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## The 1.5 million children no one cares about: parental attachment and the effects of incarceration on prisoners' children

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**The 1.5 Million Children No One Cares About;**  
Parental Attachment and the Effects of Incarceration on Prisoner's Children

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## **Abstract**

Loosing a parent to incarceration can have a wide range of devastating effects on prisoners' children. The parent-child relationship is extremely important in a child's development and can have strong implications on the behavior that is exhibited. The literature on attachment theory and parental absence suggest that children who lack parental relationships that combine loving support with structured discipline will show increased signs of antisocial behavior. This is commonly exhibited in children with incarcerated parents because attachment bonds are likely to have never been formed or are broken upon imprisonment. The attachment a child has to their parent, as well as the indirect controls a parent has over the child, forms protective factors that reduce the incidence of delinquency. Children of incarcerated parents are not always afforded these protective factors, and are also exposed to higher levels of risk factors that can contribute to delinquent behavior. Parental incarceration increases a child's chance of experiencing disruptions, ineffective parenting, and loss of parental contact and academic difficulties, which can lead to juvenile delinquency. The solution to this increasingly prevalent problem is complex, since only targeting one risk factor would not be sufficient. However, as the United States relies more heavily on imprisonment as a form of punishment, it is necessary that these issues be taken into account.

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## **The 1.5 Million Children No One Cares About; Parental Incarceration and the Effects of Incarceration on Prisoner's Children**

Incarceration is a powerful sanction that not only impacts the intended target, the offender, but their children as well. The implications of parental incarceration are far reaching because of the repercussions it has on a relationship that is extremely important to a child's development. The quality of parenting a child receives as an infant determines the type of attachment that a child will develop. An insecurely attached child will exhibit more negative behaviors than someone who is securely attached. The changing shape of the family structure has caused more children than ever before to be living in households with only one parent. Studies have shown that children in single parent families are more likely to exhibit conduct disorders, but it is not family structure, or number of parents that is cited as the causal factor. The level of attachment that children have with their parent(s) is continuously found to be the most important aspect in predicting delinquent behavior. When a parent is able to provide a supporting environment for their children and create a balance of control and structure, children are able to form secure attachment to their parents and flourish even in situations when a parent is absent. However when one of the parents become incarcerated, the remaining parent has to maintain the household while experiencing high levels of stress. When the incarcerated parent is the mother, the children are frequently sent to live with other family members, or in last resort cases they are put in foster homes. Both of these situations result in the deterioration of quality parenting, causing a decreased level of attachment and subsequent negative outcomes. Children of incarcerated parents are more often subjected to ineffective parenting, academic difficulties, disruptions, lack of

parental contact and juvenile delinquency. The destructive combination of these risk factors warrants an intervention to protect these children, who are victimized through no fault of their own.

. Throughout this paper I will review the theory and research relating to the impact of parental incarceration on a child's development. In section one I will consider the literature on attachment consisting of theories presented by John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth. These theories are supported by empirical research conducted by Erickson, Sroufe and Egland, which illustrate how a child's level of attachment predicted behavior later on in childhood. The discussion of attachment leads into section two, the topic of parental absence, which seeks to determine the effect that a missing parent has on a child's attachment level and development. I will then examine the literature discussing which aspects of a parental bond lead to an attached relationship. These conclusions are supported by a study conducted by Stephen Demuth and Susan Brown which look at the factors of family structure that lead to delinquency. I also refer to Hirschi's social bond theory which, states that a child's attachment to their parent is likely the most important factor in controlling delinquency. Combined with additional theoretical input from Michael Gottfredson, Diana Baumrind and F. Ivan Nye, I conclude that the quality of parenting has a significant effect on the probability of conduct problems. Further empirical evidence presented by Ann Quigley, Cynthia Harper and Sara McLanahan illustrate the identifiable effects that parental absence has on children. Section three examines empirical research and ethnographical accounts on the topics of disruptions, maternal incarceration, ineffective parenting, academic difficulties, familial contact and delinquency. Research by Donald Braman, Anne Dannerbeck, Christopher Mumola,

Aaron Smith et. al, Jeremy Travis, Michelle Waul Aston Trice and JoAnne Brewster illustrate the effect that these topics have on children. The studies included in Section four are critical as they connect the implications of attachment theory and parental absence to the specific situations of children whose parents are incarcerated. The subject of parental incarceration is just starting to gain importance as prisons increasingly become a central punishment. In section five I give recommendations for the future on what can be done to combat this exacerbating issue.

Research on the consequences of incarceration is generally limited, and more studies need to be completed in order to fully understand the effects that children experience. Although my research does not exhaust all of the possible outcomes facing prisoners' children, it is indicative of the available studies. Much of the existing literature makes note of the fact that more research needs to be done, especially longitudinal studies. Studies that are more generalizable and look at larger populations of children of incarcerated parents, would also add more validity to the existing research.

## **I. Attachment**

### **A. Bowlby's Attachment Theory**

Emotional attachment is universal among all primates and is crucial for health and survival throughout life. Attention to the importance of early attachment was sparked by the work of British psychiatrist John Bowlby. His interest began when he observed the devastating effects on children of growing up in orphanages and not receiving any touch beyond what was necessary to keep them physically healthy. "By becoming attached to their caregivers, Bowlby said, children gain a secure base from which they can explore the environment and a haven of safety to return to when they are afraid" (Wade and

Travis 2006:495). Optimally, infants will feel a secure attachment to their caregiver, yet at the same time have the desire to explore their surroundings.

In Bowlby's theory it was proposed that all human infants, however treated, become attached to persons who care for them. The quality of such attachments relationships varies, however, depending on the quality of care the infant has experienced. Further, the quality of this early experience, and the relationship to which it leads, exercises an important influence on later development (Belsky and Nezworski 1988:18).

As a result of such early experiences, infants develop inner working models which are the foundation of initial experiences concerning self and others. Inner working models provide a context for subsequent transactions with the environment, especially relating to social relationships. The securely attached child with positive expectations of self and others is more likely to approach the world with confidence and when faced with difficulty is likely to deal with them effectively or seek outside help. In contrast, infants whose emotional needs have not been consistently met come to view the world as comfortless and unpredictable. As a result, insecurely attached children respond to conflict by ignoring it or reacting in a way that brings about more adverse consequences. (Bretherton and Waters 1985:148) Bowlby also proposes that disturbances of the attachment relationship are the main cause of psychological and behavioral dysfunction, such as anxiety or distrust. This results in poor coping skills and an increased likelihood of deviant behavior.

## **B. Attachment Research**

The importance of attachment can be demonstrated by a 1958 study conducted by Margaret and Harry Harlow using infant rhesus monkeys. The study consisted of two kinds of artificial mothers, one made solely of wires with only a bottle connected to it, and another that was covered in terry cloth but had no food source. Psychologists at the

time theorized that children become attached to their mothers simply because it is the mothers' role to provide food. However, the monkey in Harlow's study cuddled with the terry cloth mother almost exclusively, except when it needed to eat (Wade and Travis 2006:496). This study demonstrates how a child's need to be nurtured is just as essential to survival as being fed.

### **C. Ainsworth's Strange Situation**

In order to study the nature of attachment between mothers and their children, Mary Ainsworth came up with the experimental method called Strange Situation. During this procedure the following routine is played out: the baby is brought into a room with toys; a stranger comes into the room to play with the child; the mother leaves the two alone; she reenters the room and continues to play with the child; the stranger and the mother both leave for three minutes before the mother returns to her child. At each stage observers note how the baby reacts to the mother's disappearance and reappearance. If attachment has been established between an infant and a caregiver, the baby will become anxious and fearful when the mother leaves or when strangers are introduced. Separation anxiety is exhibited if a child cries incessantly when left alone with an unknown person. This reaction continues until the child is around two to three years old. The Strange Situation is used to determine if a child exhibits signs of insecure attachment or secure attachment. Secure attachment is shown when a child cries when the parent leaves the room and welcomes her back by playing happily with her when she returns. Insecure attachment is broken down into two categories, avoidant and anxious-ambivalent. Avoidant is characterized as showing no emotion when the mother leaves the room, making no effort to seek contact when she returns, and treating the stranger the same way

as the mother. Anxious-ambivalent is characterized as the child crying loudly when the mother leaves the room but resisting contact when she returns. “Insecure attachment worries many psychologists because it is associated with later emotional and behavioral problems and aggressiveness” (Wade and Travis 2006:497). The Strange Situation is commonly used in research studies today to determine a child’s level and typology of attachment.

