Children of Incarcerated Parents
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Children of Incarcerated Parents

Theoretical, Developmental, and Clinical Issues

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The desire to produce this edited book developed from our many conversations with friends and colleagues on the plight of children with parents in the United States criminal justice system. We were disturbed by their numbers—there are over 1.5 million children under the age of 18 with parents in the criminal justice system; the racial disparities—African American children comprise 53% of that number, followed by Caucasian children (23%) and Latino children (23%); the lack of attention to their persistent adverse developmental and clinical outcomes—low self esteem, depression, decrease in academic performance; and the overall inconsistent focus on their life challenges and general well-being. Thus, our major goal in creating this book was to stimulate discourse among a diverse group of social scientists, to pose questions and offer suggestions on research directions for children of incarcerated parents, and at some level to influence public policy and public opinion on this frequently marginalized group of children.

To this end, we assembled an esteemed group of social scientists with expertise on theory, developmental trajectories, neighborhood issues, challenges inherent in parenting from prison, reunification, legislative concerns, and service planning and intervention.

It is our desire that *Children of Incarcerated Parents: Theoretical, Developmental, and Clinical Issues* will serve as a comprehensive source for psychologists, educators, students, researchers, and policy makers who work with (or will work with) or pursue research on children of incarcerated parents, as well as the frontline responders who provide immediate assistance to these children.
We would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the many people who helped to make this book possible.

Thanks to our family and friends for their love and encouragement. We appreciate your belief in our having the vision to create this textbook. We thank you for keeping us grounded through the editing and writing process.

We would like to extend our sincere appreciation to the authors and publishers whose works are included in this text. We are grateful for your courage to investigate topics on children of incarcerated parents and their families. Your work served an instrumental role in the creation of this volume.

We would also like to thank our respective universities (Miami University, The College of New Jersey, and Northern Kentucky University) for providing us with the time and resources to complete such an undertaking.

Thanks to the editorial, production, and marketing staff at Springer Publishing Company. We value your time and expertise in making this text possible.

Finally, a big thanks to Sheri W. Sussman, our editor at Springer Publishing Company. This book could not be possible without your editorial feedback, guidance, and belief in our work.
Over the past 15 years, numerous studies from a variety of academic disciplines have examined the impact of parental incarceration on children (see Johnston, 1995; Parke & Clarke-Stewart, 2002; Braman, 2004; Travis, 2005; and Farrington & Welsh, 2007 for reviews). Given the increasing growth in the nation's prison population, it is important to examine the potential impact of parental incarceration on children. Regardless of how one feels about the criminal justice system in America, it is evident that parental incarceration disrupts families emotionally, socially, and financially.

Children of incarcerated parents (CIP) are a subset of American children at risk for anti-social and delinquent behavior. The level of risk may vary in children of prisoners compared to children in the general population. Assuming a normal distribution for both populations, Figure 1.1 shows some children are less at-risk and some are more at-risk, with the majority being in-between; however, the CIP fall into a higher-risk zone.

Due to the societal challenges and informational demands, an examination of demographic characteristics of parental incarceration is relevant to developmental scientists for two major reasons. First, there is a dramatic increase in the number of children growing up without a parent due to incarceration. Many children face varying amounts of
time without their parents; thus it is important to examine the developmental trajectories that these children experience prior to their parents' incarceration, during imprisonment, and upon reunification with them. Second, parental incarceration is a multifaceted issue that encompasses varying layers of complexity, from individual to dyadic, familial, community, and societal. The impact of parental incarceration on children is studied from a variety of disciplines, theories, and methodologies. Given the complexity of this issue, it is important to continually add to, modify, and enhance research on the impact of parental incarceration on children. We explore these concerns throughout this volume. In this introductory chapter, we start with a brief review of the Bureau of Justice Statistics report on the demographic trends of incarcerated parents and their children. One should carefully examine such reports often because they often focus on the parental perspective of incarceration, rather than the child's perception of having an incarcerated parent. A common limitation of much of the work in the field is that it fails to account for the bidirectional perspectives of the incarcerated parent and the child. In this chapter, we discuss this issue as well as other conceptual and methodological biases inherent in research on children of incarcerated

Figure 1.1 Normal distributions for all children at risk and CIP at risk.
INCREASES IN THE NUMBER OF CHILDREN GROWING UP WITHOUT A PARENT DUE TO INCARCERATION


Population Statistics

According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), a leading source of information pertaining to reports on incarcerated parents, an estimated 809,800 prisoners of approximately 1.5 million held in the nation’s prisons at the middle of 2007 were parents of minor children (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008). Parents held in the nation’s prisons—52% of state inmates and 63% of federal inmates—reported having an estimated 1,706,600 minor children, accounting for 2.3% of the U.S. resident population under age 18 (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008). The percentage of incarcerated parents of minor children increased by 79% from 1991 to the middle of 2007 (see Figure 1.2).

