

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

Non-Profits, Parental Incarceration and Perceptions by Caregivers

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Abstract

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This study will examine the consequential effects of parental incarceration in association to a child's healthy development. Increasing rates of incarceration in the United States have prompted a need to further explore these effects, as children pose serious risks of psychological, economic and social problems. Past studies have not yet examined protective factors that unveil resiliency among these children with adequate support in the following core areas: (a) prison system support, (b) caregiver support and (c) academic support. This study will collect data that is necessary in building a clearly defined understanding of key issues that exist through the perspectives of children of incarcerated parents' kinship caregivers. Qualitative interview schedules will be conducted in order to explore the experiences of 30 kinship caregivers of children of incarcerated parents who have experienced firsthand possible developmental risks.

INTRODUCTION

As the United States prison population continues to rise at increasing rates across the nation, the subsequent effects of incarceration on families, for children in particular, has raised serious concerns regarding the impact of parental incarceration in association with a child's healthy development. According to (Hairston, 2009, p. 4), there are 2.25 million individuals incarcerated in federal, state and local prisons throughout the nation and more than 1.7 million children whose parents are within this incarcerated ratio. Incarceration rates are highest among the most disadvantaged areas of urban and minority neighborhoods, posing a serious risk for children of incarcerated parents who are more likely to experience financial hardship, economic and residential instability and aggressive behaviors in comparison to their peers.

According to the Bendheim-Thoman Center for Research on Child Wellbeing (2008), this form of separation amongst parents and their children causes disruption to the family household structure, requiring more conclusive research. The subsequent effects of incarceration for families have been disregarded, with minimal attention to the disruptive nature of the prison system and its impact on families with children. Research suggest that forced separation can disrupt the parent-child bond, causing potential harm to a child's social and emotional well-being (Geller, Cooper, Garfinkel, Schwartz-Soicher, & Mincy, 2012). Thus, for the purpose of this study, an examination of the three core areas of prison system support, caregiver support and academic support in association to a child's healthy development will be applied. These areas will be measured in an effort to determine support services that the non-profit sector can develop in order to assist children of incarcerated parents in achieving healthy developmental milestones.

Many challenges that currently exist for researchers are contributed to the task of separating the effects of parental incarceration from the effects of other contributing factors in a child's life prior to incarceration that can hinder healthy development. These additional factors can include the social contexts in which children are exposed to prior to incarceration ranging from their residential status, poverty and neighborhood disadvantages (Turney, 2017, para. 1). Additionally, there is also a lack of research to examine the characteristics of children of incarcerated parents in association to school and family connectedness (Nichols, Loper, & Meyer, 2016). Further exploration into this void can help to determine whether or not this factor has the potential to reduce risk of developmental, behavioral and academic outcomes (Nichols, et al., 2016). This research gap poses the question: *What can be done to prevent adverse child development during parental incarceration?*

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on parental incarceration has developed over the years as mass incarceration rates continue to affect family households in the United States (Aaron & Dallaire, 2010). Children of incarcerated parents are often described as the “forgotten victims” of incarceration or the “unseen victims of the prison boom” (Anaraki & Bootsani, 2014, p. 3094). Inmates in the U.S., that are in the custody of local jails, state or federal prisons and privately operated facilities average 710 per 100,000 U.S. resident, while the average global rate is 130 (Kearney, Harris, Jacome, & Parker, 2014, p. 10). This puts the U.S. at more than six times higher than the average global incarceration rate of 115 (Kearney et al., 2014, p. 10). Consequently, over 1.7 million children in the U.S. have a parent who is incarcerated, 60 percent whom are mothers and fathers in state prisons that have never received a personal visit from their children; 41 percent of fathers and 41 percent of mothers who have never communicated with their children over the phone (Hairston, 2009, p. 22). This literature review will examine current practices and administrative regulations within the prison system, to further enhance research that can be utilized in the non-profit sector to develop supportive services for children of incarcerated parents.

Background

The United States has been distinguished as enforcing harsh sentencing practices that have caused a significantly massive ratio of parents to be separated from their children (Anderson, 2015). In the 1970’s, incarceration rates in the U.S. averaged around 340,000 individuals, while most recent data reflects a projected total of 2.3 million incarcerated individuals (Martin, 2017, p. 22). From 2008 to 2012, the number of inmates

in state correctional facilities decreased by approximately 4 percent (from 1.41 million to 1.35 million), while the number of inmates in federal prisons increased by more than 8 percent (approximately 201,000 to 218,000) (Kearney, et al., 2014, p. 9). From the time a child's parent is arrested, sentenced and incarcerated, children are at risk of experiencing significant challenges related to this separation ranging from psychological, academic and economic challenges (Anderson, 2015). Parental incarceration poses huge risk factors for children; however, the nature of a child's relationship with their parent prior to incarceration is an influential factor in determining whether or not the removal of a parent is considered to be beneficial to a child's well-being (Turney, 2017).

