

Children and Families of the Incarcerated Pathways to Change: Policy Into Practice



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Incarcerated

Based on the publication by Jessica Nickel, Crystal Garland, and Leah Kane, *Children of Prisoners: An
Action Plan for Federal Policymakers*

(New York: Council of State Governments Justice Center, 2009).

Numbers to Emphasize

1 in 100 = # of people in the USA who are in prison or jail
Pew Report 2008



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

Numbers to Emphasize

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

One in 43 American children has a parent in
prison.

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

The Sentencing Project 2009

Recommendation Highlights

The Need to Collect Data: There are no
systems in place to gather data on children
of the incarcerated.

*Create incentives and guidelines to
encourage effective information-sharing
among agencies that may already collect
relevant data on children of incarcerated
parents*

Highlights



The Need to Understand the Impact: Data is often
misinterpreted and circulated without accurate
citation.

*More research is needed on the long term impact
of parental incarceration on children especially
on variations between boys and girls, children
with incarcerated fathers versus incarcerated
mothers and children of different ages. Variations
in family and caregiver situations and supports
must include children not known to public systems
to combat or substantiate statements suggesting
that CIPs are more likely than their peers to
themselves become incarcerated.*

Highlights



The Need to Evaluate Programs

*Evaluate the effectiveness of existing program
models in improving child outcomes, including a
study of Child Protective Services (CPS) practices
regarding children of incarcerated parents in the
child welfare system and permanency outcomes
for such children.*

Implications to Program and Practice

Additional Research Recommendations

Evaluate the potential for research protocols to inadvertently cause harm:

- *increase stigma*
- *decrease willingness to be honest*
- *interfere with access to supports*

Implications to Program and Practice

Research questions that cause harm

- “Do you ever wish you had a different parent?”
- “Have you ever seen your parent use drugs?”
- “Has your child’s caregiver ever been incarcerated?”

Implications to Program and Practice

Additional Research Recommendations

- Evaluate the effect of training (on the specific needs and concerns of children of the incarcerated) of program staff and volunteers on program effectiveness and child outcomes
- Conduct research on the unique challenges experienced by caregivers of children with a parent in prison, as well as the effectiveness of existing services designed to address these challenges.
- Conduct studies (not yet done) on the presence and role of trauma, stigma and shame in the lives of these families

Highlights



Sharing of Information : Coordination Across Service Systems

Encourage collaboration between child welfare agencies, corrections, education and health and mental health services with guidelines to ensure that the sharing of data follows privacy and confidentiality laws governing the sharing of client information.

Implications to Program and Practice

Focus group families said:

- *They are wary of cross system communication*
- *They want communication with them!*
- *They were not aware of resources for them*

Establish a navigator system across programs that are accessible to a broad array of caregivers in contact with the criminal justice system.

Implications to Program and Practice

Obstacles and Pathways

Enhance the capacity of other child serving systems to meet the needs of these children by making recommendations to Departments of Education and Health (Mental Health) that information about children of the incarcerated be provided on a national or state basis

- *Pediatricians and TB*
- *Teachers and Monday morning meltdown*

Implications to Program and Practice

Establish task forces at the state and federal levels

- Leverage the resources of agencies already in contact with these children and families, to identify existing programs and services for children and families of the incarcerated, identify gaps in services, and devise strategies for improving coordination between agencies
- Develop a needs assessment tool could be developed that could help agencies understand where on the continuum of need a child or family falls coordinate services

Highlights



Support for Caregivers

- *Establish a federal policy that would permit kinship care agencies to serve families that are not in the child welfare system.*
- *Identify promising examples of kinship navigator programs and disseminate this information to the field.*
- *Analyze the impact of AFSA on children of incarcerated parents who are in foster care and provide a more detailed definition of ASFA's "reasonable efforts" requirement.*

Highlights



Financial Barriers for Parents and Caregivers

Child Support Enforcement

Reach consensus so that incarceration is not considered "voluntary unemployment" or "abandonment" and streamline the review and adjustment processes for modifications of child support orders for parents in prison who lack the financial resources to provide long-term economic support to their children.