Age

According to estimates by the Bureau of Justice Statistics, over 700,000 children will reach the age of 18 while their parents are incarcerated. The percentage of minor children with a parent in state or federal prison is greatest among children from birth to 9 years, followed by 10- to 17-year-olds (see Table 1.1). Parents between 25 to 35 years old were more likely held in state and federal prisons, followed by prisoners ages 35 to 44, and 24 years and younger.
Figure 1.2 Estimated number of parents in state and federal prisons and their minor children. Bureau of Justice Statistics (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008).
Chapter 1  The Changing Landscape in the American Prison Population

Race and Ethnicity

As Figure 1.3 depicts, Black children are approximately 8 times more likely, and Hispanic children are nearly 3 times more likely, than white children to have an incarcerated parent (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008). Out of the 1.5 million children with an incarcerated father, nearly half are black. Approximately 200,000 children have an incarcerated mother. These mothers were more likely to be white (45%), followed by Black (30%) and Hispanic (19%). There is a disproportionate representation among black and Hispanic children with incarcerated parents. These data must be carefully interpreted, as higher numbers may be a reflection of larger societal issues (such as poverty, urbanization, and discrimination) rather than just a problem among certain social groups.

Gender

The impact of parental incarceration on a child may differ depending on the gender of the parent and the child. A child’s experiences of separation from a mother may vary from the child’s experiences of paternal separation. The nation’s federal and state prisons held approximately 744,200 fathers and 65,600 mothers in the middle of 2007. According to Glaze and Maruschak (2008), since 1991 the number of children with a mother in prison has more than doubled, and the paternal incarceration statistics demonstrate a 77% increase. How does the difference in incarceration rates among mothers and fathers affect the living arrangements of their children?

Table 1.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age of Minor Child</th>
<th>Children of Parents in State Prison (Age Group Percentages)</th>
<th>Children of Parents in Federal Prison (Age Group Percentages)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total Male Female</td>
<td>Total Male Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 1 year</td>
<td>2.4 2.5 1.6</td>
<td>0.7 0.7 1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1–4 years</td>
<td>20 20.3 16.7</td>
<td>15.1 15.3 12.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5–9 years</td>
<td>30.2 30.3 29.1</td>
<td>33.8 34 30.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10–14 years</td>
<td>31.6 31.4 33.8</td>
<td>35.1 35 35.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15–17 years</td>
<td>15.8 15.5 18.8</td>
<td>15.3 15 20.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Family Structure

The number of children with incarcerated parents has increased dramatically over the years. In the month before their arrest or just prior to imprisonment, 64% of mothers held in state prisons and
approximately 50% of incarcerated fathers reported living with their minor children. In the month before their mothers’ arrest, children were much more likely to be financially supported by their mothers and living in a single-parent household than children with incarcerated fathers.

The impact of parental incarceration on children may vary depending on whether or not the parent lived with them prior to incarceration. Incarcerated parents differed in their reports of who were the primary caretakers of their children prior to their arrest. Incarcerated fathers were more likely to report mothers as being the primary caretaker of their children in the month before arrest. As shown in Table 1.2, incarcerated mothers were more likely to report that they were the primary providers for their children before arrest, and they were more likely to report that grandmothers (42%) or other relatives (23%) are the current caretakers of their children (Mumola, 2000; Glaze & Maruschak, 2008). Regardless of age, race/ethnicity, gender, or living arrangements, most incarcerated parents influence the emotional, social, and financial lives of their children in some way.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Children’s Current Caregiver</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Other parent</td>
<td>84.2</td>
<td>88.4</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grandparent</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>44.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grandmother</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>42.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grandfather</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other relatives</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>22.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foster home or agency</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>10.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends, others*</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estimated number of parents</td>
<td></td>
<td>636,300</td>
<td>585,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in state prison</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>51,100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Includes all parents with minor children. Detail may sum to more than 100% because some prisoners had multiple minor children living with multiple caregivers.

*Includes inmate’s friends, friends of the inmate’s children, cases where the parent reported that the child now lived alone, and others.
CONCEPTUAL AND METHODOLOGICAL BIASES IN RESEARCH ON CHILDREN OF INCARCERATED PARENTS

Systematic investigations of research concerning children of incarcerated parents are limited. A review of the literature suggests a range of historical and ongoing concerns regarding the methods used in studies of children with an incarcerated parent.