#### **D. Predictive Qualities of Attachment Research**

The significance of attachment theory is its ability to predict the future behavior of children. The predictive qualities of attachment are exemplified in The Minnesota Mother-Child Interaction Project conducted by Erickson, Sroufe and Egeland. A sample of 267 socially and emotionally at risk mother-child pairs were picked from communities where poverty was present. This socioeconomic class was targeted as a contrast to pairs from a stable middle-class family.

The results of this project provided striking evidence of the importance of a secure attachment to a child’s competent functioning in subsequent years. Children securely attached as infants were found to be more ego resilient, independent, compliant, empathic, and socially competent; they had greater self-esteem and expressed more positive affect and less negative affect than did children who were anxiously attached as infants (Bretherton and Waters 1985:149).

Furthermore, securely attached infants were shown to be more sociable as toddlers and more compliant at age 2 with their mothers. Once they reached preschool they exhibited more self-control in the classroom and were less dependent on the teacher (Bretherton and Waters 1985:149). This study also took attachment theory one step further and examined infants who were insecurely attached at 12 months, but showed competent functioning at preschool age. Although this occurred only 6 times in the final sample of

92, the independent variable that was shown to cause this change was the mother's behavior. Mothers of anxiously attached children who did not have behavior problems were more supportive, provided clear and firm structure, consistent limits and were less hostile (Bretherton and Waters 1985:157). This finding is crucial in showing how important a mother's behavior towards her child can affect their level of attachment and subsequently their behavior.

The mother's ability to nurture her child towards a more positive form of attachment is also seen as significant in *Clinical Implications of Attachment*. Belsky and Nezworski (1985) make note of the fact that Erickson, Sroufe and Egeland are responsible for the emphasis put on the continuity in socioemotional development. This has occurred as a result of their work that indicated how a child's level of attachment is dependent on experiences that occur during infancy. Belsky and Nezworski (1985) found it especially profound that insecurity and social difficulties were mitigated when mothers became more available and supportive (5). The implications that attachment has on a child are greatly affected when one of the parents are incarcerated during the child's infancy. The effects are even greater when the missing parent is the mother.

The significance of attachment theory and how it affects infants is important because maladaptions that arise in the early years do not disappear, but take on a different form. Theoretically, children should resolve issues or crises during earlier developmental stages in order to ensure optimal development in the following stages. Children who successfully move from one developmental stage to the next are able to function more independently and are able to experiment with new environments and communication methods. This ability to explore within the safety net of a child-parent relationship

promotes greater self reliance and confidence during toddlerhood. Consequently, toddlers who are able to move towards more autonomous functioning are equipped to have positive social exchanges and a mastery of object skills, all which lead to successful peer relations during the preschool age. Starting with the type of attachment in infancy, each developmental period plays into how well the child adapts to the next stage (Bretherton and Waters 1985:148). This pattern of development applies to maladaptive circumstances as well. “Thus pronounced difficulties with impulse control, aggression, and other antisocial behaviors, prolonged emotional dependency, and extreme difficulty in relating to other children may be linked to adaptational failures during earlier periods when the major developmental issues were attachment and autonomy” (Bretherton and Waters 1985:148). All of these studies and theoretical accounts have shown how crucial the potential attachment period is for the child and how it has an affect on later development. Although many children experience inadequate attachment to their parents, the effects that accompany it are more so relevant to children whose parents are incarcerated.

## **II. Parental Absence**

### **A. Nonresidential Parents**

Nonresidential parents (NRPs), or those who do not live in the household with the children, have increased significantly over the past two decades, fueled by high divorce rates and out of wedlock births. “As a result, about half of white children and two thirds of African American children spend at least part of their childhood in a single parent home, away from the other biological parent” (Kirkpatrick, Duck and Foley 2006:181). Most of the research done on relationships between the NRP and child are from divorced

households where the father is absent. Although this limits the generalizability, studies have shown similar childhood experiences when the mother is absent (Kirkpatrick et al. 2006:182). The level of effect a NRP has on a child's life has been argued on both sides. While some researchers found paternal contact had no significant effect on children's behavior, others insist that a relationship with the non-residential father will decrease risk factors for conduct problems.

The value of NRPs can be better evaluated by looking at three specific aspects: payment of child support, frequency of contact and relationship quality. A positive correlation between the payment of child support and behavioral outcomes, especially in academic achievement, has consistently been reported. This is no surprise since poverty often accompanies poor academic behavior and inferior health. Sadly, the majority of nonresidential fathers do not pay child support. The lack of correlation between NRP visits and stronger relationships suggest that simply visiting a child is not sufficient. The nature of the interaction, such as sharing of parental responsibilities instead of just engaging in leisure activities, will affect the closeness between the NRP and child. "Amato and Gilbreth (1999) found that feelings of closeness and, more importantly, engagement in authoritative parenting positively affect child outcomes such as academic achievement (i.e., test scores, grades, years of school completed), internalizing problems (i.e., low self-esteem, depression, and anxiety) and externalizing problems (i.e., aggression, misbehavior at home or school, and delinquency)" (Kirkpatrick et al. 2006:185). This finding gives a shred of hope to parents who are unable to see their children often because they are in prison. If they are able to maintain the quality of the relationship through phone calls, letters and visits, the fact that the frequency of face time

is low may not be as important. In order for this to happen a lot of effort needs to be put in from both the parent and the child. It is unfortunate that many times a parent pulls away because they feel it is too difficult and the existing relationship may do more harm than good to their children.

Non-residential parents have the potential to become important people in their children's lives. However several barriers prevent this from occurring. Obstacles such as living arrangements, feelings of loss and financial constraints will act as barriers to healthy, functional relationships. Obviously when a parent no longer lives in the household with the children, opportunities to engage in normal routine activities are diminished. The larger the distance, the less likely NRPs will be able to establish regular routines and rituals that constitute parenting. The time and cost of traveling have the ability to severely decrease the amount of face-to-face time between both parties. Visitation rights and custody agreements usually add additional red tape for parents to get through before they are allowed contact. "Consequently, custody decisions and arrangements can have enormous influence on opportunities for NRPs to have access to (and form relationships with) their children. Some NRPs find it easier to simply terminate the relationship than expend the energy necessary to parent from a distance" (Kirkpatrick et al. 2006:187). Families with an incarcerated parent experience the same barriers since prisons are usually located a great distance from the family's residence. The lengthy and expensive trips, plus the evasive nature of entering a prison, contribute the fact that only about 50% of children get to visit their parent during their sentence (Mumola 2000:5).

## **B. Parental Absence Research**

The findings in Kirkpatrick's work are replicated in Stephen Demuth's and Susan Brown's study, *Family Structure, Family Processes, and Adolescent Delinquency: The Significance of Parental Absence versus Parental Gender (2004)*. Demuth and Brown (2004) set out to find which aspects of family structure contribute to delinquency: parental absence or parental gender. Specifically, they try to answer the following question: "Is it the absence of a parent in general or the absence of a father in particular that tends to contribute to higher levels of delinquency among adolescents in single-parent families relative to adolescents in two-parent families?" (Demuth and Brown 2004:60) This study is extremely innovative because it is one of the first of its kind to compare single-mother families to single-father families. Prior to this time, the number of children living in single-father families was too low to provide sufficient data. However, recent estimates indicate that families who have a single father as the head of household are increasing, making up about 15 percent of all single parent families. Using data from the 1995 National Longitudinal Survey of Adolescent Health, they compared levels of delinquency to the structure of a family and the level of direct and indirect controls. A direct control is where a parent sets rules and physically supervises the child to make sure they are not delinquent. Indirect controls are when a child does not break the rules because of the respect they have for their parent and the desire to not cause disappointment. What they found was that adolescents in single-father families showed the highest levels of delinquency, followed by single-mother families and families with two biological married parents being the lowest. In terms of parent functioning, indirect controls were found to have a much greater effect on delinquency than direct controls.

Analysis of the statistics reveals that parent closeness, or attachment, has the largest effect on delinquency, much more so than parental supervision and monitoring (Demuth and Brown 2004). This study is extremely significant because it adds importance to the literature on attachment theory and reveals the secret to reducing delinquency in single-family households.