Early intervention is a necessary method in preserving the relationship between incarcerated parents and their children (Cassidy, Poehlmann, & Shaver, 2010). Research is continuously developing in this complex area, which suggest that maintaining a healthy relationship with an incarcerated parent increases the likelihood of healthy child development and positive family connectedness (Hairston, 2009, p. 28). Providing children with stability and supportive services during this critical time period is an area of focus that the non-profit sector can help to fill in much needed service gaps. In recent years, advocacy in prison reform has been primarily focused on addressing less costly alternatives for nonviolent offenses; however, little attention has been given to the negative effects families are faced with after incarceration (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2016). From a family perspective, formal kinship caregivers play a vital role in keeping the lines of communication consistent between the incarcerated parent and their child, yet they are often overlooked during the transitional period of incarceration (Dallaire, Ciccone, & Wilson, 2012). Kinship caregivers are reported as being predominately

African American females, poor, unemployed and more likely to suffer from mental health issues (Hairston, 2009, p. 13)

After a parent is incarcerated, kinship caregivers are left with the financial burden of covering the basic needs for the incarcerated parent's child, although often times they do not have access to receive the proper support (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2016). A recent survey revealed that 65 percent of families of incarcerated parents are reported as being inadequate to meet basic needs (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2016, p. 3). Financial costs such as court-related fines and costly prison visitation places almost one-third of families in debt (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2016, p. 3). Formal kinship caregivers are needed to provide emotional and financial support to a child, yet many lack the skills necessary to nurture children of incarcerated parents and provide stimulating environments (Miller, Perryman, Markovitz, Franzen, Cochran, & Brown, 2013). This can be caused by the overwhelming responsibility that has been placed on them (Miller et al., 2013). An organizational change to prison system administrative practices that currently overlook the vital importance of family connectedness during incarceration is required, however, until these needs are met non-profit organizations are needed to fill in these service gaps. Non-profit sector program services are needed to cultivate a child's healthy development and support caregivers during periods of parental incarceration, so that children have the opportunity to overcome adversity.

Upon reviewing non-profit sector program services for families of incarcerated parents in California, options are scarce. Limited access to supportive services of this nature requires the support of the non-profit sector to help fill in current service gaps in the region. According to (Ferro, 2002), there are five major program types that are

typically developed for incarcerated parents in many prison institutions consisting of: parent education courses, special parent-child visits, child-orientated visiting activities, parent support groups and parental rights services. Research suggest that the focus of incarcerated families has been placed primarily on the *quantity* of contact between incarcerated parents and their children, rather than the *quality* of these experiences (Folk, Nichols, Dallaire, & Loper, 2012, p. 539). In a survey conducted to analyze national parenting programs for incarcerated parents, data revealed that for 51 percent of male facilities and 90 percent of female facilities, parenting classes offered did not directly involve children; programs involving children were offered at 10 percent of male facilities and 33 percent of female facilities (Folk, et al., 2012, p. 532).

Children not directly involved in parenting programs limit the opportunities for incarcerated parents to thoroughly practice their newly learned skills, requiring efforts from the non-profit sector to help bridge service gaps in this area (Folk, et al., 2012). The participation of children and incarcerated parents through more interactive parenting programs can create opportunities for parents to not only learn parenting skills, but also to display more positive interaction skills that are beneficial to healthy child development (Folk, et al., 2012). In another study conducted by Central Connecticut State University's (CCSU) Institute for Municipal & Regional Policy (IMRP), in partnership with the Nutmeg Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS) and Families in Crisis (FIC) programs, data was collected to observe current services offered by children of incarcerated parents, their caregivers, program mentors and agency staff (Merenstein, Tyson, Tilles, Keays, & Ruffolo, 2011). Ten children and ten caregivers were interviewed; half of participants

were enrolled in the BBBS program, while the other half were enrolled in the FIC program (Merenstein, et al., 2011).

Data from this study revealed program constraints, with caregiver participants admitting that they felt restricted to services offered to them in comparison to the children. Caregivers believed that program services focusing on group therapy, assistance with finding housing and clothing and being appointed to their own caseworker separate from the child would be beneficial to them (Merenstein, et al., 2011). Child participants admitted that the quality of their experiences while visiting their parents remained a difficult task that is directly associated to prison facility locations and the lack of privacy during visitation (Merenstein, et al., 2011). Although transportation services to prison facilities were currently being offered for families, it still remained a difficult challenge for many of them. Program mentor participants suggested that more frequent contact with case managers needed to be enforced, as well as hiring of more case managers (Merenstein, et al., 2011, p. 172). In addition, program mentors expressed their frustrations with procedures and practices that were often times interpreted differently and caused significant miscommunication among staff (Merenstein, et al., 2011).

In order to strengthen program services for families of incarcerated parents, the non-profit sector must take into consideration key elements that have been identified as “lessons learned” in areas such as program designs that are relevant to the incarcerated population and specific cultural and ethnic norms, involvement of prison staff and incarcerated parents’ in program planning and the development of family support programs that are essential components of release preparation for incarcerated parents (Ferro, 2002, p. 28). In addition, current programs should be thoroughly examined by the

non-profit sector, along with usage of national databases in order to evaluate an incarcerated parent's family characteristics and the number of children (Ferro, 2002).

Lewin's Organizational Change Theory

The United States criminal justice system is composed of a series of government agencies at the federal, state and local level that hold the responsibility of maintaining laws throughout this nation. Within this criminal justice system, there is a variation of administrative practices that ultimately impede on the successful preservation of parent-child bonding during parental incarceration. The opportunity for children of incarcerated parents to maintain a healthy relationship with their parent can be a powerful tool in strengthening the parent-child bond; however, administrative practices have created barriers in supporting this unification. These barriers prompt a critical need for organizational change to occur within the criminal justice system that will prevent underdeveloped bureaucratic processes from interfering with a child's constitutional right to maintain a healthy relationship with their incarcerated parent.