Conceptual Biases

Children of incarcerated parents are considered an at-risk population, but not all of these children are at-risk (Johnston, 1995), and if they are at-risk it may be for different reasons among children (Phillips, Erkanli, Costello, & Angold, 2007; Phillips & Erkanli, 2008). Research on children of incarcerated parents typically recruit participants from high-risk environments characterized by poverty, crime, urbanization, and the like. Such narrow recruitment methods and limited social contexts minimize the amount of work on normative development and mutes potentially positive developmental outcomes in children (McLoyd, 1998).

Unfortunately, delinquency and negative developmental outcomes have been the main focal point of much of the research in this arena. There is an inclination to believe that children of incarcerated parents are more likely to end up in prison because they are following their parents’ example. There is no clear empirical evidence to support this claim; however, a lot of research and legislative reform uses this ideology to guide public policy decisions.

As reported earlier in this chapter, parental incarceration is more common among black and Hispanic children compared to white children even though children from all socioeconomic classes and ethnicities experience parental incarceration. Researchers and social service agencies need to be aware of the connection between discrimination and other social issues inherent in the criminal justice system, housing, education, and employment sectors, which place these groups of color at differing levels of risk for incarceration.

Methodological Constraints

Historically, much of the research on understudied populations, such as children of incarcerated parents, is confounded in a number of ways. Unfortunately, methodological limitations, such as deficiencies in validity
and reliability, continue to trouble research today. We briefly explore these two issues in the sections to follow.

As Harris and Graham (2007) point out, attempts to increase internal validity often enhance the “scientific rigor” of the research, but it often comes at a price—a decrease in external validity. This demand for internal validity makes it more challenging to conduct scientifically rigorous research with certain populations. Researchers who work with some understudied populations, such as African American children or children of incarcerated parents, may encounter difficulties with recruiting participants, developing valid measures, using valid theories, and training research assistants to be culturally sensitive (Sue, 1999). These factors may discourage many social scientists to initiate empirical investigations that examine complex developmental and clinical issues among children of incarcerated parents.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, much of the research views the child of an incarcerated parent from a homogenous rather than a heterogeneous perspective. We need more research to uncover the complexities of CIP, but it is just as important to create a knowledge base that extends beyond the stereotypical urban, lower-income community of color. We need to create a more balanced representation of the child of an incarcerated parent, one that includes varying socio-economic, educational, and residential backgrounds. According to McLoyd (1998), the external validity of many studies on understudied groups is highly variable because of the lack of specification of many demographic variables of the participants (including the white comparison group). Because there is a widening divide among children of incarcerated parents, it is important that research provide objective specification of demographics (such as race, ethnic origin, social class, gender, neighborhood, etc.), given the cultural complexity of parental incarceration, even in race-homogenous studies.

An additional methodological constraint is the type of research design that one chooses to use in the examination of the influence of parental incarceration on child development. Most social scientists fall within two camps: one group primarily employs quantitative methodologies, and the other approaches research from a qualitative perspective. The study of parental incarceration on child development is interdisciplinary. The research in the field has focused on the interaction of a variety of disciplines, such as anthropology, biology, education, juvenile justice, psychology, social work, and sociology. An interdisciplinary examination of child development can provide insight into various pathways of development
often overlooked by a one-dimensional focus of study, such as the use of methods or designs that are only quantitative or only qualitative. The utilization of both quantitative and qualitative research approaches (e.g., case study, ethnography, focus groups, surveys) may be helpful in the study of child development (Sue, 1999) and may be particularly relevant to CIP because the field is ripe for both basic and applied research.

The reliability of some research in the field of children with incarcerated parents is highly variable. To minimize such variability, many leaders and organizations that focus on parental incarceration and child development are creating initiatives to address the growing need for more reliable research in the field. Because of some of these initiatives, Bouchet (2007) reports on key issues that hinder reliability of studies on children of incarcerated parents.

In general, the reliability challenges faced in CIP studies revolve around three areas: (1) research, (2) practice, and (3) public policy. Research needs to address some key challenges (Bouchet, 2007). First, it is difficult to gather information about children with incarcerated parents because the population is virtually invisible for several reasons, such as stigma, lack of communication among social service agencies, and limited definition of “family” from the U.S. criminal justice system. Second, many studies that generalize to the population of children of incarcerated parents may be largely based on reports from correctional agencies that solely focus on the parent’s perspective (rather than parent and child), while the sample sizes in others studies may be too small or outdated. Third, there is no consistent method of data collection on the characteristics of children and incarcerated parents. Furthermore, there is not a central repository of reliable data sources that can be shared with persons interested in this topic area to raise public awareness or to promote advocacy.

