Children of Incarcerated Parents

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Silent Victims

By

Marian S. Harris

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PREFACE

The deleterious impact of parental incarceration on the lives of millions of children in the United States and in countries all around the world cannot be ignored without continued adverse consequences for these children now and in the future. Children of the incarcerated must be protected, loved, and provided with the care and support they need to grow, develop, and maximize their fullest potential. Their social, emotional, and cognitive development must be priorities for caregivers, incarcerated mothers and fathers, judges, social workers, prison officials, law enforcement officers, mentors, policy makers, and other professionals who are charged with acting in their best interest and ensuring their rights are always protected.

Who are these children? Where are they? Children of incarcerated parents can be found in every city, county, and state in this country and in other geographic regions in the world. Parental incarceration tends to prevail in the lives of children who are poor, Black, Indigenous, or other children of color. Some are infants, toddlers, latency age, and adolescent. It doesn't matter where they live nor their age, the trauma as well as the separation and loss they experience are very real and cut right to the core of their well-being. Recent statistics show that over 2.7 million children in the United States have an incarcerated parent. More than five million children have experienced the adverse childhood event of parental incarceration. At least half of the mothers and fathers who are incarcerated are parents of minor children who are under 18 years of age.

Children of the incarcerated are the author's strongest incentive for writing this book. Now more than ever, those of us living in the United States must move away from stigmatizing these children, their parents, and caregivers and focus attention on making them a top priority. It is imperative for intentional resources to be allocated for programs and services that provide the best possible support to them and their current, or formerly, incarcerated parents and caregivers.

This book examines the extent and ramifications of the myriad of issues encountered by children who experience parental incarceration via in-depth interviews conducted by the author with a wide range of people who discuss their personal experiences including adolescents, young adults who

experienced parental incarceration in their early childhood, incarcerated birth mothers and fathers, judges, grandparents, social workers, prison superintendents, department of corrections administrators, etc. A significant part of the book examines federal policies in the United States that are relevant for incarcerated parents, their children and families. The policy content is often ignored or it is assumed that readers are familiar with, and know, the significance and impact of these policies.

Readers will gain knowledge about the varied programs for children of the incarcerated in the United States and programs from many countries all across the world. The current volume not only represents a bold step in addressing the issues of children of the incarcerated but also provides an opportunity for the reader to hear the children's voices as well as the voices of others in their lives, including professionals, whose decisions can, positively or negatively, have a long lasting effect on their lives. The book is timely and touches on a very significant topic given the inordinately large number of children who continue to be SILENT VICTIMS of the incarcerated, many of whom never have an opportunity to have their voices heard.

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Children are always paramount in my work. The reader will see what an enormous amount of gratitude is owed to the children, incarcerated parents, and family members who taught me how they thrive and survive each day in spite of the continuous cloud of stigma, shame and insensitivity that constantly overshadows their lives.

There are too many colleagues to mention all who have shared their thoughts and supported me throughout the time I have spent writing this book. A posthumous thank you is given to John Bowlby, the father of attachment theory; this theory has laid the foundation for all of my work with children and families throughout the years. A posthumous thank you is also given to Vincent Woods, one of my former MSW students, who unexpectedly died shortly after my interview with him; he willingly shared his challenges as a father and husband during and after his incarceration and the work that he was doing to assist incarcerated fathers, their children and families prior to and after earning a Master of Social Work degree.

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INTRODUCTION

There is not one single story that can describe the life of more than 2.7 million children in the United States who have a parent incarcerated in prison or jail or the 5 million children who experienced parental incarceration at some point in time in their lives (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2016). Parental incarceration is a traumatic experience for children, which adversely affects their lives in many ways. The purpose of this book is to examine the extent and ramifications of the myriad issues encountered by children who experience parental incarceration. The book will discuss the impact of parental incarceration on children, families and communities including federal policies that have an impact on children and incarcerated parents and best practices to maintain the parent-child relationship. There is also a discussion of what services children need to help them adjust to parental incarceration, i.e., maintaining the parent-child attachment relationship, caregivers, mentors, the education system and other systems in the community, etc. The reader will learn what services parents need to help them maintain the parent-child relationship including parent-child visits, preparing for family reunification when they are released from prison, reintegration services required to prevent reentry into the prison system, and maintaining positive relationships with social workers, the courts, etc. An overview of selected programs and services in the United States, as well as in other countries, that are having a positive impact on children and families will be presented. The objectives of the book are to help the reader:

- Understand the psychological impact of parental incarceration on children and parents;
- Understand the importance of focusing on the family system when parents are incarcerated;
- Identify the short-term and long-term effects of parental incarceration of children including child development;
- Understand the significance of maintaining the parent-child relationship when parents are incarcerated;
- Think critically about current justice and child welfare policies related to children and incarcerated parents and ways in which the policies can be improved;

- Understand the disparate impact of parental incarceration on children and families of color;
- Identify and analyze relevant programs in the United States and in other countries for children when parents are incarcerated;
- Understand the significance of race, class and gender in the many facets of the criminal justice system for parents who are incarcerated and how these facets are used to oppress parents, especially mothers and how this oppression ultimately impacts on children.