### **C. Theoretical Arguments-Parental Roles**

Demuth and Brown (2004) support their research with theoretical arguments from Nye and Hirschi. Nye has found that delinquency is more prevalent for children from single parent households because of the loss of direct parental controls and decreased child-parent attachment. Nye stated “family structure did not exert a direct effect on adolescent delinquency but, rather, an indirect effect through the social controls provided by family relationships” (Demuth and Brown 2006:61). Nye also maintained that it is true that certain types of bonds and levels of attachments are more common in some family structures than others. Hirschi’s social bond theory similarly states that children are less likely to engage in delinquent behavior when they are bonded to conventional parents. “Specifically he argues that the bond of attachment through the parent’s psychological presence in the mind of the child, the intimacy of communication between parent and child, and the affectional identification of the child with the parent, is likely the most important family factor in controlling delinquency” (Demuth and Brown 2006:64). These theories show that the lack of one parent does not doom the child, but it is essential that the remaining parental relationship be one of closeness and support.

The importance of parental bonds and levels of attachment are often referenced when citing causes of delinquency among juveniles. Ronald Simons, Leslie Simons and

Lora Wallace in *Families, Delinquency and Crime (2004)* also call upon Travis Hirschi's, and Michael Gottfredson's theories to determine how families have an effect on crime. Hirschi's earlier social control theory "suggests that people conform to the social norms of society because they form attachments to others, develop goal aspirations, become involved in conventional activities, and acquire a respect for the law. Delinquents and criminals are persons who lack these bonds to society" (Simons et. al 2004:21). After reviewing empirical evidence on the subject, and collaborating with Michael Gottfredson, Hirschi altered his views and emerged with the self-control theory. They argued that individuals who have low self-control, characterized as impulsive, self-centered, and risk-takers, are attracted to crime because it provides immediate gratification. In order for a person to obtain self-control, Hirschi and Gottfredson felt that it must come from the parents.

In addition to being caring and supportive, the child's primary caregiver must set behavior standards, monitor the child's behavior, and be willing to discipline the child when the standards are not met. When caretakers do this in a consistent fashion, the child learns self-control. On the other hand, children fail to develop self-control if they are raised by caretakers who are lax in nurturance, monitoring and discipline (Simons et. al 2004:27).

In altering his theory to fit the current ideology, the influence of parenting became even more of a central point than it was in Hirschi's earlier principles. The key aspect of Hirschi and Gottfredson's theory is repeated in the work of Demuth and Brown, Kirkpatrick et al., and Bretherton and Waters. What is being reiterated in multiple forms of empirical research and theory is that parents have a tremendous responsibility that involves two crucial components. The secret to raising children who do not exhibit conduct problems is to provide a nurturing environment that is structured and instills discipline at the same time. The problem is that when a parent is suddenly taken away

from a child for any reason, this sequence of events becomes significantly more difficult to achieve. However, as a result of having the key factors identified, we have a starting point in which we can start to make improvements in these children's lives.

Since a lot of emphasis is placed on the quality of parenting, Diana Baumrind came up with a typology of parenting styles to define which ones are most effective. Baumrind makes the distinction between responsiveness and demandingness where responsiveness is presences of support and demandingness dictates the level of control. Four different parenting styles emerge from the combination of these characteristics. Permissive parents exhibit high responsiveness but low demandingness, whereas authoritarian parents show low support but exercise high discipline. Neglecting/rejecting parents are low on both ends, leaving the optimal parenting style; authoritative. Authoritative parents are able to communicate with their children about the reasoning behind rules that need to be enforced, while maintaining a warm and caring environment. Children brought up in authoritative households show higher levels of academic achievement, psychological well-being, and social adjustment and lower levels of conduct problems (Simons et. al 2004:25-26).

All three of these theories suggest that the quality of parenting has a significant effect on the probability of conduct problems. Inept parenting is able to have a direct and indirect effect on adolescent delinquent behavior. "It directly contributes to oppositional and defiant tendencies that make delinquent behavior attractive to the child, and it allows youth to drift into association with peers who encourage antisocial behavior" (Simons et. al 2004:81). Ineffective parenting directly relates to delinquency in a concrete sense where little supervision and communication pertaining to a child's whereabouts are

taking place. Since children receive less supervision, this indirectly leads to them spending more time with other unsupervised peers. It is important to note that most mothers are competent parents and only a minority are unable to utilize appropriate discipline and control methods. The difference in quality of parenting can be attributed to the high stress and impaired psychological functioning experienced by many single mothers. Single mothers need to balance both roles of providing financial support and emotional support to their children. Even though most mothers work long hours, leaving their children unsupervised for periods of time, 60 percent of female-headed households are below the poverty line. Financial hardship is another example of an indirect affect on juvenile delinquency because of the way it disrupts effective parenting (Simons et. al 2004:81). In this fashion, mothers who have become single parents due to the incarceration of the father have the deck stacked against them when trying to establish meaningful bonds with their children.

A notable limitation to the theory and literature on the influence of parents is its inability to take into account outside environmental factors. By just looking at the effect of the parents, other very important influences such as peer relations, disorganized neighborhoods, and lack of opportunities are disregarded. Although family bonds have shown to be crucial factors in effecting children's behavior, it is important to consider the environment as a whole. Negative peer relations, disorganized neighborhoods, and lack of legitimate opportunities negatively affect children's behavior, but protective factors provided by the parents are supposed to prevent this. As seen in the previous and ensuing research, the caretaker's ability to provide these protective factors, when the parent is incarcerated, is severely diminished.

#### **D. Paternal Absence Research**

Removing a parent from a household has an array of detrimental effects on the children. There is evidence that suggests that when the mother runs the household without the presence of a father, the children are affected more than if a male ran the family. This is extremely significant since 92% of children who have an incarcerated parent are missing their father (Mumola 2000). Young females who grow up without a father are particularly affected because they crave male affection and misconceive attention as love. Donald Braman (2004) illustrates how girls in this situation will do anything for male companionships to fill the void that a missing father leaves. When adolescent girls perceive sex as love, sexually transmitted diseases and teenage pregnancies are more prevalent. A study done by Ann Quigley suggests that regardless of the female's race, socioeconomic status, level of control, and exposure to stressful life events, father absence is strongly linked to teenage pregnancy (118). This is significant because if a father's absence can have such a strong effect on girls from affluent, affectionate families, imagine what it can do to a family dealing with the stress of incarceration.

In addition to teenage pregnancies, Cynthia Harper and Sara McLanahan's (2004) research shows that father absence also increases delinquency. "After controlling for income and all other factors, youths in father absent families (mother only, mother-stepfather, and relatives/other) still had significantly higher odds of incarceration than those from mother-father families" (Harper and McLanahan 2004:384). Their study showed that father absence causes certain risk factors, such as residential instability, remarriage and elder caregivers. These risk factors affect supervision, discipline, and

positive support, which are key components in avoiding delinquent behavior. Harper's and McLanahan's (2004) research found that for the population they sampled, the presence of a step father was as detrimental, if not worse, than the lack of a father. These findings are supported by Braman's (2004) claim that the absence of a biological father is one of the strongest predictors of abuse. One reason is that when a father is not around there is more of a chance that another type of guardian will be looking after the children. It is more difficult for that person to have the same love and affection for the children as a biological parent would, and he sometimes treats them accordingly (119). This would suggest that a more productive solution than public policy that promotes marriage would be after school programs that encourage males to mentor adolescents. The findings of these studies are relevant, even though father absence is not the same as father incarceration. A child whose father is suddenly detained in prison would experience similar feelings of loss compared to someone whose father abandoned them voluntarily.

Although parental closeness, not structure, is considered the most important factor affecting delinquency, Harper and McLanahan's (2004) study shows how the lack of a father introduces the family to a series of risk factors that threatens the existing families bonds. Braman (2004) also notes that paternal absence is one of the greatest predictors of abuse. Their research contradicts the works of Kirkpatrick et al. (2006) and Demuth and Brown (2004), which say that single parent households that utilize both direct and indirect controls will be able to replicate children's outcomes from a dual parent family. The difference may be due to the fact that Harper, McLanahan and Braman's research does not take into account factors such as socioeconomic status. When these extraneous

and suppressing factors are controlled for, the research outcomes may look more like Kirkpatrick et al. and Demuth and Brown.