Lewin's organizational change model is primarily influenced by a planned approach to solving social conflicts that enable individuals to shift their perceptions pertaining to the world in which they operate in. Lewin's model involves four core areas of change within an organization that include: Field Theory, Group Dynamics, Action Research and the 3-Step model. Each approach is unique; however, Lewin perceived all approaches to work collectively to bring about planned change on an individual, group or organizational level (Burnes, 2004). In the Field Theory approach, gaining a clearly defined understanding of group behaviors must be achieved by assessing the complexity of how behaviors form. Lewin proposed that by analyzing the *status quo* within an organization,

group behaviors that are maintained by certain forces that influence individual behavior could be disclosed (Burnes, 2004). In addition, Lewin believed that change and loyalty were relative concepts, seeing as group behaviors could be changed by identifying the forces of influence and diminishing or strengthening their existence in order to bring about effective change.

Status quo in prison systems are led by practices that advocate for safety regulations, while undermining the importance of parent-child bonding experiences. Many prisons are consumed by unwelcoming and controlled environments that disrupt the quality of how children of incarcerated parents interact with their parent. Prison staff behavior and its correlation to prison environments is an area that lacks sufficient research data; however, motivating and helpful staff are believed to contribute to the positive experiences of human dignity. According to (Molleman & Leeuw, 2012), prison staff behavior is not consistent across the board, with factors such as varying institutional practices and the mood of a staff member playing a vital role in inmate-staff experiences. Forces within prison systems that create environments that negatively impact family connectedness during incarceration must be disengaged and interchanged by more effective approaches.

In the Group Dynamics approach, Lewin emphasizes that the main focus of change should be placed on group behaviors rather than individual behaviors. The individual in isolation is constrained by group pressures to conform, requiring a more extensive look into group norms, roles, interactions and socialization processes within an organization (Burnes, 2004). In a study aimed at determining organizational characteristics that are related to the success of change in prison systems, data revealed that organizational norms and values were directly linked to leadership positions that are critical to planned change

outcomes (Prendergast et al., 2017, p. 641). Organizations were found to be more prone to change if fewer program needs were required to change. Fewer changes required to meet program needs indicated a current existence of organizational culture that preserved open communication, good supervision and staff satisfaction; therefore, establishing the likelihood of successful change. Research from this study suggest that prison systems often operate under highly disciplined management structures that make change difficult, specifically in prison systems with high program needs, that may be a proxy to limit necessary organizational changes (Prendergast et al., 2017, p. 641). Lewin acknowledged that focusing solely on groups would not bring about effective change, but instead a series of processes would need to be implemented to allow employees to engage and commit to changing their behaviors.

Accordingly, the Action Research and the 3-Step model approaches of change are then required to be applied. In the Action Research approach, a theoretical basis of psychology is the primary stimulus, which emphasizes that changes can only be achieved by helping individuals reflect and gain new insights. This requires action at the group level, to gain a better understanding of why group members behave in the manner that they do when subjected to particular forces within an organization (Burnes, 2004). Managerial approaches are proposed to have a critical impact on a prison system's organizational culture, with evidence that suggest consequences of command and control leadership causes disadvantageous effects in achieving positive outcomes (Molleman & Leeuw, 2012). Regulatory practices influenced by leadership advocate for inmate staff to enforce security and control, which in return form barriers that ultimately impede on the successful attempts of implementing organizational improvement strategies.

The 3-Step model approach more commonly known as the “Unfreeze-Change-Refreeze Model” refers to a three-stage process of change that encompasses distinct changes that prepare organizations for change before it occurs and requires unique planning strategies to be formed in order to properly manage this change (“Understanding Change”, 2016). The first phase of change is called the “unfreezing” stage, which requires an extensive amount of preparation for the organization to accept change. This initial stage is considered somewhat confusing for individuals as their coping abilities and competencies do not essentially support change unless they’re convinced to go against the *status quo* (Hussain et al., 2016). This will entail the constant monitoring from leaders and managers to emphasize change from the core, while developing strategies that will exhibit why the change must occur. Lewin believed that the stability of human behavior is based on a quasi-stationary equilibrium; requiring equilibrium needs to be unfrozen before old behaviors can be discarded and adopted with new behaviors successfully (Burnes, 2004).

The second stage is the actual change itself, requiring leaders to play a key role in ensuring that individuals not only understand these changes, they must also be able to recognize their connection to the organization during this transitional phase. Leaders should advocate for effective communication, participation, training and emotional support to ensure effective adaptation to this change. Employee involvement is vital to the adaption of change as it has been highly recognized as an effective strategy in formulating, planning and implementing change (Hussain et al., 2016). Organizations must foresee the time duration that will be prearranged for individuals to embrace this change and support the new direction that the organization will head in. Lewin viewed this stage as an interactive

approach of research, action and more research that enables individuals and groups to transition from a less acceptable set of behaviors to more acceptable ones (Burnes, 2004).