Chapters of the Book

Chapter 1 (Understanding the Development, Relationships, and Issues of Children of Incarcerated Parents) – This chapter begins with a discussion of the continued increase in the number of parents with minor children incarcerated in jails and prisons; the impact of maternal vs. paternal incarceration; changes in the parent-child attachment relationship; changes in extended family relationships; the impact of parental incarceration on the social and emotional development of children and adolescents; risk factors associated with a history of parental arrest; living arrangements prior to and following parental incarceration; the school system including discriminatory practices by some teachers; and reactions to parental incarceration by gender, i.e., girls vs. boys. Attachment theory, relational theory, and trauma theory are addressed in section two and their relevance to understanding children of incarcerated parents. Several people share their personal stories via detailed interviews in section three. Selected content from interviews is referenced and included throughout Chapter 1.

Chapter 2 (Social Welfare Policy in the United States and Children of Incarcerated Parents) – A synopsis of federal justice and child welfare policies is presented in section one (Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act of 1974; Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986, Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1988, Personal Responsibility and Work Reconciliation Act of 1996, Public Housing Program Extension Act of 1996, Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997, Child and Family Services Improvement Act of 2011, Promoting Safe and Stable Families Amendments of 2001, Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008, and Second Chance Act of 2019). The relationship of each policy to the theme or issues identified in Chapter 1 is presented in this chapter as well as an explanation in terms of the impact on children of incarcerated parents and their families. Section two has interviews from an attorney and

two judges that are segmented into subtopics to demonstrate support for the content presented in this chapter. Appropriate content from the three interviews, and other interviews, is integrated and referenced in the chapter.

Chapter 3 (International Policy/Programs for Children of Incarcerated Parents) – This chapter begins with a brief discussion of the Convention on the Rights of the Child followed by a discussion of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (Article 4 and Article 30). There is also a discussion of the UN Bangkok Rules on Women Offenders and Prisoners. The remainder of the chapter provides a description of the following ten programs from across the world for children and their incarcerated parents: PILLARS – New Zealand; Bedford Row Family Project – Limerick, Ireland; Bryggan – Sweden; Families Outside – Scotland; Relais Enfants Parents Romands – Geneva, Switzerland; Associazione Bambisenzasbarre – Milan; Italy; Niño's sin Barreras – Barcelona, Spain; Solrosen – Sweden; Treffpunkt – Germany; and the Prison Advice and Care Trust – UK). This chapter ends with an overview of Children of Prisoners Europe (COPE). There is an analysis of the programs and their contexts to determine whether there are themes or ideas that are applicable to children of incarcerated parents and families in the United States.

Chapter 4 (Programs/Practices in the United States for Children of Incarcerated Parents) – This chapter explores several programs and practices for children and their incarcerated parents that impact them in a positive way. Among the programs explored in section one are the following: Amachi Mentoring organization; Angel Tree; Big Brothers Big Sisters of America; Boys & Girls Clubs of America; Children's Connections; Center for Restorative Justice Works (Get on the Bus, Camp Suzanne); Family and Offender Sentencing Alternative (FOSA); Girl Scouts Beyond Bars; and the Osborne Association. Section two has in-depth interviews from an Administrator of Girls Scouts Beyond Bars, Seattle, WA; Administrator of Boys & Girls Clubs of South Puget Sound; Corrections Specialist 3–Children of Incarcerated Parents; and the Administrator for the Family and Offender Sentencing Alternative (FOSA). Varied portions of interviews have been integrated in discussion of some programs in this chapter.

Chapter 5 (Family Reunification Issues/Challenges and Children of Incarcerated Parents) – The focus of this chapter are the many challenges children face when a birth mother or father is released from prison and family reunification is the permanency goal. Children are faced with a

major transition and life event that includes issues of trauma, abandonment, betrayal, and stigma and shame. Birth parents and caregivers also have many challenges and issues that are discussed in this chapter. All of the aforementioned challenges are presented in section one. In section two there is a detailed discussion of a Family Reunification Group that was developed and implemented in 2007 at a minimum security prison for women. A thematic analysis and summary of the Family Reunification Group is included. There are also selected portions of interviews integrated throughout the chapter. Section three culminates this chapter with interviews from the following: a birth father and his reunification experience with his daughter, a social worker who was formerly a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA), two former superintendents from correctional facilities for women, and a Deputy Director of the WA State Department of Corrections. Selected portions of the aforementioned interviews, as well as excerpts from other interviews, are integrated in this chapter.

