The Critical Role of Caregivers in Addressing the Needs of Children of Incarcerated Parents

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Background

• Experiences of Caregivers
  – “Secondary prisonization” (Comfort, 2008)
  – “Disenfranchised grief” (Arditti, 2012)
  – Limited resources and no monetary benefits (“informally” providing care) (Phillips and Bloom, 1998; Poehlmann, 2003; Poehlmann et al., 2008)
  – Feelings of shame and guilt (Mackintosh et al., 2006)

• “Gatekeepers” facilitate contact between children and parents and control children’s awareness and understanding of the imprisonment
Research Aim

• Comprehensive assessment of Arizona families affected by maternal and paternal incarceration

• Partners
  • AZ Governor’s Office
  • AZ Department of Corrections
  • AZ Department of Economic Security
  • AZ Criminal Justice Commission
  • ASU School of Criminology and Criminal Justice
  • ASU School of Social Work
  • ASU College of Nursing and Health Innovation
Research Project

• Examine fuller range of consequences by situating the incarceration in the family system

  1. Prison interviews with 300 men and 300 women in 2010 - 1,400 children; 899 caregivers
  2. Periodic interviews with a sample of caregivers and released prisoners in Maricopa County

• Data sharing agreements with governmental agencies enable routine tracking of family members
Measures

• Prisoner Interviews
  – Parent stressors (mental illness, substance abuse), parent-child contact and relationship history, public assistance, residential mobility, prior incarceration

• Caregiver Interviews
  – Includes current and former romantic partners, grandparents, other family members, friends
  – Caretaker experiences, parent-child contact and relationship history, post-release expectations, child needs and services
Impact of Incarceration on Caregivers

• Marked variation in the effects of incarceration
  – Majority of caregivers (58%) described negative instrumental and expressive effects
  – 22% of caregivers indicated no change in their lives
  – 20% of caregivers reported an improvement in their status or condition

• Familial processes key in explaining these effects
  – Prisoner’s prior parental involvement; interpersonal relationship between caregiver and prisoner; and caregiver’s family support system

Source: Turanovic, Rodriguez, & Pratt (2012)
Caregivers and Child Well-being

• Age-graded effects of incarceration on children
• Children’s emotional/behavioral problems affected by:
  – Responsive, effective parenting
  – Traumatic experiences
  – Instability in care and living arrangements

• Multiple child households
  – Older siblings and antisocial behavior
  – Modeling behavior exhibited by younger children
  – Tension within blended families

Source: Rodriguez & Turanovic, unpublished report
Incarceration as a System of Reciprocal Exchanges

• Support system
  – Formal and informal sources
  – Expectations of caregivers and children
  – Cultural differences

• Prison visitation – “It’s not all cupcakes and lollipops”
  – Visitation encounters (“family time”; therapeutic exchanges; directives)

• Criminal organizations and families
  – Heavily entrenched in “the life”

Sources: Rodriguez & Tasca, unpublished report; Tasca, unpublished report
Policy Recommendations and Current Efforts

1. **Improve child well-being and parenting strategies**
   - Caregiver interviews and clinical assessment of children to develop an enhanced service delivery model for families of incarcerated parents
   - Enhance prison programs to address criminogenic needs
   - Inform reentry program to target family system during pre-release process

2. **Address the needs of children exposed to violence**
   - Administer the NatSCEV to children and create interventions to address their needs
Policy Recommendations and Current Efforts

3. Reduce economic strain through improved service delivery
   – Stipend for grandparents providing care ($75 monthly)
   – Understanding barriers to seeking services

4. Collect and share data on parental status
   – Identifying capacity to link parent to child records across agencies