Some may question the reliability of some studies on children of incarcerated parents because of the challenges associated with practice and public policy. In terms of service delivery and practice, many social service agencies grapple with several issues relating to children of incarcerated parents. These agencies have limited funding, which makes it difficult to create a quality program that addresses the needs of children with incarcerated parents while concurrently working to maintain the integrity of their other social service programs (Bouchet, 2007). Many social service agencies and practitioners lack the cultural knowledge to provide adequate assistance to this heterogeneous group of children and their families. The lack of revenue among some agencies may exacerbate
the problem; agencies may not have adequate resources to provide cultural training for workers in their incarceration programs.

Reliable interventions and research may be difficult due to the nature of the topic. Some parents, children, and families may be reluctant to take advantage of services due to the social stigma, shame, and fear (Bouchet, 2007).

Public policy and system reform movements in this area face a number of challenges that may influence the reliability of work done in this field. In order to move forward in this area, advocates, politicians, and legislators need to base their efforts on and gather knowledge from reliable sources of information. There are a number of challenges in this arena. There is a lack of public awareness or education on the impact of parental incarceration on children. Many incarcerated parents do not clearly understand the parental termination risks associated with incarceration under the Federal Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997. Moreover, creating partnerships with correctional institutions and their constituents (such as guards, social workers, psychologists, and unions) may pose as a barrier to policy reform. A final issue impeding progress and the reliability of reform in parental incarceration is determining which level of entry is best—the federal, state, or local level?

The purpose of this chapter is to identify fundamental issues facing research on children of incarcerated parents, rather than to provide an in-depth analysis of the topic. Research and policy decisions are mired in controversy, in the absence of valid and reliable data on children and families of incarcerated parents. In addition, the lack of a common knowledge base that contains scientifically sound research on the impact of parental incarceration and effective interventions poses a threat to research and work in this area (Christian, 2009).

**ORGANIZATION OF THE VOLUME**

This volume is divided into five parts. The chapters provide detailed information from a variety of developmental and clinical perspectives to shed light on this complex and increasingly significant topic. The chapters in this edited volume offer a mixture of basic and applied research using varying methodologies (e.g., quantitative, qualitative), theoretical frameworks, and experiences with this phenomenon at individual, community, state, and national levels. The contributors to this edited book offer illuminating and practical insights into the world of children
Part I: Framework

This section provides the overall rationale for the book, and begins with an introduction and overview of the material to be covered in subsequent chapters.

Chapter 1: The Changing Landscape in the American Prison Population: Implications for Children of Incarcerated Parents

Graham, Harris, and Oliver Carpenter begin with a discussion of the demographic trends of parental incarceration and the percentages of children, by race and age, with parents who are currently incarcerated in jails and state and federal prisons. The chapter continues with a brief overview of the conceptual and methodological limitations of research on the developmental outcomes for children with incarcerated parents.


Chapter 2, by Holmes, Belmonte, Wentworth, and Tillman, presents a discussion of the theoretical models guiding the research and intervention programs for children with incarcerated parents. The chapter answers such questions as: How is the problem conceptualized? Who is the focus of the intervention? and What are the factors that promote risk and resiliency in these children?

Part II: Developmental Trajectories

The two chapters in the second part of the book focus on describing the developmental outcomes of children (including school-age and adolescents) with incarcerated parents. The section includes chapters that address such questions as: (1) What are the effects of parental arrest, incarceration, and re-entry on children’s developmental outcomes?
Chapter 1  The Changing Landscape in the American Prison Population

(2) How do they cope (both positively and negatively) with parental arrest, incarceration, and preparation by parents to re-enter the parenting role? (3) How do parental arrest, incarceration, and re-entry impact children's education, their social-emotional development, their peer relationships, and their sibling relationships? (4) How is the parent-child attachment relationship altered because of parental arrest, incarceration, and re-entry into the parenting role?

Chapter 3: Children of Incarcerated Parents: Developmental Trajectories Among School-Age Children

Chapter 3 by Naudeau focuses on the developmental trajectory of school-age children. According to statistics released by the Department of Justice (2007), over 50% of the children with incarcerated parents are infants under the age of 10. Their developmental outcomes significantly differ from those of adolescents. Naudeau discusses the negative and the positive outcomes that children and families are likely to experience during all phases of parental incarceration. Using a positive development perspective, the chapter discusses how school-age children of incarcerated parents may grow from the experience when provided with adequate support.