Chapter 6 (Future Directions for Practice and Research) – Section one provides a discussion of recommendations for social workers and other professionals who work with children of incarcerated parents as well as their parents and other family members. In section two qualitative findings from the first focus group for the following study are presented: ReFORM: A Multi-Modal Intervention for incarcerated fathers. This section culminates with recommendations for future research. Finally, in section three there is a succinct conclusion to end the book.

CHAPTER 1

UNDERSTANDING THE DEVELOPMENT, RELATIONSHIPS, AND ISSUES OF CHILDREN OF INCARCERATED PARENTS

The U.S. continues to incarcerate more people than any other country in the world. More than five million children, representing seven percent of all children in the United States, have had at least one parent incarcerated at one time in their life (Murphey and Cooper, 2015). Approximately 1,473,700 minor children had parents in state or federal prisons in 2016 (Maruschak, Bronson, and Alper, 2021). Children of incarcerated parents experience a myriad of traumatic and adverse events that can impact on their optimal growth and development. The first part of this chapter will provide a discussion on the lives of children of incarcerated parents including the continued increase in the number of mothers (with minor children) incarcerated in jails and prisons; impact of maternal vs. paternal incarceration; changes in the parent-child attachment relationship; changes in extended family relationships; impact of parental incarceration on the social and emotional development of children and adolescents; risk factors associated with a history of parental arrest; living arrangements prior to and following parental incarceration; the school system including discriminatory practices by some teachers; and reactions to parental incarceration by gender, i.e., girls vs. boys. The following theories will be addressed in Section Two: attachment theory, ecological systems theory, family systems theory, relational theory, and trauma theory. These theories are applicable to children of incarcerated parents. Several people share their personal stories via interviews in Section Three. Selected portions of varied interviews are integrated throughout the chapter.

Lives of Children of Incarcerated Parents

Development, Attachment and Trauma

The formation of neural connections begins early in life. From birth to age three, millions of neuron connections are formed each second in a child's brain. Optimal child development occurs when children grow up and their social, emotional, physical, and educational needs are met. Children need a safe environment with loving and nurturing parents to maximize their growth and development. The brain is wired for relationships. The mother-child attachment relationship begins in infancy and is significant across the lifespan (Bowlby, 1969, vol. 1; Harris, 2011, 2017). It is important for a child to have continuity in the attachment relationship with the primary caregiver; a key factor is the availability of the caregiver; however, when there is disruption in the attachment relationship brain development as well as the child's safety and security are impacted (D'Hooghe, 2017). A very strong early attachment relationship lays the foundation for healthy brain development and serves as a protective factor for children. A child's early relationships and experiences have a significant impact on the brain development of children from birth to age three.

Neurodevelopmental research has demonstrated that a traumatized child's brain develops differently from the brain of a child who is emotionally healthy (Innocenti and Price, 2005; Kostovic and Jovanov-Milosevic, 2006; Kjaer, Fabricius, Sigaard, and Pakkenberg, 2017; Batelle, Edwards, and Mulcheartaigh, 2018). The emotional attachment between an infant and his/her mother influences both the structure and functioning of the developing infant's brain. Disrupted attachment, whether caused by abuse, neglect or emotional unavailability on the part of the primary caregiver, i.e., mother, can negatively impact on brain structure and function, causing developmental/relational trauma. Developmental trauma is the result of abuse, abandonment and neglect during the first three years of a child's life; this trauma is caused by a relational disconnect between a child and their mother that is either too long or too frequent during ordinary normal or subtle daily activities (Perry 2006; Schore 2000, 2002, 2008, 2010). Prior work has demonstrated that healthy self-organization of the developing neural networks happens in the context of the child's relationship with the primary caregiver (Shore, 2000). The mother-child attachment relationship is disrupted when a mother is incarcerated in jail or prison. Incarcerated mothers are emotionally unavailable to their children. Children of incarcerated parents are at risk for a number of negative outcomes including primary caregiver disruptions, exposure to

non-birth parents, economic disadvantage, residential mobility, shame, and stigma (Dallaire, 2007; Phillips et al., 2002; Tasca, Rodriguez, and Zatz, 2011). The following changes might also be seen in children of incarcerated parents:

- Birth to age 2 – Lack of parent-child bond
- Ages 2 to 6 –Separation anxiety, impaired social development
- Ages 7 to 10 – Damaged self-concept, regression
- Ages 11 to 14 – Rebellion against limits
- Ages 15 to 17 – Premature disruption of relationship with parents, possible increased risk of incarceration (Travis, McBride, and Solomon, 2006).