The third stage is called the “refreezing” stage, which occurs once changes have formed and individuals have encompassed these changes. Individuals within an organization must be properly transitioned into this change, so that they can properly internalize this new way of conducting business. This requires leaders to consistently incorporate this new change into day-to-day operations, so that individuals can confidently move forward. Leadership involvement is highly encouraged as the ultimate method for change adaptation in behavioral integration and social dimensions (Hussain et al., 2016). Lewin believed that new behaviors must be in alignment with the rest of the behaviors, personalities and environment of the learner to prevent disconfirmation, while on an organizational level changes in organizational norms, policies and practices must also be changed (Burnes, 2004).

PRISON SYSTEM SUPPORT

The criminal justice system works collectively with a multitude of entities that include law enforcement, probation officers, lawyers, courts and prison systems. The United States Sentencing Commission (USSC) is an independent agency in the judicial branch composed of seven voting members and two non-voting members, whose primary purpose is to establish sentencing policies for the federal justice system (United States Sentencing Commission [USSC], 2016). USSC sentencing policy guidelines have been prone to revisions over the past decade; however, despite these changes there still remains an ineffective lack of organizational recognition on the current standing of family impact during sentencing. A defendant's family is regarded as collateral damage during the process, leaving children of incarcerated parents as an extraneous factor in sentencing procedures. According to (Boudin, 2011, p. 81), more than a third of children under the age of 10 will reach the age of eighteen, while their parents serve time in prison due to long prison sentences. Each child exhibits a unique response to their parents' incarceration, with some typically being short term, while others can cultivate into long-term problems (Hairston, 2009). This is solely dependent on the amount of support they receive throughout the duration of their parent's incarceration.

Parental incarceration after sentencing is correlated to financial hardships for families, many who are distinguished as formal kinship caregivers. If children are unable to find placement in formal or informal kinship care, they're required to be placed in non-kinship foster care. During this timeframe, incarcerated parents are susceptible to loss of parental rights under the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) of 1997. From the time of sentencing up until the transitioning of a parent into incarceration, consequential effects

begin to ascend that prompts a need for major overhaul in criminal justice system administrative practices.

Communication & Visitation Barriers

Ongoing communication and contact between parents and children are critical to maintaining parent-child attachment bonds following the sentencing of a child's parent. In the prison system, there are three forms of contact between incarcerated parents and their children that include: visitation, telephone calls and letters. Children have reported that attempts of visiting their incarcerated parent were met with physical and environmental constraints that affected the quality of their visits. The lack of quality during visitation were reported as being a conflict with school schedules, lack of age appropriate activities and lack of physical contact and privacy (Saunders, 2017, p. 69). Children and youth reported difficulties getting to prisons by public transportation or finding transportation alternatives, due to age limitations. 62 percent of incarcerated parents in state correctional facilities and 84 percent of incarcerated parents in federal facilities are reported to be more than 100 miles away from their place of residence at arrest; only 15 percent of parents in state facilities and 5 percent of parents in federal facilities are within a 50-mile radius of their place of residence (Boudin, 2011, p. 103).

These visitation barriers are directly associated with current administrative practices that deter children from visiting their parents. According to (Boudin, 2011), visitation policies within a prison and jail system are upheld at the discretion of the warden, who has the responsibility of establishing practices such as visitation scheduling. In California, The California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) are responsible for implementing regulatory guidelines that govern prison institutions within

the state, particularly in areas such as visitation. Strict procedures are placed on how State prisons in California operate, with no special accommodations for children of incarcerated parents. According to (Serrato, 2016) institutions believe the visitation between an individual and inmate is a privilege, with certain conditions placed on visitation in ways that are rationally consistent with the security of a custodial facility.

Administrative practices such as California's visitation regulations, demonstrate a conflicting issue that exists between parenting and incarceration in the prison system. These conflicting issues are completely dissimilar in practice, inadvertently impeding on a child's right to maintain a healthy relationship with their incarcerated parent. Prison system administrators overlook the importance of the parent-child relationship during the establishment of prison procedures, with emphasis placed more on safety regulations rather than the unique rights for parent-child bonding (Serrato, 2016). Many children do not have the privilege to visit their incarcerated parent, under conditions which imply that the prison is not suitable for a child to visit. This can be associated with relatively oppressive environments that incarcerated parents are subjected to. In addition, incarcerated parents are often moved from one facility to another, prison lockdowns are enforced, disciplinary write-ups are given and work assignments all contribute to a child's uncertainty in their parents' whereabouts. (Hairston, 2009). This reality further indicates that prison institutions in theory promote visitation and the ability to maintain family relationships, while in the same instance heavily regulating communication and/or visitation due to safety goals (Serrato, 2016).

Maintaining contact through phone calls with an incarcerated parent can be a very expensive burden on an incarcerated child's caregiver, causing a financial drain on the

family. Specifically, collect calls that are required as a means of communication within prison systems has a tendency to impose huge costs to a caregiver's expenses (Hairston, 2009). Incarcerated parents have voiced concerns of communication barriers between caseworkers, lack of timely notification of custody hearings and limited opportunities of participation in case planning. All play an essential role in being properly informed about the safety and whereabouts of their children (Hairston, 2009). Communication barriers of this nature leave incarcerated parents incapable of receiving adequate access to legal help and social services that can play a detrimental role in preventing termination of their parental rights.