### **III. Parental Incarceration**

#### **A. Introduction**

Parental incarceration does not predict delinquent behavior. Rather juveniles who exhibit antisocial behaviors, generally have a cluster of risk factors in various life domains, coupled with few protective factors to offset those risks (Dannerbeck 2005:201). Parental incarceration is merely one of these risk factors, but its complex nature tends to produce additional risk factors. Losing a parent to incarceration can cause disruptions in a child's life, the presence of ineffective parenting, loss of parental contact, academic difficulties and/or juvenile delinquency. At the same time the absence of quality parenting allows children to fall subject to risk factors that parents are supposed to be a barrier to. Therefore the effects of parental incarceration cannot be explained by a linear relationship. Instead the main problem has many offshoots that arise before and after imprisonment.

#### **B. Environmental Disruptions**

Disruptions in a child's life are such great risk factors because of the potential they have to disrupt the socialization process during development (Dannerbeck 2005:2001). The trauma a child experiences takes away from the energy that is normally rationed for developmental tasks. When a situation overwhelms a child's capacity to cope, emotional survival takes precedent over other developmental tasks. The result is delayed development, regression or other maladaptive strategies (Travis and Waul 2003:16). Physical disruptions occur when a child moves to another home and changes

school. Social inconsistencies occur when people move in and out of a child's life. Children can also experience emotional turmoil when a parent's mood is inconsistent due to mental illness or substance abuse. The more frequent and severe the disruptions will logically lead to increased anti-social behavior. This means that the different types of disruptions are not created equally and differ in their evasiveness depending on their level of harm. For example it is more common for a child to relocate when a parent finds a better job, the same cannot be said for a child who is swept away by a social worker while the police are taking their parent into custody. One incident that spreads across all three types of disruptions is when a child is removed from the home. This can occur in instances of abuse and neglect, mental illness, substance abuse and/or when there are no caretakers left in the household. In a study that looked at delinquent youth, children who were placed outside of the home were found to have higher associations with the juvenile justice system. The results also indicated that youth with a history of parental incarceration experienced out of home placement at much high proportions (Dannerbeck 2005:209).

### **1. Ethnographical Account: Disruptions**

The effects of disruption are portrayed by the story of David and his two children. In junior high school David started drug dealing to help his mother pay the bills. By high school he was addicted to heroin, in and out of juvenile facilities and serving his first prison sentence soon after graduation. David fathered his first daughter, Davida, while he was in prison, making his mother Thelma the sole caretaker. David fathered another child, Charles, who remained in custody of his birth mother Carla. During the time Davida and Charles were growing up their father was in and out of prison, but spent

much more time in than out. Although David married twice amidst his prison time, the mothers of his children were neither of the women he married (Braman 2004:68-70).

Throughout the course of their lives both Davida and Charles engaged in negative behavior and repeatedly found themselves in unhealthy situations that were harmful to their development. The times when Davida and Charles's behavior was the worst paralleled the severe disruptions in their environment. For example, David was incarcerated again just after Davida started junior high school. Thelma and her granddaughter could not afford the mortgage payments without David's income and subsequently lost the house. They moved to the projects in Southeast D.C., but Davida never attended her new school. She started hanging out with the local boys, became locked up in a juvenile facility for truancy and continued to spiral downward (Braman 2004:78). The disruptions of losing her father again, as well as the house, and having to move to a new neighborhood were too much for a 12-year-old child to cope with.

Charles's reaction to David's repeated incarcerations was similar to Davida's, even though he was brought up in a separate household. At the age of 13 Charles was in junior high, getting straight A's and had secured a place on the honor roll. He also had three arrests for auto theft and shoplifting. Charles, Carla and David all agree that he acts out every time his father is reincarcerated, and that his behavior is markedly different when David is home. When asked if he was afraid of going to prison, Charles response was that he would be able to be with his father (Braman 2004:81-84). Children of incarcerated parents, who often lack the financial support and structure of a conventional household, are exposed to many exacerbating disruptions without any source of much needed protective factors.

### **C. Maternal Incarceration**

The level of disruption that children experience disproportionately affects families when the mother is incarcerated. When the father is the person in prison, 90% of the time the children are taken care of by the mother. Maternal incarceration leads to the father becoming the children's caretaker only 28% of the time. When the mother is absent children often live with their grandparents or other relatives, and enter into the foster care system at higher rates than when the father is taken away.

Women are arrested and incarcerated primarily for property and drug offenses. The Bureau of Justice Statistics reported that drug offenses represent the largest percentage of growth for female offenders (39%, compared with 17% for males). This increase is more strongly illustrated by the fact that between 1995 and 1996, female drug arrests increased by 95%, while male drug arrests only increased by 55% (Travis and Waul 2003:68). A recent study of men and women prison-based drug treatment program showed that men have more severe criminal histories, but women experienced more egregious bouts of substance abuse. In addition women reported more co-occurring psychiatric disorders and were more likely to use prescribed medications (Travis and Waul 2003:69). Other statistics report 65% of mothers in state prison used drugs the month before their offense, and 32% committed their crime to get drugs or obtain money for drugs (compared to 58% and 19% respectively for fathers) (Mumola 2000:5). These statistics are significant since a women's role as a mother is severely hindered by incidences of substance abuse and mental illness. Adding to its significance is the fact that 64% of incarcerated mothers were living with their children just prior to their imprisonment (Mumola 2000:1). Consequently, children of incarcerated mothers

experience the ramifications of their mother's behavior at more aggravated levels compared to when the father is involved in criminal activity.

#### **D. Ineffective Parenting**

Parental incarceration has the potential to expose children to ineffective parenting before the parent is put in prison and also in the parent's absence. It is important to examine the child's environment pre-incarceration, since approximately 50% live with their parent before they are put in prison (Mumola 2000). A parent's mental health status can affect parenting by causing instability and disruptions or subjecting children to parenting styles that are laced with poor judgment and impulsiveness. Also, children are three times more likely to be abused and four times more likely to be neglected when their parents have a history of substance abuse (Dannerbeck 2005:201-202). About 25% of parents in state prison reported a history of alcohol dependence and 14% (13% of men and 23% women) reporting having a mental illness (Mumola 2000:9). In a study conducted by Anne Dannerbeck (2005), support was found for the hypothesis: "parents who have experienced incarceration will exhibit lower levels of effective parenting and greater association with factors that can impede their parenting abilities, namely substance abuse and mental illness" (199). More than half of the youth who were experiencing parental incarceration, also had parents who had a history of substance abuse. When children grow up in an environment where drug and alcohol use are common practices, studies on alcoholism show that adolescents are more likely to incorporate drugs as a normal part of life (Dannerbeck 2005:208). These results are supported by Ashton Trice and Joanne Brewster's research where they found "evidence that children of women with substantial substance involvement had less positive school,

community, and home outcomes than those whose mothers were not regular users or abusers of drugs” (Trice and Brewster 2004:33). It can be seen that children who are raised in households laced with substance abuse and mental illness have the potential to be handicapped in comparison to healthy families.

## **2. Ethnographical Account: Ineffective Parenting**

Ineffective parent is prevalent throughout much of Davida and Charles’s life. Davida was raised by her grandmother immediately after being released from the hospital because her birth mother was addicted to drugs and became HIV positive before Davida’s first birthday. Although Thelma was probably the most positive influence in Davida’s life, her fixed income and unstable health was not enough to provide consistent support. While staying with her birth mother during one of Thelma’s hospitalization periods, it was made clear to Davida that she was not wanted. Davida was able to settle into a routine and start attending school again regardless of the cold environment, but soon after she started to be sexually assaulted by her mother’s boyfriend. When her mother was finally informed of the situation, she sided with her boyfriend, as Davida expected. Davida was uprooted again to a group home, from which she almost immediately ran away (Braman 2004:78-79). Charles experienced similar episodes of abuse fueled by ineffective parenting. After David’s incarceration, Carla found a new boyfriend with violent tendencies who regularly beat her and sometimes Charles as well. Carla was too scared to report him, but Carla’s mother, Dora, eventually called the police. Carla lost custody of Charles when Child Protective Services found out that she was knowledgeable of her son’s beatings, but did not report them. Although Carla doesn’t admit to it, Dora is

fairly certain that she was abusing drugs while pregnant with Charles. Dora cites this as the cause of his antisocial behavior (Braman 2004:82-83).