When there is a secure attachment relationship, there is normal neurological development.

Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are stressful or traumatic events, including child abuse and neglect. ACEs include the following: physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, physical neglect, emotional neglect, intimate partner violence, mother treated violently, substance misuse within household, household mental illness, parental separation or divorce, and incarcerated household member. Parental incarceration is now acknowledged as an ACE and is different from other adverse childhood experiences because of the distinct amalgamation of trauma, shame and stigma that comes with having a parent in prison (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2010). Although ACEs happen regularly in the lives of children from 0 to 18 years of age regardless of race, socioeconomic class, and geographic region of residence, the prevalence of ACEs is higher for children living in poverty. Findings from a longitudinal study conducted by researchers at the University of Wisconsin-Madison demonstrated that severe poverty affects how children's brains develop; the parts of the brain linked to academic performance were eight to ten percent smaller for children who grew up in severe poverty (Hair et al., 2015). Regardless of the reason for a parent's incarceration, existing racial and poverty disparities are exacerbated for these children. For example, 45 percent of children of incarcerated parents are Black versus 28 percent who are White and 21 percent who are Hispanic. Poverty and racial disparities for children of incarcerated parents simply add to their early life traumatic experiences and affect their ability to learn, physical health, level of self-esteem and social awareness.

Maternal Versus Paternal Incarceration

The majority of people who are incarcerated are parents of minor children, i.e., about 626,800 (Maruschak, Bronson, and Alper, 2021). Mass incarceration in the United States has resulted in a continuous increase in the number of women who are incarcerated. Over the past three to four decades there has been a dramatic increase in women's incarceration rates when compared to men, i.e., 646 percent versus 419 percent (Mauer, 2013; Frost et al., 2006). For example, the total number of incarcerated women in 1980 was 26,378 compared to a total of 222,455 in 2019 resulting in an increase of over 700 percent (The Sentencing Project, 2020). Women who are mothers are incarcerated in state prisons for varied reasons such as drug offenses (26 percent), property offenses (24 percent), and public order offenses (11 percent) (The Sentencing Project, 2020). The rate of maternal incarceration has continued to grow with 118,300 incarcerated mothers of minor children in state prison and 13,400 mothers of minor children in federal prison (Maruschak, Bronson, and Alper, 2021). Children are faced with many challenges as a result of maternal incarceration including separation and loss issues, disruption and change in family structure, shame, stigma, loss of family income, a change in schools and academic difficulties. Maternal incarceration causes a disruption in the mother-child attachment relationship and the resulting separation and loss is a traumatic experience for both mother and child. According to Judge Frank Cuthbertson in his interview, "I would posit that it is traumatic for children not to have a parent available. It is trauma. It's a form of trauma." Trauma can have a significant impact on a child's physical, emotional, and intellectual development, especially if experienced in early childhood. Consequently, children need to be assessed and screened as soon as possible when a mother or father is incarcerated. Early assessment and screening provide an opportunity for professionals to provide interventions that can positively influence the life trajectory of children traumatized because of parental incarceration.

Paternal incarceration is also a major challenge for children if a father resided in the home with his child prior to incarceration. Other challenges include separation and loss, stigmatization, shame, disruption in the home environment, and the loss of family income. It is important for a child's well-being to have a father's involvement. For example, children are less likely to drop out of school, use alcohol and drugs, commit crimes, and become teenage parents when there is a father's involvement (Mbwana, Terzian, and Moore, 2009; Morsey and Rothstein, 2016; Turney and Goodsell, 2018). Children need to have access and contact with their

fathers during and after their incarceration. Forty-four to fifty-five percent of fathers lived with at least one minor child prior to their incarceration (Glaze and Maruschak, 2011). The quality of father involvement and not quantity is most important to children (Parke and Brott, 1999). Fathers in state prison had 1,133,800 minor children and in federal prison fathers reported 208,200 children (Maruschak, Bronson, and Alper, 2021). Children experience multiple losses when a parent is incarcerated, but not having daily contact with a parent is the most devastating loss; there is also a financial loss since most mothers reside with their children prior to incarceration and about 30-40 percent of fathers lived with their children prior to incarceration (Damron, 2014).

