

# [How children of incarcerated parents are affected](https://assignbuster.com/how-children-of-incarcerated-parents-are-affected/)

How Children of incarcerated parents are affected

Abstract

More than 1. 5 million children had their parents incarcerated by the year 2014 and the number continues to rise. Parental incarceration is linked to both long-term and short-tern risk factors for children such as; behavioral problems, mental health issues or experience issues related to school performance (Farraington, 2002). This is a study to explore the effects of parental incarceration of both mothers and fathers on children. This study will analyse the availability, efficiency of programming and services available to incarcerated parents along with their families that may soften the blow of the negative effects that come with parental incarceration. Recommendations relating to programming needs and ways schools could assist children and families affected by parental incarceration shall be made.

Introduction

In America, children in excess of 1. 5 million have a parent who is incarcerated. Millions more had a parent in prison during their early childhood. For a long time these children have gone unnoticed but lately, public policymakers, traditional social service providers and academic researchers have shown interest in them. Part of them fear that such children are at risk of being imprisoned themselves. Some are interested in acquiring a better understanding as well as promoting the well-being of these children. It is an opportune time to conduct this study especially now that programs and services for incarcerated parents and their children are receiving support from government and foundations.

For the children, it is potentially traumatic as well as challenging to have a parent behind bars. These children are forced to confront emotional and socioeconomic consequences which often trigger behavioral problems leading to poor performance in school and a disrupted relationship with their parents even after their release from prison. This kind of parental absence is way more complex than any other due to its unique effects of social, institutional and community stigma. Child development theories are useful in examining the effects of parental incarceration on children however, the is a need to better understand the differing effects of parental incarceration as compared to other types of parent-child separations and other childhood trauma. This can be done by comparing the effects of incarceration of a parent on the different categories of children such as for boys and girls, children of different age groups and children from different racial and cultural backgrounds.

Purpose of the Study

There are several ways in which incarceration affects the entire family. The purpose of this study is to critically analyze the various effects of parental incarceration on the development as well as well-being of the child. The results of this study are expected to reveal the negative influence that parental incarceration has on the development of the child.

Statement of the Problem

The long term consequence of parental incarceration is a topic that continues to attract interest to society due to the rise in the number of children with incarcerated parents. School officials need to be acquainted with programming and support services accessible to the families of individuals who have been imprisoned.

Research Question

The proposed study will be guided by the following research questions

* Are there differences between the impacts of maternal versus paternal incarceration?
* What ramifications do the children of incarcerated parents face?
* What parental support system is there to cater for the needs of incarcerated parents?
* How can schools help the children of incarcerated parents?

Literature Review

Several mechanisms through which parental incarceration may influence young children have been identified by earlier research has identified. First, the attachment theory (Bowlby 1973) suggeststhat the child’s social and emotional well-being can be harmed. Parent-child bonds can also be disrupted by forced separation.(Solomon and Zweig 2006; Sroufe 1988). Bowlby purports that development of the infant’s attachment to the parent will be hampered where there is no regular and sustained contact between an infant and parent. Separation after an infant is already attached to the parent will have so many emotional reactions ranging from sadness to anger which will be a hindrance to the optimal development of the child (Sroufe, 1988). It is also possible for children to develop multiple attachments such as that to non-maternal caregivers and mothers as well as fathers. Assessing the reaction that the children have to beingseparated from their incarcerated parentsis important since infants can develop strong attachments to their fathers (Parke, 2002).

It is more detrimental to the children to separate children from parents through parental incarceration than any other form of parent-child separation. Many of the unmarried and non-resident fathers stay in contact with their children (Argys et al. 2006; Tach, Mincy, and Edin 2010) and also participate daily activities such as household chores, playing games, and bedtime routines (Waller and Swisher 2006). Due to the fact that it is difficult to obtain transportation to and fro prison with the family (Arditti, Lambert-Shute and Joest 2003; Comfort 2008), less than a third of fathers who are behind bars see their children on a regular basis (Hairston 1998). It is also owed to the fact that mothers may limit contact between imprisoned fathers and children (Arditti, Smock and Parkman 2005; Edin, Nelson and Paranal 2004; Roy and Dyson 2005). This has a negative influence on the development of the child.(Swisher and Waller 2008).