In an interview conducted by Oates of the Child Welfare Information Gateway Podcast, a dialogue was presented in regards to current communication barriers among incarcerated parents and caseworkers. Initiatives highlighted during this meeting involved the discussion of particular measures that are required to ensure that an incarcerated parent can effectively remain involved in their child's life. According to (Oates, Solan, & McLearn, 2016), there are several distinctive steps, processes, and restrictions within the criminal justice system that caseworkers face while working to improve the lives of children of incarcerated parents. McLaren, Administrator of the Female Offender Branch of the U.S. Bureau of Prisons and Solan, Social Scientist Analyst with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services led the discussion by focusing on key areas consisting of communication with an incarcerated parent; planning visits to the prison; preparing children for those visits; working to include incarcerated parents in court hearings; and the handling of case plans that prepare incarcerated parents for reunification.

Incarcerated parents have reported their dissatisfaction in communication barriers that play a significant role in maintaining contact between their children and caseworker. Special permission that must be granted to an incarcerated parent in order to contact their caseworker, along with a caseworker's unavailability at times, makes it a problematic challenge to properly communicate. McLearen discoursed on varied practices of many prison systems that implement their own rules in terms of telephone usage. Many practices are likely to create barriers for incarcerated parents, many of which are already typically located 100 miles or more away from their place of residence.

Case planning is a unique experience for each incarcerated individual parent. Prearranged planning and the involvement of legal staff outside of a caseworker are alternative solutions that have been recommended to ensure that the best options are provided (Oates, Solan, & McLearen, 2016). For court hearings, McLearen recommends for caseworkers to contact the prison institution and establish a rapport with faculty, so that they are aware of the professional nature of contact requests. This initiative will ensure that an incarcerated parent is provided with an efficient amount of time to participate. This offers an enhanced alternative in comparison to communication through letters, which causes prolonged waiting periods for incarcerated parents to successfully prepare for court hearings. Waiting periods are largely due to processing procedures administered by the prison facility.

The Adoption & Safe Families Act (ASFA)

The Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) of 1997 was created to ensure that children are temporarily placed in foster care before permanent adoption placement is secured (Serrato, 2016). It is intended to provide children with a quick and stable placement

of residency until more permanent placement has been determined. ASFA completely disregards circumstances of children of incarcerated parents in its guidelines, which can be reflected through its strict deadlines. There is a fifteen to twenty-two-month timeframe that a child is to reside in the foster care system. After this period, the parental rights of an incarcerated parent are relinquished as reasonable efforts are viewed as terminated, although nowhere in its context does it factor in children of incarcerated parents (Serrato, 2016). Incarcerated parents whose sentencing exceeds fifteen months are not provided with an exception to the twenty-two-month timeframe, leaving them vulnerable to this type of relinquishment of parental rights. Once parental rights have been relinquished, children are susceptible to potential harms in foster care that increase risks of physical and sexual abuse (Serrato, 2016).

CAREGIVER SUPPORT

Kinship care is defined as a type of care, in which relatives other than a child's parent assume parenting responsibility for the child (Hairston, 2009). There are three forms of kinship care that consist of formal, voluntary and private. Formal kinship care refers to care provided by relatives when children are under the custody of the state. Voluntary kinship care refers to care provided by relatives when children are involved in the child welfare system; however, not under the custody of the state. Private kinship care refers to the private arrangements that are established among family members without the involvement of the child welfare system. For the purpose of this study, focus will primarily be placed on formal kinship care as children of incarcerated parents are interrelated to this form of care due to the consequential effects of ASFA.

In a study conducted by the Urban Institute, data was applied based on information from the 1997 National Survey of Families and Children. The study revealed that a fifth to a quarter of children in formal kinship care lived in homes where the caregiver was highly aggravated (Hairston, 2009, p. 12). Aggravation from caregivers was linked directly to the difficulty they experienced in dealing with temper issues from the child that they were unable to control. The study then collected more current data of findings that suggest that two-thirds of the 39 formal caregiver participants were grandmothers who had incomes under \$30,000 (Hairston, 2009, p. 12). About one quarter were still employed, while 26 percent stopped working when they assumed care of their grandchildren after parental incarceration (Hairston, 2009, p.12). Additionally, 60 percent were 60 years old or over; 90 percent were 50 years old or older and two-thirds indicated

that while under their care, their grandchildren reflected emotional or behavioral problems (Hairston, 2009, p. 12).

Formal kinship care is considered to be beneficial for children of incarcerated parents, primarily based on findings that suggest that children are able to overcome environmental adversities and are provided with opportunities to maintain consistent contact with their parent. Children of incarcerated parents often report that their caregiver is the “gatekeeper” for the relationship with their incarcerated parent, which is a vital component in sustaining the relationship (Saunders, 2017, p. 64). Caregivers are often times met with challenges in ensuring that this relationship is preserved, as many prison system practices are the determining factor. Families of incarcerated parents are considered to “serve time” while their family member is incarcerated, primarily due to the interruption of important family dynamics (Hairston, 2009, 16). When a parent is sentenced to prison, many aspects in how a family suffers through incarceration are overlooked. This places a huge responsibility on the formal kinship caregiver and incarcerated parent to keep this relationship strong, as the importance of their family connectedness is ignored by the criminal justice system.