Although boys and girls are adversely affected by parental incarceration, they express their reactions differently. Boys tend to externalize their thoughts and feelings which lead to behavioral problems as well as problems of aggression and girls tend to exhibit more attention problems and internalizing behaviors (LaVigne, Davies, and Brazzell, 2008; Murray and Farrington, 2005; Parke and Clarke-Stewart, 2001). One White female interviewee compared her grief regarding her father's incarceration to her brother's grief. "We were grieving in a different way. He would be – like I was saying committing criminal acts and washing out that way. And I would tend to hold my emotions in and I think it would have been really beneficial for me anyway to be able to talk to others that were like me – that had similar backgrounds and things like that." It seems important to understand the relationship between the incarcerated mother and/or father prior to incarceration to determine how to promote a positive parent-child relationship during incarceration if this is in the best interest of the child.

Excerpts from Interviews of Young Adults of Incarcerated Fathers about Behaviors

Three young adult females, two young adult males, and one adolescent were interviewed. All of the interviewees experienced parental incarceration during childhood and/or adolescence. The father of one female interviewee remains in prison because he is serving a life sentence. The following are excerpts from an interview with a 27 year-old White female who was four years of age when her father was incarcerated:

Excerpt from a White Female

> Interviewee: "I had a lot of written communication with him because he moved from Alaska to another Arizona prison."

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: "…in terms of what I would write him. I was very angry and really resentful and bitter about the situation and about him leaving us."

Interviewer: That was going to be my next question.

Interviewee: Yes?

Interviewer: Were you angry because you felt he abandoned you?

Interviewee: "Absolutely. I mean when we were younger, we didn't really understand…"

Interviewee: Right.

Interviewee: "…where he was or what he had done or anything like that."

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: "But, you know, when you become a teenager, you ask those questions."

Interviewer: Right.

Excerpt from a Bi-Racial Male

The following is an excerpt from a 14 year-old male who identified himself as African American and White:

Interviewee: "Me and my brother – my oldest brother, _____ – me and him – we used to get in trouble around our neighborhood kind of – not like big trouble – but like throwing rocks and stuff like that. But…"

Interviewer: And do you think that was because you didn't have your dad at home?

Interviewee: "I think it was because I didn't have my dad – because now that I do have my dad – I get good grades, I stay in school – everything's just a lot easier when you have that drive to not only make your dad happy but your dad – he tells you what to do – and when you have someone to tell you what to do, it makes everything a lot easier."

Expert from an African American Male

The excerpt below is from the older brother of the above named interviewee regarding his behavior during the incarceration of their father.

Interviewer: Did you engage in any kind of behavior or have behavior issues that you think that you would not have had?

Interviewee: “Yes, I talked back to my mom a lot.”

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: “And, you know, I have apologized and I’m grown now so it’s different.”

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: “I stole money from her one time.”

Interviewer: Okay. And what did you do with that money?

Interviewee: “I actually bought action figures like transformers.”

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: “So, yes.”

Interviewer: And did she punish you for stealing her money?

Interviewee: “Yes. She was only going to punish me for – I think it was two weeks – but my dad – it was around my birthday so I was 13 years-old – and my dad called to wish me a happy birthday and I told him that I had done that – stolen the money – and he actually punished me for the whole summer.”

Interviewer: that’s a long –

Interviewee: “Yes.”

Interviewer: time –

Interviewee: “Yes.”

Interviewer: And punishment – did that mean you couldn’t go outside and play?

Interviewee: “Yes, I couldn’t go outside. I couldn’t play video games. You know, if I wanted to watch TV or anything, I had to watch whatever everybody else was watching.”

Interviewer: So basically, you had no choices?

Interviewee: “Yes, yes.”

Excerpt from an African American Male

Responses from a young African American adult who stated he was seven or eight when his father was incarcerated are as follows:

> Interviewee: "Oh, yes, I spent the majority of my child/teen years angry. It caused a lot of fights for me in school because people would talk about my dad because they would ask about where my dad was and I would tell them, "He's in jail," or, "He's in prison," and –
>
> Interviewer: And, when you told them that, did they treat your differently?
>
> Interviewee: "Yes, but they would use it as a tactic to try and pick on me."
>
> Interviewer: Did they bully you?
>
> Interviewee: "Yes, and because I'm already mad about the situation, now that anger just got shifted to them because I didn't want anybody talking bad about my family because they didn't know my family so, more than not, it would result in violence and…"
>
> Interviewer: When you got into these fights, did you end up in the principal's office and counselor's office?
>
> Interviewee: "Oh, yes, detention, teacher talking to me, principal talking to me, my mom having to come to the school and get me, asking her what's going on, stuff like that. But all my teachers, anybody who's known me as a child, they're like, "You're a good kid." It's just they knew that I was touchy in certain areas and I had a temper with certain things and, and something that personal, they could understand the anger and the frustration, but they didn't want me doing it that way or addressing it that way in school."
>
> Interviewer: But you were a teenager –
>
> Interviewee: "Exactly."
>
> Interviewer: Kids act out in different ways. Some kids keep it inside; they don't fight and other kids, it's, "You said something negative about my dad. I'm going to beat you up. Did any of these fights result in you being sent to Rehamn Hall?
>
> Interviewee: "No."
>
> Interviewer: or they weren't that serious?