Second, fathers in prison have an economic effect on their families as it leads to a reduction of household resources. After the term is completed, the pay is meager and they are unable to find work. Most of the time the returning offenders are confined to low paying jobs in the informal sector.(Lewis, Garfinkel and Gao 2007; Western, Kling and Weiman 2001). The family therefore does not receive sufficient financial support from the father support (Geller, Garfinkel and Western Forthcoming; Swisher and Waller 2008) and risk poverty (Schwartz-Soicher, Geller and Garfinkel 2009). Poverty and the instability it brings harm the well-being of the child (McLoyd 1998).

Third, parents’ relationship is compromised as a result of incarceration. This affects the child. The father’s traditional role as a provider is then weakened by the economic strain.(Hairston 1998). Among low-income parents, the social stigma created by incarceration disrupts the dating relationships (Braman 2004). Enid (2000) and Anderson’s (1999) ethnographic research purports that poverty weighs heavily on prospective husbands and the view that men who were imprisoned may risk family reputation, safety and fail in providing a middle-class lifestyle. While the father is in prison, the mother may form new relationships thus making the situation more difficult when the father is released(Braman 2004). This strengthens the report that it is more likely for married incarcerated men to separate from their spouses as compared to those who are not incarcerated while there are few possibilities of marriage for single incarcerated men upon their release(Western 2006). The development of the child is hampered by their parents’ conflict, separation, or divorce which is as a result of parental incarceration.(Amato 2006).

On the other hand, the children may not be affected by their father’s incarceration. It is estimated that nearly half of the fathers in prison did not live with their children before incarceration (Johnson and Waldfogel 2002), and the impacts of parental incarceration may be less severe for those who had limited contact with their fathers. Furthermore, since fathers are normally less involved with daughters than sons, incarceration of the father will have a lesser impact on daughters.(Lundberg, McLanahan and Rose 2007). In some cases, the incarceration of fathers who have a negative effect in the life of their children, such as those that are abusive, improves their well-being (Whitaker, Orzol and Kahn 2006). Some men may turn their lives around for the betterment of their families due to having served a jail term (Edin et al. 2004). The children of an incarcerated parent also get encouraged to be law abiding citizens (Edin et al. 2004).

Practical proof on the developmental effects of parental incarceration is still limited given that there is research that puts forward many ways that it may affect children. The population in prison is young, minority and poorly educated (Petersilia 2003; Western 2006). With or without incarceration their children face significant risk. Studies are hampered by convenience samples and their short-term design thus cannot differentiate the challenges faced by these children from those faced by those who are of a humble background (see Parke and Clarke-Stewart 2002, Wilbur et al. 2007).

In both urban and rural populations, studies show that children’s’ well-being is at risk from exposure to parental incarceration that causes poverty and instability at home (Geller et al. 2009; Phillips et al. 2006) that leads to aggressive behaviors among the children (Geller et al. 2009). However, these studies do not cater for characteristics that are invisible but only those that are visible(Murray et al. 2009). Wildeman (forthcoming) gives substantial proof through examining the changes that occur in a family due to parental incarceration and its effects on the child. Both Wakefieled’s (2009) as well as this study argue that parental incarceration brings forth a serious risk to the child’s well-being especially during their formative years.

Methodology

Data from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study (Fragile Families) shall be critically examined. The Fragile Families Study makes use of a sample of children from a number of cities in the United States that have a population if more than 200, 000 with a base line from the years 1998 and 2000. 4, 898 mothers were interviewed in hospital within a day of giving birth. Out of the total number, 1, 186 had marital births and 3, 712 had given birth outside marriage. Some of the fathers were also interviewed and it revealed that nearly 90% of them were married fathers while 75% of them were unmarried. Later on, during the first and third years after the birth of the child and the response rates for mothers were 91%, and 89% at years 1 and 3, respectively, of married mothers taking part in the baseline survey while that of unmarried mothers were 90% and 87%. As for the fathers, response rates were 82% and 82% among fathers that were married at baseline while unmarried fathers were 70% and 67%.

