

Responding to the Needs of Children and Families of the Incarcerated: Implications for Public Health



APHA Philadelphia 2009
Ann Adalist-Estrin, M.S.
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on Children and Families of the Incarcerated
at FCN

Presenter Disclosures

Ann Adalist-Estrin

"No relationships to disclose"

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Numbers Talk

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

One in 43 American children has a parent in prison.

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

An estimated 7-10 million children have or have had a parent under some form of correctional supervision in their lifetime.

The Sentencing Project 2009



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Concerned Responses

After many years of advocacy, it is finally registering to the American public that having a parent go to jail or prison effects a lot of children:



(Council of State Governments Justice Center, 2009).

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The Needs of Children and Families of the Incarcerated

"...break the intergenerational cycle of crime and incarceration and give a forgotten (invisible) group of children the chance to reach their highest potential." MCP program brochure 2009

"...distorted in the telling, buried in the un-telling."
Randall Robinson



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BREAK THE CHAIN



Joe R. 58



Joe R. Jr. 36



Jimmy R. 16

Adapted from Mentoring program website-2009

" Their mothers are prostitutes and drug addicts but they want to do better."
Troop 1500 Video



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Implied Causal Patterns

"If we are at risk for following in our parents footsteps, perhaps it is because you say we are."

S. 16 year old daughter of an incarcerated mother in Connecticut

- These are children that are better off without their parents
- These are children that lack affection and guidance
- Most of them didn't even live with their parents

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Facts: Pre Incarceration Relationships

- 44%/55% Percent of fathers had at least one minor child living with them before incarceration
- 64% /84% Percent of mothers had at least one minor child living with them before incarceration

State/Federal
Hairston (2008)

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Needing a New Frame

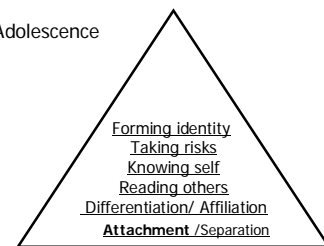
- Attachment Theory
- Brain Development Research
- Trauma Research



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Developmental Tasks For Children and Youth

Infancy through Adolescence



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The Attachment Literature

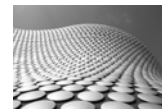
Children with secure early attachments are more likely in later years to:

- be better problem-solvers
- form friendships and be leaders with peers
- be more empathetic and less aggressive
- engage their world with confidence
- have higher self-esteem
- be better at resolving conflict
- be more self-reliant and adaptable

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Perspective is 9/10 of Reality

"Researchers and clinicians utilize attachment research to guide family strengthening program and policy development." Zero To Three 2004



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Examining the Cycle

Government Separation of Children and Parents: Attending to Attachment

Child Abuse and Neglect: Child Welfare Supports

Military Deployment : DOD Supports

Incarceration : No Supports

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Trauma in Children: Key Points

- An incident is traumatic if it carries a threat against life, physical well being or personal security
- Children always experience the loss of a parent as traumatic
- Trauma changes brain architecture
- Children can be re traumatized by situations characterized by additional threats or **simple uncertainty**

(Mc Allister-Groves, Child Witness to Violence Project 2002)

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The Impact of Trauma



Trauma or perceived danger causes the excretion of adrenalin and cortisol in amounts that cause brain damage and death in laboratory animals.

(Perry 2004)

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The Impact of Trauma

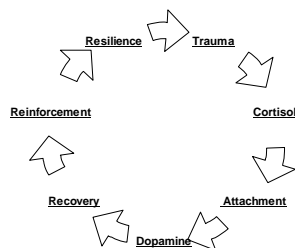


The presence of parents or other adult attachment figures lowers the dangerous levels of cortisol.

(Dozier, 2005)

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The Positive Cycle



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Attachment & Trauma

Important Connections

- Primary attachment figures provide a buffer from the most damaging effects of trauma
- Separation from the primary attachment figures causes trauma

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Attachment-Contemporary Perspective

Scientists now know that chronic, unrelenting stress in early childhood, caused by separation from caregivers, extreme poverty, or parental depression, for example, can be toxic to the developing brain in the same way as repeated abuse and witnessing violence changes brain architecture.

Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University, *In Brief: The Science of Early Childhood Development*. NGA Center for Best Practices, National Conference of State Legislatures, and Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University, 2008, www.developingchild.harvard.edu.

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Toxic Stress

Strong & prolonged activation of stress response systems in the absence of buffering protection of adult support

Activated by:

- Recurrent abuse, neglect, care-giver depression, substance abuse, family violence or triggers for tolerable stress that are prolonged and without supports
- Increased susceptibility to cardiovascular disease, hypertension, obesity, diabetes and mental health problems (www.acestudy.com)

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UNIQUE STRESS of PARENTAL INCARCERATION

Common Stress Points for Families

- Arrest : Fear, Confusion, Panic
- Pre trial/ Trial : Anxiety, Frustration
- Sentencing: Hopelessness, Helplessness
- Initial Incarceration : Abandonment, Stigma, Loyalty
- Incarceration Stage 2: Resentment, Balance
- Pre-release: Fear , Anxiety, Anticipation
- Post-Release: Ambivalence, Chaos

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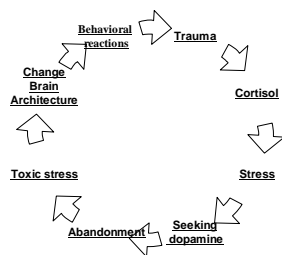
Impact on Brain Development

- Impulse Control
- Cause and Effect
- Predictability
- Emotional Regulation
- Reciprocal Engagement



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The Negative Cycle



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Children of Incarcerated Parents:

Children of incarcerated parents mourn the loss of that incarcerated parent. The one that cared for them or the one that should have.



"My mother, who did not raise me but loved me as if she had..." Clifton Taulbert

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IMPLICATIONS for PROGRAMS



Eighty-six percent of minor children of the incarcerated were under 10 years of age



22 percent were under five
Hairston (2008)

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Embedded Issue

Two-thirds of the incarcerated parent population is non-white



The Sentencing Project 2009

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Think About It

"Think of these children as you would your own, but never forget that they're not...if they were yours, you would not ...focus on the floor of crimelessness... as if it were the ceiling. And it is harder for some to think of them as our own when they are mostly black and brown."

Vince Schiraldi, DCDJJ

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Advocacy that Heals

- Recognize that incarceration causes trauma and / or re-traumatizes those who have experienced trauma
- Adapting to trauma causes behaviors such as (disconnecting from family) that are misinterpreted by others and interfere with attachment.

See Freeing Tammy by Jody Raphael 2007

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Bill of Rights for Children of the Incarcerated: A Framework for Responding

I Have the Right...

- ❖ To be kept safe and informed at the time of my parent's arrest
- ❖ To be heard and considered when decisions are made about me or my parent
- ❖ To be well cared for in my parent's absence.
- ❖ To speak with, see and touch my parent
- ❖ To support as I struggle with my parent's incarceration
- ❖ Not to be blamed, judged or labeled because of my parent's incarceration
- ❖ To a lifelong relationship with my parent.

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Implications for Public Health

- **Public Health Nurses can be trained to work with law enforcement & with Caregivers-Arkansas Voices**
- **Physicians trained to support parent –child relationships - Montefiore Hospital NY/Osborne Association**
- **Medical School Pediatrics Program focused on Children of the Incarcerated-**
- **Issue of Social Work in Public Health – Belinda Bruster, Ed.**
- **Healthy Steps for Young Children-Boston U Medical School**

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