> Interviewee: "No, they weren't that serious. I always tried not to let it get that serious, but there's always that split second where I just black out and I don't know what I'm doing and then I come to and I'm like "Wait," like, "Stop what you are doing."

The parent-child relationship is crucial to child development and child well-being. Separation from a mother or father because of parental incarceration is a traumatic experience in the life of any child that might cause long lasting problems.

Living Arrangements of Children

It is important to address the living arrangements for children when a mother or father is incarcerated. Separation from the mother or father because of incarceration is usually sudden and quite traumatic for infants, young children and adolescents and results in a change in physical living arrangements for most children; this change results in some type of foster care placement. Foster care is a system within the state to provide care for children who cannot live at home with their parents. There are several types of foster care settings (nonrelative foster family homes, relative foster homes, pre-adoptive homes, group homes, emergency shelters, and residential facilities). Most children of incarcerated parents are placed in a foster family home with a relative or in a non-family home with a non-relative. Nationally, there were 20,939 children of incarcerated parents in foster care at the end of FY 2016 (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2017). Eighty-eight percent of fathers depend on the mothers of their children to provide care during their incarceration; however, only forty-seven percent of mothers depend on

the fathers to care for their children during incarceration; forty-five percent of mothers depend on grandparents to provide care for their children (Hairston, 2009). All of the young adults interviewed for this book lived with their mothers when their fathers were in prison.

Excerpts from Interviews with Mothers

Excerpt from a Mexican American Mother

A Mexican American mother stated the following:

> Interviewee: "He's a very smart man and he was in school. He started first year of college. He was young when he started going to college."
>
> Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: “But, somehow, he just got lost and went in the wrong direction and he ended up using drugs. His parents got divorced.”

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: “And I think that was one of the major things that affected him.”

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: “And then we came – we moved to live in San Diego, and then we were there for months and then we came to LA. And that’s where he started; it was really hard for me. It was really hard.”

Excerpt from a White Mother

A white mother of two young children was verbally and physically abused by the children’s father who is serving a life sentence in prison.

Interviewee: “And when we were first married, everything seemed fine. He was not violent or didn’t talk down to me. We had a couple of fine years. I fell in love with him, so, obviously, I saw something in him that he seemed like a good person to me. But I didn’t see what other people saw, I guess. Maybe I was just blind. But we had _____, our son. And when he was probably like 1.5 or 2 years old, we were renting a house in Federal Way. And he started drinking more and smoking pot more. And I noticed his behavior changing. And he was just really short tempered. And he started getting – he was laid off from a job. And that really affected him. He got depressed and started drinking more. And it just – he started using means to cope with things that were not healthy. And he started acting out, as far as verbally abusive, starting being physically abusive, just shoving here and there, and yelling. And then, I got pregnant with my daughter. And he started using more and more things. And I was just so scared to get out because the physical violence had escalated towards me. And I just didn’t know what to do. I was just afraid of him. And I just got the kids clothes and my clothes. Not probably even all of them. I didn’t take anything else. And I went to my mom and dad’s. That’s all. And then, so, that was it as far as me leaving the house, our home, our whatever. And then, I heard he pretty much freaked out, me leaving with the kids.”

Excerpt from an African American Mother

An African American mother of two boys discussed the impact of her husband’s incarceration on her sons as well as herself.

Interviewer: I want you to tell us how this impacted you as a wife and as a mother, having your husband sent to prison?

Interviewee: "It was very, very challenging. Number one, I was left to be responsible for raising two young men and also be the breadwinner for the family, so it was challenging trying to make sure I was there as a mother for them, yet still make sure that there was food on the table. And then you throw in the fact that I still needed them to know who their father was and making sure that he was also involved in their lives."

Interviewer: How long had you and your husband been married when he was incarcerated?

Interviewee: "We had been together for five years and we got married two-approximately two

weeks before he was incarcerated."

Interviewer: Oh my goodness!

Interviewee: "Mm-hmm…hmm. So I decided that regardless of the mistake that he had made he was an amazing mate and father, and that I was confident that he was going to be the person I spent the rest of my life with, so I chose to marry him and work through this and that's what we did."