Chapter 4: Children of Promise

In Chapter 4, Boudin and Zeller-Berkman provide information on the experiences of adolescents with incarcerated parents. Some evidence suggests that parental incarceration may predispose adolescents to juvenile incarceration, and they may experience such problems as school suspensions, truancy, and a high dropout rate. The chapter discusses the adolescents’ experiences with parental incarceration, and details their reactions as the parent is arrested, incarcerated, and released from prison. This chapter reports the findings from three studies that explore key supportive relationships in the lives of adolescents with incarcerated mothers and the role of the adolescents themselves in coping with the challenges.

Part III: Environmental Considerations

Part III focuses on children of incarcerated parents and consists of two chapters. Chapters 4 and 5 discuss the community effects and familial living arrangements of children of incarcerated parents, as well as challenges encountered in these environmental contexts.
Chapter 5: The Effects of Incarceration on Neighborhoods and Communities

Chapter 5 by Chung and McFadden reviews two lines of research that help to explain the consequences of incarceration for communities and the children living in them: (1) the effects of mass imprisonment on community functioning, and (2) community-level effects on child development. The chapter recommends programmatic efforts during imprisonment and reintegration to promote healthy child development in high-incarceration areas.

Chapter 6: Living Arrangements of Children of Incarcerated Parents: The Roles of Stability, Embeddedness, Gender, and Race/Ethnicity

In Chapter 6, Foster first reviews literature on child living arrangements prior to and during parental incarceration, with particular attention to parental gender and race/ethnicity. The second part presents new research on how living arrangements influence parental expectations of living with their children upon release from prison from a Texas dataset. The findings include information on children of both incarcerated mothers and fathers from African American, Hispanic, and non-Hispanic white groups.

Part IV: Parenting from Prison

Part IV discusses the effective clinical interventions and programs that help children to develop resiliency and coping strategies. This section concludes with a chapter on programs that focus on rebuilding the parent-child relationship.

Chapter 7: Building Partnerships to Strengthen Families: Intervention Programs and Recommendations

In Chapter 7, Toth and Kazura highlight programs that help parents reconnect with their children and improve parenting skills, and that help provide services to other family members to help incarcerated parents transition back into the community and reunite with their children successfully. This chapter serves as a catalyst for an examination of matters related to children's visitation programs and the long-term impact on developmental adjustment.
Chapter 8: Strengthening Parent-Child Relationships: Visit Coaching with Children and Their Incarcerated Parents

In Chapter 8, Beyer, Blumenthal-Guigui, and Krupat describe how visit coaching and family centers in prisons and jails offer an attachment-based, culturally competent developmental framework to help incarcerated parents and children’s caregivers better understand and meet the needs of their children and manage the uncertainties about the future due to incarceration. In addition, they discuss ways to support children in navigating their relationship with their incarcerated parent.

Part V: Current and Future Directions

This section begins with a discussion of the controversial Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997, which mandates termination of parental rights after a length of time of parental absence. The section continues with a discussion of the various national-, state-, and community-level programs designed for children with incarcerated parents. The section concludes with suggestions for next steps in research, intervention, legislation, and social policy for children of incarcerated parents.


Chapter 9 by Beckerman discusses variability in how child welfare agencies and correctional facilities deal with incarcerated parents and their families, and how legislation affects the well-being and developmental outcomes of children. In addition, the chapter describes the findings of a recent study of foster care caseworkers who manage cases of children with incarcerated parents.

Chapter 10: Service Planning and Intervention Development for Children of Incarcerated Parents

Chapter 10 by Phillips discusses national-, state-, and community-level programs that are available for children with incarcerated parents. The chapter describes the strengths and limitations in service planning and intervention development efforts for children of incarcerated parents from two frameworks: (1) a procedural justice perspective and (2) a developmental epidemiology perspective.
Chapter 11: The Challenges of Family Reunification

Harris, et al., discuss the challenges inherent in family reunification. They specifically address the challenges that the re-entering mother faces, as well as those of the children and their current caregivers. The chapter proposes components necessary for family reunification and closes with suggestions for framing research directions and questions on family reunification in the twenty-first century.

Chapter 12: Research and Intervention Issues for Moving Forward with Development in Children of Incarcerated Parents

The volume closes with Chapter 12, with a reflection by Oliver Carpenter, Graham, and Harris on the status of science, practice, and policy on children with incarcerated parents. The chapter includes a summary of the information presented in previous chapters, continues with a discussion of the issues that remain unaddressed, and concludes with recommendations for new directions with reference to legislation, social policy, and programs that impact the quality of life for children of incarcerated parents.

REFERENCES