The Fragile Families study was set to analyse the function of social and material disadvantage on a child’s well-being. A notable number of these parents have been incarcerated at some point. Statistics show that only 3% of the fathers were behind bars at the time of child birth. The study also revealed that 45% of unmarried fathers, 10% of married fathers, and 7% and 2% of mothers were in prison by the time their children turned three.

As shown, the imprisonment of a parent makes obtaining gainful employment difficult. This means that the needs of their children are not fulfilled. During their time in prison, these parents are unemployed and after their release it is quite challenging to get a job let alone job security. This study shall analyse the measures of labor market performance: if they have jobs during the third year, how long they have been working in the past year, their latest hourly wage as well as the total income over the past year. Then, the researcher will be able to make a comparison on the amount the fathers contribute to their families during the past year (Betson, 2006).

The imprisonment of a parent results in family instability that is harmful to the growth and development of the children. Incarceration of a parent will more often than not lead to poverty whereby the child suffers the most. Confirmation of poverty comes when the mother confesses to not having fulfilled a major need for her child during the past year as a direct result of an insufficiency in financial resources. By counting the number of needs that the mother fails to fulfill for her children it shall be evident just how much suffering the child is put through. Another factor to be considered shall be amount of public assistance, the rate of marriage, coâ€resident, or nonâ€resident when the child is aged three years. The study shall finally compare the stability in homes by measuring the frequency of relocation.

Instability emanating from parental incarceration has serious negative impacts on the development of the child. There are a number of viewpoints from which the children of non-incarcerated parents shall be compared in this study. A five point rating of the children’s’ health from poor to excellent as provided by their mothers or primary care givers shall also be assessed in depth. A child’s behaviour shall also be measured by using the Child Behavioral Checklist will also be examined (Achenbach and Rescorla, 2000). The researches shall lastly evaluate the children’s cognitive development using their performance on the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT) at three years of age. The variations between children with and without imprisoned parents may imply measures to better child outcomes.

It could be said that children whose parents have been incarcerated face unique challenges. For a researcher to determine this, he/she ought to put into comparison families where a parent has not been incarcerated against those whose parent has been incarcerated. This is done by creating a sequence of regression models. To be considered are the parents’ race or ethnicity, impulsivity, educational background and age at child’s birth. These make up the vector Xi. The resulting variable Yi is a representation of each of the labor force functioning, family arrangement and consistency, and child development indices described above;

Yi = β0 + β1\*Incarcerationi + β2\*Xi + εi

Parents who have previously been incarcerated have a higher chance of getting partners with a similar history. Their children are at risk of suffering when one parent is forcefully taken away as a result of imprisonment but would suffer a lot more where both parents are imprisoned. As a result, a second sequence of models is created;

Yi = β0 + β1DadOnlyInci + β2MomOnlyInci + β3BothInci + β4\*Xi +εi

Here, the focus is on family stability and child development as a set of limited results on the basis of both parents being imprisoned. Similarly, Xi has an increased set of variables so as to avert multicollineaity. Assortative mating scientific hypotheses have shown that parents often couple up with other people whose race, ethnicity, age and education (Weiss, 2008). Therefore, the model Xi is based on a mother’s attributes. These attributes include age and race with the inclusion of impulsivity and education for both parents.

Social change implications

Studies on children whose parents are behind bars is still developing. Some aspects of it may require an input from national statistics in instances for those children with living arrangements or connections with their parents. It can be shown that there exist policies like those that give children an intimidating and degrading experience when they visit their imprisoned parents. These policies are more disadvantageous than are beneficial. The study on the adjustment of the children to their parents’ incarceration requires discrete and supplementary studies to acquire knowledge. From this work, it could guide in the building and informing of program and policy development.

However, a further and exhaustive knowledge is essential so as to see through major changes that should have long-term and positive effect on the well-being of the many children in this situation. In addition to existing research and knowledge, this research is a stepping stone to further developments in the area. America has many children who have gone through their tender ages whilst their parents being in prison. The research that will be taken into account in the study and how it will be put to good use by several actors such as researchers, social service and non-profit agencies, religious-based organizations just to mention but a few will help influence the state of happiness and satisfaction as well as success of these children as family members, students and ultimately as grown-ups who play an active role in their communities in the future.