Some children end up living with aunts, uncles, cousins, or friends. However, there are children of incarcerated parents who enter the child welfare system because there are no viable relatives or friends who can care for them. These children are often placed in foster care with non-related caregivers.

It is preferable for children to be in the care and custody of a family member when a mother or father goes to jail or prison. The sense of loss and feeling of abandonment are lessened when children are able to live with grandparents or other relatives whom they love and already have a positive relationship with. Placement with kin/relatives helps children to maintain the bond that has already been established prior to parental incarceration. It is important during this traumatic and turbulent time for children to maintain their connection with grandparents and other loved ones. Title IV-E of the Social Security Act requires that states "consider giving preferences to an adult relative over a nonrelated caregiver when determining placement for a child, provided that the relative caregiver meets all relevant State child protection standards."[1] Connection is defined

[1] 42 U.S.C. § 671 (a) (19) (Leus Nexis 2013). Placement refers to the placing of a child in the home of an individual other than a parent or guardian or in a facility other than a youth services center.

as “an interaction that engenders a sense of being in tune with self and others and of being understood and valued” (Bylington, 1997, 35). There are three types of kinship care placements, i.e., formal, informal, and volunteer. Children in formal kinship care are in the legal custody of the state per court order by a judge; they are placed by the child welfare system with grandparents or other kin. On the other hand, informal kinship care is a type of living arrangement made by the birth parents and other family members without any involvement of the child welfare system or court system; children live with kin and are still in the custody of their parents. Parents can legally take back their children from kin at any time. Children in voluntary kinship care arrangements live with kin, and there is involvement with the child welfare system; however, the state does not have legal custody of the children. Some children are placed in kinship care by the court, but other children are placed by a child welfare agency with no involvement by the court.

In some voluntary care cases, the birth parents have legal custody and in other cases temporary legal custody is given to the kin caregivers. There are fewer traumas for children who are in kinship care placements because they are with people that they love, trust, and know. Children in kinship care placements experience fewer moves in placement and have fewer behavior problems. Children in kinship care also have an opportunity to receive love and support from other extended family members. There are many positive factors for children in kinship care; however, many caregivers often experience several problems:

- Lack of adequate housing
- Financial difficulties
- Physical health issues, especially with older caregivers
- Emotional stress caused by childrearing responsibilities
- Strained relationships with the children’s parents
- Any past criminal charges that may keep a relative from being eligible to become a caregiver
- Lack of easily accessible training about the specific needs and issues of parenting grandchildren or other related children, limited peer support, and lack of information on available resources
- Lack of warning about the plight of the children (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2013, 3).

African American children are 7.5 times more likely and Hispanic children are 2.3 times more likely than White children to have an incarcerated parent (Glaze and Maruschak, 2011). In many states, for children of color,

kinship care placements are the preferred placement and are disproportionately used, especially for African American children (Harris and Skyles, 2008). Although African American kinship caregivers are attached and committed to the children in their care, they tend to have a strong desire for children to be reunified with their birth parents (Harris and Skyles, 2008). Finally, the emotional connections that are continued when children of incarcerated parents are placed with relatives go a long way in enhancing their well-being.

Education

When supported by very strong educational policies and practices, positive school experiences can counteract the traumatic experience of parental incarceration for the 2.7 million children who have a parent in jail or prison. Changes in school are a significant problem for children of incarcerated parents. School changes occur when children are removed from the care of their parents and placed in some type of out-of-home care. Children in foster care have lower scores on standardized tests, higher absenteeism, tardiness, truancy, dropout rates, and difficulty developing and maintaining relationships with teachers and/or peers (Barrat and Berliner, 2013;

Castrechini, 2009; Christian, 2003; Kerbow, 1996; Reynolds, Chen, and Herbers, 2009). When parents are incarcerated their children usually have a change in home address resulting in a change in schools and sometimes there is not a timely enrollment in the new school. Delayed enrollment in school can cause other problems such as repeating courses already taken at another school, failure of the new school to identify and address special needs, and enrollment in classes that are not best for the child (Zetlin, Weinberg, and Shea, 2010). One study examined why children of incarcerated fathers in elementary school are more likely to repeat a grade; teachers utilized their assessment of the child's abilities as the major factor when deciding whether or not a child would be required to repeat a grade rather than the child's test scores or behavioral problems (Tunney and Haskins, 2014).

Excerpt from an Interview with A. H.

Teachers' Attitudes

A. H. is a teacher; several children of incarcerated parents have been in her classes in the community and at a detention facility for juvenile offenders.

Interviewee: When I started there, I started in the special education classrooms for students who had instabilities, object-forward processing, visual processing, or some mild mental retardation, now intellectual disability, and I always had the view that regardless of where you're coming from, there's always room for learning regardless of your disability, and that regardless of your background, you can always learn something.