Highlights



Financial Barriers for Parents and Caregivers
State and Federal Benefits and Income

Evaluate the three main issues commonly affecting the availability of state and federal benefits and income support for incarcerated parents and their children:

1. *Statutory bans that disqualify individuals with criminal records from eligibility*
2. *Restoration of eligibility upon release*
3. *Enrollment of individuals who did not previously receive benefits or income support;*

Highlights



Minimizing Trauma :

Responses During a Parents Arrest

Implement training and protocols for actions to be taken before and during arrests at which children are present – especially arrests involving custodial parents or guardians – to minimize trauma as much as possible and sensitize arresting officers to the impact of trauma on child development.



Implications to Program and Practice: Law Enforcement

- Most initiatives focus on child placement issues
- Focus group families said:
We are less concerned about the placement protocols than the issue of interrogating children about their parents whereabouts and activities and destroying childrens' property in search of drugs in front of the child.
- An additional concern is children who are not at home but arrive later after the arrest.

Highlights



Minimizing Trauma :
Parent/Child Interactions within Corrections

Engage courts to help reduce trauma or strain experienced by children as a result of parental incarceration by recommending that parents be incarcerated in proximity to their children, when appropriate, and suggesting that parents enroll in parenting classes.



Implications to Program and Practice: Corrections



Emphasizing the role of corrections in developing family strengthening visiting policies.

Implications to Program and Practice: Corrections

Provide parenting education classes that are specifically designed for incarcerated parents in the corrections setting. These programs are most effective when they are connected to visiting programs and when caregivers are included in the parenting class through mailed materials or parallel classes in the community.



Highlights



Minimizing Trauma :
Parent/Child Interactions within Corrections

*Promote promising practices of state and local corrections ,child protection and community agencies to eliminate barriers to contact between incarcerated parents and their children, when appropriate and identify additional strategies to keep families connected and facilitate **healthy parent-child contact** to complement in-person visits (such as reading books on tape, teleconferencing, or other outreach).*

Implications to Program and Practice: Corrections

Evaluate parent-child programs and policies to determine not only how many people with a demonstrated need participate in these programs, but also the outcomes for program participants.



Implications to Program and Practice: Corrections



Recommend that the National Institute of Corrections provide cross-training for corrections staff and child welfare caseworkers and community agency staff to highlight the impact of incarceration on children and families, with the goal of mitigating existing tensions between corrections and child serving agencies

Highlights



Promoting Promising Practices

- *Initiate efforts to identify promising program models and effective evidence-based practices that address the needs of children of incarcerated parents and their caregivers.*
- *Develop a consistent set of outcomes measures to be collected by participating programs to enable cross-site, cross-program evaluations and provide funding to conduct those*

Emphasis and Embedded Issues



- Eighty-six percent of prisoners' minor children were under 10 years of age
- 22 percent were under five
Hairston (2008)

The largest Federal Funding Initiative is Mentoring Programs which are best suited to children ages 8-16. Programs and practices focused on young children must be developed.

Implications to Program and Practice

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



Most children of incarcerated parents have a father in prison or jail

BJS, 2007 and Sentencing Project 2009

BUT



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

The Sentencing Project 2009

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

Embedded Issues in Policy and Practice

Two-thirds of the incarcerated parent population is non-white.
The Sentencing Project 2009

- Disproportional Representation in the Criminal Justice System
- Disparity in Health/Mental Health Care
- Discrepancies in Sentencing



Embedded Issues in Policy and Practice

These policy recommendations do not address the fundamental issues in the U.S.:

- Racial Disparities
- Drug Addiction and Treatment
- Trauma
- Mass Incarceration

Closing Notes

- The needs of the children of the incarcerated must be included in the agenda of the proposed White House Conference on Children
- Family members must be included in all task forces, advisory groups and grant reading activities for this population



NRCCFI at FCN
www.fcnetwork.org

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

Presenter Contact Information

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