The existence of substance abuse and mental illness in the home is a good example of how certain risk factors have twice the negative qualities because of their nature to erode protective factors. Usually “adverse life experiences and maladaptive behaviors can be moderated through effective parenting in the form of structure, responsiveness and monitoring of behavior” (Dannerbeck 2005:208). When the caretaker, the person responsible for providing the moderation, is the adverse factor, the child has a significantly less chance of avoiding negative behaviors without assistance from outside the home.

#### **E. Academic Difficulties**

Attending school enables children to develop cognitively, and fosters a certain way of thinking, reasoning and problem solving. “The quality of children’s school experiences influences a wide range of outcomes including vocational aspirations, feelings of competency and self-worth, academic motivation, identity formation, peer relations, racial attitudes, gender-role beliefs, and even a standard of right and wrong” (Meece 2002:14). These factors are all significant to a child’s advancement, but in order for them to be fully implanted in a child’s mindset, school needs to be completed in its entirety. This is further supported by the fact that there is also a strong correlation between IQ and years of school completed (Meece 2002:214). In a study conducted by Ashton Trice and JoAnne Brewster (2004), children (ages 13-19) of incarcerated mothers were compared to a control group of their best friends. The researchers examined the adolescents’ school and community behavior by looking at their school attendance,

school misconduct, grades, involvement in positive school activities, home behavior and arrests (Trice and Brewster 2004:28). Overall children of incarcerated mothers had a significantly higher drop-out rate of 36% compared to a 9% national rate and a 7% rate of those in the control group. School drop-out rates showed no connection to parents' sentence lengths, a slight correlation to maternal substance abuse and a significant relationship to the mothers' level of education. For mothers who had dropped out of high school and who had not earned a GED, their children's drop out rate was 52%. Among mothers who had completed high school prior to incarceration, their children had a drop out rate of 15% (Trice and Brewster 2004:29). This could be the result of a number of factors, such as educated mothers having lower incidence of mental illness and substance abuse, or mothers modeling good behavior for their children. When the children of incarcerated mothers were compared with their best friends they performed more poorly on all five measurements of academic outcomes, including rate of suspension and the occurrence of failing one or more classes. Arrest rates were also extraordinarily high for the experimental group (34%), especially since delinquent behavior is usually dealt with informally and often does not result in arrest. The best friends' rate of arrest was less than half (15%) while the state average was 9% (Trice and Brewster 2004:31-32).

The variable that was strongest predictor of poor academic performance, as well as delinquent behavior was the level of contact between mothers and their children. Adolescents who were defined as having a high level of contact with their mother were four times less likely to drop out of school than those who had minimal or no contact with their mother. In addition, those who corresponded with their mother on a weekly basis were found to have lower arrest and suspension rates. The quality of the caretaker's

home also had an effect on how the children functioned at school. Adolescents in homes with more structure and social control were less likely to be suspended than those in homes that lacked discipline and boundaries (Trice and Brewster 2004:34). The literature on attachment and parental absence support this finding since the number of parents in a household was shown to not be as important as the environment.

Similar findings have also shown the association between incarcerated parents and school related problems. In one study of six to eight year old children, 16% exhibited transient school phobias and were unwilling to go to school for about a months time. Other disadvantageous, less specific behaviors were discovered at much higher rates. A 1991 study found that 70% of children of incarcerated parents displayed poor academic performance and 50% exhibited classroom behavior problems (Travis and Waul 2003:204). In schools where teachers are not as in tune to their students' backgrounds, children's sub par accomplishments will not necessarily be connected to their personal situations. This is enhanced due to the negative connotations and stereotypes of parental incarceration that prevent children from divulging their personal situations. In another study that examined the outcomes of children with incarcerated mothers, Julie Poehlmann (2005) measured children's intellectual abilities. Using the Stanford-Binet Intelligence scale, children were scored on a scale where 100 is the average, 1 standard deviation (84) is considered below average, and 1.5 standard deviations (76) is indicative of cognitive delay (Poehlmann 2005:1277). Children's cognitive test scores ranged from 62 to 119 with a mean of 89.6. "Of the 59 children who completed the cognitive assessment 19 (32%) obtained subaverage test scores (at or below 84). In addition, six (10%) scored in the delayed range (at or below 76)"

(Poehlmann 2005:1280). These results are about one and a half times the number expected base on a normal curve, which signifies the inherent difficulty that children of incarcerated parents face when they attend school.

### **3. Ethnographical Account: Academic Difficulties**

Academic difficulties affected Davida and Charles in very different ways. Davida first dropped out of the sixth grade after watching the police violently arrest her father, who subsequently was imprisoned (Braman 2004:2). Her ability to attend school was disrupted once again during the time she was being sexually assaulted by her mother's boyfriend. For a time Davida tried to not say anything, for fear of being thrown out on the streets, but inevitably she started to fail her classes, inciting a reaction from her teacher (Braman 2004:79). While Davida suffered from truancy issues, Charles was able to excel academically by receiving straight A's and achieving honor roll status. When asked what his aspirations are he immediately responds that he wants to be a surgeon, indicating that he has no intention of becoming a life long criminal (Braman 2004:83). His problem is that by resorting to delinquent behavior as a coping mechanism, he could potentially loose access to his education by being put in prison.

### **F. Familial Contact**

What Trice and Brewster's (2004) study demonstrates is that the importance of parental contact cannot be overlooked. Multiples sources of literature stress the importance of a continued relationship between the incarcerated parent and child, as well as the positive benefits that affect both parties. Only about half of parents (40% of fathers and 60% of mothers) have some form of contact with their children on a weekly basis. These numbers are almost identical to the percentage of parents who lived with

their children before they were put in prison (Mumola 2000:5). What this means is that the child has a relationship with their incarcerated parent only half of the time. The necessity of contact across prison walls is shown in a study conducted by Aaron Smith et al. (2004), where 41% of the children had no contact with the nonincarcerated parent.

“Family contact throughout incarceration often lessens the stress felt by separated parents and children while simultaneously preserving attachments, maintaining family bonds, and enhancing mental health” (Smith et al. 2004:188). Smith’s research suggests that strong family relationships and contact during incarceration consistently decreased violent inmate behaviors, decreased chemical dependency, and increased parole success. As a result visits with family members will ease the unification process after release, and increase parent’s ability to prevent relapse. Children suffer from the lack of contact with their parent, often showing signs of isolation and rejection (Smith et al. 2004:188). Other studies illustrate similar support for the benefits of parental contact. Trice and Brewster (2004) observed that children who had regular, frequent contact with their mothers had better adjustment than those with less contact (34). This adds to their findings of the significantly lower school drop out rates among children who had contact with their incarcerated parent. Travis and Waul reiterate Trice’s observations on the child’s ability to adjust almost to the letter. He notes that when children visit their parents in prison it calms their fears about the parent’s welfare as well as their concerns about the parent’s feeling for them (Travis and Waul 2003:207).

Although parents are allowed to communicate with their families through personal visits, phone calls and letters, it is very expensive to do so. One of the biggest financial burdens that families have to deal with is costly phone bills. Correctional

facilities contract out phone services and receive huge profit by doing so. States collect tens of millions of dollars every year from collect calls to prisoner's families, which cost around ten dollars for ten minutes. This might not be an issue for the average middle class family, but since incarceration is disproportionately apparent in low-income families, the cost is too much to bear. Most families are force to block collect phone calls, limiting the contact that is so desperately needed between a parent and a child. Prison visits are even more expensive, especially since over 60% of parents are located over one hundred miles away from their home. Sadly, 57% of fathers and 54% of mothers reported to have never received a personal visit from their children while in prison (Mumola 2000).

#### **4. Ethnographical Account: Familial Contact**

Increased contact with his father would have enabled the distress that Charles felt to be cushioned and may have prevented his resort to crime as an outlet of his emotions. Charles really looks up to his father and even David admits that he is trying to be like him. David says that he tries to tell his son that what he did was wrong, but he can only hope that he listens (Braman 2004:82). If Charles had the opportunity to visit David or have more frequent phone conversations, he may have been able to fill the void, at least partially, that accompanies the repeated loss of a father. The ability to have a continued relationship would hopefully change Charles's nonchalant perspective of getting sent to jail. Charles has the skills to live a very successful lifestyle, but without the support and guidance of a parent he is slipping. His behavior has not receded to the point where it cannot be rectified, but it needs to be reformed quickly before he receives a lengthy prison sentence. Davida certainly would have benefited from increased contact with her

father, but her needs were more directly related to the lack of financial support that David was not able to provide. Thelma's fixed income is not enough to cover the rent, groceries and other bills, forcing the two of them to go without many necessities and uprooting from their homes twice. Although keeping the phone on is not as essential as buying food, Davida realizes how that is her lifeline and the only method to ensure her father is doing okay. In a powerful statement Davida describes how hard she tried to maintain contact with her father, but her efforts are not enough to keep things afloat.