It was mostly in the lunchroom during my lunch hour when I noticed that some of the teachers would come back from their classrooms very frustrated, as teachers generally are with students and with students who have behavioral issues and who are hard to manage. I would hear a lot of the teachers often times complaining about the students who would come back or who were about to be released, saying, "I'm not going to say goodbye to So-and-so because he'll be back in two or three weeks.

There was a lot of talk like that from one English teacher in particular, and that was always frustrating to hear. I would generally pack up my lunch and go back to my classroom at that point. That really just irked me just because he just never thought the best of any of the students, especially ones who did tend to come back.

Interviewer: It is a biased attitude, first of all. A lot of people feel that if a child or children have a parent who's incarcerated, the child is going to be just like the parent. So, children are prejudged. They're not given a chance. If the parent was incarcerated, when they were released from the detention facility, did they go to live with a relative? Did they go to foster care? What happened to these kids?

Interviewee: One of them that I know for sure, went to live with his grandma.

Interviewer: That's typical.

Interviewee: That is typical. And then, a few of the others would go to group homes. They would go to group homes. So, some of them would go to group homes, and a lot of the times, if they had to go to group homes, they wouldn't be released back into their old high schools, so they would go into a whole new high school, or they would be hooked up with a community school. Everything was very much interrupted.

Interviewer: That's problematic for kids this age.

Interviewee: Right. And already, because they don't have their parents there to support them –

> Interviewer: They don't have their parents. They're going into unfamiliar surroundings, i.e., a new community and a new school. They're teenagers, which means that they're going through physical and emotional changes, coupled with having been in a detention facility. It's almost like setting them up to fail.
>
> Interviewee: Right. But I will say that our frequent flyers, if you will, the ones who kept coming back, they had built rapport with the teachers, so when they came back –
>
> Interviewer: All the kids knew them.
>
> Interviewee: The teachers knew them. "Hey, why are you back? Glad to see you, but what are you doing?" and it was usually truancy or a fight or something.

Children of incarcerated parents often experience stigma, shame and unsubstantiated assumptions about them from teachers, peers and individuals in their communities. For example, a study examined teachers' expectations for the competence of children with incarcerated mothers to teachers' expectations for the competence of children with mothers who were away for other reasons; the findings revealed that teachers rated the children of incarcerated mothers less competent than the children of mothers who were not incarcerated and away from home for other reasons (Dallaire, Ciccone, and Wilson, 2010). This study demonstrated the possible harm of making assumptions without facts and either conscious or unconscious biased attitudes about children of incarcerated parents.

Excerpt from an Interview with a Young African American Woman

The following is an excerpt from a young woman whose father was incarcerated during her childhood:

> Interviewer: Right. So, when you were a little girl and going to school, did you know any other children in your school who had a dad or mom who was incarcerated?
>
> Interviewee: "Nope. It was almost like I was a black sheep. You know, for Career Day and stuff like that – you know – parents would come and talk about what they do…"
>
> Interviewer: Right.
>
> Interviewee: "…and people would have their mom and dad – then, oh my dad couldn't come because – you know – he's a lawyer, he's a police officer – whatever. And then they would always ask where your dad is?

I'm like, oh, my dad's in jail. And they it had that negative stigma. Then I feel like they see me differently."

Interviewer: Did they treat you differently?

Interviewee: "I wouldn't say they necessarily treated me differently, but the expression in their faces when I would say that my dad is in jail…"

Interviewer: Changed.

Interviewee: "…or prison – yes. It kind of changed. You can tell."

Interviewer: And what about your teachers?

Interviewee: "My teachers…"

Interviewer: How did they treat you?

Interviewee: "They didn't treat me any different, but once again, when I would say that my dad's in jail or prison, you'd see that they eyes kind of lit up – kind of like deer in headlights – like whoa!"

Interviewer: And I'm asking you that because there have been a couple of research studies that have been done with teachers, and even though the studies have not been done with large samples – which means that they're not statistically significant the little anecdotal things that are in these studies state teachers treat children differently when they find out that a child or children have incarcerated parents.

Interviewee: "Mm-hmm."

Interviewer: And that's not right.

Interviewee: "No."

Interviewer: Because you're blaming the child and the child had not committed a crime.

Excerpt from a Young White Woman

These are responses from a young white woman whose father was incarcerated when she was four years old and about what she told people about her incarcerated father are stated below.

Interviewee: "I remember though telling people at my schools that he was in the Army or he was somewhere else because I was so ashamed and I was thinking that people would perceive me like him and I didn't want that stigma on me."