes (Thompson & Harm, 2000)

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## Best Practices

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## Bill of Rights for Children of Incarcerated Parents

(San Francisco Partnership for Incarcerated Parents, 2003)

1. I have the right to be kept safe and informed at the time of my parent's arrest.
2. I have the right to be heard when decisions are made about me.
3. I have the right to be considered when decisions are made about my parent.
4. I have the right to be well cared for in my parent's absence.
5. I have the right to speak with, see, and touch my parent.
6. I have the right to support as I struggle with my parent's incarceration.
7. I have the right not to be judged, blamed, or labeled because of my parent's incarceration.
8. I have the right to a lifelong relationship with my parent.

## Best Practices

- Maintaining connections
  - Visitation & communication
  - Therapeutic visitation
  - Open communication about parental status
- Community support
  - Mentoring programs
- Alternative to incarceration programs
  - Pregnant and parenting women
  - Substance abuse treatment
- Post-releases programs
  - Housing & economic sustainability
  - Reunification

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## Reasonable Efforts?

(Conway & Hutson, 2007)

- Maintain relationship
  - Facilitating visits, communication, "virtual visitation"
- Needed services for parents (during incarceration and post-release):
  - Parenting
  - Substance abuse treatment
  - Mental health treatment
  - Economic stability & housing at re-entry

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## Local Programs Alternative to Incarceration

- Chrysalis House (formerly Tamar's Children) (<http://mdhalfwayhouses.org/id22.htm>)
  - Alternative to incarceration/re-entry for pregnant women
  - Healthy start, parenting intervention, substance abuse, life skills

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## Local Programs Visitation & Mentoring

- Project SIT --Wicomico County Detention Center
- Girl Scouts Behind Bars ([www.gsgm.org](http://www.gsgm.org))
  - National program – modified locally
- Big Brothers/Big Sisters (Amachi)
  - [http://www.bbbs.org/site/c.diJKKYPLJvH/b.1632625/k.A4D2/Other\\_Programs.htm](http://www.bbbs.org/site/c.diJKKYPLJvH/b.1632625/k.A4D2/Other_Programs.htm)
- Mentoring Children of Prisoners Program Grants (new):
  - Center for Children, Inc. (So. MD)
  - Institute for Interactive Instruction (Laurel, MD)
  - US Dream Academy, Inc. (Columbia, MD)

Source: Report to the Joint Committee on Children, Youth and Families on Programs & Initiatives in MD for Children of Incarcerated Parents (December 2007)

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## Local Programs Transitional Programs

- Alternative Directions, Inc. ([www.alternativedirections.org](http://www.alternativedirections.org))
  - Advocacy & legal assistance
  - Turn About Program (TAP)
    - Services to women on parole
    - Visitation facilitation and assist women working with DSS to reunify with children.

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## Future Directions - Research

- Linking data to assess true prevalence of problem
- Testing alternative models of collaboration between criminal justice and child welfare programs
- Evaluating alternative to incarceration programs
- Assessing outcomes of visitation and other interventions for children in foster care

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## Future Directions – Child Welfare Practice

- Facilitating family bonds – beyond visitation
- Interventions that incorporate trauma reactions and other mental health needs of children
- Advocating for alternative to incarceration
- Strengthening collaborations between child welfare and criminal justice systems

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## Future Directions... Your Thoughts

- ...your experiences with working with children of incarcerated parents
- ...challenges in working with both the children and parents
- ...systemic changes
- ...individual interventions
- ...best strategies for overcoming challenges

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## Resources Available Online

**Family & Corrections Network** – lists local and national programs, web conferences, trainings, etc.

- [www.fcnetwork.org](http://www.fcnetwork.org)

**Children of Incarcerated Parents: Bill of Rights**

- <http://www.sfcipp.org/images/brochure.pdf>

■ **Children of Arrested Parents: Strategies to Improve their Safety & Well-Being** (Nolan, 2003)

- <http://www.library.ca.gov/crb/03/11/03-011.pdf>

■ **"Working with Children with Parent in Prison" a resource for Child Welfare Social Workers.** North Carolina Department of Social Services

- [http://www.practicenotes.org/vol7\\_no1.htm](http://www.practicenotes.org/vol7_no1.htm)

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