Paternal Incarceration

The impact to a child during parental incarceration has been described as a traumatic experience comparable to parental divorce or death (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2016, p. 3). The majority of the incarcerated population is men, many who are fathers. Many who were the sole providers of their household, contributing both economically and emotionally to their families. Paternal incarceration limits a father’s ability to properly parent, by straining family relationships in areas such as financial stability. Families have reported to

experiencing a 22 percent decrease to family income during paternal incarceration (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2016, p. 3). Constant costs that are accumulated throughout incarceration force an incarcerated father to rely heavily on the family financially, simultaneously undermining their role as a provider. This traumatic event leaves the incarcerated father absent physically and emotionally, causing a hindrance to a child's behavioral and cognitive development.

It is within this time period, that a formal kinship caregiver and incarcerated parent must work collectively together to create the best outcomes for the child. They must find ways to overcome barriers that are deeply embedded into the criminal justice system. Children have reported that even through infrequent and sporadic contact with their incarcerated father, they held a biological connection that they desired to acknowledge and preserve (Saunders, 2016, p. 68). In a study conducted by SHINE for Kids, children expressed that when they were unable to have direct contact with their incarcerated parent, they enjoyed hearing stories about them through family members that gave them a sense of closeness to their parent (Saunders, 2016, p. 68). Siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, etc. are all a part of a family connectedness that can contribute to helping a child fill in these desires.

Each child has a unique reaction to the removal of their father ranging from low, moderate and high risks. Some variables that determine these fluctuating reactions are dependent on a child's life prior to incarceration. Children that are exposed to a moderately stable life and lived with their father prior to incarceration typically have been shielded from economic deprivations and are prone to a unique reaction to this unforeseen event in comparison to their moderate or high risks counterparts (Turney, 2017, p. 363). High risk

children do not experience a parent's incarceration similarly, causing a more complex set of prior disadvantages in correlation to parental incarceration. These disadvantages can include instability, poverty and neighborhood environments. Recent studies suggest that children adjust to the experience of parental incarceration differently depending on the gender of the parent (Aaron & Dallaire, 2010). Paternal incarceration is more heavily correlated with aggressive and physically aggressive behaviors for a father's son in comparison to their daughter's (Geller et al., 2012).

Maternal Incarceration

The Institute on Women & Criminal Justice report that from 1977 to 2004, there has been a 757 percent increase in female incarceration rates throughout the criminal justice system in the U.S. (Brooks, 2014, p. 64). Society has taught us that while men are designated as the breadwinners for the family structure, women are the backbone that holds a family together. Once this structure is interrupted, children are exposed to distinct stressors that are harmful to a child's healthy development. In 2009, African American and Hispanic women were imprisoned at a rate 3 times higher than their white counterparts (Cox, 2012, para. 1). This data reflects the likelihood of minority children disproportionately bearing the burden of harsh sentencing practices. A study conducted in 2005 examining the early experiences of relationship disconnection in 94 children of incarcerated mothers, revealed children's initial reaction to the separation correlating to sadness, crying, behavioral problems, worry and developmental regression (Rahimipour & Boostani, 2014, p. 3094).

In another study consisting of 16 incarcerated mothers in Iran, children were analyzed in order to assess the consequences of children's living conditions after their

mother's incarceration. Findings from the study suggest that maternal incarceration has negative behavioral outcomes, poor academic performance, eating disorders, sleeping problems and mental and health problems for children (Rahimipour & Boostani, 2014, p. 3097). One incarcerated mother of a 4-year-old son indicated that after her incarceration, he became nervous, aggressive and sensitive about her personal belongings at home causing him unrest during the day and sleeplessness during the night (Rahimipour & Boostani, 2014, p. 3097). The child's grandmother, who was appointed as the caregiver, was forced to visit a psychiatrist in order to receive tranquilizers to stabilize his behaviors. Both, mothers and children in this study were found to be affected by the separation of incarceration as their connections are intermingled, with the mother being left in a poor mental and psychological state as well.

In the same study, children's reactions were examined while visiting their incarcerated mother. The participants admitted to their own emotional reactions that were correlated to the prison's controlled environment of not being able to touch their children. This limitation caused participants to constantly cry as they were unable to console their children who exhibited fear and insecurity (Anaraki & Bootsani, 2014, p. 3102). Findings from this study suggest that children being separated from their parent, made them aggressive and restless. In addition, the long intervals between visitations made children impersonal and indifferent in some instances (Anaraki & Bootsani, 2014, p. 3104). Solidarity among formal kinship caregivers and mothers must be achieved, so that the best interest of a child is at the forefront. In forming this type of solidarity, formal kinship caregivers and mothers can co-parent effectively and keep contact between children consistent. Of course, this will be met with challenges that are completely outside of the

scope of their roles. The prison system will ultimately be the determining factor in how this can successfully be achieved. In one study conducted examining kinship care during parental incarceration, one grandmother admitted to having deep concerns about taking the child to visit their mother and maintaining consistent contact. This was primarily influenced by negative visitation experiences and financial burdens of \$300 a month for collect calls, all of which interfered with maintaining family connectedness (Miller, et al., 2013, p. 592).

