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

Extent of the Problem: Incarceration in the US - 2006
- US Dept. of Justice stats
  (Sabol, Couture, & Harrison, 2007)
  - Over 1.5 million state and Federal prisoners at year end – 2.8% increase
  - Over 112,500 women – 4.7% increase
  - Total all correctional facilities – over 2.3 million inmates

Extent of the Problem: Incarcerated Parents
- 80% of women were primary caregivers of children prior to incarceration
  (Ehrensaft, Khoshu, Ross, & Wamsley, 2001)
- 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 Services to Maryland Children of Incarcerated Parents, 2003)
  - Approximately 12,600 incarcerated parents of 26,000 children

Extent of the Problem: Incarcerated Parents with Children in Foster Care
- Children in care with an incarcerated parent:
  - 4.5% (Hamoda, 2003)
  - 5% (Maryland Commission for Women, 1998)
  - 10% (Adletten, 1999a)
- Foster care population (2003) with parental incarceration identified at removal:
  - 6% (Hayward & Defoff, 2007)
- Increased criminal activity after child welfare involvement (Ross, Khoshu, & Wamsley, 2004)

Maryland Correctional Institution for Women (MCI-W) – 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% |
Racial Disparity in the Criminal Justice System - Maryland

African Americans as Proportion of Population:

28%

African Americans as Proportion of State Prison Population:

76%


Effects of Parental Incarceration on Children

After Parental Incarceration…

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

Potential Psychosocial Effects

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

Study of Post-Traumatic Stress Reactions in Children

(Kampfer, 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

Children in Out-of-Home Care

- Restricted reunification options
- Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) timeline conflicts (Lee, Gentry, & Laver, 2003)
- Visitation challenges
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)

Characteristics of Parents (Hayward & DePanfilis, 2007)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Identified Incarcerated Parent (6%, N=45,284)</th>
<th>No Identified Incarcerated Parent (94%, N=698,506)</th>
<th>T value (p value)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Single Female</td>
<td>14% (22,843)</td>
<td>47% (121,313)</td>
<td>-18.73 (&lt;.001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substance Abuse</td>
<td>39% (22,847)</td>
<td>21% (144,584)</td>
<td>-22.73 (&lt;.001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Family Problems</td>
<td>M=2.38 (SD=1.09) (0.7)</td>
<td>M=1.65 (SD=1.18) (0.7)</td>
<td>-64.67 (&lt;.001)</td>
</tr>
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Characteristics of Children (Hayward & DePanfilis, 2007)

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<tr>
<td>Age at removal (mean age)</td>
<td>6.3 (n=15,841)</td>
<td>7.4 (n=144,584)</td>
<td>46.04 (&lt;.001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>34% (n=15,841)</td>
<td>36% (n=144,584)</td>
<td>5.76 (&lt;.001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Behavior Problem</td>
<td>17% (n=158)</td>
<td>19% (n=14,584)</td>
<td>21.54 (&lt;.001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diagnosed Disability</td>
<td>19% (n=8158)</td>
<td>25% (n=169,001)</td>
<td>32.17 (&lt;.001)</td>
</tr>
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Placement & Discharge Characteristics (Hayward & DePanfilis, 2007)

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<td>Placed with Kin</td>
<td>25% (11,250)</td>
<td>22% (156,583)</td>
<td>11.67 (&lt;.001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of Time in Care</td>
<td>M=1.89 (SD=2.36)</td>
<td>M=2.16 (SD=2.82)</td>
<td>23.387 (&lt;.001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discharge to Reunification</td>
<td>27% (9,353)</td>
<td>27% (144,713)</td>
<td>ns</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Likelihood of Reunification from Foster Care

- More likely to reunify:
  - Middle childhood years
  - Girls
  - Two parent families
- Less Likely to reunify:
  - African American
  - Health or psychological problems
  - Housing problems
  - 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
  - Total family problems
- Less Likely to reunify:
  - African American
  - Child disability
  - Housing problems
  - Placement with kin
  - Longer time in care

Implications and Discussion

- Limitations of this study:
  - Missing data
  - Missing information
  - Violation of 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
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.

Intervention Research
Girl Scout Behind Bars Program (Block & Potthast, 1996)
- 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)

Best Practices

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

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

Local Programs
Alternative to Incarceration
Chrysalis House (formerly Tamar’s Children) (http://mdhalfwayhouses.org/oj22.htm)
- Alternative to incarceration/re-entry for pregnant women
- Healthy start, parenting intervention, substance abuse, life skills
Local Programs

Visitation & Mentoring

- Project SIT – Wicomico County Detention Center
- Girl Scouts Behind Bars (www.gsgm.org)
  - National program – modified locally
- Big Brothers/Big Sisters (Amachi)
  - http://www.bbbs.org/site/c.5xkXPEw/b.1632675/k. 3417/Amachi-Programs.html
- 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)

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

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

Local Programs

Transitional Programs

- Alternative Directions, Inc. (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.

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

Resources Available Online

- **Family & Corrections Network** – lists local and national programs, web conferences, trainings, etc.
  - www.fcnetwork.org
- **Children of Incarcerated Parents: Bill of Rights**
- **Children of Arrested Parents: Strategies to Improve their Safety & Well-Being** (Nolan, 2003)
  - http://www.practicenotes.org/vol7_no1.htm

  - http://www.practicenotes.org/vol7_not.html

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