You know, and it's, like, in order to keep the phone on for me to keep on talking to him, and for my grandmother not to be worried, I mean, I actually went, as low as to where, like, one time I actually slept with a man for three hundred dollars to pay for the phone bill. That's the lowest I ever went in my life, and it's, like, I didn't ever tell my father that. But I'm bending over backwards trying to keep everything intact while he's not here, and by me being my age, it's hard, you know? I'm going through a hell of a life while he's not home (Braman 2004:80).

Davida has a lot of issues to deal with and barriers to overcome, but despite everything she is going through, having contact with her father is still a priority. Her commitment to her father, regardless of his status, portrays how essential it is to maintain familial contact through prison walls.

## **G. Delinquency**

Although there is no direct link between parental incarceration and juvenile delinquency, it is often a byproduct of the environment that is brought on by loosing a parent to criminal behavior. While Dannerbeck's (2005) research found support for a host of negative outcomes that are associated with parental incarceration, she was not able to prove that it could predict delinquent behavior. Rather, her study suggests that the incarceration of a parent has the strong potential to be a signal that a host of risk factors exist in the child's environment. Dannerbeck (2005) recommends that "given the

likelihood of having experienced other adverse life circumstances, they should be supplied with appropriate resources and supports to address their needs before they get far down the pathway to delinquency (211). Even though a causal relationship cannot be established, studies such as Trice and Brewster's (2004) observed a significant increase in delinquent behavior among children of incarcerated parents. The affected children had a soaring arrest rate of 34% compared to the rate of their best friends (15%) (32). Even if delinquency is found to be a secondary byproduct instead of a direct result, it does not discredit the effort that is needed to address the entire set of risk factors that these children experience.

#### **IV. Discussion**

The research on attachment stresses that the environment the child is brought up in has an immense impact on whether or not they are able to obtain secure attachments with their caretaker. At the same time studies on parental absence conclude that the number of parents a child has is not as important as the nature in which they are raised. What this means for children of incarcerated parents is that at the surface level there may be no incidence of negative outcomes if the child is securely attached to a caretaker and is raised in a structured and caring environment. Nevertheless, because the effects of incarceration are so comprehensive, it is very difficult for those characteristics to fall into place. The child may be unable to form secure attachments as an infant either because their primary caretaker is in prison themselves, or because the parent is not able to function under the high levels of stress from being a single parent. It is also possible that when children are cared for by relatives in the parent's absence, they receive love and affection but are not brought up in authoritative environments. The structure and

discipline of a household are just as important to a child's successful development as warmth and love. The optimal household in which attachments have the best chance of being formed is becoming more difficult to stay intact with the rising rates of non-residential parents coupled with the intensifying reliance on incarceration as the primary form of punishment. Therefore we can expect to see an increased amount of children exhibiting negative behaviors that are associated with poor attachments.

The reason for applying attachment theory research and parental absence research to the children of incarcerated parents, is to paint a comprehensive picture of the obstacles that these children must overcome. On a whole even the more visual encumbrances that these children face, such as academic difficulties or delinquency, do not garner a lot of attention. The effect that insecure attachments have on children is likely to not be discussed outside a psychology classroom, making it improbable that is recognized in children of incarcerated parents.

## **V. Future Recommendations**

As exemplified by Davida and Charles, there is substantial room for improvement to ensure that children of incarcerated parents are given the ability to develop into confident, compliant, emotionally and academically stable children, and later into conventional and productive adults. One such program that should be targeted at children of parents with substance abuse histories are drug prevention programs. The idea is to prevent the cycle of substance abuse and incarceration, especially in children who grew up in households where drugs and alcohol were normal occurrences.

There are quite a few programs whose implementation would reduce the risk factors that children face and would ease the transition when the parent re-enters the home post

incarceration. Visitation programs would allow children to maintain a level of attachment with their incarcerated parent, while improving the parent's behavior at the same time. This type of program has been seen to decrease the amount of violent inmate behaviors and increase the success of those recovering from substance abuse (Smith et al. 2004:188). Making prisons run more smoothly would be a great secondary result that would help policy makers put this program into practice. The superior benefit would be seen in the children, who would be able to maintain a relationship with a person who plays such a key role in their development.

In response to the confirmation that children of incarcerated parents are an especially vulnerable population, Congress passed the 2001 Amendments of the Safe and Stable Families Act. Within the act \$67 million dollars was appropriated to mentoring programs for children with incarcerated parents (Johnson and Waldfogel 2002:476). This bill is very significant because not only does it acknowledge that a problem exists, but it also takes a step in the right direction to undoing some of the detriments. The bill itself cites how the prevalence of children whose parents are in prison is increasing dramatically, and that the population often exhibits a broad variety of behavioral, emotional, health, and educational problems that are compounded by the pain of separation (107<sup>th</sup> U.S. Congress 2001-2002). It is justified to allocate resources to these specialized mentoring programs because of the studies that have proven its effectiveness.

Empirical research demonstrates that mentoring is a potent force for improving children's behavior across all risk behaviors affecting health. Quality, one-on-one relationships that provide young people with caring role models for future success have profound, life-changing potential (107<sup>th</sup> U.S. Congress 2001-2002).

Programs that aim to help children replace fragile bonds with strong, supportive relationships are taking a huge step in the right direction and need to be fortified so that their affects can be more widespread.

When parents are put away in prison, their ability to provide for their family is terminated. Approximately 70% of parents were working the month before their arrest causing a lack of financial support to their family at the start of their incarceration (Mumola 2000:9). While in prison, parents have no opportunity to support their family, which can have devastating affects as seen in the story of Davida. “Indeed, as currently practiced, incarceration not only provides offenders with an excuse for not contributing to the welfare of their families and communities, but it practically enforces their noncontribution” (Braman 2004:4). If prisoners were enrolled in a working program that sent home funds to their families, they would be able to feel a sense of connectedness and purpose as well as relieving some of the burden from the caretaker.

Currently, much of the aid provided to children comes from small non-profit organizations, such as Boston’s Aid to Incarcerated Mothers (AIM). These types of organizations usually receive their funding from federal grants and private donations. The work that they do is imperative to keeping prisoners connected with their families. Organizations such as AIM, like most non-profits, have little money to work with and a lot of people who would benefit from their services. In order for non-profit organizations to reach more people, they need to be more widespread throughout the country and given more funding. The services that they provide are necessary to keep families afloat and create awareness about the effects of incarceration.

Since the state and federal governments partially finance the non-profit organizations, shouldn't they be held accountable to implement a more widespread relief effort? Unfortunately the government already has the difficult job of solving the country's many problems, and people associated with criminals are usually not a priority. Government officials are also not as well versed in criminology, which is understandable since they cannot be experts in every field. Furthermore, public perception on hot topic issues, especially crime rates and the way offenders are punished, have an enormous influence on the public policy that is passed through our legislature. Billions of dollars are spent on the criminal justice system every year, so the issue is not lack of funds, but what the funds are used for. Money that is used to build more prison cells would see a more effective outcome if it was put towards a rehabilitative focus. Rehabilitating the offender is the first step, but the next step, which most people overlook, is rehabilitating the *families* of the offender. Incarceration is supposed to change an inmate's behavior for the better, but it has the opposite effect on their children. By creating a household that has lost its familial attachments and is filled with shame and isolation, risk factors for delinquency are imbedded in the prisoner's children.

If more programs tending to inmates and their families were developed, there would certainly be a public outcry that the government is too soft on crime. The public shares the opinion of politicians that putting more people in prison will prevent future criminal behavior. This has already been proven ineffective, making the notion of targeting at risk juveniles before they even become offenders the next logical step. Children who have parents in prison are great examples of at risk juveniles and are likely to exhibit criminal behavior because of the circumstances surrounding their parent's

incarceration. Once these juveniles already have a history of arrests it is not as easy to change their behavior. Like most government agencies, funding is tight and extra programs often get cut in order to stay under budget. If there is one thing the public does not approve of, it is paying extra taxes to benefit prisoners. This is a valid argument, but the investment is necessary to help prevent the next generation of strained criminals who could have had a better life. In order for this problem to be deemed worthy of a solution, the conditions surrounding parental incarceration need to be made public. This will cause people to start looking at not only the prisoners, but the families of the prisoners. In order to see improvements that would decrease recidivism and prevent affected children from being delinquent, the public's perception has to shift.