ACADAMEIC SUPPORT

1 in 43 children in the United States currently have a parent in the prison system and nearly half of them are between 11 and 18 years old (Nichols, Emily, Loper, & Meyer, 2016, para. 1). It is necessary to examine the developmental risks for school-aged children who may be exposed to this traumatic life event, seeing as adolescence is a period of great potential and vulnerability within a child's development path. School-aged children are at risk for being distinctively impacted by the incarceration of a parent, during a time period where they experience significant changes in cognitive, social and emotional abilities (Nichols et al., 2016, p. 1092). This poses a unique challenge for educators and school administrators who may not be equipped to explore this obscure and potentially high risk population of students in order to ensure better academic outcomes.

The non-profit sector must develop supportive services to help children of incarcerated parents overcome adversities in order to prevent declines in academic performance. Current practices in the criminal justice system have neglected to acknowledge these types of negative outcomes for children during sentencing. Children of incarcerated parents have been found to have less supervision and quality discipline after parental incarceration, which is associated to the increased stress on their caregiver (Nichols & Loper, 2012, p. 1456). This stress is associated with the financial, social and emotional stress of a caregiver that occurs after parental incarceration has interrupted the family dynamic. Parental incarceration effects a child's interaction with their peers, teachers, as well their academic motivation, achievement and behaviors (Nichols & Loper, 2012). Poor academic performance can become an indicator for lower income wages,

welfare dependency and incarceration as children enter into adult life. (Nichols & Loper, 2012, p. 1457)

School-aged children of incarcerated parents are reported as being stigmatized by their peers and display poor academic performance and behavior problems (Geller, Garfinkel & Western, 2011, p. 26). Resiliency in overcoming these negative outcomes is associated with unique and systematic resources that promote healthy development in stressful circumstances. Resiliency is defined as the achievement of positive developmental milestones in the presence of a significant threat to an individual's development (Nichols et al., 2015, p. 1091). In a study measuring the closeness and frequent contact with a child and their incarcerated parent in association to their academic success, children who had weekly contact with their mother were four times less likely to drop out or be suspended from school (Nichols et al., 2016, p. 1093). In addition, school teachers were interviewed in regards to school behaviors and found that the child's overall behavior generally improved after receiving a letter from their incarcerated parent. The significant role of parent contact and parent attachment during a child's most vulnerable life is linked to significant impacts to academic achievements.

Conclusion

As estimates of over 1.7 million children exposed to parental incarceration remains a reality for many children in the U.S., it is vital to gain a deeper understanding of where critical issues exist. Existing research captures many of the negative outcomes that children of incarceration are predisposed to; however, further research is required to examine how children can overcome these obstacles. Lack of adequate support in criminal justice system procedures creates a barrier in the parent-child bond that is crucial to a child's healthy

development. Improving outcomes for these children are important methods that the non-profit sector can establish in order to increase the probability of children overcoming these negative outcomes in their lives.

Criminal justice system administrators must gain wide-ranging knowledge of the role that a prison system's controlled environment plays in the parent-child bonding experience. Many children in previous studies have expressed their experiences of current barriers that prevent the preservation of a healthy relationship with their incarcerated parent. These barriers are directly correlated to many of the current prison system procedures that are in place. Prison system safety regulations are a dominating factor that disregards many of the intricate details involved in a child's best interest during incarceration. From the time a parent is taken into custody, up until their incarceration, a child's well-being is overshadowed by bureaucratic flaws in the criminal justice system. Consequently, children are exposed to many vulnerable conditions of family instability, financial hardship and developmental challenges that ultimately can affect their well-being. This prevalent issue requires the attention and collaborative efforts of the non-profit sector, formal kinship caregivers, prison system institutions, child welfare agencies and the education community to further pursue empirical research, so that the well-being of children of incarcerated parents is not jeopardized by the current prison system as it stands to date.

Research Questions

One: Does group dynamics in prison systems negatively affect how incarcerated parents are treated during case planning processes

Two: What type of organizational changes in prison systems must occur to prevent conflicting visiting experiences for children of incarcerated parents

Three: How can non-profit organizations build resiliency in children of incarcerated parents

RESEARCH METHODS

Current research on the healthy development of children of incarcerated parents demonstrates a multitude of negative outcomes that interfere with a child's likelihood for resilience. Research that focuses primarily on these negative outcomes neglect to form a better understanding of protective measures that can be taken to prevent negative outcomes. This creates a need to fill in current data gaps in areas of protective measures for positive outcomes. In the present study, focus will be contributed to this data gap by assessing an assortment of possible protective measures that will assist formal kinship caregiver in successfully caring for the child. Highlighting these deficiencies will assist in collecting important data that can be utilized in the non-profit sector to establish new ideas towards the contribution of positive outcomes for families during incarceration. In fulfillment of the requirements for a Master's in Public Administration, Non-Profit Sector Management degree, exploration on the above mentioned protective measures will be reviewed in order to contribute to the critical development of strong collaborative efforts amongst the non-profit sector, incarcerated parents, prison system institutions, school systems and formal kinship caregivers.

Research Method Details

The unit of analysis will consist of a group of 30 formal kinship caregivers. The methodology used will be a cross-sectional study consisting of a qualitative approach to better understand the everyday lives of the participants. The sole purpose of this study is intended to identify communal experiences that formal kinship caregivers are subjected to while parents are incarcerated for periods of 6 months or more. This time duration of sentencing will provide a more in depth look at the transitional effect that occur for families

of incarcerated parents, in connection to the support or lack of from the criminal justice system.

Purposive non-probability sampling will be used in order to conduct qualitative interview schedules of participants that meet certain criteria's. Criteria's will consist of a parent's incarceration sentence length in correlation to a specific type of caregiver qualifications. This assessment will be applied based on the perceptions of participating formal kinship caregivers. The criterion is primarily focused on the ability to assess a more in depth look at the effects of parental incarceration in association to a child's healthy development. Research suggests that certain challenges exist that prevent isolation of these effects for moderate or high risks children, due to their exposure to an assortment of disadvantages involving poverty, instability and disadvantaged neighborhood environments (Turney, 2017).

Interview schedules will primarily focus on key areas that include: how formal kinship caregivers maintain the child's relationship dynamic with their incarcerated parent(s), prison related experiences for kinship caregivers during parental incarceration and types of support systems in place or lack of. Interviews will be structured in order to analyze certain difficulties formal kinship caregivers experience while caring for the child. Challenges are likely to occur in recruiting participants who are willing to participate, either by their own reluctance or from the incarcerated parent's. This is dependent on the nature of family connectedness between the formal kinship caregiver and incarcerated parent.

Research Questions

One: Does group dynamics negatively affect how incarcerated parents are treated during case planning processes

Two: What type of organizational changes must occur to prevent conflicting visiting experiences for children of incarcerated parents

Three: How can non-profit organizations build resiliency in children of incarcerated parents

Concerns

Concerns associated with this study are primarily influenced by the possible challenges that will arise in selecting participants who meet the required criteria. The task of identifying this specific target population is likely to be met with roadblocks.

Distinguishing these factors will require a variety of different methods in canvassing qualified formal kinship caregivers to participate. This may also be met with barriers due to the sensitivity of the study's nature. This will require formal kinship caregivers to provide sensitive information in nature on behalf of themselves and the children under their care. Many interview questions may provoke certain emotional reactions to particular questions, which will require procedural guidelines to be implemented during the interview of each participant. Depending on the participant's reaction to each interview question, the formal kinship caregiver may choose either to discontinue or proceed.

PROJECT CONCLUSION

To eliminate and/or minimize barriers that currently exist within prison systems in California, non-profit social services organizations that provide services to incarcerated families will be canvassed to administer the questionnaire. Upon reviewing non-profit organizations in the Los Angeles County region, an organization called Friends Outside in Los Angeles County (FOLA) has been designated. The organization's mission is primarily focused on servicing children and families who have a family member that is incarcerated. FOLA serves as a bridge between the community and the criminal justice system, by offering a multitude of program services that assist in addressing the unique needs of incarcerated individuals and their families. FOLA partners with other social services organizations such as the Community Build Family Source Center (South Los Angeles), South Bay One Stop Business and Career Center (Inglewood), Health Rights 360 (Los Angeles) and Cleveland Elementary School (Pasadena).

Research questions will attempt to obtain information from current formal kinship caregivers in order to uncover issues that are currently effecting communication between incarcerated parents and their families, existing financial burdens and behavioral and psychological problems that are exhibited while caring for the child. Collection of this information will assist non-profit organizations in determining specific areas of focus in order to develop suitable program services. Furthermore, data collection will be able to determine where organizational change must occur in California's prison institutions in order to eliminate existing problems. There are political implications, as well administrative practices in the prison system that must be addressed in order to solve this

complex issue; however, this project will focus on identifying a non-profit social services organization to assist in identifying persons that qualify for the questionnaire.

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APPENDIX: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this important questionnaire that will be administered by this agency. Participation in this questionnaire will help to measure the needs of families of incarcerated parents.

As mass incarceration rates continues to effect American family households, it is important to collect necessary data that is critical to maximizing the effectiveness of maintaining healthy parent-child relationships and supporting healthy child development during incarceration. Collection of data can increase efforts from the non-profit sector to develop beneficial programs that can effectively support families of incarcerated parents. Through this questionnaire, your honest answers will be helpful in enhancing goals of developing supportive services for families of incarcerated parents. This questionnaire should take 20-30 minutes to complete. Please be assured that all answers you provide will be kept confidential.

1. Can you please provide a brief description of your relation to the child you're currently caring for and their incarcerated parent?
2. How old are you?
3. How old is the child that you're currently caring for?
4. How long has the child been in your care?
5. Do you currently work? If so, what is your annual income?
6. Can you please provide a brief description of changes that have occurred in your family dynamic after the sentencing of your incarcerated family member?
7. How did the child react to their parent's incarceration?

8. Have you noticed any changes that the child has exhibited from the time their parent was sentenced up until now?
9. What grade is the child in?
10. Have you noticed any changes, positive or negative, in the child's academic performance during their parent's incarceration?
11. Can you please explain the dynamic of your relationship with your incarcerated family member?
12. How has the location of the prison facility where your family member is currently incarcerated impacted your family?
13. How has your experience been facilitating visitations for the child in the prison facility that your family member is currently located in?
14. Do you allow the child to receive collect calls from their incarcerated parent? If so, are the costs typically expensive?
15. As a caregiver, do you feel that you have the necessary resources to provide for the child?
16. Are you currently receiving any funds to assist with the care of the child?
17. What type of resources do you feel would positively benefit you as a caregiver in successfully caring for the child?