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## Appendix

SOURCE: Bretherton, Inge and Everett Waters. 1985. *Growing Points of Attachment Theory and Research*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press

STUDY: The Minnesota Mother-Child Interaction Project

HYPOTHESIS: Martha Erickson, Alan Sroufe and Byron Egeland sought to prove that children who were anxiously attached would be more likely to have behavior problems in preschool. They also examined exceptions to the predicted relationship. Specifically they sought to identify child, parental, and environmental factors that account for behavior problems in preschool children who were securely attached at 12 months as well as factors that account for functioning amount children who earlier had been anxiously attached.

METHOD: A sample of 267 pregnant mothers were selected from a public health clinic that were considered to be at risk for later caretaking problems. To assess the quality of attachment, all children were videotaped at 12 and 18 months with their mothers using Ainsworth's Strange Situation. Following that children were observed with their mothers, and mothers were asked to complete written surveys every 6 months to a year. When they reached the age of 4½ -5, 40 children attended a special laboratory school at the University of Minnesota, while 56 other children attended preschools throughout the metropolitan area. These 96 were observed in their preschool setting, in a variety of activities and the final data is based on this group of children.

VARIABLES: The independent variable is the level of child's attachment to the mother. The dependent variable is the occurrence of problem behaviors in preschool.

FINDINGS: The results of this study provided evidence of the importance of a secure attachment to a child's competent functioning in subsequent years. Children securely attached as infants were found to be more ego resilient, independent, compliant, empathetic, and socially competent; they had greater self-esteem and expressed more positive affect and less negative affect than did children who were anxiously attached as infants. Children who exhibited anxious/avoidant patterns of attachment in infancy were described by preschool teachers as hostile, socially isolated, and/or disconnected. Such a child has difficulty relating to others and carries an underlying anger that he or she has not learned to express directly. Children who had been anxious/resistant in infancy were described by preschool teachers as impulsive, tense, helpless and/or fearful. These traits are consistent with ambivalent/inconsistent or over-involved caretaking. For children who were insecurely attached at 12 months, but showed competent functioning at preschool age, the mother's behavior was shown to be the independent variable that caused this change. Mothers of anxiously attached children who did not have behavior problems were more supportive, provided clear and firm structure, consistent limits, and were less hostile.

SIGNIFICANCE: The significance of attachment theory and how it affects infants is important because maladaptions that arise in the early years do not disappear, but just take on a different form. Children who successfully move from one developmental stage to the next are able to function more independently and are able to experiment with new environments and communication methods. Consequently, toddlers who are able to move towards more autonomous functioning are equipped to have positive social exchanges and a mastery of object skills, all which lead to successful peer relations

during the preschool age. This pattern of development applies to maladaptive circumstances as well, meaning that pronounced difficulties with impulse control, aggression, and other antisocial behaviors may be linked to adaptational failures during earlier periods.

LIMITATIONS: The levels of attachment for this study are based solely on mother-child relationships and do not take into account relationships with other family members or household environment. Although this study was published over two decades ago, I do not feel that this compromises the findings.

SOURCE: Belsky, Jay and Teresa Nezworski. 1988. *Clinical Implications of Attachment*. Hillside, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates

DIRECTION OF STUDY: The book sets out to show that attachment theory and research have significance in the clinical setting by illustrating how the level of attachment an infant has in his/her earliest year, will predict behavior as far as the school-age years

METHOD: The editors of the book compiled papers from scholars, in addition to their own writing, based on two research reports that indicated a possible link between insecure attachment and the subsequent development of child behavior problems.

FINDINGS: Bowlby's theory of attachment, which states that a child's attachment to their caregiver provides them with a secure base from which they are able to experience and explore their surroundings. A child who is securely attached will exhibit different expectations and levels of confidence than a child who is insecurely attached. Bowlby concluded that this sequence of events in a child's early development, and the relationships that it leads to have an important influence on later development.

SIGNIFICANCE: The literature from this source references the study conducted by Erickson, Sroufe and Egeland (presented in *Growing Points of Attachment Theory and Research*) as a highly significant piece of research that has placed emphasis on the continuity in socioemotional development.

LIMITATIONS: This review of attachment literature does not present any original studies, but discusses existing theories and research. The book also does not focus on the greater context of a child's environment or what may be the causing the mother to produce insecure attachments with her child. Although it was published in 1988, I do not feel that the literature or the context is outdated.

SOURCE: Demuth, Stephen and Susan Brown. 2004. "Family Structure, Family Processes, and Adolescent Delinquency: The Significance of Parental Absence Versus Parental Gender." *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency* 41(1):58-81.

HYPOTHESIS: Is it the absence of a parent in general or the absence of a father in particular that tends to contribute to higher levels of delinquency among adolescents in single parent families relative to adolescents in two parent families?

METHOD: The data is derived from the 1995 National Longitudinal Survey of Adolescent Health, which is a nationally representative sample of more than 20,000 adolescents from grades 7 through 12. In this study the authors specifically look at the 16,305 adolescents who are residing in two-biological-parent married-couple families (n=9,505), single-mother families (n=3,792), single-father families (n=525), mother-

stepfather families (n=2,039), and father-stepmother families (n=443). The information from this data set includes extensive measures of delinquency that range in seriousness, and several dimensions of family processes.

VARIABLE: The independent variable is family structure, which is broken down into physical structure (number and gender of parents) and level of parental controls.

The dependent variable is the adolescents' delinquency which is measured by self-reported data on involvement in various levels of criminal activities in the past year.

FINDINGS: Adolescents in single-father families had the highest levels of delinquency, followed by single-mother families and families with two-biological married parents being the lowest. Indirect controls were found to have a much greater affect on delinquency than direct controls. Parental absence, whether it is the mother or the father, is not associated with delinquency after taking into account differences in child and parent characteristics and family processes in the five family types.

SIGNIFICANCE: Indirect controls, such as parent closeness and attachment had a larger effect on delinquency than the direct controls of parent involvement, supervision and monitoring. Parental absence is thought to cause delinquency because there is less opportunity to implement direct controls.

LIMITATIONS: Self-reported data brings about the opportunity for under representation and incorrect responses.

SOURCE: Kirkpatrick, D. Charles, Steve Duck and Megan Foley. 2006. *Relating Difficulty: The Process of Constructing and Managing Difficult Interaction*. Mahway, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

DIRECTION OF STUDY: Exploring the challenges that are involved in relationships where the parent lives outside the household.

METHOD: A review of the literature on parent absent households and how it affects children.

FINDINGS: The amount of time shared between a nonresidential parent (NRP) and his children is not enough on its own to produce a stronger relationship. When the NRP does get to spend time with his children, it must include authoritative parenting which involves acts such as enforcing discipline and doing homework. One study that was reviewed found that authoritative parenting positively affects a wide range of child outcomes from academic achievement to the presence of depression and delinquency.

SIGNIFICANCE: The positive outcomes that effective parenting produces, will not occur when the parent and child only engage in limited activities. In order for attachment to develop, the characteristics of the relationship must be multi-faceted and include deeper experiences such as talking about personal problems and not just playing baseball.

LIMITATIONS: The literature focuses on divorce which does not have the same implications and surrounding characteristics as parental incarceration.

SOURCE: Simons, Ronald, Leslie Simmons and Lora Wallace. 2004. *Families, Delinquency, and Crime: Linking Society's Most Basic Institution to Antisocial Behavior*. Los Angeles, CA: Roxbury Publishing Company

DIRECTION OF STUDY: Examining the link between family life and antisocial behavior exhibited in adolescents.

METHOD: Arguments from Michael Gottfredson, Travis Hirschi, and Diana Baumrind are presented in their social learning, social bonding and typology of parenting styles theories.

FINDINGS: Hirschi and Gottfredson conclude that all individuals are low in self-control and attached to crime. In order to attain self-control it must be taught by parenting styles which contain support and nurture as well as structure and discipline. In Baumrind's theory an authoritative parenting style is optimal because it combines a warm and caring environment with firm rules and discipline that are communicated in a reasonable manner. Without effective forms of parenting, the child has an increased chance of experiencing child conduct problems, adolescent delinquency and adult crime.

SIGNIFICANCE: These theories suggest that ineffective parenting allows children to drift into peer groups that encourage delinquency, while a child's defiant tendencies make antisocial behavior more attractive. Ineffective parenting is often caused by high stress situations and impaired psychological functioning experienced by many single mothers. Mothers who become single parents as a result of incarceration have the deck stacked against them when trying to establish meaningful bonds with their children, while providing for their basic needs at the same time.

LIMITATIONS: Broader social forces that have influences on delinquency, such as lack of occupational opportunity, living in a disadvantaged neighborhood, and stressful life events, are not addressed. This book also relies more heavily on theoretical arguments rather than statistical and ethnographic information.

SOURCE: Mumola, Christopher. "Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report, Incarcerated Parents and Their Children." August 2000.  
<<http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/pub/pdf/iptc.pdf>>.

DIRECTION OF STUDY: Provides raw statistical data on the lives of children, mothers and fathers concerning many facets, such as prevalence, contact, prior living arrangements, substance abuse, mental illness, prior employment, offense typology, and current caregivers.

METHOD: Data in this report are based on personal interviews conducted through the 1997 Surveys of Inmates in State and Federal Correctional Facilities.

FINDINGS: The report found that in 1999 an estimated 721,500 state and federal prisoners were parents to 1,498,800 children, which has increased by 500,000 children since 1991. Children lived with their parent in about half of the cases (64% of the time for mothers and 44% of the time for fathers) prior to their incarceration. When the father was incarcerated, the mother became the primary caretaker 90% of the time. When mothers are incarcerated, the children's father becomes the caretaker 28% of the time, making the grandparents the predominant caretaker (50%). Weekly contact with their children was received by fathers 40% of the time, and 60% for mothers. The prevalence of drug use the month before the offense was 58%, and 32% of mothers admitted to committing their crime to obtain drugs or to get money for drugs. The report reveals that approximately 1 in 7 parents reported indications of mental illness. About 50% of parents said that they were making over \$1,000 a month before they became incarcerated.

SIGNIFICANCE: The data from this report reveal that the amount of children with incarcerated parents is increasing exponentially, warranting a response more than ever before. The statistics show us that these children are likely to have experienced ineffective parenting in the forms of substance abuse and mental illness. The report also portrays how incarcerated parents are responsible for their children prior to their imprisonment, being both caretakers and financial supporters. It is important to realize the even parents with criminal behavior are capable of functioning in provider roles. When that parent is removed, alternative arrangements must be made for the children, especially when the mother is incarcerated. The statistics show how maternal incarceration results in a bleaker situation since mothers more often care for their children before they are imprisoned, and can only rely on the father to become the caretaker 30% of the time.

LIMITATIONS: Although this report was published in 2000, the majority of its statistics were gathered from surveys in 1997. The numbers in this survey are increasingly becoming outdated and there has not been an updated study of its kind. Also the data is purely objective and does not present any qualitative findings, nor does it attempt to draw any conclusions.

SOURCE: Smith, Aaron, Kerry Krisman, Anne Strozier and Marsha Marley. 2004. "Breaking Through the Bars: Exploring the Experiences of Addicted Incarcerated Parents Whose Children Are Cared for by Relatives." *Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Social Services* 85(2):187-195.

DIRECTION OF STUDY: To study parents who are incarcerated and recovering from substance abuse issues and whose children are being taken care of by relatives. Issues such as parent-child bonding, relationships with caregivers, and the impact of drug abuse and incarceration on the family are explored.

METHOD: A sample of 5 male and 20 female jail inmates were selected from participants in a substance abuse class. They were interviewed in a one-on-one setting and answered 39 open ended questions.

FINDINGS: The mean duration of the participants' substance abuse is 12.6 years. 80% of respondents indicated that they felt drugs and alcohol had negatively affected their family. A grandmother is taking care of the children 76% of the time. The caregiver began taking care of the prisoners' children before they became imprisoned 60% of the cases. This care was continuous rather than intermittent 76% of the time. 72% of prisoners had not received a visit from their child, but 52% had communicated by phone or letters.

SIGNIFICANCE: Drug abuse occurred over many years for a majority of the respondents, inferring a more long term negative impact on their parenting skills and relationships with their children. Increased contact between parents and children would benefit both parties.

LIMITATIONS: This study has limited generalizability because of the small size and specificity of the sample. The generalizability is especially limited since most of the participants are women, while the majority of incarcerated parents are men.

SOURCE: Dannerbeck, Anne. 2005. "Differences in Parenting Attributes, Experiences, and Behaviors of Delinquent Youth With and Without a Parental History of Incarceration." *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice* 3(3): 199-213.

HYPOTHESES: 1) Youth with a parental incarceration history experience lower levels of effective parenting and greater association with factors that can impede ability to parent, namely parental substance abuse and mental illness. 2) Youth who have parents with an incarceration history will be more likely to experience negative effects of ineffective parenting, namely abuse and out-of-home placement. 3) Youth with a parental incarceration history will have longer and more serious delinquent histories of their own. 4) Parental incarceration history is a predictor of delinquent youth.

METHOD: The data used for this study was derived from juveniles who encountered the Missouri Juvenile and Family Courts in 2001. Information was collected from 1,112 adolescents during in-person interviews with a trained juvenile officer.

INDEPENDENT VARIABLE: The independent variable is whether or not one of their parents had experienced incarceration. The dependent variable is the level of effective parenting (substance abuse/mental illness), child abuse, out of home placements, delinquent histories, and delinquent behavior.

FINDINGS: This study found support for the first three hypotheses, but not the fourth.

SIGNIFICANCE: This study shows that parental incarceration by itself does not predict juvenile delinquency. Rather having a parent with a history of incarceration causes the child to be exposed to clusters of risk factors, while erasing protective factors.

LIMITATIONS: Data was based on self-reports and was not cross checked, with the exception of criminal records. This may cause some of the risk factors to be underreported or misreported.

SOURCE: Travis, Jeremy and Michelle Waul. 2003. *Prisoners Once Removed*. Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute Press.

DIRECTION OF STUDY: The effect of maternal incarceration on children's experiences in the home, school and community.

METHOD: This study looks at 58 children, ages 13 to 19 whose mothers were incarcerated in a Virginia state prison. The caretakers filled out a questionnaire regarding the children's behavior. As a control group, the parents of the children's best friends filled out the same survey.

FINDINGS: The findings indicate that 36% of children dropped out of school and 34% had been arrested in the previous 12 months. The drop-out rate for the best friend group is 7% and the arrest rate is 15%. The children who have the least amount of contact with their incarcerated mother have four times higher suspension rates than those in the high contact group.

SIGNIFICANCE: Children with incarcerated mothers fare much worse at school and in the community than their peer counterparts. The importance of contact between the incarcerated parent and the child is emphasized by the increased academic performance by those who had the most contact with their mothers.

LIMITATIONS: There are great problems with the generalizability of the study because of the small sample size and the surveying of only incarcerated mothers and children between the ages of 13 through 19.

SOURCE: Braman, Donald. 2004. *Doing Time on the Outside*. Ann Harbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press.

DIRECTION OF STUDY: The hidden hardships that incarceration puts on the family members of the imprisoned, such as stigmatization, depression, poverty, behavioral problems, and juvenile delinquency.

METHOD: This book employs a combination of literature reviews and ethnographies. The author conducts in-person interviews with 11 families and provides a detailed account of their backgrounds and how incarceration impacts their lives.

FINDINGS: The families he studied often experienced cyclic periods of adversity that paralleled the family members' relapse and/or reincarceration. Braman also discovered a pattern of social silence where family members were very closed off about the situations of their loved ones.

SIGNIFICANCE: The remaining family members' unwillingness to let others know about their situation causes additional problems such as isolation, depression, and lack of support. This is also evident in children who are shown to withdraw from their peers at school. A defense mechanism like withdrawal exacerbates the already difficult situation for children with incarcerated parents, at a time when they need support the most.

LIMITATIONS: The subjects that the author selects to illustrate are likely to experience much greater hardships than the average family that deals with incarceration. There is no scale to judge how the portrayals fit within the rest of the families in America. The generalizability is limited for because of the small sample size and because only families from one specific geographic location are interviewed.